
IMAGE ^{A N D} IDENTITY

**Reflections on Canadian
Film and Culture**



R. BRUCE ELDER

Image and Identity

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Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture

R. Bruce Elder

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for
my parents
Edrie M. Elder
∞
David M. Elder

But that which most I wonder at, which most
I did esteem my bliss, which most I boast,
And ever shall enjoy, is that within
I felt no stain nor spot of sin.

No darkness then did overshadow
But all within was pure and bright;
... A joyful sense and purity
Is all I can remember

Whate'er it is, it is a light
So endless unto me
That I a world of true delight
Did then, and to this day do see.

THOMAS TRAHERNE

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Foreword

The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television is very proud to have played a role in the publication of this important work on Canadian film and Canadian identity, written by one of Canada's internationally acclaimed filmmakers. During the past several decades the Canadian film industry has established its reputation both at home and abroad as the producers of world-class film productions, attracting wide critical recognition and international awards, as well as achieving box-office success. Bruce Elder provides us with new perspectives on the growth and development of this important cultural industry.

Several years ago, a large package containing unbound papers arrived at the Academy's new Publications Department. To become known by all who read it as the "Bruce Elder Manuscript," it caught the admiration and attention of the Academy, Françoise Picard at the Canada Council, Ian Birnie and Wayne Clarkson at the Ontario Film Development Corporation, Sandra Woolfrey at Wilfrid Laurier University Press, and a number of impressed "readers."

With financial support from the Canada Council and the OFDC, and the guidance and commitment of Sandra Woolfrey and her staff, the manuscript slowly but surely evolved into *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*. For Bruce Elder, nothing could have been closer to a labour of love. For the Academy, this publication strengthens and complements our publication program. With several successful reference books, student texts and books for film buffs to our credit, *Image and Identity* is a prestigious work reflecting our commitment to the artistic and cultural concerns of the Canadian film industry.

Our sincere thanks to all who made this possible. We are all proud of it. Congratulations, Bruce!

Andra Sheffer
Executive Director
Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television

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Preface

During the past several years, a number of studies of Canadian film have appeared. Martin Knelman's *This Is Where We Came In* provides a popular introduction to Canadian cinema, while his later *Home Movies* is an odd mixture of gossip and business journalism. John Hofsess' *Inner Views* presents profiles of a few of the most important Canadian directors. David Clandfield's book, *Canadian Film*, offers a neatly drawn map of the cinemas of English Canada and Quebec, charting with nearly unflinching accuracy the major styles and forms and filmmakers. The CFI monograph series gives in-depth studies of Canadian auteurs (Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Don Shebib, Norman McLaren, etc.). Peter Morris' *Embattled Shadows* is a painstakingly careful history of Canadian film up to 1939. All of these works have been valuable in their own way, but none of them has considered Canadian film against the background of Canadian thought and Canadian art. Many of the most common attributes of the Canadian cinema reflect features prevalent in other forms of art in Canada, and these features reflect beliefs that are deeply embedded in the Canadian consciousness. It is in our major philosophical tradition that these beliefs are most explicitly formulated.

In this study of Canadian film, I attempt to demonstrate that there are interrelations among Canadian film, Canadian art and Canadian philosophy. Instead of surveying the development of Canadian film over the last four decades, I have chosen to concentrate on certain key moments in the history of Canadian films, moments in our national filmmaking that most clearly manifest the indigenous style and concerns of our cinema and that disclose certain deeply felt problems that pertain both to our collective psychology and social dynamics and to fundamental issues of artistic representation and expression. What seems to be needed at this stage in our cinematic history is a careful, reasoned assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our cinematic tradition which establishes the place of the Canadian cinema within Canadian artistic practice.

Because I have focused my examination of Canadian cinema on a few key works that throw features of the various problems I discuss in high relief, I have omitted many truly important works from discussion. I stress here that

my criterion for selecting films for discussion was based purely on a film's relationship to the unfolding thesis of the book. No judgement of quality is implied in the fact that I have omitted a film from discussion (though I have striven to include for detailed analysis only films I believe have considerable aesthetic merit and historical importance). Because of the length of this study, regrettably I have had to omit the films of such artists as Chris Gallagher, Phil Hoffman and Richard Kerr (among others) from detailed consideration. Some day I hope to be able to rework the material I had prepared on these artists (and others) and bring it out separately. At the same time, I wish to make quite clear that I do not believe that the Canadian avant-garde cinema is a large movement; in fact I believe that only a small number of films stand up under close scrutiny or repay frequent viewing.

In writing the section on avant-garde film, I frequently resorted to an historiographic fiction that troubles me somewhat, and that is that the decade of the 1960s (beginning actually in the later 1950s) was that of lyrical and mythopoeic cinema, the decade of Brakhage and his followers, while the decade of the 1970s (beginning actually in the late 1960s) was the decade of structural film, the decade of Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Ernie Gehr.

There is some truth in this assertion. The structural film certainly did command more attention and more critical interest in the 1970s than other types of avant-garde film. I remember vividly how absolute and complete was the lack of interest shown by exhibitors, programmers and critics of avant-garde film in anything but structural film.

Yet while this historiographic fiction announces one truth, it conceals an ever deeper one. Coupled with the myth of artistic progress which still dominates critical writing about art today, this fiction implies that in the 1970s Brakhage's work was surpassed by that of Snow, Frampton and Gehr. This historiographic fiction, then, conceals the important truth that the work of Brakhage and his followers continued throughout the 1970s and indeed the 1980s, undiminished in aesthetic stature. The truth of this is obvious to anyone who is intimate with Brakhage's masterworks of the 1970s and 1980s – with *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971), the *Sexual Meditation Series* (1972), the *Sincerity/Duplicity Series* (six films, 1973-1980), *The Text of Light* (1974), *Murder Psalm* (1981), *Unconscious London Strata* (1982), *Hell Spit Flexion* (1983).

While I am certain that Brakhage's aesthetic powers did not diminish in the 1970s and 1980s, I am at the same time convinced that they represent a form of thinking different from that which began to show itself, in avant-garde film at any rate, in the 1970s. In *Image and Identity*, I characterize this new paradigm of thinking I see emerging in the structural film of the 1970s and explain why I think it is important. But it would be a logical error (a category error, to be exact) to infer any aesthetic assessment from my claim that

Brakhage does not engage in this new form of thinking. For the record, I believe that Brakhage is the greatest filmmaker who has yet lived (though Michael Snow's genius is, perhaps, more multi-faceted).

A similar caveat should be attached to my contrasting of Brakhage's Americanness with Michael Snow's Canadianness. The fact that many of the best writers on our national culture have expressed virulently anti-American conclusions may prompt some readers to take this opposition as, implicitly, one between "a good object" and "a bad object." It should not be interpreted in this way. I consider it simply a fact that Brakhage's films are very American in nature, just as are the writings of Charles Olson, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams (all writers for whom Brakhage has professed admiration). But that fact itself neither adds to nor detracts from their aesthetic value which obviously must be judged on grounds other than their having or lacking certain national characteristics.

It should be evident that I believe that the aesthetic value of Brakhage's films is very high. Indeed – indeed, to stress my conviction again, I consider them to rank with Ezra Pound's poetry, Picasso's paintings and Stravinsky's music. Still, they are very American works, and as such should not be taken as a model exemplifying every feature our own independent cinema should possess. If, in *Image and Identity*, I attempt to identify some of the differences between the cinematic tradition that Brakhage inherited and regenerated and our own tradition of independent cinema, it is not to denigrate Brakhage's achievement but (I hope this does not sound immodest) to help us remember our own path.

Nor would I suggest to our aspiring film artists that they bypass Brakhage, the better to know their own cultural heritage. I think this would be as foolish as recommending to a budding poet that in order to get to know himself or herself, he read only the very fine poetry of Michael Ondaatje, Dennis Lee and Christopher Dewdney but avoid the experience of confronting the work of Ezra Pound.

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Thanks are due to many. Professor Peter Harcourt encouraged my initial efforts. Piers Handling and Wayne Clarkson gave me the opportunity to present a large program of Canadian films at Toronto's Festival of Festivals, which allowed me to test the hypothesis that became the thesis of this book. Dr. J.M. Davie helped me see things clearly enough that I was able to avoid some errors and wrong moves. Stan Brakhage, Richard Kerr and Michael Snow offered support when I was besieged and near defeat. A remarkable series of filmmaking assistants uncomplainingly assumed additional filmmaking responsibilities and the burdens of running my business when I neglected them to write. Their names are Anna Pafomow, Cindy Gawel, Marilyn Jull, Alexa-Frances Shaw, and Susan Oxtoby. Anna, Cindy, Susan and especially Marilyn willingly took on research assistants' responsibilities along with their filmmaking duties. Tom Thibault's cool-headed efficiency in sound production was an enormous help during the period in which most of *Image and Identity* was written.

Sandra Woolfrey, the director of Wilfrid Laurier University Press, took a personal interest in this project and so showed a tolerance of some of my less admirable traits that, were it known, would make me the envy of most authors. Andra Sheffer, executive director of The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, was so unflinching in her resolve to see the project through that she put up with my impatience and discouragement. Alison Reid, publication officer at The Academy, was efficient with coping with my requests. Mary Scally was of tremendous help from beginning to end. She took an appalling, incoherent pile of notes, photocopies, scribbles, typed pages, and inserts and turned it into a coherent typescript, then uncomplainingly and with impressive accuracy prepared several drafts. A copy editor who, according to her customary policy, wishes to remain anonymous performed the formidable task of getting a too-bulky manuscript down to a readable length. Olive Koyama completed the line editing and handled the preparations for printing.

The Canada Council and The Ontario Arts Council (through its program of grants for Visual Arts Critics) came through with financial aid. Since

university research support is not available to me, this assistance was crucial. A very special thanks is due to Françoise Picard, Film and Holography Officer, Canada Council, who believed in this project before anyone else, continued to believe in it even when I had abandoned hope, and was strong enough to lay down the law to me when, near the end, I quit the project. Without her faith *Image and Identity* would never have been completed. Tom Sherman, former media officer at The Canada Council provided the initial impetus that set the project in motion. The Ontario Film Development Corporation also provided a generous grant.

I would also like to thank those readers alert enough to recognize that *Image and Identity* is not an objective survey of an artistic field but an artist's statement of his credo and an attempt to construct for himself a usable tradition.

Only my wife really knows the hurt that unscrupulous reviews of films written by reviewers who have not seen them can cause and she has always been there to assuage the pain. But I am most thankful to her for understanding why I continue filmmaking despite the financial havoc, the psychological disarray and the unprincipled criticism that seem to be the inevitable result. She has also tolerated the long periods during which I have been emotionally absent while absorbed in work. It is something of a convention for authors to remark in their acknowledgements that their books would not have been written were it not for their wives' support. In this case, it is all too true.

From my father and mother I acquired my love for my country. My mother, by recognizing that curiosity is a form of love, encouraged the quest that resulted in this book. And it was she who showed me that any true philosophy must begin with a love of one's own. My father embodies the standards of learning that I cherish and represented the Calvinist ideals of honesty with oneself, self-sacrifice, sharing and frugality by which I still measure myself. He gave me the granite that has enabled me to work in such severe conditions as those in which this book was written. He also taught me that it is far more important to think about the proper punctuation for a sentence, the relationship between a poetic image and the structure in which it appears, or the derivation of a mathematical theorem than it is to think about how one's career is faring. I dedicate *Image and Identity* to my mother and my father.

Introduction

It is something of a cliché that Canadian art tends to take on a realistic, often documentary character. We see this in our cinema, for example, in the prevalence of the tendency to formulate social purposes for our films. In this study, I take this cliché seriously in the sense that I take it on as an issue and use it to open up an inquiry into the reasons why much of our art and our filmmaking has had this realistic character. I have been especially concerned with identifying those features of the Canadian sensibility that have given rise to a realist style and with explaining how that sensibility was formed. The features of our realist style are precisely described, the virtues and limitations of the realistic impulse on Canada are mapped out and the several ways our film artists have cultivated those virtues and overcome those limitations are explained.

One of the primary factors in the constitution of the Canadian sensibility has been the nature of our landscape. The early Europeans who came to Canada found our land alien, hostile, difficult to identify with. As a result, one of the philosophies these early Canadians brought with them took a strong hold among them. That philosophy, known as Common Sense philosophy, involved a dualistic view of reality, according to which reality is made up of mental stuff and physical stuff entirely different from each another. So strong was the hold of this philosophy that not only did it dominate the classrooms of our universities around the time of Confederation, but it was also widely disseminated from pulpits, through magazines and through newspapers. This dualistic worldview is also embodied in much of the painting of Europeans visiting Canada in the middle part of the nineteenth century and of early settlers in Canada.

A dualistic view of the constitution of reality poses fundamental problems for thoughtful people and this was no less so for Canadian thinkers of the mid-1800s. If consciousness and nature are as radically different from one another as dualistic philosophies conceive them to be, it is difficult to conceive how consciousness can really know nature. While this problem is difficult to solve conceptually, a visual image provides us with a model for the solution, for an accurate likeness of nature is at once a product of a consciousness and an object that possesses at least analogues of spatial,

volumetric, tonal and often colouristic structures of reality. Since it originates in consciousness but possesses at least some of the structures of reality, it provides a model of how the opposition of consciousness and nature can be overcome.

An accurate image belonging to any visual medium whatever provides such a model. The only condition that an image must fulfil in order to serve this purpose is to be as accurate a representation of nature as possible, while still affording some scope for human expression. It is the demand for accuracy that derives from this purpose that largely accounts for the realistic, documentary impulse of much Canadian art. Because the opposition of nature and consciousness is especially acutely felt in a harsh landscape and climate such as ours, the realistic image which provides a model of the reconciliation of consciousness and nature has an especially important role in our culture. So important is the role of the realistic image in our culture that the expressive dimensions of artmaking here are often confined to discovering, and subsequently representing, a scene or landscape with which we feel a special degree of empathy.

Though any sort of likeness can serve the role we have been outlining, a photograph can do so especially well, for nowhere other than in a photograph are consciousness and nature brought together in such an intimate cohabitation. Paradoxically, a photograph is at once both a product of consciousness that possesses some of the structures of nature and an emanation from nature that resembles the contents of consciousness. So intimate is the relation between nature and consciousness in the photograph that each seems to lose its independent identity. What creates the photograph – mind or nature? The answer is that mind and nature work so closely together that it is difficult to tell their roles apart; nature inspires consciousness but consciousness so enlivens the natural as to give it its significance, its inspirational powers. The roles of nature and consciousness so merge with one another that no boundaries can be discerned. In light of this, the most accurate statement that can be made about the creative process in photography is that in its creation and discovery become identified with one another. Thus in photography, the problem of representational art, the problem of how to reconcile expression with accurate depiction, is resolved.

The modern art traditions in most countries took a highly disparaging attitude towards representation in general and photography in particular. Representations were accused of importing irrelevant associations into the experience of a work of art, thus debasing the purity of the aesthetic response, and were said to impose unnecessary restraints on the formal conditions to which artworks could aspire. Photographs were especially despised, since it was said that the fact that the camera is a mechanical apparatus that furnishes exact likenesses of its subjects means that the artist has little control over the formal qualities of the image. As well, the mechanical nature of the process was said to preclude human expression.

While these attitudes did exist in Canada, they were far less prevalent. The frightful alienation of consciousness from nature called for representational imagery. For this reason, photographic imagery has had a place of importance in Canadian art that even the most shrill and insistent claims of the abstractionists could not endanger. The National Gallery of Canada's 1970 monograph which assembles the photographs of Tom Thomson demonstrates conclusively the deep influence that medium had on his painting and suggests much about the influence of photography on the Group of Seven. In contrast to the vast majority of American artists of the post-Second World War period, many Canadian artists maintained this interest in the photograph and even developed this tradition further. Jack Chambers, for example, returned to North America from Spain in 1962, when abstraction still dominated American painting, and began to paint from photographs. About the same time, Michael Snow turned from abstraction to depiction. His own art reveals the reason why he made this change; inter-media works like *Midnight Blue* and *One Second in Montreal* reveal Snow's fascination with the characteristics of photographic imagery and with the nature of the relation between photographic imagery and other sorts of imagery.

Most Canadian film has been a part of the realistic tradition. We can see this in the especially important place documentary filmmaking has had in Canada and in the prevalence of realist films in our feature film tradition (films like *Entre la Mer et l'Eau douce*, *Goin' Down the Road* and *Between Friends*, *The Grey Fox* and *Partners* and *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, *Proxyhawks* and *Outrageous*). But the influence of the photograph on Canadian films takes far more specific forms than this. Many of the lyrical, personal documentaries produced by the National Film Board in the 1950s exploited features specific to the photograph; a key example is Colin Low's *City of Gold*, but other equally important if less obvious examples would be Roman Kroiter's *Paul Tomkowicz*, *Street Railway Switchman* and Colin Low's *Circle of the Sun*. The justly celebrated cinéma-vérité movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, known in Canada as the Candid-Eye movement, was enormously influenced by the work of the French photo-journalist Henri Cartier-Bresson. Members of the Candid-Eye movement have referred to Cartier-Bresson's book *The Decisive Moment* as the bible of the movement and have noted the important role the book's introduction (in which Cartier-Bresson states his most fundamental belief about the art and craft of photo-journalism) had in the formulation of their ideas about filmmaking. The Candid-Eye movement has even been described as an attempt to translate Cartier-Bresson's photo-journalistic practices into film.

Some later films made at the National Film Board would make this supposed relation between photography and film one of their central issues. This is true, for example, of Martin Duckworth's *The Wish* and *Accident* and Derek May's *Film for Max*. Though the makers of these films have rejected the rather facile assumption that photographic styles can be

straightforwardly adapted for film, a concern with issues arising from photographic representation is still very much in evidence in these works.

The realistic tendency of our feature film has its origins in our feature cinema's roots in the documentary movement of the 1960s. (Both *Goin' Down the Road* and *Nobody Waved Goodbye* began as documentaries.) It is, however, in our experimental cinema that the influence of photography is most evident. There were two mainstreams of thought about the relation between photography and film in the international avant-garde. One tradition held that photographic representation should have no place in film at all, that it should be eliminated and film transformed into rhythmically animated geometric shapes or pure colours projected on the screen for varying, metrically related intervals. The other tradition held that the destiny of cinema was to represent the contents of consciousness operating under the impact of such extreme states as hallucination, dream, mad love, etc., and that to do so the spatial field natural to the photographic image had to be transformed. Though in most matters these traditions were opposed to each other, they agreed on one matter – that the unaltered photograph had no place in film. Not surprisingly, neither tradition took root in Canada.

Michael Snow took a very different attitude towards the relation between photograph and film than did American or European experimental filmmakers. Partly as a result of his longstanding interest (evidenced in such works as his photographic series *Plus Tard*) in certain traditional themes of Canadian art, Snow believed he could make a legitimate place for the unaltered photograph in film; this is an aspect of *Wavelength*, of \longleftrightarrow and of *La région centrale*. It was, I believe, Snow's "Canadianness" that led him to think differently about film than his American counterparts. Because he stood outside the tradition of American avant-garde filmmaking, he was able to revolutionize it, and he did so by insisting that his longstanding concerns as a Canadian artist be accommodated within the tradition of vanguard filmmaking.

Canadian artist Jack Chambers also took up experimental filmmaking in the late 1960s. Given the nature of his concerns as a painter, it is hardly surprising that his films are in part reflections on the nature of photography. All his paintings after 1962 were based on photographs, and over the course of the 1960s his paintings increasingly took on more and more aspects of the source photographs on which they were based. In the mid-1960s, he produced a series of silver canvases which were monochrome, like black-and-white photographs, and appeared to switch from photographic negative to photographic positive as a viewer moved in front of them. His perceptual realist paintings, done in the late 1960s and after, not only closely resembled their source photographs but were based on the theory that photography should play a most important role in contemporary painting. Michael Snow and Jack Chambers have given rise to a school of experimental filmmaking. Filmmakers like David Rimmer, Richard Kerr, Andrew Lugg, Chris Gallagher and Jim Smith have made films in which the nature of photography is a central issue.

These are the themes I examine in this book. I explore the role played by the photograph in the development of what I call an empirical style of filmmaking. I consider the strengths and the weaknesses of that style, and I demonstrate how certain film artists have transcended the limitations of that style while exploiting its strengths. I also demonstrate that, in order to exhibit its strengths, they had to transform it into something quite other than an empirical style.

Image and Identity is divided into three sections. In the first section, I argue that a genetic approach is the most appropriate method for inquiring into questions concerning a person's or a people's identity and then survey our cultural history for indications of the nature of certain decisive experiences that, for better or for worse, have shaped what we as a nation have become. I also consider the relations between these primal experiences and some forms of cultural expression prevalent in Canada – consider, that is to say, how those primal experiences have given shape to our intellectual and artistic culture.

Because the formative experiences of Canadian settlers emphasized the alienation of human beings from nature, the first philosophy that took root in Canada was the dualistic philosophy of Common Sense. But this philosophy has been the lesser tradition in Canadian intellectual history. The greater has been a philosophy of reconciliation that answered to the dialectical needs of accounting at once for the opposition between human beings and nature and for the truly extraordinary intimacy between the two that developed as the thinly scattered European settlers came to depend so basically upon nature's sometimes harsh, sometimes bountiful ways.

Northrop Frye's image of the garrison – of people huddled together for mutual support against the savage wilderness "out there" – represents only a partial truth. For what must also be acknowledged in framing the images that depict the core of our cultural identity is the wondrous closeness with nature which developed as far-flung settlers came to depend so profoundly on the land.

Thus the first truly important, native-born Canadian philosopher, George Blewett (1873-1912), argued that we "receive and achieve our spiritual nature," our very identity, through the series of instructive interactions we have with nature. Blewett claimed that it is not by introspection that we find out about ourselves; rather, that it is by practical experience, by our give-and-take with objective reality, that we discover who we truly are. In the end, Blewett proposed that there is a fundamental unity of mind and nature. There is, Blewett argues, a rational self that reveals itself in both nature and human life. The reason that structures our thought also constitutes the structure of reality. Human existence only adds consciousness of its structure to reality; it does not create that structure. Its structure, though rational, is essentially objective.

These ideas are obviously Hegelian – in fact, as Blewett himself testified, they represent an Hegelianism of the full-blown sort, not the watered-down Hegelianism of the English Idealists – T.H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet, F.H. Bradley and J.M.E. McTaggart. It was indeed Hegel who expounded more powerfully than any other philosopher the dialectic of the relation of subject and object that Blewett (and many other Canadian philosophers) made the core of their systems.

Hegel's system is the very model of what a philosophy of reconciliation might be, for in it the subject and the object, Spirit and Matter, the universal and the particular, are identified with one another. Even the individual identity of persons and the social being of the community are shown to be mutually independent – a demonstration that influenced Canadian intellectuals who were attempting to define the communitarianism which had taken hold in Canada.

Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, in their astonishingly rich history of Canadian philosophy, *The Faces of Reason*, go so far as to suggest that Hegel's system-building reflects an imperative which the early European settlers in Canada would have found somewhat familiar:

The German-speaking peoples were divided from one another by religion, by ethnic origin, and by geography which left them scattered amongst Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Frenchmen.

The situation in Canada was not altogether different from that which Leibniz, Kant and Hegel faced. The enormous ethnic diversity of the European thinkers and the staggering differences amongst the various geographical regions of our country resulted in a variety of subcultures. Consequently, as Armour and Trott point out, just as German thinkers had been, Canadian intellectuals were required to provide a comprehensive and truly general theory that could expound the broad aims that could unify all these peoples, of such different ethnic backgrounds and living in very different circumstances, into a single nation. No economic goals could possibly suffice for this task, for it is clear that economic policies which benefit one sector of the economy will be of benefit to some parts of the country, but detrimental to other parts (as policies which favour secondary industry are of primary benefit to central Canada and are detrimental to the prairie provinces, whose economy is mainly resource-based). No, only goals of the most general sort could serve the task.

Canadian philosophers soon discovered that an Absolute Idealism along Hegelian lines – not the Hegelianism of the English and Scottish universities which was so reasonable, decent and respectable, but one that accepted the darker side of Hegelian thought, the side that saw that conflict and negation were essential to the work of the Spirit – was the very model of the philosophy of mediation and reconciliation that was needed. In its many versions, it became the leading philosophical tradition in Canada. Drawing examples

primarily from paintings but also from literature, I argue that this philosophy has also been the provenance of our strongest artistic practices, including our avant-garde cinema. Arguments in support of this claim constitute the very core of *Image and Identity*.

In Part One, I provide descriptions of our main philosophical heritages, Common Sense philosophy and Absolute Idealism, and trace the development of these traditions in Canada back to certain primal experiences, which were the very source of the tensions these philosophies attempted to bring into harmony.

In Part Two, I examine a realistic tradition which appears in most of our documentary and some of our fictional feature films. I explore the worldview implied by this realist style and consider the relationship between that worldview and the worldview presented in Common Sense philosophy. My contention is that these two worldviews are very similar. At the end of Part Two, I argue that this brand of realism is artistically restrictive.

Part Three deals with our avant-garde cinema, which at its best, I consider to be our strongest cinema. I argue, in essence, that this cinema does not attempt to present realistic illusions but rather inquires into the conditions of realistic representations. That this inquiry often proceeds by the systematic variation of features of imagery, testing by that method the bounds of realistic representation, is evidence that the self-reflexivity of this cinematic practice overcomes the artistic restrictions of the realistic style (its preclusion of a wide latitude of variation). At the same time, that the features of realistic imagery that cinema takes as its problematic is itself highly significant, as is the fact that, in our avant-garde, realistic imagery is almost as often deployed as it is questioned. The significance of these facts is a major topic of Part Three.

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PART ONE

Introduction

Throughout its history, Canada's very existence has been both precarious and implausible. Many potent forces have conspired against the forging of a Canadian identity. Undoubtedly, the most corrosive dissolvant of national identities that has ever been known, the most powerful force toward the homogenization of all the world's cultures has been technology, and Canada had to face the task of developing its own culture at a time when the technological era was already well underway. Furthermore, the enormous geographical expanse of the country, the pronounced differences between its various parts, even the centrifugal tendency of our historical age towards national independence and self-determination have made the endeavour to construct a national culture extremely arduous. The concept of fate simply acknowledges the historicity of being, and Canada's fate, one could easily think, has been determined by its having been conceived in the technological era. Specifically, our fate would seem to be that our national existence becomes something insubstantial and purely formal.

Yet human beings require a culture to which they belong, and, despite the baleful, homogenizing force technology exerts, Canada has remained a particular culture. Perhaps the extreme difficulty of forming a national identity has been one of the factors that have made Canadian thinkers so deeply aware of the fact that the community does not (as so many American thinkers seem to believe) necessarily oppress individuals but rather, that individuals come into being in and through the community. Canadian thinkers have stressed persistently the importance of the community in the moral formation of the individuals – indeed have stressed persistently that there can be no individual being apart from social being. Perhaps, too, the immensity and diversity of the country, and the very difficulty of creating a community in a country of empty spaces help make Canadian thinkers so acutely aware of the importance of community.

The ancients knew that since human being is what it is, humans, in order to become fully human, must come to love the Good. But, the ancients averred, that love is the culmination of a process that begins with learning

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the love of one's own. We can know and love the Good only by first encountering it in what is our own – our own bodies, our own families, our own cities.

The first three chapters of this book ask what experiences were at the origin of the development of our national culture and how that national culture developed. And it examines how those experiences were reflected in art and thought.

But first, we must ask some methodological questions about how one goes about characterizing a national culture.

In Reality, Who Are We?

Like Oedipus, Canadians unremittingly seem to face the question of their identity. Though not much headway has been made towards answering it, a clue for unlocking the riddle of our identity was provided some time ago by Vancouver communications theorist Anthony Wilden.¹ According to Wilden, when under the oppression of what he refers to as a dominating "Other," we take for our identity everything we believe the "Other" not to be. But any identity achieved through the process of negation is only an imaginary identity and not a real one. Thus attempts to characterize Canadian culture that have taken the identification of distinctive traits of Canadian culture as their goal (and this includes the majority of books on Canadian art and culture) can only redescribe, in various permutations, relations that exist on the register of the Imaginary. They can never break through to the real. Oedipus' question will forever remain a puzzle for them.

The pivotal distinction in Wilden's texts is between Imaginary and real relations. Wilden took the term "Imaginary" from Jacques Lacan who, he states, "began to talk about an individualistic and competitive relationship between 'self' and 'other', a relationship he called Imaginary."² Unlike Lacan, Wilden uses these terms in the analysis of the structure of interpersonal, social relationships rather than in a psychoanalytical context.

Imaginary relationships depend upon images, imaginings and fantasies that misrepresent the real. This misrepresentation often takes the form of stereotyping. According to Wilden, the form of stereotyping in which Canadians most often engage is to blame those lower on some particular social scale. While I never would deny that Canadians engage in this form of thinking, or even that they engage in it with great frequency, I do not think this is the form our Imaginary thinking typically takes. I believe that Canadians tend to vilify those who are perceived as having more power and prestige than they, but who, in reality, are nearly as oppressed by the colonial system as they are.

One of the deleterious effects of Imaginary thinking is that the images of "self" and "other" it produces are likely to take the place of true understanding of the real. Thus, Imaginary thinking has an alienating effect, for it

obscures the truth about interpersonal and social relations. We take relationships founded on stereotypical images to be real.

But how do these images come into being in the first place? Wilden reveals that they come into being through "the social (and ideological) processes of Imaginary projection, identification, objectification and opposition."³ Though these terms are drawn from Freud, Wilden claims he uses them to describe the structure of relationships which are primarily social and economic rather than psychoanalytical. Projection involves attributing unacceptable attributes, feelings and desires to others in order to deny that we ourselves possess them. Projection is a mechanism associated with paranoia, for the unacceptable feelings are often aggressive in nature, and, through projection, these aggressive feelings are attributed to another, so one comes to believe "I'm not aggressive, he (the 'other') is." We come to fear others because we do not acknowledge attributes of ourselves. Imaginary identification takes two forms. Positive identification is a process of constructing an image of our "self" that matches the image we have of an "other," while negative identification is a process of constructing a "self" image in opposition to our image of the "other." In both cases, the image of the "other" is instrumental in constructing our image of our "self." Objectification is a defense mechanism by which we make the "other" alien, and by doing so, we deny our actual relation to the "other." On the basis of the "others'" difference, we deny them the attributes of humanity, and render them thing-like. We construct an Imaginary self through the paranoid relation of opposition, by reducing the "other" to a "not-self." And when we recognize similarities between our "I" and this "not-I," we feel insecure about ourselves, and use projection to blame the other for threatening us (undermining our sense of self).

The concern to establish the distinctiveness of Canadian culture has all too frequently locked the discussion into the register of the Imaginary. Too often critical writing that has taken the identification of our cultural uniqueness as its goal has resorted to the paranoid mechanisms of stereotyping, scapegoating and vilification. It has degenerated into the expression of anti-American and anti-British sentiments. Because it has lost its relationship with the real, it has been unable to answer Oedipus' puzzle and tell us who we really are. It has sealed us in a "victim's position" or in the perpetual adolescent mystification which victims tend to celebrate (because it proposes that the victim's past contains something preferable to the present). Because it has not provided us with any help in grasping the real context of our relationships, it has not aided us in distinguishing what we think we perceive from what we actually perceive. It has only added to our confusion.

Objectification results in "individuals" becoming atomized, or perceiving themselves as becoming atomized. Individuals defend themselves against the "other" by distinguishing themselves from the "other," who is perceived as less than human. This relationship, an Imaginary one, takes us out of

contact with the real. The relationship between a "self" and an "other" comes to be thought of as a relationship resembling that between two atoms in a void. The substitution of an Imaginary context for a real context results in the relationships among different individuals, individuals and groups, and different groups being deprived of any recognizable political, economic and historical context. By engaging in this form of thinking, Canadians have lost their grasp of their political, economic and historic context, and their grip on their own history and their own political realities. But few seem to understand how this has come to be.

The key to understanding the deleterious effects of these Imaginary relations is to analyze their structure, for the pieces of behaviour that belong to the register of the Imaginary are structured by a code (the code belongs to a higher logical type than a message, inasmuch as the code is a set of rules which constrains the structure of messages. A code makes messages possible), and it is by understanding the code that we really see how we come to be entrapped by such relations.

Wilden's key claim about Imaginary relationships is that they are mediated relations and that what mediates such relations is the dominant "Other." The "Other" is not necessarily a person or persons; it can be a pattern in the socio-economic hierarchy, an institution or even the media. But the "Other" always dominates, in much the same way as a code does a message. Thus, any relation between any particular male and any particular female in our society will be structured by "the code of male-female relations in a sexist society." (Another way of expressing this idea is that all male-female relations in our society will, willy-nilly be mediated by codes of male domination since even relations between males and females which escape male dominance have the same sort of status among social relations as anti-grammatical constructions have in speech or writing.) Real "Others" do dominate us, though they are not necessarily dominating and exploitative. But sometimes the paranoiagenic processes of projection, negative identification and objectification lead us to turn "others" into "Others." Canadians do this to those who have just slightly more power than they.⁴ This is like the child who sees his/her older brother as a terrifying overlord but his/her parents (who have real power over the child) as friendly giants lacking any trace of "Otherness." As a result, the real locus of domination goes unrecognized, while someone who is simply an "other" is made into an Imaginary "Other."

The relation between such "Others" and those with whom they associate comes to be mediated by codes that should have no part in these relations. They will be treated as exploitative, domineering, and self-aggrandizing; they will be resented for their power and will be expected to correct the real harms and abuses these people suffer. And when they fail to magically do away with the harms these people suffer, they will be vilified for their lack of concern, when really, not having much power, they are not capable of

righting these wrongs. Nevertheless, their failure to help will be perceived as the arrogant difference typical of domineering "Others" and the whole paranoid cycle, beginning with converting an "other" into an Imaginary "Other," will begin over again.

The second sort of Imaginary "Other" is the distorted representations of real "Others" who really do possess powers of domination over us; they are, we might say, real "Others" seen through the distorting optic of the Imaginary. The actual relation of being dominated is converted into a paranoid relation. At times, this involves instances of real exploitation being transformed into Imaginary threats to the self. People who engage in this form of behaviour fail to perceive the real nature and real context of their exploitation and respond instead to Imaginary threats.

This is quite useful to the person in the dominating position in the relationship. For one thing, dominated individuals, because they feel threatened, are often provoked to inappropriate behaviour and the very "irrationality" of their behaviour serves to lock them into their dominated position. Furthermore, through a mirroring operation they consign themselves to the role of the oppressed and turn their hatred for the Imaginary "Other" inward, making of it self-hatred. The internalization amounts to collusion with the function of the "Other." Moreover, the real person (or institution) whom the dominated individual has converted into an Imaginary "Other" continues to have access to the real, while the dominated "individual" does not. This ensures that the other remains in the position of domination. Thus, the dominating other can use this position to provoke the dominated person into increasingly paranoid behaviour, which only further strengthens the Imaginariness of the dominated person's thinking, which further increases their alienation from reality, which gives the other even greater advantage over the person they dominate, which the other can use.... And so it goes, around and around.

Lacan has shown that Imaginary relations, indeed all relations based on mechanisms of identification, are prone to ambivalence, for the "Other" always has something of the status of an ideal, of the once-loved (image of the) ego-ideal. Our relation to an ego-ideal is always ambivalent; this is because the ego-ideal is always loved for its power (which is always "orthopedic," providing the ego with support when it might, but for this introjected ideal, collapse into the nothingness it truly is) and hated because its power reveals our impotence and/or the person – or persons (for an ego-ideal can be and often is the product of condensation) – represented in this image always fails to measure up to the introjected ego-ideal (after all, they are for most of our lives merely fallen idols). This ambivalence sets into motion an oscillating effect.⁵ Sometimes one acts in opposition to the "Other," sometimes in collusion with its commands.

This form of Imaginary relationship is evident in the thinking of those who cast the Americans and British not just as colonizers (real "Others") but

as cruel and inhuman monsters. Distinctions between “us” and “them” are cast in the terms of the Imaginary relation of absolute difference, absolute opposition. In providing Americans or British with a stereotyped identity, the evil persecutor, we end up locking ourselves into the circuit of Imaginary relationships. When we begin this way, we end up conceiving the relationship between “us” and “them” in terms of dualistic oppositions between Imaginary images, that misrepresent reality. Thus, it is often suggested that our films, television programs, novels etc. are slow-paced, meditative and gentle, while American films, television programs and novels are fast-paced, action-oriented and brutal. This Imaginary relationship obscures the fact that the real relationship between Canadians and Americans is not one of opposition on the same level but one that involves different levels, for Americans are in the position of their dominating Other, and they have a strong culture, while we possess only the beginnings of a culture. We have every reason to take pride in what we have produced, but to pretend that our culture has flourished just as theirs has is to ignore the reality of impoverishment. It is to deny that relatively fewer Canadians have been provided with the wherewithal to make art, as a full-time, moderately well-compensated profession. It is to deny that most of our artists (including many dealt with in this book) have worked under brutal economic conditions, experienced a gruesome lack of recognition, and suffered for it, in the sense that they have not been given the opportunity to develop as they might. It is to deny the reality of our oppression.

Conceiving the relationship between Canada and the United States as opposition between political entities on the same level of power conceals the truth that urgently must be understood – that Canada is a neo-colony of America, that America dominates Canada, admittedly not by military power, but just as effectively, by having acquired ownership of the means of production within our borders (we can’t properly say “our” means of production, for they belong to them) and by controlling the cultural industries here – perhaps this would better be expressed by saying by controlling us with their cultural industries installed here. Stereotypes of the Canadian and American identities – of America as the evil, oppressive monster and Canada as the innocent victim – only help maintain American domination of Canada. In fact, the negative feelings implied by the criticism of American oppression very often serve to mask positive feelings about American power.

To change the situation, we must understand the real relation between the two countries. To do so, we must discover what we have in fact achieved, and discern what is usable in what our history has provided us. It is to discovering this tradition that *Image and Identity* is dedicated. We shall try to get beyond defining ourselves in terms of the Other (as those who start out looking for “distinctive” features of Canadian culture do), beyond the oppositions of Imaginary identity, to discover what we are in our history, in the

traditions we possess. Rather than attempting to discover our identity in difference, we shall pursue a genetic approach and endeavour to discern, in the process of our becoming, what we are today.

CHAPTER 1

A House Divided

"The owl of Minerva only takes flight at twilight," G.W.F. Hegel once wrote. With its reference to Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, Hegel's dark remark suggests among other things that philosophy flourishes only when cultures reach their twilight years. People turn to philosophy only in a civilization's fading moments, when destructive historical changes cast doubt on its traditions and institutions. Thus Greek philosophy was born at the time Greeks developed an economy based on trade, which brought them into contact with different social, political and religious beliefs that brought their own into question. Spinozistic philosophy was created by a Jew living in a Christian town near Amsterdam, then a centre for world trade, and at a time when the recent scientific developments of Newton and Huygens were bringing traditional beliefs into doubt. Hegel's philosophical system was developed, not in one of the great imperial centres of the time, but in Jena, Bamberg, Heidelberg and, most importantly, Berlin. The Hegelian synthesis reflects the difficulty of finding a way of integrating the kinds of differences that existed among the states which would become the German federation. German-speaking people were divided, not just by geography, but also by religion, political affiliation, tradition and ethnic origin. Hegel's philosophy offered a way of rationally mediating these conflicts.

Settlers arriving in Canada in the nineteenth century and even in the early twentieth century confronted a three-pronged challenge to the ideas they brought with them. First, they faced great diversity among the people who were forging a new country and a new political unity. Secondly, they encountered the Amerindians, whose way of life, beliefs and relationship to nature was far different from their own. Thirdly, they encountered a landscape that was inhospitable and seemed intractable to any familiar conceptual system. Nothing could have been more out of place in this environment than Wordsworthian rhapsodies about the tranquil glories of nature.

In the late nineteenth century, this three-pronged challenge provoked the development of two philosophical traditions in Canada, the Common Sense school and Absolute Idealism. Both relied upon the mind's capacity to deal

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with conflicting, even contradictory, ideas. And both attempted to bring into harmony the tensions arising from the three primal experiences that confronted Canadian settlers.

Three Primal Experiences

Canada's population has been one of extraordinary diversity since shortly after French settlers began conquering the Indian lands of northern North America. Although the French and British predominated in the early days, other immigrants arrived in large numbers and so were never entirely overshadowed by French and British settlers. By the time of the British conquest in 1759-60, the transplanted Scottish community had been joined by German and Swiss immigrants. In the late eighteenth century, immigrants began settling in Newfoundland. The mostly Catholic settlers of Upper and Lower Canada were joined by 40,000-50,000 United Empire Loyalists during the American Revolution. The mostly Protestant Loyalists were largely conservative people, quite different in spirit from the settlers who were fleeing persecution or seeking religious and civil freedoms. They brought with them both a political moderateness and an American practicalness. What primarily distinguished the Loyalists from the Americans they had left behind was not so much a top-hatted Tory enthusiasm for the Crown and all things traditional, but rather a flexibility and an ability to compromise, traits that came from not having a utopian dream to realize. These United Empire Loyalists, who included conservative merchants, Anglican clergymen and colonial officials would form the nucleus of a ruling oligarchy within what had been a largely Roman Catholic country.

Among the Loyalists were many people of German descent who had been living in Pennsylvania, New York and Georgia, and they joined Germans who had arrived earlier. The German United Empire Loyalists included Mennonites, civilians, members of militia regiments and German regiments who had fought for the British Crown. To these were added Germans, mostly Mennonites and Lutherans, who arrived between 1792 when John Graves Simcoe invited Americans who were still sympathetic to Great Britain to take up free land in Upper Canada, and the beginning of the Upper Canada rebellion in 1837. After 1830 German Catholics and Amish immigrated directly from Europe.

After these waves of new settlers, the pattern of immigration became, until the mid-nineteenth century, one of a slow, steady influx of mostly English and Scottish settlers, along with a few settlers from the United States. They bolstered the stock of Anglo-Saxons, the dominant group until the Great Famine of the late 1840s brought hundreds of thousands of Irish to British North America. By 1871 the Irish were the largest ethnic group in every large town and city, with the exceptions of Montreal and Quebec City. Their cultural, social and religious traditions, their low income and their

destitution marked them as different from the majority. The tradition of Irish republicanism (represented in America by the Fenians) made their loyalty to Britain suspect in the eyes of the Tory establishment. There were divisions among the Irish themselves, not just between the Catholics (who considered themselves to be descendants of the original inhabitants of Ireland) and the Protestants (who made up the English and Scot colonialists), but also between the Fenians and the Protestants, and even between the Fenians and the Catholics.

Eastern Canadians at first believed the Prairies were uninhabitable. Mennonite and Hutterite settlers proved that the prairie lands were fertile, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, economic expansion and demand for agricultural products made settlement of the Prairies imperative. Soon settlers began arriving from Britain, the United States, France, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Finland, Russia, Hungary, Germany, the Ukraine, Poland, Italy, Greece, Syria and China.

Canada's ethnic diversity has always had an overlapping religious diversity. The most conspicuous divisions were those among Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics. But there were others, and there were also divisions within these main groups. Methodism divided followers of the Church of England into two groups: the supporters of the Church of England's claims to be the official church of the colonies and the adherents of Methodism who supported no official church. The Methodist movement itself was divided. In the Maritimes where the first Methodist congregations had been founded, Methodism was mainly a very conservative movement stressing a disciplined (methodical) life. Other Methodists, especially those in Upper Canada, were less conservative. Many Upper Canadian and Prairie Methodists, in particular, interpreted the traditional Wesleyan teaching – that it was possible to attain perfection in this life and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth – as support for the Social Gospel movement (it could be said that the Canadian Socialist movement had at least part of its base in Methodism). Similar divisions appeared among Roman Catholics. In the 1820s Ultramontanism was imported into Canada and it split the Roman Catholic thinkers and many of their followers into two camps: the Ultramontanists, who believed in the final authority of the Pope in all matters, secular as well as spiritual, and the Gallicans, who argued for the final authority of the state, even in spiritual matters. Eventually this conflict spread to nearly every sphere of social life. Monseigneur Ignace Bourget, the second Roman Catholic bishop of Montreal, zealously led the Ultramontanists' fight for freedom of the church and religious supremacy, ensuring that Ultramontanist ideals triumphed in almost every field – in education, in church-state relations and in theology. Gallicanism continued to offer its countervailing claims and to endure despite constant Ultramontanists' denunciations throughout the period.

In the 1860s the Ultramontanist movement itself split into two factions. The extremist faction called for an immediate application of all Ultramontanist principles in the fields of education and law (stipulating that all civil laws must be made to conform to canonical law). The moderate faction counselled compromise where necessary. In 1882 a militant fringe group called the Castors was formed and led to further division and strife among the Ultramontanists. After Louis Riel's hanging in 1885 and the attacks made against French-language education in Ontario, Manitoba, the North-West and New Brunswick, the more progressive side of Ultramontanism was increasingly transformed from a conservative internationalist movement to a weapon the clerical hierarchy used to fight off English-Canadian nationalism and imperialism. It had the effect of making French-Canadian nationalism more aggressive and outward-looking, turning its attention away from Quebec to the plight of French-speaking inhabitants in other parts of Canada. And like any transformation, this one produced divisions. Some Quebeckers remained attached to the idea of Quebec and conceived of it as the principal home of Francophone culture in Canada.

Religious and ethnic traditions may have divided the settlers of Canada, but there was one point on which there was universal agreement among them. The landscape and climate of the country they had chosen to call home were at best inhospitable and at worst life-threatening. "The land God gave to Cain," was the way Jacques Cartier described it when he landed on the north shore of the St. Lawrence in 1534. Those who arrived in Canada had no tradition that allowed them to understand and to relate to Canada's stark and inhospitable landscape. Their view of nature centred around belief in the existence of the sublime in nature. The term "sublime" was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by art critics and theorists to refer to feelings that encompassed "a degree of wonder and astonishment ... a degree of awfulness and solemnity, even approaching to severity ... very distinguishable from the more gay and brisk emotions raised by beautiful objects," as Richard Payne Knight wrote in *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805). The qualities of the sublime included vastness, power, magnificence and obscurity which overpower spectators, filling them with fascinated awe that can reveal the workings of the "Infinitely Grand" and the "Infinitely Powerful." In the sensation of the sublime are mingled feelings of terror and grandeur, awe and delight. Striving to create a work which combined these almost contradictory feelings was considered by the pre-Romantics to be the artist's most profound duty. Thus Scottish poet James Thomson thought that "great scenes" aroused "rapturous terror." In *Winter*, which formed part of his *The Seasons* (1726-30), he wrote: "How mighty, how majestic are thy works! / With what a pleasing dread they swell the soul."

While this complex of feelings might be inspired by the Rockies, little else in the Canadian landscape has such power. Except for its furthest western

and northern reaches (and perhaps small parts of the Gaspé Peninsula and the Cape Breton highlands), the land hardly swells the soul. It is stark and austere; majestic and awesome it is not.

The most remarkable feature of the nature images of the earliest European settlers in Canada is that they rarely depicted untamed nature. At first the sketches and paintings they produced were largely scenes of nature domesticated by a civilizing force. Even after the process of familiarizing themselves with the landscape was underway and fashions in European landscape painting underwent a shift in taste towards more rugged and terrifying scenes, these European newcomers still did not produce paintings of untamed nature. Usually their paintings included a human presence, and almost always they were done in a slightly outmoded, conventionalized European style which offered a false depiction of the Canadian landscape.

This is especially true of the topographic painters, many of them artist-soldiers trained at Woolwich Royal Military Academy by Paul Sandby, who was known at the time for his poetic and ornamental views of nature. These were men like Richard Short, whose drawings of Quebec after the siege portrayed quaint, good-natured inhabitants living in picturesque houses, George Heriot, Captain Hervey Smyth and the remarkable Thomas Davies, a water-colourist whose major theme was the harmony between human beings and nature. Living in the Age of Enlightenment, they naturally sought "the picturesque and sublime" in nature – majestic, exotic or awe-inspiring scenes. Mountains and waterfalls (especially Montmorency Falls) were among their favourite subjects. But these were almost always falsely depicted; generally these artists turned harsh, unscenic landscapes into impressively exotic scenes caught from agreeable points of view. Davies and Heriot, in particular, seemed to believe that all of nature could be rendered as a huge land in the British style. In their works, the *habitants* and the Amerindians were depicted as exotic and the colonial administrators as well-dressed gentlemen. The harsher realities of life were never shown.

Thomas Davies was certainly one of the best of these topographic painters. But works like *Montréal from St. Helen's Island* (1762) and *On the River La Puce* (1789) demonstrate how complete the mismatch was between the style and the subjects of his painting. In the foreground of *Montréal from St. Helen's Island* is something that looks like a fantasy British parkland, complete with exotic-looking vines clinging to tree trunks and hanging from branches and ground foliage of a sort never seen in Canada. *On the River La Puce* uses the careful, leaf-by-leaf British style of naturalism and ends up making this riverbank near Montreal look like a fantasy fern jungle.

George Heriot's *Chippewa Creek* (1813) displays a different style than the one Davies learned from Sandby. It is said that Heriot disliked the army and rejected Sandby's instruction, but his style is nevertheless still quite English. Heriot used full, wet strokes of the brush to create works modelled after the "southern" style of British water-colourists; he even employed a very thin

application of colour ("wash") to create highlights typical of that English school of painting.

This tradition was continued by one of the most popular artists of early Canada, the genre painter Cornelius Krieghoff. Krieghoff had spent his youth in Germany and had studied at the Düsseldorf Academy, which was famous for its genre painting. In 1845 he established himself at Longueuil, a village across from Montreal; in 1849 he moved to Montreal and a year later to Quebec. Although Krieghoff's paintings generally tell high-spirited and humorous stories of the *habitant* lifestyle, his works are now valued primarily for their apparent documentary value. His works do indeed represent some sort of a turning towards reality.

Narrative painting of the type Krieghoff practised had been developed in the Netherlands in the 1600s by such artists as Jan Steen, whose scenes of the Dutch middle class and especially of peasants contain smart references to human misconduct. His work is basically didactic, illustrating instructive aphorisms or proverbs, and he maintains an aloofness from his subject matter which reveals an almost condescending cleverness. This tradition of narrative painting continued in France in the 1700s, as well as in Germany at least into the 1800s. One of the reasons for the immense popularity of this type of painting is that it represented a turning away from sacred subjects and spiritual events, depicting instead the world of the new mercantile bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century.

Although the development of genre painting marked a turning towards reality, the *habitants* Krieghoff is supposed to have depicted so sensitively and affectionately viewed his work as a vulgar caricature of their lives. Support for Krieghoff came only from English-speaking patrons. His *Merrymaking* (1860) shows one man drunkenly swinging a bottle over his head; another with his sword lifted high seems to dare all comers to a fight. It is perhaps in Krieghoff's works that we best see the ideological significance of the imposition of an imported style on a domestic content.

The tradition of borrowing conventions to represent the landscape endured remarkably well. There is certainly evidence of this in the work of Homer Watson. Watson was virtually self-taught, though he spent some time studying painting in both Toronto and New York where he absorbed the influence of the Hudson River School. He also travelled in Europe where he became acquainted with the work of Whistler, Millet, the Barbizon school and most importantly John Constable. Watson painted mostly landscapes that show an extreme sensitivity to the moods of nature. For his subject matter, he drew mainly from the countryside around his home near the village of Doon and depicted scenes that included trees, grain fields, rivers and cattle.

As canvases like *The Stone Road* (1881) show, the paintings Homer Watson did as a young man present the landscape directly, with great honesty and true fidelity. In 1882 British writer Oscar Wilde saw some of Watson's work while on a lecture tour of Canada and commented that Watson was the

Canadian Constable. The canvases he saw were likely typical Watsons of the time, depicting changes in the landscape that arise with changes in the weather. In this respect, they did resemble Constable's paintings. And like Constable's works, at this stage Watson's paintings leaned towards Romantic idealizations of nature, though this impulse was contained by the documentary character of his work. Perhaps swayed by Wilde's remark, Watson came to paint more like Constable. Later works like *Landscape with Sheep and Wheat Fields* (1884), with its white-water streams and grazing sheep, make Watson's Grand River valley look like Constable's Valley of the Stour River.

Two contemporaries of Watson, James Arthur Fraser and Lucius O'Brien, the former born and raised in England and the latter in Upper Canada, were affected by a shift of taste that had occurred among European and British artists, towards chillingly wild landscapes that seem at times almost tormented. Fraser's *The Rogers Pass* (1886) presents a foreground of exploded stumps and toppling trees which resembles the work of British painters influenced by ideas of the sublime. Off in the distance are the further ranges of mountain peaks painted in broad, flat areas, as though Fraser were applying the techniques of the British water-colourists in oil painting.

O'Brien painted in Ontario and Quebec, on Grand Manan and along the Atlantic seacoast, but he is best known for the paintings he did in the Rockies and on the Pacific during a trip sponsored by the C.P.R. In his landscapes, such as *Sunrise on the Saguenay* (1880), he used light similar to the way in which Albert Bierstadt and the American Luminists did. In his western paintings particularly, the influence of the English Romantic school of landscape is predominant, as *Scene in the Rockies* (1887) shows.

The fact that, frequently in the history of Canadian painting, scenes that fail to conform to the imported stylistic conventions have been painted as though they did indicates that the landscape was felt to be impossibly "other," that is, as impossibly different from those European landscapes for which these conventions were invented, as "other" than the European art tradition, and most importantly, as "other" than human nature. They seem to have been felt to be so impossibly "other" that they could not be incorporated into works of art without being transformed to such a degree as to surrender their real nature. The conventions of European and English landscape painting were clung to much more tenaciously by early painters of the Canadian landscape than by painters of the landscape of the United States. The harshness of the Canadian landscape evoked a terror that these early painters tried to control by transforming them into a more familiar European or English look.

During the initial years of settlement in the West, Prairie painters showed a proclivity for a limited view of nature. This is shown sometimes in the use of such a low point of view that any foreground object, however small, obstructs the view of the horizon; the flat and empty Prairie, stretching off

into a vast horizon unbroken by any verticals, was rarely depicted. The proclivity for a limited view of nature is also apparent in the common tendency to place large figures right at the centre of the canvas, close to the foremost plane of the illusory picture space. This has the effect of so concentrating attention on these figures that the landscape in which they are situated almost fades from view. We see it too in the frequent use of smoke or cloud or other atmosphere effects to obscure the horizon. Obviously, the limitless, empty space was too terrifying to depict. Perhaps the earlier explorer-artists, like Paul Kane and W.G.R. Hind, could not afford to become too conscious of the emptiness around them. It probably seemed to them, as it still does to us, an image of the unknown.¹

In 1842 Paul Kane, a minor portrait painter at the time, decided to go to Europe and principally to Italy to copy old masters. In Europe he encountered the work of French Romantics Théodore Géricault and the famous painter of exotic scenes Eugène Delacroix. But the artist who excited Kane most and who showed him the direction he was to follow was American artist George Catlin. Catlin painted the native people of the American West, and to Kane his work must have seemed (as indeed it is) an indigenous American version of Romanticism in the style of Delacroix, for he depicted the Amerindians as having similar exotic qualities as the subjects of Delacroix images.

Kane returned to Canada determined to produce a series of Indian paintings similar to Catlin's. He left Toronto in 1845 and travelled west, across the prairies and across the Rockies. He sketched the coastal tribes around Victoria and Mt. St. Helens in Washington State, then returned home to Toronto in 1848.

On this trip Kane produced some 700 sketches, which he used for the canvases he painted in the contemporary European style of genre painting. Like Krieghoff's, Kane's work displays a real tension between its documentary and its stylistic aspects. *Ojibway Chief Mani-tow-wah-bay* (1845) and *Blackfoot Chief and Subordinates* (1851-56) illustrate the clothing of the native people, while *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* (1851-56) gives us an image of the buffalo hunt. But this documental value is betrayed by formal features of the imagery. *Blackfoot Chief and Subordinates* presents its subjects too exotically. *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo* is patterned after a European painting of youths and a bull and simply substitutes a buffalo for the bull and two Indians for the two youths of the original. Not even the horses are accurately presented: they are Arabian steeds.

Kane's *Brigade of Boats* (1850s) displays an equally strong proclivity for using European conventions that misrepresent indigenous subject matter. In this work, Kane portrays the fur-trading fleet returning to the trading post at Le Pas, Manitoba, but the scene resembles what we might find in a European marine painting rather than an inland river. Heavy atmospheric effects add to the overall Romantic quality of the work, while wild sea waves add to the drama. *Blackfoot Chief and Subordinates* and *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo*

also include examples of devices that either attract attention away from the open space of the prairies or preclude the necessity for its being represented. In both works the figures portrayed are large and centrally and frontally placed, the point-of-view is very low and strong clouds attract attention away from the flat, open horizon.

Taken in isolation, Kane's paintings appear to be simply examples of an innocuous Victorian romanticism. But his work reached its largest following in a book entitled *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* where his sketches accompany a text.² The text dwells on the violence of the native people, of one tribe against another and of the Indians against the whites. It repeatedly asserts that the Indians were superstitious people who harboured ridiculous, child-like beliefs. In chapter 12 we read: "the horrible harsh, spluttering sounds ... proceed from their throats, apparently unguided either by tongue or lip" and "their persons [abound] with vermin and one of the chief amusements consists in picking these disgusting insects from each other's heads and eating them."

Everything about Kane's text suggests a different reading than the currently predominant one, which sees his paintings as instances of an innocuous Victorian romanticism. Given the developing tendencies of the age towards imperialism and the rage for scientific study of the vagaries of the behaviour of "the backward peoples," we have reason to suspect that those who viewed the exotic deportment, dress and behaviour Kane depicted saw the Canadian Indian as savage and backward. In her ground-breaking article on Kane's work, Halifax art historian Heather Dawkins argues that Kane's ethnological accuracy is really just an expression of a will to power. "Clearly this archive is not a sketch of life as it was, a document of Indians in their original state," she notes, "but neither is it simply the perception of Indians through European filters. Kane's gaze, of observation and knowledge, his sketches, paintings and writings, are deeply implicated in, and constitutive of, power."³

Like Kane's *Blackfoot Chief and Subordinates* and *Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo*, W.G.R. Hind's *The Third Rapid on the Moisie* (1861) illustrates the use of topographic features that block views of open space, while his *Mining in British Columbia* (1862-63) includes forest growth that blocks the view to the distant vanishing point and restrains the eye from travelling into empty space. The image is also presented in full, pre-Raphaelite precision. In F.A. Verner's *Hudson's Bay Officials Leaving Brûlé Portage* (1876) a pastel mist fills what would otherwise be threatening, empty space, while a mountain is placed laterally across the picture's background to prevent the eye from travelling into an endlessly deep space.

All these devices have correlatives in contemporary Canadian art, including Canadian cinema. Examples of these techniques can be found in almost any work by contemporary painter Dorothy Knowles. A famous trait of National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentaries is the use of close-ups

that isolate an object, or even a portion of an object, for attention; it is so common that one was christened this style of documentary as "the dew-drop glistening on leaf approach." Saskatoon's Ernest Lindner offers precisely rendered close-ups. And many Canadian avant-garde artists, including Jack Chambers and Michael Snow, display an interest in framing, which suggests a desire to restrict the field of vision in order to isolate the image from the vast space it could so easily spill into. All this indicates that from the earliest days until now Canadians have reacted with terror to the power of untamed nature.

Early Canadian literature also provides many examples of terrified responses to the Canadian landscape. Catharine Parr Trail and her sister Susanna Moodie always presented nature in close-up views and avoided describing the import that larger vistas of nature had on them. The classic example is John Richardson's *Wacousta*, whose eponymous hero, a renegade Scot turned savage, represents the terror that inhabits the Canadian landscape. The contrast between this response and the initial reaction of European settlers in the United States is striking. They described the land in millennial or paradisiacal terms, as Arcadia, Elysium, Atlantis, "the paradise of the world," "a good land" and "a land flowing with milk and honey" – a telling difference from Cartier's remark that the north shore of the St. Lawrence must be "the land God gave to Cain."

Certainly this contrast reflects actual differences between, for example, Virginia and the north shore of the St. Lawrence. But reflected as well are hermeneutical differences – differences in the way the different groups that settled the two countries interpreted the landscapes. Because the Puritans who settled the eastern United States brought with them the millennial expectations common in the seventeenth century, they tended to interpret the meaning of nature in typological terms. (The typological interpretation of history, including the discovery of America, is a crucial feature of the American epic.⁴)

The basic principle of typological interpretation is that everything that happens in the Old Testament is a type, an adumbration of some event recounted in the New Testament, and everything that happens in the New Testament is an antitype or the realization of something adumbrated in the Old Testament. Typological interpretation was extended from interpreting the Bible to interpreting history, and some thinkers began to look for typological patterns in historical events. On the consequences of typological thinking on the understanding of history, Northrop Frye wrote:

Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately, of historical process; an assumption that there is

some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously. Our modern confidence in historical process, our belief that despite apparent confusion, even chaos in human events, nevertheless those events are going somewhere and indicating something, is probably a legacy of Biblical typology.⁵

Typological hermeneutics is common amongst most protestant groups, but it was the Puritans who extended this interpretive method into the understanding of history. Puritans believed that contemporary events were part of the historical process towards future antitype, that history was progress. They believed that our time-bound life is a type and that its antitype would be the end of time, a leap out of time altogether.

Puritans saw their exile from England and their migration to America as an antitype of Israel's exodus from Egypt. For them the wilderness was charged with theological associations. They interpreted the wilderness either as the promised land or as the desert (either spiritual or physical) just outside the promised land.

The distance separating New England from the mother country came more and more to be interpreted in moral and religious terms. The developments that took place during the English Reformation were viewed as imperfect and even as the work of the Antichrist; the American colonists believed that they needed to be completed by further puritan reforms. In typological terms, England replaced Rome – both the Rome that occupied Palestine in biblical times and the Rome of the Holy Catholic Church.

This break with the European and English past led the colonists to doubt the value of European manners, culture and intellectual traditions (including that of the Jesuits, an order that exerted a powerful influence on the formation of the intellectual tradition of Quebec). The pioneers viewed practical action and simplicity as cardinal virtues and the frontier as a source of goodness. They were convinced that they were returning to the simplicity of early Christianity.

Soon a trek to a new land was heralded as the journey that would lead humankind to the New Jerusalem. Getting to the New Jerusalem would be a journey of progress that would conclude with the end of history, and it would require effort to make such progress. Jonathan Edwards thought that work could transform New England into a paradise, thus the millenarism of the Puritans (and of other non-conformist sects) led to progressivism. Canadian political philosopher George Grant has argued that technological progressivism stands behind American imperialism and that the secularization of eschatological millenarism was at the core of the origin of America.

Northern North America was settled primarily first by Roman Catholics and then by Calvinists and Lutherans. Puritanism had an insignificant place

in the intellectual life in Canada, unlike its place in the United States' intellectual life. The interaction of an altogether more austere land with a mind not disposed to interpreting nature in millennial terms led to a very different view of the wilderness. Those who settled Canada saw nature as at worst malicious and at best utterly indifferent to the needs and interests of mere humankind.

Critics have often commented on the prevalence in Canadian art and literature of such attitudes towards nature. Northrop Frye has stated: "Nature is seen by the poet, first as unconsciousness, then as a kind of existence which is cruel and meaningless. Nature is consistently sinister and menacing in Canadian poetry."⁶ Marcia Kline comes even closer to relating this attitude to our lack of a typological hermeneutics of nature: "Canadians ... exhibit a 'terror of the soul' at the utter indifference of Nature to the values and efforts of puny men. In their work, this terror manifests itself in the fear – or even the conviction – that the geographic realities of the New World mountains and forests are not symbols of that metaphor for moral goodness, Nature, but symbols instead of Chaos and Indifference."⁷

This attitude towards nature has shown remarkable endurance. Despite the popular impression that the Group of Seven celebrated the beauty of the Canadian landscape, a close look at their works reveals something quite different. Arthur Lismer's and Frederick Varley's pine trees often seem contorted in terror. Varley's *Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay* (circa 1920) is anything but a picture of restful cottage country, and the woodland in Lismer's *Forest, Algoma* (1922) appears awesomely impenetrable.

This aspect of the work of the Group of Seven was noted by English novelist and painter Wyndham Lewis, who became acquainted with the Group of Seven (and especially friendly with A.Y. Jackson) while seeking refuge in Canada from the Second World War. Lewis' description of the work of A.Y. Jackson applies as well to an aspect of the work of the Group as a whole:

"Nature" for Jackson does not mean what it did for Turner, a colossal and sumptuous pipe dream akin to the Kubla Khan of Coleridge, nor what it was to Van Gogh, a barbaric tapestry, at the heart of which was man and his suffering – his human rhythms branching out, the tormented nervous system of nature responding to man's emotions. In Jackson's case it is nature-the-enemy as known to the explorer.

Yes, it is an affair of Jackson-against-nature and vice-versa. Jackson being what is called a "fighter" likes this situation. His painting seasons are as it were *campaigning-seasons*, rather than the breathless rendezvous of "nature-lover" with the object of his cult. It is impossible to associate the notion of pleasure with these grim excursions, or at least nothing sensuous....

There is gaiety sometimes in Jackson, but it is rationed. His vision is as austere as his subject matter, which is precisely the hard puritanic

land in which he has always lived: with no frills, with all its dismal solitary grandeur and bleak beauty, its bad side deliberately selected rather than its chilly relentings.⁸

Of the work of Tom Thomson, a painter closely associated with the Group of Seven, Northrop Frye wrote: "Griffins and gorgons have no place in [his work], but the incubus is there, in the twist of stumps and sprawling rocks, the strident colouring, the scarecrow evergreens. In several pictures one has the feeling of something not quite emerging which is all the more sinister for its concealment."⁹ The attitudes that the Group of Seven displayed are still evident in contemporary Canadian art, in, for example, the brash harshness of Ivan Eyre's paintings whose fragmentation often seems to make the world seem in collapse.

The Puritans' typological hermeneutic gave them a way to understand nature and, as importantly, to describe or at least talk about it. They were vastly more at ease because they had at hand a model for understanding what they encountered in the New World. But nothing prepared Canadian settlers of the Atlantic Maritime regions or New France or the interior – the Great Lakes region, the Canadian Shield and the Prairies – for what they discovered. Consequently early draughtsmen or artists either avoided attempts at rendering the landscape or used imported conventions – platitudes even – to describe it. At bottom, the experience these settlers had of nature could not be described, let alone conceptualized – another reason why nature was seen as alien and unfathomable, as "Other." Because it could not be described or grasped conceptually, it had the effect of silencing those who experienced it most profoundly. What begins as merely resistant to understanding quickly comes to be seen as a source of terror, as Margaret Atwood reveals in her *Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer*.¹⁰

Things
 refused to name themselves: refused
 to let him name them....
 The green
 vision, the unnamed
 whale invaded.

This is the source of the Canadian tendency, as Seth Feldman points out in his article "The Silent Subject in English Canadian Film," to be reticent with language and of our commonly held belief that about many of the most important things there is not much that can either usefully or truly be said:

Unit B and its descendents in the Film Board's tradition of experimental documentary were characterized by a pioneers' uncertainty at capturing the landscape before them. The task facing Englishmen like Terence Macartney-Filgate and Derek May, or Australian Michael Rubbo was as impossible as that of Atwood's pioneer. And the films they

produced questioned the very idea of naming the unnameable, of finding easy definitions of their subjects. Whether we see this self-reflexive despair as true innovation, or whether we question it as audacious misrepresentation, it is difficult to disregard the intensity with which the anglophone documentarians moved in the sixties and seventies toward the institutionalization of open-end forms, the failure of judgement and silence.¹¹

This feeling that nature was unknowable developed into a dualistic view of reality, according to which reality is made up partly of mental stuff and partly of physical stuff, with the two entirely different from one another. A dualistic view of the constitution of reality poses fundamental problems. If consciousness and nature are radically different from one another, it is difficult to explain why we depend on nature as completely as we do. It is difficult too to see how we can know natural events well enough to predict their outcomes, and obviously we sometimes are able to do so. It is difficult to explain how we can formulate plans and operate upon nature, or can use nature to our advantage, and these are things we do (sometimes with a vengeance). And finally, the psychic consequences of the conception that we are isolated and living in an hostile nature are dire ones.

The problem of giving an account of the relatedness of human beings and nature is difficult to solve conceptually. But a realistic image provides a model of a solution, for an accurate likeness is at once a product of a consciousness – often even the revelation of features of consciousness – and an object that possesses at least analogues of the spatial, volumetric, tonal and sometimes colouristic structures of reality. Since it originates in consciousness (and can serve to reveal some of its features), yet shares some structures with reality, it provides a model of the reconciliation of the opposition between consciousness and nature.

There is one condition an image must fulfil in order to serve this purpose: it must be a highly accurate representation of nature while still affording scope for human expression. And it is the demand for accuracy deriving from this purpose that accounts for the realistic, documentary impulse of much Canadian art. Because the opposition of nature and consciousness is acutely felt in our harsh landscape and climate, the realistic image which provides a model for the relatedness, even the reconciliation of consciousness and nature, has an especially important place in our culture. So important is the role of the realistic image in our culture that in Canada the expressive dimension of artmaking is often confined to discovering and representing a scene or landscape we can feel a special degree of empathy with.

Though an accurate image belonging to any medium can act as such a model, a photograph serves the role especially well. Paradoxically, a photograph is both a product of consciousness that possesses some of the structures of nature and an emanation from nature that resembles the contents of

consciousness. So intimate is the relation between nature and consciousness in the photograph that each seems to lose its independent identity. What creates the photograph, mind or nature? Mind and nature work so closely together that it is impossible to tell their roles apart. Nature inspires consciousness but consciousness so enlivens the natural as to give it its significance, its inspirational powers. The roles of nature and consciousness so merge with one another that no boundaries can be discerned. The most accurate statement that can be made about the creative process in photography is that creation and discovery become identified with one another. Thus in photography that fundamental problem of all representational art – the problem of how to reconcile expression with accurate depiction – is resolved.

The modern art traditions in most countries took a highly disparaging attitude towards representation in general and photography in particular. Representations were accused of importing irrelevant associations into the experience of a work of art, thus debasing the purity of the aesthetic response, and were said to impose unnecessary restraints on the formal conditions to which works of art could aspire. Photographs were especially despised because, it was said, the camera's mechanical ability to furnish exact likenesses of its subjects means that the artist has little or no control over the formal qualities of image. As well, the mechanical nature of the process was said to preclude human expression.

Although these attitudes did exist in Canada, they were far less prevalent. The frightful alienation of consciousness from nature called for representational and photographically based imagery. For this reason the photograph has had a place of importance that not even the most insistent claims of the abstractionists could endanger. The National Gallery of Canada's 1970 monograph assembling the photographs of Tom Thomson demonstrate conclusively the deep influence that medium had on his painting and suggests much about the influence photography had on the Group of Seven.¹² In contrast with the vast majority of American artists of the post-Second World War period, many Canadian artists maintained this interest in photographs and even developed this traditional interest further. Jack Chambers, for example, returned to North America from Spain in 1962, when abstraction still dominated American art, and began to paint from photographs. At about the same time Michael Snow turned from abstraction to depiction. His own art reveals the reason he made this change; inter-media works like *Midnight Blue* (1974), *iris-IRIS* (1979), *Sink* (1970), *A Casing Shelved* (1970) and *One Second in Montreal* (1969) reveal Snow's fascination with the characteristics of the photograph and with the relationships between photographic imagery and other sorts of imagery.

Like the modernists, the Canadian filmmakers and artists who have attached such importance to the photographic image have recognized the appalling split between nature and consciousness. But with their roots in Canadian Idealism – in a model of reality that most closely resembles the pre-

modern beliefs of Western Christianity – they have forged a new model of reality – a postmodern paradigm – that proposes an essential harmony between nature and consciousness.

A Garrison Mentality

A desire to remain on the safe side of the line that divides civilization from the wilderness has been the response of Canadians to a nature viewed as menacing and chaotic. The only hope of surviving rests with human institutions. This is the logic of what Northrop Frye refers to as “the garrison mentality.” Like the garrisoned troops of Richardson’s *Wacousta*, like the settlers of the prairie novels who build a simple house and huddle inside it, as Canadians we seek shelter from the “huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting,” as Frye characterizes it, in the human community. We stress relations with other humans and isolate ourselves from nature and as a result nature becomes even more alien.

The importance the garrison mentality attaches to community accounts for the prevalence in the Canadian novel of the tragic pattern of stories about a person who leaves his – or, more often, her – community in search of her individuality and discovers frightening isolation. But at the same time she learns that she cannot return to the stifling, overbearing community. This garrison mentality also accounts for the importance that Canadian philosophers have accorded the concept of community. Those who worked in the period that stretched from the middle decades of the nineteenth century until just after the Second World War by and large celebrated the function of community. This interest is not exclusively traditional, for much of Marshall McLuhan’s writing is simply an attempt to reveal the potentials of the new media to accomplish the ages-old Catholic ambition of creating a “new, universal community.”¹³

One of the best Canadian films of the 1970s deals with the theme of community versus nature. Keith Lock’s *Everything Everywhere Again Alive* (1974) belongs to the diary genre of avant-garde film, a genre Canadians have used more frequently than avant-garde film artists in any other country. In a fragmentary form, the film presents details of the life on a commune where the filmmaker lived from 1971 to 1972. Each shot of the film is separated from the preceding shot by a fade and/or a rather short length of unmodulated colour and/or black spacer. The action presented in each shot is distinct and does not – or, at least, not very often – link up with the action presented in the preceding or succeeding shots. These features and the significance of the content of the shots make each shot seem like a distinct moving-picture snapshot presenting an important moment – another instance of a Canadian artist using a form that exploits and highlights features of the photograph.

What is particularly significant is the film’s through-line (as composers sometimes call it), that is, the narrative the filmmaker uses to make the

fragmentary shots cohere. The film begins sometime around late summer or early fall. At the outset the film introduces us to the group of people who have decided to live together. The filmmaker's portrayals of the various members of the group do a remarkable job of individuating each of them, especially considering that he uses neither drama (in the traditional sense) nor dialogue. There are, for examples, a young, bearded man who seems remarkably competent and especially knowledgeable about construction; a thin, hardworking but somewhat confused teenager; a woman with extraordinarily large breasts whom the filmmaker seems to treat as a combination of earth-woman/water-nymph; and helping the group, a rough-hewn but kind old man, presumably a local resident.

The process of constructing the cabin in which they will spend the winter together soon commences. From the very beginning, there is no sentimentality in the way the process is depicted. It is hard work and hazardous. At one point we see the young men planting and detonating explosives; a few shots later we see one of them limping through the woods, helped by a companion.

We soon notice that the leaves are changing colour. A race is on, pitting the commune dwellers against nature; the cabin must be raised before winter sets in. After we see the young people hammering studs and joists together, there is a long shot that elicits a considerable feeling of relief – the frame for the cabin has been completed. The long winter sets in. The section of film dealing with the winter is, as well, far from sentimental. We are shown perilous roads, a horse dying of the cold, people stoking a fire to keep warm, the tedium of long winter and the generous help provided by local residents.

Everything Everywhere Again Alive is proof of the persistence of the garrison mentality among Canadian artists, even among avant-garde artists. But *Everything Everywhere Again Alive* is interesting in other respects. The film suggests that there exists an extremely intimate relationship between the filmmaker's personal life and the life of the natural world. The way the filmmaker handles the camera in the final passage reveals that along with nature he too is coming alive again. And the title of the film, *Everything Everywhere Again Alive*, suggests that all things share in a common life. This appears to be what the filmmaker discovered by entering into so intimate a relationship with nature. Nature might be demanding, cruel and threatening, but the life-force that animates us is no different from the life-force that animates the whole of nature. Nature provides us with our being, and in the end we find ourselves in nature. These convictions are profoundly Idealistic. Out of the intimate relationship with nature that the early Canadian settlers established, Canadian philosophy evolved towards the same Idealist convictions that the filmmaker did. These Idealist convictions have animated our best filmmaking.

Many of the shots in Lock's film are followed by stretches of pure colour. The colours of these pieces of film are related to the shots that precede them in a number of different ways. Sometimes the colour is complementary to the

dominant colour of the preceding shot, and presents the after-image the retina / mind forms when the shot ends. Sometimes it is rather similar to the dominant colour of the preceding shot, and the colour footage represents the vague memory image of the content of the shot. Finally the colour of this footage is sometimes neither similar nor complementary to the dominant colour of the preceding shot, but is rather some other colour which is usually used to convey the quality of the filmmaker's emotional association with the preceding shot. In all cases the colour footage is used to point towards the contents of the filmmaker's inner world.

The inclusion of such internal imagery in the film inflects the character of the film as a whole. Because of its presence, the film moves back and forth between the internal and the external world. Or at least it seems at first to do so. Before we have seen too much of the film, it becomes apparent the film is presenting us with the filmmaker's perception of reality and that the function of the colour passages is to provide a more comprehensive, a more inclusive, catalogue of the contents of the filmmaker's consciousness. This attempt to reconcile the inner and outer realms is characteristic of much Canadian art.

In the major Western traditions, perhaps even in most world traditions, the land is thought of as nourishing, providing and thus feminine. As Gaile McGregor points out in *The Wacousta Syndrome*, because the land and climate of Canada are felt to be so harsh, austere and unnurturing, in this country nature is often conceived as masculine. Thus those who huddle inside the garrison, seeking protection from this masculine Other, are almost uniformly feminized, at least in temperament.¹⁴ The large number of difficult marriages depicted in Canadian novels may reflect the troubles of adjusting to this inversion of sexual roles; as the male is "unusually feminized" in shrinking from the masculine "Other," the female comes into her own as she escapes from male domination and becomes in her assumption of power "unusually masculinized."

In most cultures the cosmos is thought to be the product of male and female principles. In Western Christianity these principles are represented by God the Father and Mother Earth. Gaile McGregor also points out in *The Wacousta Syndrome* that this mythology has held little appeal for Canadians, because nature has seemed to them to be not a nurturing mother, but an unproviding, masculine "Other." This mythology had to be reworked to fit how Canadians experienced nature. The mythology that resulted from this reworking portrayed the self as an isolated feminine individual confronting a vast, indifferent, sometimes even malicious "Other." The psychology represented in this myth is not the usual three-person psychology – one based on relationships among an individual and his/her mother and father – but a two-person psychology, based on the relation between self and "other."

Perhaps this is why Peter Harcourt makes such high claims for the adolescent film. The two-person, self/other psychology is pre-Oedipal; the Oedipal

moment inaugurates the three-person stage. Canadian fiction is rife with examples of individuals who set out to discover their individuality (their places within a three-person framework), who are defeated and regress to the earlier self/other phase. Adolescents have the courage to engage in the quest for their identity (the place allocated to them in a post-Oedipal framework).

From this we can infer why the third primal experience of the European settlers, that of confronting the Amerindians, is so troubling and why it is given so little consideration. To the Europeans our native peoples represented Nature and so were viewed as menacing. The Romantic myth of the noble savage was not for us. To protect themselves from native peoples, the European settlers consigned them to oblivion (usually mental oblivion, but sometimes, as in the case of the Beothuks, to physical oblivion). But as John Richardson's *Wacousta* or James Beaven's *Reminiscences of a Long Vacation* or Paul Kane's Indian paintings (among other works of art) establish, they did have a presence in early Canadian thought, much as they do in the contemporary Canadian imagination. Examples of works that reveal the importance the native people have to the contemporary Canadian imagination include: Peter Such's novel *Riverrun* (1973); James Houston's novels *The White Dawn* (1971), *Spirit Wrestler* (1980) and *Eagle Song* (1983); Rudy Wiebe's novels *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *My Lovely Enemy* (1983); John Beckwith's composition *The Sun Dance* (1968), which incorporates words adapted from texts of the Plains Cree and includes a chorus, organ, male speaker, six soloists, four vocal subgroups and an array of percussion devices such as tom-tom, gourd rattle and hand-drum; Herschel Hardin's Inuit drama *Esker Mike and his Wife Agiluk* (1969); George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1970); Michael Cook's play *On the Rim of the Curve* (1977), about the demise of the Beothuk Indians; Michael Snow's film *Presents* (1981); and my own *Lamentations: A Monument to a Dead World* (1984).

A Tragic Vision

One of the impulses that have pushed Canadian artists towards realism has been the desire to tame – or at least to arrive at an understanding of – hostile nature in order to overcome the alienation of consciousness from nature. Establishing an intimate relationship with nature (more intimate than many other Western cultures have known) has been considered essential to our survival. If we succeed in the task, humans and nature will exist in a relationship similar to that of different species in an ecosystem. If we fail, given the character of our climate, we will be either overwhelmed or destroyed by nature.

Many Canadian thinkers and artists have viewed this enterprise of creating an intimate relationship with nature as a battle we are destined to lose. They have recognized that nature is in the process of vanishing, of being displaced by technology or by the simulacra which technology, and especially

the technological media, produce in such abundance. Much of Canadian art and Canadian thought, therefore, is devoted to a last-ditch effort to establish a satisfactory relationship with nature, a force that humanizes people by making them aware of their mortality, their brutality and their tenderness.

This effort is apparent in the work of the Group of Seven. Fred Housser, the first enthusiastic promoter of the Group of Seven, remarked upon the Group's conception of nature. The work of the Group of Seven, he noted, was about the only activity in Canada providing encouragement to those who "desire to see our people liberated from the trance of a purely industrial and commercial ideal."¹⁵ On this score, he is correct, though it is actually in the work of the Group's associate, Tom Thomson, that we find the most compelling evidence for Housser's claims. Towards the end of his life, Thomson created a trio of works that convey his growing disgust with the effects of technology on the primeval forest land of northern Ontario and the increasing terror he felt about where technology was leading Canadians. *Abandoned Logs* (1915), with its flaming orange colours, is an apocalyptic view of the devastation wrought by technology. *Burnt Land* (no date) is similarly apocalyptic and conveys Thomson's terrifying vision of a landscape in utter ruin, likely the result of human rather than natural forces. *New Life After Fire* seems to offer the most hope, for it does show the forest coming back to life, but the primary impression it gives is one of stark destruction, unrelieved by the few signs of life we can discern. Housser also attributed to the Group of Seven a redemptionary view of nature. Many Canadian artists, including the Group of Seven (particularly Lawren Harris) have often conveyed in their works such a conception of nature, in spite of their awareness that nature is – or at least appears to be – cruel and harsh. But overall what we find lying at the heart of Canadian culture is a tragic vision. For Canadian artists and intellectuals, the relationship that is essential for human beings to establish, if they are to become fully human, is quickly becoming an impossibility because nature – a fundamental ingredient in this humanizing relationship – is being eclipsed by technology.

CHAPTER 2

Two Schools of Thought

Two philosophical schools have vied for dominance in helping Canadians understand their three primal experiences – a diversity of worldviews, an alien and inhospitable land and climate, and the Amerindian culture. The Common Sense school arrived before the school of Absolute Idealism, and it was the first to be accepted institutionally.

Common Sense philosophy was originally imported from Scotland and was a close relative of empiricism. Both Common Sense philosophy and empiricism were associated with specific political views. Empiricism was commonly associated with liberalism, and liberalism in the version propounded by the founding father of empiricism John Locke provided a significant base for the erection of the American constitutional state. We will better understand the historical reasons for the similarities and differences between Canadian and American culture if we look first at the political philosophy of liberalism and then at the metaphysics and epistemology that undergird it.

American-Style Liberalism

The American conception of the role and limits of state powers, as George Grant has explained so well, was formed out of the merger of two important traditions, the liberal contractarian theory of government and the Puritan version of the Reformist tradition.¹ More specifically, Grant argues that North American culture (which he sees as originating in the United States and only later swamping a distinctive Canadian culture) arises from the historical interdependences of liberalism (the contractarian theory of government), Protestantism and technology (the idea of progress). Although Grant sees these as being historically interdependent, he does not see them as necessarily (i.e., logically) interdependent. This is particularly true of his analysis of the relation of technology and modern liberalism. In *English-Speaking Justice*, he offers the foreboding comment that “modern liberalism and technology, although they have been interdependent, may not be mutually

The notes to Chapter 2 begin at page 402.

self-sustaining, and their identity may not be given in the nature of reason itself."² Indeed Grant may well have considered the darkness of the present age to be the consequences of this contradictory basis of our culture.

Grant has summarized, better than most, Locke's revolution in political theory and the basis of the contractarian theory of government:

The Aristotelian account of nature ... was known by Locke to be untrue, above all because of what was given in clear philosophic reflection about the discoveries and methods of the new sciences.... For Locke, the Aristotelian teaching could no longer be the framework for the understanding of either human or non-human things. In the old view of nature, human beings were understood as directed to a highest good under which all goods could be known in a hierarchy of subordination and superordination. Our lesser goods were seen as pale participations in that highest good. To Locke, the untruth of the traditional teaching means that there is no such highest good given to human beings in their recognition of the way things are. Nevertheless the understanding of the way things are – the state of nature – remains for him the only basis from which a true account of the best political regime can be understood. Put negatively, then, for Locke the great question about justice must be: how can the foundations of justice be laid when rational human beings are not given the conception of the highest good? His answer to that question is that justice is contractual, not natural. The state of nature does not provide us with the conception of a highest good; but it does provide us with a knowledge of the greatest evil, and the desire to escape that evil. The calculating individual knows that the worst evil is death and that although we cannot finally escape it, we must escape it as long as we can. We must preserve ourselves – if possible comfortably. Reflection on the state of nature makes us recognize this given end (albeit negative) and from it a new political teaching can be laid down. In the social contract, we agree to government and its limitations on us because it is to our advantage, in the sense that it protects us from the greatest evil. That contract is the source of our rights because we have consented to be social only on certain conditions, and our rights are expressions of those limiting conditions. All members of society are equal in the possession of these rights, because whatever other differences there may be between human beings, these differences are minor compared to the equality in our fundamental position: to be rational is to be directed by the dominating desire for comfortable preservation. Justice is those convenient arrangements agreed to by sensible men who recognize the state of nature and what it implies concerning the greatest evil.³

In *Two Treatises on Government* (1690) Locke analyzes how government and political obligation arise from the state of nature. According to Locke, the

most basic duty of human beings is to discover how God requires them to live and to live according to his laws, according to the laws of nature. A human being's most fundamental right is to hold other people responsible for their breaches of these laws and to punish them for these infractions.

In the state of nature, all people are equal in one most fundamental respect, they all have common rights and duties. Locke's state of nature is:

the condition in which God himself places all men in the world, prior to the lives which they live and the societies which are fashioned by the living of these lives. What it is designed to show is not what men are like but rather what rights and duties they have as the creatures of God.⁴

The laws of nature, known through the exercise of reason, dictate that people divest themselves of the right to punish those who harm them in exchange for protection from the social body constituted in the act of making this agreement. The advantage sought through this agreement (the social contract) was impartiality in formulating the rules of common life and in judging those who transgressed.

Though Locke's conception of justice was based on what was revealed to him about rights and duties in the exercise of God-given reason, his theory of state can be dissociated from the theological notions underlying it.⁵ Grant was correct when he stated that, among Locke's followers, including John Rawls, the idea of justice came to be associated with the concept of "rational self-interest" and with the concept of reason itself, understood as the faculty for calculating the net profit that accrues to an individual in the long run as the result of some course of action. Grant was at his most trenchant when he commented on "the account of the political situation in which the question of justice arises in terms of essentially calculating individuals" – an account, Grant states, which can be described accurately as the "American bourgeois common sense."⁶

This account of the derivation of the first principle of justice appears to Rawls to have the enormous advantage of not requiring any knowledge of the way things are beyond common sense. It does not depend on our being able to attain any knowledge of what human beings are fitted for. Our legal rights, so derived ... in no way depend on any public affirmation concerning what is good. Indeed it would appear that according to Rawls enlightened human beings are quite clear that it is not possible to have knowledge of the highest good.... Moral pluralism about "life-plans" is guaranteed by the law so long as those plans do not harm other people or interfere with their basic liberties.... Moreover in terms of modern theory, the chief advantage [of this account of the derivation of the principles of justice] is that it enables us to free ourselves

from all the difficulties and disagreements of the traditional political philosophy which arose from its dependence on metaphysical assumptions. We free ourselves from the burden of speculation while remaining quite certain about the principles of political justice. Philosophy and religion become comparable to the questions of sexual habit. They are simply a matter of private pursuit, unless their conclusions interfere with the liberty of others. We can think what we like metaphysically or religiously ... as long as we recognize that these thoughts are our private business, and must have no influence in the world of state. Philosophy and religion can be allowed to be perfectly free because their conclusions are perfectly private.⁷

Grant makes a similar point in a more extreme manner when he asks the question "Or does this account of human beings only lead to individuals concerned with consumption – above all entertainment and the orgasm as consumption." This is one of the blackest pictures Grant paints of the consequences of joining the definition of the human being that has come down to us from Greek philosophy, as essentially a reasonable being, to the view that reason is fundamentally an instrument for performing the calculations necessary to furthering our self-interest. The distractions of entertainment and "orgasm as consumption" are sought to compensate for what is lost when the contemplation of the Good is given no place within the field of public morals and no restrictions are placed on people as a result of their having discovered, in Grant's ringing phrase, "what man is fitted for."

Though Grant is very critical of the non-contemplative features of Calvinism (and especially Puritanism), and of the Calvinist emphasis on the individual's relation to God rather than on anything resembling a public morality, when he attacks liberalism he sometimes sounds rather Calvinist himself. This is nowhere more true than in his contrast of Plato's account of justice with the liberal account:⁹

In his [Plato's] account our interests are known through our knowledge of the nature of things. Justice is what we are fitted for.... In this account, justice is not a certain set of external political arrangements which are a useful means of the realisation of our self-interests; it is the very inward harmony of human beings in terms of which they are alone able to calculate self-interest properly.... For justice is the inward harmony which makes the self truly a self (or in the more accurate language which today sounds archaic: Justice in its inward appearance is the harmony which makes a soul truly a soul).¹⁰

Though more systematic and penetrating than others (and more implacable in his despair), Grant is not alone among Canadian thinkers in finding American liberal political philosophy unsatisfactory. Not many Canadian thinkers have accepted its tenets.¹¹

The Epistemology of Empiricism

Any political philosophy, like Locke's or Rawls', that proposes that political authority derives ultimately from human reason must ground itself in an articulated philosophy of mind. If we fail in the task of demonstrating how the mind can know what it needs to know in order to recognize moral imperatives, we are liable to succumb to a moral scepticism of the most invidious sort. Through the concept of natural law – laws that are given to us in the nature of reason – Locke linked his contractarian theory of government to notions about the nature and function of the human mind, for he realized that his ideas about moral agency had to be undergirded by articulated views about the scope and limits of human understanding. Locke certainly recognized the demand to produce an epistemology that was adequate to form the basis for his moral and political theory and attempted to provide that epistemology in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.¹²

In the "Epistle to the Reader" which introduces *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke casts himself in the role of an under-labourer to the master-builders of the seventeenth century – Boyle, Huygens, and Newton – whose task it was to remove "some of the Rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge." Locke argues that the activities of reason must be restrained by the testimony of the senses. The sole objects with which the human mind is directly acquainted are ideas, by which Locke means "whatsoever is the Object when a Man thinks." Ideas may be simple or complex. If simple, they derive directly from the senses; if complex, they are formed by the association of simple ideas. Therefore all human knowledge derives ultimately from experience.

This epistemology came to be called empiricism. Empiricism is primarily an epistemological, not a cosmological, doctrine. It aspired to develop a theory of mind and a theory of knowledge that conformed to the methods of the natural sciences, especially mechanics. The empiricists believed that all knowledge derived from sense experience, that before it has had any experiences, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, devoid of concepts or forms which it imposes on experience and which can be known prior to experience. This view was sometimes reduced to the notion (though not by the empiricists themselves) that the mind is a "glassy essence" which merely passively mirrors nature.

According to the empiricists, the original ideas or impressions upon which knowledge is based are either individual ideas of separate and distinct qualities or aggregates of such atomistic ideas. The distinct ideas or impressions of which the aggregates are composed are considered to be more fundamental and to have less chance of being confused than the aggregates themselves, since they are – or at least have the potential of being – apprehended with clarity. The relations between the ideas or impressions in a compound idea are external to the individual components. In the empiricists' view,

ideas are not constructed by the relations in which they exist, for such relations are understood as having only an abstract existence, unlike the relations which they relate, which are thought to have concrete existence.

Associated with this is a nominalist theory of ideas, according to which general ideas are abstracted from individual sensations by eliminating from them all particularizing features, such as time and place. Such general ideas, according to Bishop Berkeley (among others), are strictly inconceivable; general ideas cannot be formed in our consciousness. We cannot, for example, form the general idea of triangularity, we can only conceive of particular triangles.

The fact that empiricism had its origins in the attempt to develop a theory of mind that conformed to the science of mechanics accounts for the empiricist belief that the origin of all ideas are discrete atomistic entities, for in mechanics bodies are held to have definite properties that are not altered by mechanical processes. However, the notion that bodies are composed of essentially independent properties that survive the processes they are subjected to has become outmoded with the development of field theories in physics, which hold that a body and the force field surrounding it reciprocally determine each other's nature, and with the kinetic theory of gases, which has shown that when materials attain certain critical masses they acquire properties that they do not possess in lesser masses.

Empiricists also maintained that the real is co-extensive with the observable. This is sometimes expressed negatively: only that which is observable is known to be real. In these cases, however, it is usually understood that the term "reality" becomes meaningless when extended beyond the boundaries of the observable. Consequently, such claims are equivalent to the claim that reality can only be meaningfully ascribed to observable phenomena. Some would also argue that the empiricists denied that reality is co-extensive with the rational.

Because they believed that the field of knowledge has a very restricted scope, the empiricists argued that the realm of mystery is very large. On this unknowable realm, Locke wrote:

not knowing what is the particular bulk, figure and motion of the greatest part of the bodies of the universe, we are ignorant of the several powers, efficacies and ways of operation whereby the effects which we daily see are produced. These are hid from us, in some things, by being too remote; and in others, by being too minute. When we consider the vast distances of the known and visible parts of the world and the reasons we have to think that which lies within our ken is but a small part of the universe, we shall discover a huge abyss of ignorance.¹³

Locke's philosophy developed from a non-operationalist basis; the science that dominated the thought of his time was mechanics, and in his day its methodology was more observational than instrumental since natural

processes were observable but not reproducible in laboratories. The concept of knowledge as production, therefore, was hardly a viable one in his time. Knowledge was thought to passively reflect nature; hence knowledge of effects was thought to reveal nothing of their causes. The observable regularities in the occurrence of phenomena rather than the inner operation of causality became the norm for knowledge. It was precisely the lack of that inner experience of the power of human beings to transform nature that led Locke and the other empiricists to argue that the inward constitution and powers of the forces of nature are unknowable and that only the manners in which their manifestations are co-ordinated can be known with certainty.

Experience can be described atomistically, according to empiricists. We need not understand either the nature of the object or the conditions of the subject in order to comprehend an experience. This means that descriptions of the state of the subject – of his or her social background, previous history or position in the hierarchy of classes – need not be included in analyses of his or her experiences. Empiricists also hold that just as experiences are atomistic or ontologically independent of one another, so the individual human personality is simply the sum of its parts. Thus individuals are fulfilled when their particular drives are fulfilled.

The empiricist epistemology found ready acceptance in the United States. It was consistent with the individualistic and experiential bias that characterizes American culture. However, these views were uncongenial to Canadians, for empiricism offered them a conceptual paradigm, a model of reality, that did not fit their experience of the world. So they went in search of an alternative.

Common Sense

From the basic view that all our ideas derive ultimately from experience, Locke generated "a modest metaphysics." Following Locke's new way of ideas, David Hume developed a metaphysics that was anything but modest in its challenge to common-sense beliefs.

According to Hume, the principle that all knowledge ultimately derives from sense impressions, and that the method of inquiring into the true meaning and value of any idea is to ask from what sense impressions it is constituted, is a powerful tool for demolishing nonsense. Hume used the principle that we must consider as unfounded any idea we cannot trace back to sense impressions as a wrecking ball to destroy our convictions about the rationality of many of our most fundamental and persistent beliefs. Hume argued that, because we are acquainted only with ideas and impressions, we have no knowledge of what causes them. Our convictions that an external world exists, that physical substances exist or that a God exists are not rational. The belief in the existence of a continuing self underlying our diverse experiences is likewise something that does not come to us through reason. Not

only is metaphysics impossible, but so is science; as Hume demonstrates, there is no sense impression from which the idea of causal efficacy derives.

These ideas scandalized eighteenth-century philosophers like Thomas Reid, James Beattie and Dugald Stewart, who belonged to the Scottish school of "sober philosophy," a school that had an enormous influence in Canada. Thomas Reid, the founder of the Scottish school, attempted to defend common sense against the scepticism of David Hume. In his *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), Reid argued that the source of philosophical scepticism lay in a very innocent-looking assumption that John Locke and his followers had made to allow them to explain how we can be aware of anything beyond the present contents of our minds. According to this philosophical assumption, which Reid termed "the theory of ideas," our awareness of things outside the mind is only second-hand; what we are immediately aware of are ideas which act as representative substitutes for external objects. Though this theory is utterly innocent-looking, it has implications that conflict with the notions of common sense. Among these are, as the writings of Bishop Berkeley made clear, the denial that a material world exists, that there is an immaterial subject to which all our experience makes reference and that the will is free (free in the sense of not being determined in its choices).

Reid dismissed such claims because they conflicted with common sense. He founded his appeal to common sense on data discovered through introspection. According to Reid, by looking into the mind we discover that it is divided into many "senses" or "faculties." Introspection also provided Reid with the data required for describing the attributes of these various faculties. Among the faculties of the human mind are reason and moral sense. Reason was usually depicted by Reid and his followers as a legitimate power of the mind but, they argued, it should not be used to question "self-evident truths," truths that cannot be rationally established but that are known by intuition. Reid claimed that the faculty that produces such intuitions is common sense and that the beliefs of common sense regulate the actions of all people, even those who purport to deny them. The very behaviour of those who deny these beliefs thus refutes their claims to believe in principles which contradict those of common sense. When the sceptical philosopher leaves his study to cross the street, he conducts himself according to the beliefs of common sense. And because the principles of common sense regulate human action, they must have a moral dimension, Reid argued.

When we look into our minds, we do not gain acquaintance with what Locke or Hume called ideas. Reid accused them of using the word "idea" in a strictly philosophic sense. In *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1788), Reid wrote that what we usually mean "by having an idea" is the action of conceiving something, but when the term is used by Locke "it does not signify that act of mind which we call thought or conception, but some object of thought."¹⁴ Reid petitioned to common sense and concluded that

ordinary people are convinced that what they perceive is the sun itself, for example, not some "idea" of the sun. There are no such things as ideas, in the philosophic sense.

While Locke argued that the first operation of the mind is the apprehension of simple ideas, which are then compared with one another in order to perceive agreements and disagreements that further our knowledge, Reid viewed this as fiction. "Instead of saying that the belief or knowledge is got by putting together and comparing the simple apprehensions, we ought rather to say that the simple apprehension is performed by resolving and analyzing a natural and original judgement."¹⁵ The first *donnée* for Reid is a judgement, not the elementary datum of Locke and Hume. "When I perceive a tree before me, my faculty of seeing gives me not only a notion or simple apprehension of the tree, but a belief of its existence, and of its figure, distance and magnitude; and this judgement is not got by comparing ideas, it is included in the very nature of the perception."¹⁶

The ultimate arbiter of the truth of common sense is common sense itself, not reason. Were this not so, the opinion of the bulk of people would carry no weight against the superior competence of the philosopher. But, said Reid, in "a matter of common sense, every man is not less a competent judge than a mathematician is in a mathematical demonstration."¹⁷ Hence the truths that people know through the faculty of common sense are beyond question: "The same degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident and that he distinctly apprehends."¹⁸ The common principles revealed by common sense are understood and assented to as soon as they are proposed. Among these principles are mathematical axioms, logical axioms and moral axioms (which, Reid stated, "appear to me to have no less evidence than those of mathematics") and the first principles of contingent truths – truths like "those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be" and "the natural faculties by which we distinguish truth from error are not fallacious."¹⁹

Reid used his analysis of common sense to combat Humean scepticism, ethical relativism, materialism and a host of other sins. While these rebuttals made Reid's philosophy very appealing, for many thinkers the greatest of its appeals was that it preserved a form of empiricism (in its direct appeal to data derived from introspection and its conviction that accurate descriptions of the contents of consciousness are unassailable) yet overcame Hume's scepticism and phenomenalism.²⁰ Common sense even allowed for a revival of metaphysical thinking.

The Scottish philosophers also "maintained that principles of common sense, imposed upon us by the constitution of the human mind, are principles by which our cognition is conformed to its objects, to things as they really are in themselves."²¹ This statement, written by the leading modern

interpreter of the school of Common Sense, S.A. Grave, does more than merely indicate how decisive the Scottish philosopher's rejection of Humean phenomenalism was; it also stresses that the philosophy implied a strong distinction between subject and object. This dualism came to haunt Canadian thought, and much effort has been expended by our philosophers and artists to show how this dualism of mind and matter can be overcome.

These three principles – subject-object dualism, faculty psychology, and appeal to introspection – were built into the base upon which Canadian philosophy was erected. So fundamental did these beliefs become that, even though many later philosophers – particularly the Idealists – came to challenge these principles, the grip they had on the Canadian mind was maintained long after they had been philosophically refuted.

More significant than the longevity of these principles is the fact that they established a permanent foothold for empiricism in Canada. More precisely, this foothold was established in the attitude of the early European settlers towards the Canadian landscape. As we know from the paintings of such artists as Thomas Davies, George Heriot, Charles Fothergill and John Paul Drake, the early European settlers found our landscape alien and hostile, something they could not easily identify with. This sense of alienation of human beings from nature furnished the basis for the development of dualistic views of reality. Almost all the various versions of empiricism – which collectively have been a permanent feature of Canadian intellectual life and which separately have dominated during several periods – have accepted a dualistic view of reality. Certainly the Common Sense school did and that school constituted, to all intents and purposes, Canada's first official philosophy.

Indications of the enormous influence the sober philosophy of Scotland had on the intellectual life of Canada in the nineteenth century can be found in the curriculum that John Clark Murray taught at Queen's University.²² In their second year students studied the first volume of the Common Sense philosopher Dugald Stewart's *Outlines*; in their third year they worked through the second volume; and in their final year they mastered Murray's own account of the modified Common Sense philosophy developed by William Hamilton. At McGill University fourth year metaphysics students were studying Hamilton's *Discussions* and his *Notes to Reid* and John Stuart Mill's *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (the book that destroyed the hegemony of the Scottish School in the Scottish education system), while fourth year students in moral philosophy were studying Stewart's *Philosophy of The Active Powers and Moral Powers in Man*. Furthermore, most Methodist preachers were schooled in the writings of the Common Sense philosophers, and in the 1860s and 1870s James McCosh, an emigré member of the school who had accepted the presidency of what was then Princeton College in order to uphold the Common Sense tradition in North America, was the philosophical mentor of the Methodist *Christian*

Guardian, the most widely circulated and influential religious magazine in Canada at the time.²³

A dualist metaphysics of the sort expounded by John Stuart Mill constituted the empiricist counterweight – the philosophical official opposition – during the period of Idealist dominance, from about 1865 to 1945. John Stuart Mill and his Canadian disciples argued vigorously against both Humean scepticism (noting that “in denying all knowledge, it denies none”) and the intuitionism of Sir William Hamilton. They contended that no intuitions are necessary for mathematics, logic or the procedures of natural science. Mill claimed that our concept of external objects is really that of groups of possible sensations which, because they are publicly observable, answer in all respects to our criteria of externality. However, Mill noted, a similar theory is inadequate for our concept of mind for, even though we know nothing of the mind but its conscious manifestations, some conscious processes (such as memory and expectation) involve a belief in something beyond their own existence. We discriminate between these processes partly on the basis of the nature of the object of the experience. How then can we tell the difference between sensation, memory and expectation when all we are acquainted with is conscious experience itself? Mill considered this question unanswerable; in fact, he considered the differences among contemplating, imagining, supposing and actually believing to be utterly inexplicable. And he concluded that, since mind cannot be explained in the same way as matter, there must be important differences between the two. Thus he arrived at a dualist view of reality that was for the most part accepted by his Canadian disciples. Later Canadian empiricists were influenced first by American pragmatism, then by logical positivism and most recently by Parsonian sociology. But all the versions of empiricism they developed have been dualistic.²⁴

The faculty psychology of the Common Sense school sharply distinguished reason, intuition and the faculty that apprehends moral laws. These distinctions themselves were philosophically problematic. Thus for William Lyall, a Presbyterian minister and philosophy professor at Dalhousie University, the relation between Christian piety and intellectual activity was the paramount question of philosophy. Lyall had studied philosophy at Glasgow University and Edinburgh University and, though he struggled mightily to overcome the faculty psychology he had learned there, his attempts were at best faltering and muddled. As its title suggests, his book *Intellect, The Emotions and Man's Moral Nature* frequently lapses into the view that the mind is composed of separate and distinct faculties. Of the mental faculties listed in the title of the book, it is clear which Lyall believed should be accorded priority: “The spiritual constitution of man is composed of more than a merely intellectual provision or apparatus; the intellectual is but a part of his compound being, and not the most important part.... The intellectual part of our nature is a surpassing mystery ... but marvellous as this is there are mysteries of our nature far greater than these, and the

intellectual part may be said to be the least wonderful [aspect] of our compound being."²⁵

Common Sense philosophers often praised the moral faculty as being loftier than reason. The moral will was said to be capable of discerning ultimate values which reason could never know. The Common Sense philosophy portrayed Reason as a limited faculty, capable only of affording insight into a small area of experience. They argued that we should not attempt to discern what lies beyond this limited area, using either the senses or reason, for all attempts were doomed to failure.¹⁷ We should accept our state of unknowing, realizing that this intellectual darkness is ultimately of little significance, for our lives can be illuminated by a moral grace.

Beliefs like these filtered down to the common people. They have become so widely accepted and so well established that they constitute enduring principles of Canadian thought, at least of its empirical moment. It was their widespread acceptance that enabled a certain Mrs. Holivell, in one of her "Holiday Musings of a Worker," to write:

Sir William Hamilton says, finely, on this subject: The highest reach of human science is the scientific recognition of human ignorance.... This learned ignorance is the rational conviction by the human mind of its inability to transcend certain limits; it is the knowledge of ourselves – disproportion between what is to be known and our faculties of knowing – the disproportion, to wit, between the infinite and the finite. In fact the recognition of human ignorance, is not only the one highest, but the one true, knowledge; and its first fruit is humility.²⁷

Hamilton's epistemological theories, stated here by a worker, stresses the limitations of knowledge that arises from the disproportion between "what is to be known and our faculties of knowing – the disproportion, to wit, between the infinite and the finite." But, as we shall see, this is exactly the epistemology on which the *cinéma-direct* "spectacles of wonderment" are based.

Dualism and Representation

Common Sense philosophy presented a dualistic view, for it argued that there are two basically different sorts of existents – physical objects and the contents of the mind. Dualistic philosophies pose problems for thoughtful people, and this was no less so for the early Canadian thinkers. It is difficult to conceive how, if mind and nature are as utterly different as dualist conceptions of reality maintain they are, a mind can have that form of intercourse with nature we know of as knowledge. It is in this context that the importance of certain features possessed by a vast majority of Canadian artwork can be understood. While a realistic image does not have the power to actually solve the epistemological problems inherent in the dualistic position, it

does provide a model of the reconciliation of opposition between thought and nature.

The realist tradition is very strong in Canadian painting, and much of it is photographically based. The paintings of Jack Chambers, especially his perceptual realist works like *Sunday Morning No. 2* (1970), *Diego Sleeping No. 2* (1971) and *Lombardo Avenue* (1972-73), are well-known examples of the realist tradition. Michael Snow's use of visual forms that bear comparison with those found in photographs indicate the continuing strength of that tradition. More important in this context are those artists who have pressed realism into the service of exhibiting threatening features of the *Umwelt*. The most notable of these is Alex Colville. Sometimes such work seems to depict the threat as coming from the technological environment, sometimes from the natural environment, and sometimes from internal drives projected onto the external. (There are examples of all three sorts of work in Colville's oeuvre. *Horse and Train* (1954) is an example of the first sort of depiction, *Hound in Field* (1958) is an example of the second, and *Pacific* (1969) is an example of the third sort.)

Sometimes realism is used for metaphysical ends, as it is in the work of Newfoundland artist Christopher Pratt. The harmony of the geometrical structure which undergirds the visual forms in works like *Memorial Window* (1982) conveys a sense of a remembered unity which underlies the appearances the works depict. Sometimes it is used to convey a sense of the elevated importance of quotidian, even domestic, reality, as it is in works by Mary Pratt, for example, *Christmas Turkey* (1980). And sometimes realism serves social ends, as it does in the work of Claude Breeze. The realism of the films of the National Film Board of Canada generally serves social purposes as well.

All of these realisms are grounded in photography. Mary Pratt, Chris Pratt and Jack Chambers have all painted from source photographs; Claude Breeze has used imagery derived from photographs, films and television in his work; Michael Snow surveys systematically the interrelation between photography and the other visual arts.

Common Sense and Calvinism

Most features of Common Sense philosophy were compatible with the core beliefs of the Calvinism that spread in the wake of the second Helvetic confession of 1566 to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Common Sense philosophy, like Calvinism, was an enemy of Enlightenment thought, particularly of its universalist and secular features. There were also resemblances between the Common Sense tendency to subordinate the intellect to the dictates of the moral sense and the Calvinist emphasis on piety. There is little reason to wonder, therefore, at the fact that the Common Sense school briefly became the semi-official philosophy of Calvinist countries, where it was usually

mandated with promoting piety and obedience to indisputable moral principles.

Common Sense philosophy did find more than a little acceptance in the United States.²⁸ Scottish realism had been imported to the U.S. by John Witherspoon of Princeton and some variety of it was expounded by Francis Bowen, Joseph Haven, Samuel Mitler, Frederick Beasley, Noah Porter and James McCosh who emigrated in 1868.²⁹ But in Canada it had a wider and more tenacious grip on intellectual life. To some extent, this can be accounted for by the greater impact of a dour Calvinism in Canada compared with the more decisive influence of Puritanism in colonial America.³⁰ Moreover, the presence in the United States of a sunny rationalism (best represented by deists like Thomas Paine, Ethan Allen, Elihu Palmer, and political leaders such as Thomas Jefferson), the Enlightenment's muscular optimism (represented by humanists such as Joel Barlow, Lockean federalists like Alexander Hamilton, and "secularizing Puritans" like Benjamin Franklin) moderated whatever Calvinistic features the American ethos did possess.³¹

The Calvinism the Scots, among others, brought to Canada was of a pretty immoderate and rough-hewn sort. There has not been a significant religious leader more violent, more wilful or more zealous than John Knox whose Presbyterianism had many followers among early settlers. Calvinism emphasized making the most of our natural gifts by industry, it condemned idleness and materialism, it taught that humans are creatures of fellowship. It was probably just the sort of religious belief that could forge a community and provide it with the values it required to sustain itself in a far from generous land.

The difference between American and Canadian Protestantism is also apparent in the different ways the two nations seem to have responded to Calvin's doctrine of the separation of church and state, a doctrine that can be used to support contradictory conclusions.³² On the one hand, by claiming that secular authority was mandated to deal only with non-spiritual matters, and by arguing that each person can establish an individual relation to God, Calvin left open the argument that we can challenge the moral authority of the state on the basis of what is revealed in scripture. Furthermore, as the American example shows, the notion of the separation of church and state can be interpreted as lending support to federalism (since federalism has the effect of removing the political sphere from the domain of universal moral principles). Moreover, Calvin's emphasis on Bible-reading demanded a literate population. As a result, in many Calvinist countries, including Scotland and Canada, educational systems open to all were founded. And a literate populace is more likely to question state authority and state edicts.

On the other hand, Calvin's belief in natural law counselled submission to universal moral principles. This after all was the basis for the quasi-theocracy Calvin founded in Geneva in 1541. In fact, though Calvin did argue for a degree of separation of church and state, he nonetheless maintained that

the state was divinely instituted. ("God maintains principalities inasmuch as it serves man's need for fellowship," he wrote.) According to Calvin, both church and state should recognize God as the Ultimate Sovereign, and in the task of regulating a person's life, church and state should be united. Thus Calvinism in Geneva relied heavily on discipline and obedience and mandated both a ministry (a political body) and a consistory (a church body) to control social, political and individual behaviour, with the civil authority enforcing the moral decisions of the consistory. Control was complete and infractions dealt with severely.

In the United States it was the first and more liberal interpretation of the Calvinist doctrine that predominated; in Canada it was the second, more conservative tendency. Many free thinkers found in Puritan theology support for their liberal theological doctrines. Their interpretation of Puritanism joined with the humanist, rationalist and liberal strains of the intellectual life of early America to provide the ground for American federalism, whose notion of justice is, as George Grant has pointed out, its conception in liberal thought. Benjamin Franklin's writing illustrates well the synthesis of these various strains of thought in a sunny and down-to-earth American philosophy.

In Canada a morally severe Calvinism, whose notion of justice has its roots in the concept of natural law, combined with common-sense ethics, whose notion of justice had its roots in intuited moral principles. The result was a foundation for an ethics that justified moralism of the least tolerant sort. A strong influence was James McCosh, who advocated absolute and unbending moral principles.³³ McCosh endeavoured to give ethics a secure foundation in moral axioms which, like the axioms of geometry, "admit of no demonstration"; they are self-evident. Moral laws are God's decrees and are unbending. And while most Scottish Common Sense philosophers espoused a faculty psychology, McCosh believed that the soul was a composite of distinctive functions while maintaining a view of the integrity of the person. He argued that these moral principles, which are discovered through the moral faculty of conscience, must dominate the affections and the will. In order for an individual to be transformed, the conscience must unite with and control the other faculties, the emotions, the intellect and the will. And against liberal thinkers, McCosh argued that human nature is not the source of good. He repudiated anthropocentric moralities. The moral faculty, he argued, perceived something real, something that truly is "out there," whether or not it is perceived. What God deems to be good is good, according to McCosh, and we can have no better reason to submit to the obligation to follow these principles than that moral sense informs us of their goodness. He believed that the utilitarians' calculations of net pleasure or pain were not solid enough ground upon which to base moral principles. He emphasized the superiority of the moral sense over the passions and the will and affirmed a conviction that these ethical absolutes exist and can be discerned by consciousness.

The moral absolutism, the stress on human depravity and guilt, the demand for self-effacement that we find in the work of McCosh had a strong influence in Canada. They formed the basis for a morally severe worldview. In America things were different. American Puritanism fused with humanist, rationalist and Lockean liberal thought to produce American-type liberalism. In fusing with liberal thought, American Puritanism became more open, but it also became secularized. Even the account of virtue included in the political theory which developed from this amalgam had undergone secularization. As a result, the political theory that most bourgeois Americans would point to as "the simple truth" lost all ability to provide an account of justice. Long ago Aristotle pointed out in *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics* that well-ordered human existence must be ordered by the love of divine perfection. Secular social theories cannot rise above considerations of intramundane realities to ponder questions about the order that is supposed to be actualized in society. George Grant explains the problem:

It is important to recognize the dependence of secular liberalism for its moral bite upon the strength of Protestantism in English-speaking societies.... To put the ethical relation clearly: if avoidance of violent death is our highest end (albeit negative), why should anyone make sacrifices for the common good that entail that possibility? Why should anyone choose to be a soldier or a policeman, if Lockian contractualism is the truth about justice? Yet such professions are necessary if any approximation to justice and consent are to be maintained. Within a contractual belief, why should anyone care about the reign of justice more than their life? The believing Protestants provided the necessary moral cement which could not be present for those who were consistently directed by contractualism or utilitarianism or a combination of both. This fundamental political vacuum at the heart of contractual liberalism was hidden for generations by the widespread acceptance of Protestantism.³⁴

Thus, as the great contemporary philosopher of history Eric Voegelin points out, the failure to give due consideration to the *agathon*, the transcendental pole of existence represented by Plato's Form of the Good, results in *amathia*, folly or aversion to the truth caused by an unwillingness to consider the source of justice and virtue.

In Canada Calvinism's accounts of virtue and justice were not secularized when they entered into the construction of political ideas. Thus the idea of community has been much stronger in Canada than it is in the United States, exactly in proportion to the greater strength in Canada of the conviction that there are values to which the individual must submit. In the United States the sense of individualism is stronger and the sense of community weaker.

The relative moderation of American Puritanism was also a consequence of the fact that the Puritans saw their journey to America in typological

terms, as a journey to “the American Israel” or as a journey back to the garden. This led to the belief that in America human beings recovered their innocence and sometimes to the belief in the American Adam. The punitive self-vigilance advocated by the more severe Calvinist sects – and by some (though not all) of the Puritans – as the cost of post-lapsarian depravity seemed somewhat inappropriate and unnecessary for the American Adam. It was only the alienation of humans from God, resulting from the corruption of both their reason and will in the Fall, that necessitated stringent self-discipline. For the people who had come back to the garden of America, it was not required.³⁵

While Calvinists had argued that redemption was possible only through God’s grace, within the typological interpretation of the Puritan odyssey is another notion of redemption. According to this interpretation, humans purified themselves through their own efforts in the journey to the American paradise. The effect of historicizing and secularizing the typological vision, and of viewing actual historical events as though they had typological significance, was to make the actors in history the agents of their own salvation – resulting in the American proclivity toward activism. Furthermore, applying the theory of types to real historical events resulted in the more Calvinistic features of Puritan thought being undermined from within Puritan tradition itself. That Puritans considered Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus as the type-form for all experiences of a personal relationship with the Maker, and the fact that Paul was a thinker, provided Puritans with an exemplar of intellectuality that moderated the austere anti-intellectual pietism of some Calvinist groups.

As American Protestantism weakened into a secular devotionism, it became merely the justification for an activism that argued that idleness was a source of sin and that goodness consisted in doing good works – with the emphasis on doing. Lacking any significant account of justice, we can conclude only that there is nothing that humans are by nature fitted for and that their essence is their creative freedom. Lacking any sense of the truth of the traditional account of nature, that it is created by God, we conceive of nothing that might restrain our active impulses, our impulses to transform nature. Thus as George Grant points out, we are alienated from “those systems of meaning” that would mitigate “both our freedom and the indifference of the world, and in doing so put limits of one kind or another on our interference with chance and the possibilities of its conquest.”³⁶

This was the fate of secularized American Protestantism – to be a justification for technology. It justifies technology by speaking in the language of freedom. It justifies technology by proposing an *imago hominis* as freedom – a freedom that is unrestrained by the purposes human beings are fitted to serve. As Grant points out, “Every development of technique is an exercise of freedom by those who develop it, and as the exercise of freedom is the only meaning, the changes can only be publicly known as the unfolding of meaning.”³⁷

This vision of freedom as the highest value for humans – the heart of the liberalism of secularized American Protestantism – is the inner meaning of modernity. What secularized American Protestantism contributed to the primal notion that stands at the origin of modernity is the idea of the human being as will. As secularized thought, however, it had nothing to offer in answer to the question “What does the good will will?” As it fused with liberalism, it accepted for itself the liberal answer, that the freedom of the individual to will what she or he will will is itself the highest good. Grant puts the idea a little differently:

In myth, philosophy and revelation, orders were proclaimed in terms of which freedom was measured and defined. As freedom is the highest term in the modern language, it can no longer be so enfolded. There is therefore no possibility of answering the question: freedom for what purpose? Such may indeed be the true account of the human situation: an unlimited freedom to make the world as we want in a universe indifferent to what purpose we choose. But if our situation is such, then we do not have a system of meaning.³⁸

Willing no longer serves the Good, it makes it. This understanding of the relation of human beings to value is one that arises from the notion that humans make values. But our values also make us what we are. It is this co-penetration of making and being that is the hallmark of modernity. Liberal theory, in offering freedom as its *imago hominis*, justifies the unlimited use of human and non-human nature in making. And like secularized American Protestantism, it justifies technology as being merely an extension of the human impulse towards refashioning human and non-human nature.

The psychology produced by secularizing Puritanism abetted the will to dominate nature. The Puritan will degenerated through secularization into mere wilfulness. The noble Puritan virtue of self-reliance declined into selfishness, resolve became unthinking stubbornness, thrift became niggardliness, the commitment to hard work became the needless pursuit of toil, and self-denial hardened into a narrowness of feeling.

Furthermore, as secularized Puritanism combined with American liberalism, it took into itself the liberal idea of reason. Liberalism has understood reason as a faculty for making calculations. Thus it was in liberal thought that reason became what it is for most North Americans today, an instrument for determining what means can be used for achieving our ends. And to the question “What ends ought a human being pursue?” liberalism could give no answer other than those that follow from enlightened self-interest. Moreover, since secularized Protestantism’s own answer was that human beings are free and can choose whatever goals lead to self-realization and self-fulfilment, the American ethic, forged from the materials of secularized Protestantism and liberalism, could give no account of what might restrain the will.

Americans excelled in the application of technology because there was nothing in the American ethic that limited its use. Canadians traditionally have harboured different beliefs. The notion of natural law and the moral principles that are propounded in Calvinism and Common Sense philosophy (systems of belief that are at the origins of Canadian thought) argue that there are limits to what a person may rightly will – limits more stringent than those imposed by enlightened self-interest or eudaemonistic calculations. According to these systems of belief, a human being must submit to something beyond himself or herself, something that declares the unlimited use of human and non-human nature in making is simply wrong.

This is why Canadian thought – from Eric Havelock (*Preface to Plato* and *Prometheus*) to George Grant (*Technology and Empire*) to McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*) – has been dominated by questions concerning technology.³⁹ A brilliant exposition of the forms the Canadian discourse on technology has assumed – and one of the first to indicate the centrality of that discourse to a range of Canadian thinkers beyond those with whom we usually associate these questions – is Kroker's work *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis / McLuhan / Grant*.⁴⁰ Kroker opens the book by stating that "Canada's principal contribution to North American thought consists of a highly organized, comprehensive, and eloquent discourse on technology." He continues:

The essence of the Canadian intellectual condition is this: it is our fate by virtue of historical circumstance and geographical accident to be forever marginal to the "present-mindedness" of American culture (a society which specializing as it does in the public ethic of "instrumental activism" does not enjoy the recriminations of historical remembrance); and to be incapable of being more than ambivalent on the cultural legacy of our European past. At work in the Canadian mind is, in fact, a great and dynamic polarity between technology and culture, between economy and landscape. And this dialectical movement between the power of American empire and our bitter historical knowledge that the crisis has its origins much deeper in European culture is the gamble of the Canadian discourse on technology. The Canadian mind may be one of the main sites in modern times for working-out the meaning of technological experience.⁴¹

Absolute Idealism

The combination of Calvinist pietism and common-sense moral intuitions was potent, even tyrannical. It spoke to post-lapsarian humanity as utterly depraved and utterly dependent upon God for redemption. In Common Sense philosophy, the notion of the dependence of humans on God was asserted with the claim that the human conscience, the instrument of the moral faculty, is regulated by the will of God.⁴² Thus James George, professor of men-

tal and moral philosophy and logic at Queen's College and the first person to hold a chair in moral philosophy in the English-speaking colony, wrote:

Plainly, he who is thoroughly under this heavenly guidance, never can be fake in moral sentiments, or fail in his relative duties. A good moral condition of mind, then, is *the first*, and I will add, the *indispensible* [sic] element in the civilization of the individual man. Without this you could no more civilize a man than you could civilize a brute, or a devil. Civilization, then, must begin within, or there can be no fruits without. A God-regulated conscience is that which can alone regulate the passions and appetites, and of course the outward conduct of man.⁴³

The *imago hominis* presented here – and it is common in the writings of those who followed this philosophical school – is too austere to be tolerated in the long run. Most of us have experiences of humanity that make this view of it seem excessively narrow. Its truncation must have been even more apparent to early Canadians. They did have ample evidence that every life provided its share of misery and suffering. But united as they were in their strong garrison communities and surviving as a result of the mutual aid they offered one another, they knew of other aspects of human beings not adequately accounted for in this view. They needed a philosophy that, instead of emphasizing only the depravity of humanity, provided an account of its positive features as well. Given their strong mistrust of reason, it would have to emphasize the emotions, the passions and the will as the springs that drive human behaviour. The strong sense of community that Canadians experienced within the garrison demanded that this philosophy speak for people not as individuals but as belonging to a collective. And the formation of this collective would have to be explained in the only way that seemed to Canadian thinkers to be possible – by relying on the idea that people intuit ethical principles inherent in the order of things, then bring their reason into accord with these principles and finally use their reason to regulate their actions.

Canadian thought also needed a more complete account of the relationship between human beings and nature than was provided in Calvinist or Common Sense philosophy. Certainly the land the settlers encountered seemed alien and, with few exceptions, ungenerous and forbidding. Still they settled into a close relation with the land, worked with it, and in the end nature provided for them. To explain these experiences, a philosophy would have to account for the intimate relation that had developed between human beings and nature, without denying the opposition between them. It would have to hold these two moments of experience in a dialectical unity.

Intellectual developments outside Canada's borders helped shape the philosophy that was produced by these demands. One such development arose from the challenge to the religious orthodoxy posed by Darwin's theory of

evolution. Most of those Canadian thinkers who subscribed to orthodox religious beliefs – and they were by far the vast majority – accepted the principles laid down in William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802): that the pursuit of biology and geology was providential, that there were meanings in nature that could be uncovered by natural philosophy, and consequently that students, by observing nature closely, could discern the evidence of Divine Presence. Canadian thinkers considered the study of natural theology very important; the first philosophical work written in English Canada was James Beaven's *Elements of Natural Theology* (1850).⁴⁴

Darwinian evolution offered a challenge to natural theology's claim to have discovered a rational order in nature. It was believed that Darwinism argued first that nature was not created in a single act, but evolved, and secondly that Darwinian theory implied that nature came to be what it is not by design but by a series of accidents. It was also believed that Darwinism implied that human beings were not deliberately created by God but were the product of a series of accidents. Finally, many people felt the basis for moral belief that natural theology provided seemed to have been undermined by Darwinism.

At first Canadian thinkers rejected Darwinism. But eventually the weight of the evidence became too great and they became convinced that some way of reconciling Darwinism and natural theology would have to be found. Such a philosophy would have to accept the historicity of nature while presenting evidence that Reason or Divine Principle guides this evolution. The task of developing such a philosophy was among those the Canadian thinker Jacob Gould Schurman set for himself in writing his *Kantian Ethics and the Ethics of Evolution* (1881).⁴⁵ While Schurman seems to have adopted an Hegelianism of some sort and to have believed that reality undergoes evolution, he believed that there are moral principles that are universal and ahistorical. Perhaps Schurman's Hegelianism was more thoroughgoing, but the difficulties he had with the apparently relativizing tendencies of Hegelianism are not so different from those of George Grant, Charles Cochrane or Maurice Hutton.

As part of the wave of sentiment elicited by Herbert Spencer's *Evolutionary Utilitarianism* there was, in the later part of the nineteenth century, a renewed wave of enthusiasm for science, for the empirical method in general, for "being up to date." There was a sense that a new world was coming, a world more down-to-earth, more practical and less hidebound. The Canadian mind has long had a streak of philosophical conservatism in it and many thinkers objected to this enthusiasm for progress, for the new sciences (especially for the social sciences) and generally for the use of the empirical method in the study of humanity, the state, economic theory and social phenomena on the whole. They set out to find some way of combatting this enthusiasm.⁴⁶

Many of the demands that set them forth on this quest had a common origin. Canadian thinkers have not accepted individualistic social theories of any sort and certainly could not accept a theory like Spencer's, which seemed to suggest that the primary character of social relations is conflict, with each person locked in a struggle for survival with others. From its beginnings Canadian social thought has had a communitarian bias. Canadian thinkers have attempted to establish that the basis for community is to be found in transcendent moral principles; this is as true of James George or William Lyall as it is of George Grant. The origin of the impulse to establish a strong basis for the community is found in the three primal experiences of Canadians – a new and different nature, an extraordinary ethnic diversity, and the Amerindian culture.

At the very time there were demands for a system of thought that overcame the shortcomings of the Calvinist/Common Sense synthesis and that adequately accounted for experiences Canadians had undergone, a new philosophical school was developing in the United Kingdom, especially in Scotland. This school propounded the principles of Absolute Idealism.⁴⁷ Among the many important figures belonging to this school were Sir William Hamilton, a precursor of the movement whose work was influenced by Common Sense philosophers such as Reid, by Immanuel Kant and by German Romantic thought; James Frederick Ferrier, who introduced Absolute Idealism into the Scottish tradition; James Hutchinson Sterling, author of *The Secret of Hegel*, a work that Queen's University Professor John Watson drew upon extensively; and, of particular importance, T.H. Green, who brought the Idealist arguments he acquired on the Continent back to the United Kingdom. William Wallace, Bernard Bosanquet and F.H. Bradley proclaimed Idealist arguments in England during the later part of the nineteenth century and the very early years of the twentieth, during the British heyday. In Scotland John Caird and his brother Edward Caird, along with Benjamin Jowett, presented Idealist views to their students. Even at Cambridge, the established centre of scientific philosophy, students listened to the arguments of Absolute Idealism from the likes of J.M.E. McTaggart, James Ward and G.T. Stout.

Absolute Idealism attracted an international following during these years. German-trained Idealists became prominent in American universities. George Herbert Palmer expounded Idealist principles at Harvard. George Holmes Howison did the same, first at St. Louis where he founded a school known as the St. Louis Hegelians, then at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and finally at Berkeley. A.C. Armstrong taught Idealism at Wesleyan, George Trumbull Ladd at Yale, George Fullerton at Pennsylvania and Columbia.

Another centre of Hegelian thought was Cincinnati. The brand of Hegelianism that developed in Cincinnati was quite different than that advocated by the liberal circle in St. Louis. Members of the Cincinnati Hegelians were committed to a left-wing interpretation of Hegel. August Willich, editor

of the *Cincinnati Republicaner*, attacked Christianity using Marxist and Feuerbachian arguments. A close friend of Willich, and the most important philosopher among the Cincinnati Hegelians, was John Bernard Stallo, a theorist of secular democracy. Most prominent among the American Absolute Idealists were Josiah Royce and Brand Blanshard, who developed highly original and profound variants of Absolute Idealism.

In Britain Absolute Idealism was relatively short-lived. By the early part of the twentieth century, G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell had delivered its death blows. In America it was, despite the importance of philosophers such as Royce, mostly a colourful sidebar to Pragmatism. But in Canada it found an especially important place and became the dominant school of philosophy from the later part of the nineteenth century until the end of the Second World War. It was expounded by George Paxton Young, John Clark Murray, John Watson, Jacob Gould Schurman, George Blewett, James Ten Brocke, Wilfred Currier Kierstead, James MacEachran, John Macdonald, Herbert Leslie Stewart and Richard M. Bucke.

The crucible out of which all this emerged was Germany. And the greatest of all the German Idealists was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel proposed that there is an order to history that results from the end towards which history progresses. According to Hegel, it is demonstrable that history is the progressive achievement of freedom. A being is free if it is unconstrained by anything outside of itself, that is, if it is self-determined and self-motivated. That which is self-determined and self-motivated, Hegel termed "Spirit." So history, in Hegel's terms, is the progressive self-realization of Spirit. He claimed that the story historians tell essentially concerns how "Spirit" emerged out of "Nature." And since the most spiritual of all "natural beings" is the human being, history is the progressive achievement of human freedom. This is what we discover when we consider history "reflectively" (when, transcending time, we view each event's relation to all other events and to the course of history in general). Thus the full realization of human freedom is the aim of history, the "final cause of the World at large," as Hegel said.

Many have found Hegel's idea of history as the progress of freedom and self-consciousness to be a rosy picture of the historical process. But Hegel was no Dr. Pangloss; there is no vacuous optimism in his writing. Hegel himself spoke of "the terror of history," the agonizing recognition of the misery and destruction, the suffering of individuals and the obliteration of cultures that have typified the historical process. "History," in Hegel's own words "is the slaughter bench at which the happiness of people, the wisdom of states or the virtue of individuals have been victimized."

How then could Hegel say that history is the progress of freedom? Hegel felt compelled to construct a philosophy of history that contains the qualities of a theodicy, that would justify God's – and History's – ways to human beings. He did so by drawing a distinction, which would become central to

Idealist philosophy, between appearance and reality. The impression that history is a slaughter bench, Hegel argued, is only an appearance, a surface view of history. In reality, history is the progressive rise of the Spirit, the progress of humanity to consciousness of its own freedom. Still the question remains: How can this view be vindicated in the face of evidence of the truth of the view of history as a slaughter bench? Hegel answered that "the events which make up this picture of gloomy emotion and thoughtful reflection are the only means for realizing the essential destiny, the absolute and final purpose, or, what amounts to the same thing, the true result of world history."⁴⁸ He insisted that the only way anything spiritual can be achieved is by means of will. But this does not mean that freedom is won deliberately. While history is clearly "a drama of passions and needs" in which a welter of "private aims and selfish desires" come into conflict, the self-interests and destructive passions are often the unintentional cause of their opposite. This is accomplished through what Hegel referred to as "the Cunning of Reason."

Hegel illustrates the Cunning of Reason by distinguishing between two elements that enter into history. One is the Absolute, by which Hegel means the totality of what really exists, conceived as a unitary system that both generates and accounts for all apparent diversity. Since for Hegel the Idea (the reconciliation of Spirit and Matter) is ultimately what truly is, the Absolute is the totality of rational truth. The Absolute attempts both to externalize itself in the real and to express itself through Reason.

The second element is human passion. "Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion," Hegel wrote. The passions are set into motion by the personal desires of human beings, their private aims to gain satisfaction of their selfish wants. Desires are the expressions of human will, and even when they appear to be motivated by altruism, they are really selfish and serve the will's selfish aims. Seen in these terms, Hegel's problem of illustrating the Cunning of Reason is to demonstrate how the Absolute can make use of human passions and desires. Hegel's account of the power of the Absolute to use the strong forces of human passion for its own end relied upon two concepts; the Nation-State and the World Historical Individual.

According to Hegel, the Absolute unfolds not in the individual human spirit, but in the Spirit of an entire people. Each nation possesses a *Volksgeist*, a Spirit of the People which Hegel described as "its culture generally," its language, religion, art, philosophy, science. The *Volksgeist* is embodied in a people's culture and unifies them in an organic totality. Hegel claimed that no element within a *Volksgeist* can be understood apart from the Spirit which pervades a culture and brings all these elements into a totality. A people's religion or science or any other aspect of culture can be understood only in relation to the Spirit it manifests. Hegel went on to show that "the true Individuals of World-History are nations." The individuals who are important in bringing humanity to consciousness of its freedom are not particular individuals but the great nation states.

The Absolute

From almost the beginning of his philosophical career with the publication of his work on the *Difference between the Philosophical Systems of Fichte and Schelling* (1801), Hegel had claimed that "Division is the source of the need of philosophy." In common experience, we are confronted with differences, with oppositions, and seek to construct a whole from this sundered harmony. The basic goal of Reason is to attain this synthesis.

The task of philosophy is to construct the Absolute for consciousness. This synthesis must comprehend the whole of reality; it must overcome all oppositions, including that between finite and infinite. In doing so, it must not simply deny all reality to the finite, nor reduce infinity to a mere collection of finite things, but must show how the finite is incorporated into the infinite. Indeed, Hegel claimed, we cannot even think of the finite without thinking of the infinite. The concept of the finite is the concept of that which is limited by what is other than itself. (Thus the concept of the finite is not a self-contained concept, inasmuch as it cannot be thought through itself, without reference to any other concept.) It has been determined through a *negation*. Following the path of the dialectic traced by Hegel's philosophy, we negate the negation, and in doing so we affirm that the finite is more than finite – that it is also a moment in the infinite. To construct the Absolute (the task of philosophy), we must go through the finite, Hegel claims, inasmuch as we must demonstrate how the Absolute expresses itself in the finite human mind. And while the human mind is finite, it is also more than finite, Hegel claims, because it can attain that standpoint where it is the instrument by which the Absolute attains knowledge of itself.

For Hegel the Absolute is a process, the total process of its own self-expression in and through the finite. Since the Absolute is the Totality, reality as whole, Hegel concluded, is a process of self-development. As the totality of this process of self-development, the Absolute comes into being only in the course of its becoming; it becomes concrete and actual only in its developmental process and through the end towards which it evolves. In this sense, it is an unfolding of an Idea, and only the end of this process reveals what its reality is – only in its end does it show its meaning.⁴⁹ Since the task of philosophy is to overcome divisions with a final synthesis, and since the Absolute in its historical developments becomes all-comprehending, the Absolute is the proper subject of philosophy. And since the Absolute unfolds through history, philosophy must be concerned with the historical process and take data about it as a primary concern.

But the Absolute is not merely Substance; as the whole of reality, it is also Subject. Here an important point of the Hegelian system emerges. If the Absolute is everything, and if it is a Subject, then what is its Object? There can be only one answer: its Object must be itself. The Absolute must be self-thinking thought, Hegel argued, that is Thought which thinks itself. Hegel gave the term "Spirit" to the self-conscious Subject that has the Absolute as

its Object – that is, the Absolute itself considered subjectively. This Spirit is not transcendent, nor is it something different from Nature; it is the Totality itself, as process. And as the Absolute comes into being through the process of its own self-development, the Spirit attains ever greater levels of self-awareness. Reality comes to know itself through the self-unfolding of the Absolute.

The precondition of this self-knowledge is Nature, Hegel claimed, for without this objective realm the subjective could not exist. As a Totality, the Absolute has both the objective realm and the subjective realm as aspects of itself. In Nature, the Absolute expresses itself objectively; in human consciousness, the Absolute returns to itself as Spirit.

The process of the development of the real is teleological, inasmuch as it is directed towards the realization of thought reflecting on itself. The Thought which thinks itself is the end towards which the universe is moving. At the end of history, the Absolute will overcome its alienation in Nature; it will return to itself in the Thought whose object is Itself, conceived as an all-embracing Totality, in the Thought which is a Self-comprehending Totality.

To say that the Absolute is Nature raised to the level of Spirit which thinks itself and which thinks of itself as a totality is to affirm the identity, in the end, of the ideal and the real, of subjectivity and objectivity. It is to affirm that Absolute involves identity-in-difference. This identity-in-difference involves different moments. The Idea (or *Logos*) expresses itself both in Nature and Spirit (the sphere of the human spirit). The Idea (or *Logos*) goes over into Nature, into the material world which is, as it were, its antithesis. In Spirit, the Idea returns to itself, insofar as it manifests what it really is, that is Reason. Thus the life of the Absolute comprises three moments, the Idea (or Concept or Notion), Nature and Spirit. Hegel claimed that these three moments are related to one another as thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

However, if the Absolute is identity-in-difference, how can it be understood? After all, as identity-in-difference, it comprehends what would appear to be mutually exclusive properties, such as being finite and infinite, being One and Many. How can the mind construct an adequate understanding of its life if it is so characterized by contradictory properties?

The Nation-State

The grandest triad in the Hegelian dialectic comprises Being, Nature and Spirit. Being is Reason (the Concept) in itself. Nature is Reason projected – objectified – for itself; in it Reason is made alien or “other” to itself. Spirit is Reason reflected back into itself.

In the realm of Spirit, there is another grand triad, comprising Subjective Spirit, by which Hegel meant soul or consciousness, Objective Spirit, that is morality, culture (as anthropologists use the term) and Absolute Spirit, or art, religion and philosophy.

The scope of Hegel's concept of Objective Spirit is breathtaking; by the term Hegel meant the whole of the "cultural heritage of a people." Hegel used the notion of the Objective Spirit to express the idea that all human experience is socialized, and thus to combat atomistic individualism of the sort propounded in the writings of liberal theorists. For Hegel the group culture has a sort of reality that individual members lack, for he believed that the human mind and human ideas are essentially social products. It is the culture to which they belong, and the cultural heritage passed down through the culture, that determines how individuals view the world, what religious beliefs they hold and what scientific ideas they apply in inventing technologies. The culture is the air that individuals breathe and that gives them being, and so is more substantial than any particular person.

But the being Objective Spirit possesses is not that of consciousness. Hegel did not propose a "universal Self" or a "transcendental Subject" or a "superhuman Mind"; he only claimed that Objective Spirit attains conscious existence only in people's "subjective minds." Nor is the Objective Spirit static. It changes, just as all forms of culture and all cultural institutions undergo constant change, advancing to richer, more complex stages.

The Objective Spirit is embodied in the life of the Nation-State, a organic totality that includes the government and all other national institutions and the entirety of a nation's culture. Hegel claimed that the Nation-States are the true individuals of World History that bring humanity to consciousness of its freedom. And, he argued, they are the individuals that Cunning Reason employs. By this Hegel meant that, though we may seek to fulfil our own selfish ends and pursue our own selfish desires, everything we do affects the life of the Nation-State. I decide to buy a computer to reduce the time I spend revising articles and consequently to increase my productivity. In doing so, I help create an electronics manufacturing sector and a software writing sector in the economy, whose presence affects the very character (spirit) of life in the country. Though we follow our personal, "subjective" desires, our actions have consequences for the Objective Spirit.

Moreover, Hegel argued, our desires do not really originate with ourselves. I decide to buy a computer because the educational, economic and media practices in my nation are what they are; though I may have thought that I was acting freely and independently, my actions are "system-determined," determined by the Objective Spirit. And conversely, since they help influence the system itself, my actions affect the evolution of the Objective Spirit.

Cunning Reason uses the desires of individuals to further the development of Nation-States and ultimately to carry forward the progress of freedom. The major steps in the historical process, though, have been achieved by Cunning Reason's use of World Historical Individuals. These were figures like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Napoleon. Like anyone else, such World Historical Individuals acted on their own selfish desires and their own

personal passions. But Cunning Reason used them without their knowing it for its own end, to bring about a new stage in history by furthering the development of the human being's consciousness of freedom. Although these World Historical Individuals were unaware of their historical function, they were the clear-sighted ones of their epoch, since they knew "what was ripe for development."

Each World Historical Individual brings to supremacy a new *Volksgeist* (Spirit of the People), often by destructiveness. And history progresses as each successive *Volksgeist* is replaced in its supremacy by another. So the historical process continues, each successive dominant Nation-State embodying one stage in the Absolute's manifestation of freedom and in human beings' developing consciousness of freedom.

According to Hegel, this Nation-State embodies the principles of truth that prevail at any stage in the historical process, as the culture and institutions of each dominant Nation-State are a stage in the development of truth, that is, in the development of the Absolute. By participating in the life of the Nation-State, we participate in the life of the Absolute embodied in the culture of the Nation State. And when we participate in the life of the Nation-State, our moral centre becomes not our own personal self-interest, but the spirit of the people as a whole, the spirit of the unfolding Absolute. It is only in the individual's participation in the life of the Nation-State that he or she attains the full development of his or her potential.

Absolute Idealism in Canada

Philosophies derived from Hegel's became prevalent in Canada in the 1870s.⁵⁰ Notes taken at Paxton Young's lectures reveal that during the 1870s he was questioning Common Sense philosophy and moving towards some version of Idealism. He was especially concerned to demonstrate that reason is the foundation of ethics. His version of Idealism has strong resemblances to Green's, though Young's may actually predate the English thinker's. During the same period John Clark Murray repudiated the philosophy of Sir William Hamilton and moved towards a purer form of Absolute Idealism, the ideal of which was "a system of thought in which all cognitions, that is, all truths, all objective connections are conceived as component factors of one self-consciousness. Such is a system of ideal truth."

The major exponent of Absolute Idealism among early Canadian philosophers was John Watson, the most important Canadian philosopher of the period. Watson's primary interest was the metaphysics of religion. In *Christianity and Idealism* (1896) and his landmark, two-volume work *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1910-12) he provided Christian belief with an Idealist undergirding. It was Edward Caird who, among the British Idealists, most influenced John Watson. Caird's was essentially a philosophy of reconciliations, in which the oppositions between different aspects of our

spiritual life – between subject and object, religion and science, freedom and determinism, reason and desire – are resolved in a higher unity. Caird believed this was necessary to achieve the spiritual harmony that lay behind the higher attainment human beings are capable of reaching. Caird also interpreted Kant's position as implying that thought enters into the very constitution of the objects of experience. He believed that cognitive processes are dominated by "the Idea of Reason," which propels the mind towards a form of experience in which differences are seen as elements of a single centre. In ethics Caird, relying on a rather Spinozistic conception of freedom, argued that human beings are free when they determine their behaviour by referring it to a unitary self – a self that is the permanent centre of the individual. Arguing this way, Caird attempted to refute utilitarian hedonism, for his argument was based on the distinction between transient desires and the permanent self; acting to satisfy fleeting desires Caird saw as a form of bondage, but acting to satisfy the self – the self as whole entity – is freedom.

When Watson wrote Caird's obituary for the *Philosophical Review*, he stressed that Caird had demonstrated that such oppositions as "materialism and spiritualism, sensationalism and idealism, empiricism and *a priori* speculation, individualism and idealism" are only the products of a specific phase of thought and are relative to that phase alone. Watson claimed that Hegel had revealed to Caird a principle of reconciliation suitable to an age dominated by historicism and evolutionary thought. Caird, Watson stated, had spotted Hegel's secret and that was the insight that the historical process is the unfolding of a single, spiritual process.

Watson went on to develop a variant of Caird's philosophy. But it is as much in the divergence of Watson's philosophy from his master's as in its similarities that we can discern his distinctive Canadianness. Like Caird, Watson conceived of the universe as an organic whole. And, he noted, since by definition nothing lies outside of this organic whole, its evolution (the evolution of the universe) is an aspect of the self-evolution of the whole. Like Caird, Watson also believed Hegel's profoundest insight to have been that the historical process is the unfolding of a single spiritual principle and that this principle becomes fully self-conscious only in the life of human beings. This identification of the divine intelligence with the human Watson saw as the essential principle of Christianity.

One of the foundations of Watson's philosophical system was his conception of truth. He had declared that truth "is a complete unity" and had used this conception of its nature to attack the theory of the empiricists. They had accepted the limited, phenomenal truths for the final truth itself. Moreover, he argued, in conceiving of the mind as passive, they failed to acknowledge the active role the self-conscious mind plays in constructing the objects of which it is aware. Philosophy was distinguished from science (and empirical thought); the business of philosophy is "to transcend the world of phenomena and to disclose the world of true being, by a discovery of the true bond of connection between thought and nature."

Against the empiricists, who in his view began with the conception that nature was absolutely independent of consciousness and implicitly with the conception that consciousness was therefore dependent upon the material world, Watson argued that true philosophy must begin with the recognition that in self-conscious reflection we apprehend in a single act both Self and Non-Self. In thinking, the object of thought is brought "under the dominion of thought." As Watson put it, Spirit (the principle under which consciousness and the objects of consciousness are reconciled), in thinking (since thought brings the objects "under its dominion"), destroys the assumed independence of Nature. It is not true that an already existing external world simply imposes itself upon the passive mind, Watson contended. Rather, the external world is a product of the mind's activity.

According to Watson, the problem of metaphysics is not simply to show that there is unity in nature, but to demonstrate that nature could be resolved into consciousness. Watson used the familiar argument to show how this could be done. He demonstrated that the history of consciousness passed through a series of phases, compelled by a logic of development which, being of logical form, derives from its own nature. At the highest stage of development, the phenomena of nature are seen to exemplify universal laws that are identical with those governing the action of thought. The metaphysical Understanding discovers those laws of nature which universal thought recognizes as true; it penetrates into the depths of Nature and discovers there a rational soul.

Thus Watson argued – in a fashion that resembled the way all Hegelians, but especially Edward Caird, argued – that truth was the Whole, and that any aspect of thought – science, religion, art, magic – only reflected a part of this complete, organic Whole. And against Herbert Spencer, he argued that the evolutionary process by which we ascend to the understanding of the whole was not a materialistic social evolution, but a spiritual evolution. Indeed, Watson argued that philosophy leads in the end to the Infinite and to God. Like Caird, Watson understood religion and philosophy as having close ties to one another, since both allow people to come to understand more fully the spiritual unity which relates all existents. Indeed, Watson's Absolute Idealism offered what Calvinism never had, unity with the Divine Nature.

Watson's philosophy overcame some of the limitations of Calvinism without repudiating those appealing aspects of Calvinism. It accepted the evolutionary schema which had been proposed by Hegelianism and which apparently was supported by the findings of recent science, without abandoning the spirituality that constituted one of the valuable features of Calvinism. It offered a critique of the limits of empiricism without involving itself in foolish, dismissive attacks on science. It accepted the modern experience without abandoning the essentials of traditional faith. It encouraged critical intelligence without forsaking piousness. It defended Paleyite natural theology without rebuking or repudiating the strengths of the modern scientific spirit, which spoke on behalf of a conception of evolution as pro-

ceeding entirely by chance. While insisting on the values of intelligence and reason, it still affirmed a moral human nature. It pointed out the intimate relation of human beings and nature without falling into a dogmatic materialism. It is no wonder then that Absolute Idealism readily found a following in Canada, for it seemed to respond to the needs of the Canadian mind.

Absolute Idealism had an enormous impact on social theory in Canada, leading to results that, seen from one point of view at least, were perhaps a little ironic. Watson's own contribution to social theory was *The State in Peace and War* (1919), a book written in the aftermath of the First World War. In this work, the application of the principle of reconciliation is extended into the domain of politics and society. Watson advocated a world government, based on a multicultural integration whose constitution resembles Canada's. Behind this there lies what Eric Voegelin has called "ecumenicism," the tendency to construct a universal order incorporating a number of particular societies. For Watson (as for the Absolute Idealists generally) history is a structurally intelligible field of reality that progresses towards a *telos* (or end) and that is the fulfilment of the one ground all human beings participate in, which is one and the same for all human beings, and is an ever-expanding presence that in its constant increase is coming to constitute the universality of human beings as such. Thus it was perfectly logical for him to conclude that progress in history would lead to the universal state.

Following Hegel and Caird, Watson used the principle of reconciliation in the social sphere to explain the relation between universal and particular interests. For Watson the state exists "for the establishment of the external conditions under which the highest human life may be carried on." Watson confronted two fundamental problems of political theory: the differentiation of particular states and their relation to the ideal world government, and the problem of uniting public authority with individual freedom (a problem Watson viewed as the essential problem of political theory).

Watson supported differentiation among governments of the world. He wrote:

We can only have a true World-State when we have developed to their utmost the possibilities of each Nation-State, just as we cannot have a true Nation-State without the institution of the family and of private property, with the various industrial and commercial relations which they imply, and without that free play of individuality which gives rise to decentralized forms of association. A World-State based upon the combination of variously differentiated Nation-States is a possible ideal; a World-State which abolishes all the differences of race and nationality and individuality is an empty ideal. The fundamental mistake of the Stoics is seen in their doctrine that the highest good of man is in no way dependent upon the interests of the social life. This drives the individual back upon himself, and makes him indifferent to the ties

of kindred and friendship, family and nation. The Stoics were weak where Plato and Aristotle were strong, namely, in not seeing that the consciousness of self as a spiritual being cannot be separated from the consciousness of self as a member of society.⁵¹

Against the conception of the ideal World-State as an homogeneous all-embracing totality which lacks internal differences, Watson pointed out that such a state would have to be either too strong or too weak. If on the one hand, it did not impose uniformity on all peoples, then it would be incapable of providing a way of realizing opportunities for the most complete range of human potentials of the largest number of people. On the other hand, Watson argued, the "ties of kindred and friendship, family and nation" would be lost if a universal (all-embracing), homogeneous (not characterized by internal differences) state were imposed. The issues Watson raised here have been taken up by George Grant. Grant deals with the problem of what (following Kojève) he calls "the universal, homogeneous state" and claims that the question of "whether the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order" is one of the most important of modern political philosophy.⁵²

Like Watson, Grant argues against the proposition that "the universal, homogeneous state is the best social order," and the arguments he offers resemble somewhat those Watson employed against the non-differentiated World-State. Grant stresses the need for "love of one's own" ("one's own" in the sense of one's people, one's culture and one's tradition) as the only means to "love of the good," stating that "people who are deracinated, so that they have nothing which is really their own, rarely move to the good."⁵³ In his article, "Tyranny and Wisdom," Grant, like Watson, suggests that one danger of the universal, homogeneous state is that it can be tyrannous. He agrees with Watson that there is a danger that the universal, homogeneous state will not actualize the highest potentials of people. The basis for this judgment is his recognition of the fact that the homogeneous states will not recognize differences between people. And since not all people are capable of attaining the highest good that is possible to humans *qua* human, that is, philosophical wisdom,⁵⁴ and since the homogeneous state is dedicated to eliminating differences, no one will be a philosopher in the universal, homogeneous state because not everyone can be a philosopher. Grant recognizes both dangers that Watson recognized as confronting the World-State. But Grant's position is even stronger than Watson's: while Watson believed the World-State would likely be sabotaged by one or the other of these conditions, Grant, following Leo Strauss, stressed that their co-presence would be inevitable. The application of the same principle to all people and the refusal to acknowledge differences would lead to tyranny and lack of wisdom – tyranny because only through tyranny could any government be universalized and lack of wisdom because such a government would have to disavow the highest good that is available to humans *qua* human, namely wisdom.

The second problem of reconciling public authority with individual freedom was even more central to Watson's political theory. Like Hegel, Watson believed that the individual is a product of the social order:

But while it is an important truth, that individuality can properly be affirmed only of a being that is self-conscious, it by no means follows that to be self-conscious is to be aware of oneself as a separate individual, having no relation to any other existents. It may easily be shown that the consciousness of individuality is on this assumption impossible....

It is the distinguishing characteristic of self-conscious beings that they are self-determined. But self-determination is not the same thing as the determination of an exclusive and separate self.⁵⁵

Watson believed that individuals come into being through the social order and obtain their being from their place within the social order. Nevertheless, he did not completely subsume the being of the individual in the being of the whole: "Plato's attempt to convert the individual into a pure organ of the whole is doomed to failure because it takes away that intense consciousness of personality which is the condition of the higher life. He who has no self cannot be unselfish. The good of the whole can only be secured by means of subordinate organizations."⁵⁶

Watson insisted that a social theory that speaks of an individual apart from social order must be incoherent. We exist only by virtue of our place within a complex social order. Only by a long historical process have the possibilities for marked individual differentiation been realized, as a result of increased complexity of the social order itself.

Watson's belief that any theory based on the conception of the atomistic individual is basically incoherent led him to criticize the social contract theory of government. Watson made several points against contractarian theories. In the first place, he pointed out that the social contract theory begins with the assumption that "ready-made" individuals exist. Watson rejected this view; the proposition that individuals exist intelligibly apart from the community is, Watson believed, an incoherent (and therefore necessarily false) one that only seems to make sense, but really does not. Furthermore, Watson believed that universal interests, shared by all people, exist and that their existence compels rational beings to accept the fact that their behaviour must be guided by principles that cannot be identified with the principles of self-interest. Thirdly, Watson pointed out an inconsistency in social contract theories – that they assume the primacy of individuality but, at the same time, assert that institutions – or at least an institution (the state) – can be established which can make decisions binding on everyone. Finally, he argued that when it is assumed that rational principles do not and cannot regulate that state's actions (a tenet he saw as implicit in social contract theories), the state becomes an uncontrollable end-in-itself.

The final point is particularly interesting. George Grant used a very similar counterargument against contractarianism (though he detaches the argument from its moorings in the Hegelian system):

Thus, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea of progress crushed the idea of providence.... In the name of human responsibility for alleviating evil and making the world, men came to think that belief in God was morally wrong.... The believers in progress claimed that the theologians by deifying the spirit put it outside of the world and in so doing assumed that the spirit cannot be actualized in the world. Bakunin, the great revolutionary, put this idea of rebellion brilliantly when he said: "If God existed, we would have to kill him." He meant that anything – including the idea of God – that stands in way of man's absolute freedom to make history as he chooses must be destroyed.

People no longer believed that they lived under a natural law which they did not make and which they had been created to obey. They came to see themselves as the makers of their own laws and values. Jeremy Bentham, the famous English reformer of the nineteenth century, ridiculed the idea of a divine law behind our human laws, precisely because it depended on the "superstition" that values and norms are not created by humans. Bentham insisted that there is no other law but that which humans make. By their conscious and voluntary acts humans shape the world, forming it ever more in accord with ideals they conceive. It is this belief which in the last centuries has dominated the élites of western nations, so that today we live in a society which is the very incarnation of that spirit.⁵⁷

Even Grant's alternative to the moral beliefs of modernity sound very much like Caird's or that of his Canadian disciple, John Watson:

The second implication of the doctrine of natural law is that reason leads us to know what is right. The good man is the reasonable man. The believer in natural law took for granted that reason could be practical. The vast range of particular desires did not appear to him simply as a chaos, because reason could present to him that idea of a highest rational good in terms of which all his desires could be brought into an intelligible and ordered system of life. The idea of the highest good was that in which not only particular desires would be satisfied but that in which the total self would find its completion, its happiness. The doctrine distinguished between happiness and pleasure.⁵⁸

In the end, Watson consistently argued for a state that represented a community of interests. In his ideal society, citizens do not use each other as means but recognize each other as unique and as having the potential to make individual contributions. Thus, while F.H. Bradley dissolved individu-

ality (which he considered mere appearance) into the Absolute (which he believed was the only reality), Watson maintained that individuals possess a fundamental reality. Nor did Watson go the way of American Idealist Josiah Royce and replace the Hegelian Absolute with a community knit together only by their common understanding of and feelings about the world. In Watson's social philosophy, the principle of reconciliation is used to show that both the individuals and the totality possess reality.

The principle of reconciliation of the material and spiritual domains which Watson had advocated led to some surprising results – results that Watson might not have agreed with himself. Canadian philosopher George Blewett who shared many of Watson's Idealist convictions (but also took Idealism in a direction of his own, by stressing man's relation to created nature), wrote:

And the truth of the world, the truth both of ourselves and of the world, is God; God, and that "far-off divine event" which is the purpose of God, are the meaning of the world. And this means that the citizenship to which we are called is a heavenly citizenship; but it also means that the heavenly citizenship must first be fulfilled upon the earth, in the life in which our duties are those of the good neighbour, the honest citizen, the devoted churchman. The perfection of human life lies in being at one with God; but to that oneness with God men can come, not by departure from the world into eternal quietude, but only by flinging themselves into the labours and causes of the history in which God is realizing His eternal purpose.⁵⁹

In so immanentizing the *eschaton* (in bringing the future world of goodness and justice that has been promised us down to the level of mundane reality, in bringing the Beyond into the world through the dialectics of history), the gulf between God and human beings, which had seemed so wide in Calvinism, was bridged. Calvinism had argued that human sinfulness meant that people could never achieve identity with the mind of God. Watson showed how human beings and God could be reconciled, and the idea of the progressive development of the consciousness was used to show that consciousness could evolve to the point of being the embodiment of Absolute Reason. At this point the identity of the real and ideal, human beings and God, was achieved. Whatever contradicted the ideal could be eliminated.

Several social philosophers elaborated a program for realizing this heaven on earth. These philosophers, advocates of the social gospel movement such as George M. Grant (grandfather of George Parkin Grant) and Salem Bland, attempted to apply biblical teaching to solving the social problems of the day. Participants in the social gospel movement maintained that God was at work in social change and that through change a moral order ensuring social justice would emerge. The social gospel movement had widespread influence from the 1890s through the 1930s in Canada, and between 1894 and 1910 all

the major Protestant denominations struck committees to deal with issues the movement raised. It achieved an even higher profile after the war through its association with the Winnipeg General Strike.⁶⁰

Watson's association with the social gospel movement does not mean that he had radical leanings. Watson used his Absolute Idealism to develop a religious metaphysics which effectively combatted the moral scepticism of Darwinism by providing a strong moral centre with the notion of community. His arguments have a typically Canadian character (even though they derived from Immanuel Kant); he stated that submission to eternal principles of duty was the route to freedom. Like Caird, he relied on a rather Spinozistic concept of freedom to support this claim, namely that a thing is free if its actions are determined by its nature. Thus Watson wrote, "Liberty is the essence of opportunity, for self-development is the creation of law, and not something which could exist apart from the action of the state."⁶¹ This notion Watson derived, in a typically Canadian fashion, from the principle that we must render obedience to those in authority, for to do so is "to seek [one's] freedom where alone it can be found – in the subordination of one's will to the good of others." Societies are held together, Watson insisted, by the idea of a good that is higher than any individual good. In fact, he argued, the true good for an individual invariably coincides with the true social good.

This explains why Watson believed that an individual's rights are only those freedoms which allow him or her to contribute to the common good:

A man has rights which are recognized by society, but they are not made right by legislation, as Bentham held, but are recognized because they are essential to the development of the common good. The possession of rights and their recognition by society are not two different things, but the same thing; for, as the individual claims rights in virtue of his being an organ of the common good, so the State recognizes his rights on the ground that they are required for the realisation of the highest good of all.⁶²

Here Watson has argued, as so many Canadians have, that the social good has primacy over individual rights, and only the common good validates individual rights. The Hegelian reconciliation of particular and universal has shifted in favour of the universal.

Like George Grant and so many other Canadian thinkers, Watson rejected utilitarianism on the grounds that utilitarians fail to recognize the absoluteness of moral obligation: "There is one sphere, however, where the contradiction inherent in Utilitarianism, comes clearly to the surface. The absoluteness of the moral obligation to respect the rights of others has so strongly impressed itself on the human mind, that a shock is felt the moment it is hinted that the conception of Justice is resolvable ultimately into a desire for the general happiness."⁶³ ... though unlike Grant and most (though not all) of

the Common Sense philosophers, Watson argued that the fundamental ethical principles are learned through reason.

Like Grant, Watson deployed the concept of the moral community to combat the disintegrative forces unleashed by technology. Watson even gave extensive consideration to the political moral effects of technology in *The State in Peace and War*, thus further confirming Kroker's thesis in *Technology and the Canadian Mind* that "Canada's principal contribution to North American thought consists of a highly original, comprehensive, and eloquent discourse on technology." He wrote:

It is still true that only in identifying himself with a social good can the individual realize himself. The individual man can find himself, can become moral, only by contributing his share to [the realization of the evolving ideal of humanity]. He must learn that, to set aside his individual inclinations and make himself an organ of the community is to be moral, and the only way to be moral. He may criticize, and seek to improve the community, but his criticism must rest upon a recognition of the principle that the individual has no right to oppose himself to the community on the ground of inclination, but only the ground that the community as it actually is in some ways contradicts the principle of the community, the principle that it is the medium in which the complete realization of man is to be found. No criticism can be of any value that denies the principle of a social good, and seeks to substitute the mere individualism of caprice.⁶⁴

Here Watson laid down the form that social criticism could take – and in fact was to take. The moral rightness of the community is unequivocally asserted, and so, like Hegel, Watson denied that a person's criticisms of the state can be based on an appeal to universally valid moral principles, religious beliefs or private conscience. In his philosophy there is no moral authority above the state; there is no court of appeal beyond the state, no moral or religious or personal principles higher than the state itself. The ethical life of the individual member of society is provided by the Nation-State itself; our life is moral only insofar as it accords with the moral principles expressed in the institutions of our society. The moral values embodied in our Nation-State are the only basis for our moral ideals and moral obligations. Thus when we criticize the Nation-State, our criticisms can only be based on the ethical ideas of our culture.

CHAPTER 3

An Aesthetic of Reconciliation

In Hegel's philosophy, the Spirit is the Ultimate Universal, the "Universal Universal." In his philosophical system, Universals seem to be the form of unity particular things possess. Hegel considered the soul to be "a universal," or "a concept." "Single members [parts] of the body are what they are only in relation to their unity," he wrote. What makes a material thing the sort of thing it is, and not some other sort of thing, is the form of the relations among its component parts and the relation between it and other orders of things which it is a component of. Moreover, Hegel believed that any order, if seen from an encompassing enough vantage point, will be found to be rational, will give evidence of the operation of reason. In fact, Unity in its all-encompassing form is Reason itself, for when they become intricate enough, ordering principles become conscious and eventually self-conscious.¹

Human beings are complex beings; their form of unity has a high degree of intricacy. Thus they are self-conscious. Since a subject is nothing other than a form of awareness, since any form of awareness is determined solely by the object of awareness, and since the object of self-conscious knowledge is identical with the knowing subject, self-consciousness must be determined through itself. Whatever is determined through itself is free; thus self-consciousness is free. Human beings, as essentially self-conscious beings, are free. Or more precisely, human beings, as beings with the potential of becoming infinitely self-conscious, are destined for freedom. The entire course of history, Hegel affirmed, can be seen as humanity's effort to realize its potential for wholeness and freedom. If humanity is to become truly free, it – or at least the reason it possesses – must become all-encompassing, since an all-encompassing whole is subject to no external limitations which might in any way restrict it. Humanity is destined for freedom and integration with all that is.

Just as human beings strive for freedom, they take delight in beauty. According to Hegel, there is an integral relationship between freedom and beauty, inasmuch as the beauty of a work of art results from its being a sensuous embodiment of freedom. He wrote: "The look of independent and total

The notes to Chapter 3 begin at page 413.

life and freedom ... lies at the root of the essence of beauty."² But while all works of art are made of physical matter, they must also have a Spiritual aspect, for only the Spirit is truly free. A work of art must therefore integrate Spirit and matter. Hegel described the nature of this unity by saying that a beautiful thing is a unified whole composed of a rational idea (the content of the work) and its vesture (the form of the work); the content and form are physically identical but metaphysically discrete: "The content of art is the idea and the form of its display, the configuration of the sensuous or plastic image."³ Thus art is the sensuous incarnation of the Idea. As Hegel put it, art is "an individual configuration of reality whose express function is to make manifest the Idea in its appearance."⁴ A work of art is a sensuous sign of metaphysical content and so can function as an introduction or propaedeutic to philosophy.

Hegel was much more interested in the particularities and details of aesthetic theory than the vast majority of great philosophers because his philosophy is basically concerned with how the Spirit comes to know itself as Idea. The process by which such a knowledge develops is one in which Spirit comes to know, first, the Idea as it exists externalized in nature and, later, as it "returns to itself from its otherness," as it reveals itself in the psychological sphere, which Hegel referred to as the realm of Objective Spirit, and in the sphere of art, religion and philosophy, which Hegel designated the realm of Absolute Spirit. Spirit is free cognitive activity. It enters into the world in order to realize its potential, and in a series of "progressive embodiments" – embodiments that encompass ever more material reality – it seeks and approaches an ever more adequate expression of its nature as an "all-inclusive totality – a self-comprehending totality."

A work of art provided Hegel with a model of how the Spirit comes to be embodied in matter, for among human activities of a Spiritual character it is artmaking that pre-eminently manifests the unity of subject and object, of mind and nature. In a work of art, the subject and object become a unity in which neither the Spiritual nor the physical aspect limits the other. Since in such a relationship neither aspect is conditioned by the other, each is free. Because it is constituted by such relationships, a work of art manifests freedom. This freedom, based as it is in the unity of subject and object, is also the freedom involved in free cognition. Thus a work of art provides a model for moral epistemology, for the process by which Mind or Spirit arrives at an increasingly adequate apprehension of Ultimate Reality.

Hegel claimed that works of art, far from being mere "likenesses" or "appearances" of lesser value than the things of nature, are actually more valuable, for they reveal better than any natural objects the inner significance of appearances, the spiritual reality within the sensuous form. "The hard rind of nature and the common world give the mind more trouble in breaking through to the Idea than do the products of art." Indeed, he affirmed the general principle that the Absolute Idea is "more honoured by

what mind does or makes than by the productions and formations of nature."⁵ It is precisely because art provides a ladder to the Absolute that the subject matter of aesthetics was extremely important to Hegel. On the basis of this conviction, he staunchly defended art against its denigrators and above all from those who condemned art on the grounds that its representations were deceptive and belonged to the realm of mere appearance.

Though acknowledging his profound debt to Plato on matters of metaphysics, on the matter of aesthetics Hegel was compelled to do battle with him. Plato is usually understood to have argued that art presents mere appearances of material things which themselves are no more than mere likenesses of the eternal Forms which belong to the higher realm of Being. Works of art, he argued, are thus mere imitations of imitations.⁶ Hegel opposed this view, claiming that art reveals the unity of Spirit and phenomenal reality, that very same unity which philosophy aspires to understand through the medium of abstract thought. As though in response to Plato, he wrote:

It follows ... that though the sensuous must be present in a work of art, yet it must only appear as surface and semblance of the sensuous.... The sensuous in works of art is exalted to the rank of mere semblance in comparison with the immediate existence of things in nature, and the work of art occupies the mean between what is immediately sensuous and ideal thought.... It is absolutely out of the question to maintain that it is owing to simple powerlessness and to limitations on his own actions that man, when evoking worlds of art into existence, fails to present more than the mere surface of the sensuous, than mere *schemata*. In art, these sensuous shapes and sounds present themselves not simply for their own sake and for that of immediate structure, but with the purpose of affording in that shape satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, seeing that they are powerful to call forth a response and echo in the mind from all depths of consciousness: It is thus that in art the sensuous is *spiritualized*, i.e. that the spiritual appears in sensuous shape.⁷

Hegel did not believe that the artist's skill consists in creating accurate likenesses.⁸ His advice on sculpture, painting and drama is inconsistent with illusionism. Sculpture, he says, must not use accurate and detailed coloration; painting must acknowledge its flatness; and actors must avoid naturalistic behaviour.⁹

Art is the sensuous embodiment of the Ideal. But the Ideal is not a static reality, it undergoes change. This change follows definite patterns. The identification of the starting point of this developmental process was a philosophical problem to which Hegel devoted considerable attention, believing that it was the failure to identify the absolute beginning of this process that was the source of most of the difficulties in the Cartesian, Kantian and

Fichtean systems. Since reality is rational, Hegel argued, the beginning of the process by which reality develops must be a logical beginning, a logical absolute. It must be a notion which has logical priority over all other notions and which appears along with the initial appearance of conscious thought. Hegel reasoned that, inasmuch as we can say about any phenomenal reality that it has being, the category of Being must be implicit in every experience. Since the positing of any other category presupposes the positing of this category, the category of Being represents an absolute. That any phenomenal reality has being is a primary and self-evident fact; therefore, the proposition that an individual reality has being is one capable of satisfying the condition that must be fulfilled by any axiom.

But Being is prior to all determinations and so "is pure indeterminateness and vacuity. Nothing can be intuited in it, if there is any question of intuition, or again, it is this pure and empty intuition itself; equally there is in it no object for thought, or again it is just this empty thought. In fact, Being is indeterminate immediacy, is Nothing, neither more nor less."¹⁰

For Hegel the real is rational. Logical progressions must therefore be mirrored in developments in reality, in the realm of the Spirit. The logical progression from Being to Nothing will be reflected in a similar movement of the Spirit. The analogous movement in the realm of the Spirit is this: first, Spirit posits Being, and then immediately posits its denial, Nothing. Thus a process is begun and it continues as a new concept arises which shows that Being and Nothing are not incompatible. The concept is Becoming.

With the positing of this third category, the pattern of the process of development emerges. This pattern is triadic, its moments being thesis, antithesis and synthesis. First Being, the original thesis, produces its antithesis, Nothing, and then the thesis and the antithesis together produce a synthesis, Becoming.

The triadic form of this process, cycling through moments of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, Hegel named the dialectic. He believed the dialectic to be inherent in the very process of thought. Every affirmative proposition yields its denial and the resulting contradiction yields another proposition, which in turn eliminates the contradiction. Once this new proposition has been posited, it too is negated, and so the process continues.

Once the first dialectical triad – Being, Nothing and Becoming – is completed, the dialectic process begins again as the negation of Becoming is constituted as Determinate Being, that is, as Hegel explained, as Being-not-in-the-process-of-Becoming. The synthesis of the categories of Becoming and Determinate Being – that is, the synthesis of change and permanence – is Quality, for when a determinate being undergoes change, a new quality appears in a permanent substance. Thus, the second dialectical triad is completed.

This entelechial process by which things actualize their potential is the process through which the hidden laws of nature reveal themselves to

consciousness and by which Being yields the Absolute Idea. It is an integrative process which, as it occurs, yields ever more complex forms of unity. An example of such emergent complexity can be found in the comparison of animate things, which appear later in this evolutionary development, with inanimate things, or in the comparison of more complex animate beings with less complex animate beings. The most basic inanimate things are primarily clusters or aggregates whose parts are indifferent to one another. In more complex inanimate things, such as are produced by chemical reactions, the parts are not indifferent to one another. The interactions between the elements involved in chemical compounds reveal a unique, unifying power that Hegel designated "affinity." Interactions between elements having affinities for one another obliterate the features of the individual elements and furnish new characteristics for the whole. The vitalistic unity possessed by animate things is an even more intimate form of unity. Vitalistic unity is a "self-regarding" sort of unity, for wholes which are characterized by this form of unity perform self-perpetuating activities which protect them from disunifying forces emanating from external conditions.

The Idea manifests itself in the forms particular things possess. Because works of art are designed to encourage us to note the relationship between the parts of the work and the whole, and to feel that their sensual aspects are mere signs that point to knowledge of a more fundamental kind, they have special abilities to provide us with insight into the nature of the Idea. It is the fact that they possess this more fundamental sort of knowledge that sets artists apart from scientists; Hegel stated that the scientist describes humans as they are, while the artist shows them striving to become what they are capable of being. For this reason alone, the function of art is never that of imitating things that actually exist. Art surpasses nature in the sense that it reveals the goals towards which nature and humankind strive.

Hegel believed that art deals especially with humanity because humans are at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of Being. But with what aspects of human beings did Hegel believe art should deal? Much in human beings is nasty and brutish and falls far short of the ideal. On what grounds can an artist distinguish between the ideal and the non-ideal? Hegel's answer to this question was that if the artist is to represent the ideal aspects of human beings, he or she must reveal them as they are at those moments when they most fully become what their potential allows them to be. But his answer was more definite than that, for he went on to describe the features which characterize such moments. Hegel claimed that we attain the plateau of the ideal when we act in such a way as to assert our freedom, our "intellectual determination" to do what is right. We can resolve to do what is right only when our actions are purposive, and our actions can be purposive only when there exist circumstances that are predictable, that possess some apprehensible structure. Only under these conditions can plans be formulated. Circumstances which have such attributes Hegel termed "Situations." Those Situations

that are charged with moral significance inasmuch as they challenge us to realize our goals and confront us with the possibility of the destruction of our basic values, of our way of existing and indeed of our very Being, Hegel terms "Determinate Situations." These are the situations that challenge us to become what we are capable of becoming and that serve to develop ideality.

Every Determinate Situation is characterized by conflict. Only through conflict, Hegel stated, does "the full seriousness and weighty import of a situation have its Being."¹¹ Conflict is the stimulus that challenges humanity to rise to a higher moral synthesis and thereby to advance the progress of the Idea in history.

Thus the Idea develops by progressing through a series of Determinate Situations. Art fulfils its mission of depicting the Idea by embodying the form of those Determinate Situations through which the Idea progresses. And since every Determinate Situation involves conflict, the form of works of art necessarily involves it too.

More than anything else, what separates the intellectual histories of Canada and the United States is that, unlike Americans, the strongest Canadian thinkers and artists have been committed to the idea that particulars, and especially works of art, possess what in Hegelian terms would be understood as a universal aspect.

For more than a century, two tendencies have dominated American art. The first views a work of art as a purely formal achievement. Like so many features of the intellectual terrain during the modern era, this tendency arose from the assumption of a dualistic universe in which mind and nature are bound in agonistic opposition and consciousness is considered to have nothing in common with anything that lies outside it. In response to this opposition, the mind attempts to impose order on the realm of matter by creating artifacts, works of art, objects possessing patterns that can be grasped by a mental act. It creates, out of the alien world of matter, artifacts and traditions that can be contemplated and appreciated by the understanding. Thus, the formalist tendency in American art is Gnostic in its drive to impose on chaos and shares with technologism the coercive proclivity to impose upon nature.

The second tendency is the immanentists' advocacy of direct perception, the belief that art's redemptory power derives from its capacity to present, to get us in touch with, the unadorned particular as it is in itself. Although this credo has found adherents in all the American arts, it is among poets that it has attracted the majority of its followers. Among those responsible for its holding sway over so much of twentieth-century American poetics are Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, who gave the credo its best known articulation: "No ideas but in things." Pound championed the belief under the banner of objectivism and counselled young poets to "go in fear of abstractions."

But it was the 1950s and 1960s that saw the rise to prominence of the concept of direct or immediate perception and of the belief in the cleansing and

curative effect of consciousness' breaking through the veil of mind-forged abstractions to get to "the thing itself." Advocates argued that poetry should be a presentational medium, that a poem should get "the thing itself" across to its reader.

Undergirding these beliefs was the conviction that consciousness is a domain of either ensnaring confusions or inert abstractions, while the order of material beings is beneficent. Hence this statement by the American poet Robert Duncan: "Central to and defining the poetics I am trying to suggest here is the conviction that the order man may contrive or impose on things about ... is trivial beside the ... natural order he may discover in them."¹²

Such a statement is grounded in a dualism identical in all essential respects to that upon which formalism rests, a dualism that conceives that values reside in the realm of nature (or, alternatively, individual objects) and that the realm of consciousness represents the fallen world. The great American objectist poet Charles Olson stated as much when he argued that Pound's conviction that any order, whether social or artistic, that depends upon the heroic will of the strong individual was downright dangerous.¹³ The poet, Olson insisted, should register the conditions of things, not impose upon nature. Those who subscribed to these tenets argued that sympathetic perception and rapt attention would lead more surely to strong poetry than either the shaping urge of the artistic will or the synthesizing ego.

Those who took up these beliefs also espoused a radical transformation of the prevailing conception of poetic form. Traditional poetics had held that a poem's value depended upon the capacity of its form to contain and to reconcile diverse materials in a complex unity that evokes and repays prolonged and intense concentration. Such forms, it was generally argued, relied on the poem's architectonic to reconcile the tensions between particular details and to bring those tensions into a harmonious yet dynamic balance. Against this position, poets like Michael McClure argued that the shape of a poem (like that of a Jackson Pollock painting) must evoke its emotional content from the flow of energy released in its making and hence that its exterior, its form, must be an extension of its interior. Form is the dynamic union of the world and the response of consciousness to the world. It is not a structure imposed upon the world.

At its best, poetry acts to transfer force from the object, which the poet painstakingly observes, to the reader. When this ideal is achieved, poetic language serves, not to attack the objects of nature, but to reveal nature's dynamism and to uncover nature's power. Hence this comment by Denise Levertov, the American writer of civic and public poetry:

The poet's task is to hold in trust the knowledge that language, as Robert Duncan has declared, is not a set of counters to be manipulated but a power. And only in this knowledge does he arrive at music, at that quality of song within speech which is not the result of manipulations

of euphonious parts but of an attention, at once to the organic relationships of experienced phenomena, and to the latent harmony and counterpoint of language as it is identified with those phenomena. Writing poetry is a process of discovery.¹⁴

While Levertov and especially Duncan developed their particularist ontology into a religious system, nothing in the nature of the basic tenets of this poetic requires that kind of move. Williams, Creeley and Olson shared this particularist ontology and yet never took their poetics in the direction of anything other than empiricism. But it is Pound who is more forceful on this topic. In the *ABC of Reading*, he asserted that, in prescribing that poets engage in an intense scrutiny of real objects, he was simply suggesting that poetry should follow the same empirical method as science and even boldly declared that "an abstract or general statement is GOOD if it be found ultimately to correspond with the facts."

The kernel of the poetics of direct perception is the belief that experience of the "utter presence" of the intensely sensed moment can restore our natural harmony with the world which modernity has destroyed. But the belief that perception rather than reflection is the primary means of developing the sympathies requisite to restoring this balance requires some undergirding, some conviction that there is a force within nature with the capacity to awaken our feeling or that an invigorating power resides within the energy of the particular moment. Such convictions lead readily to the antinomian belief that there are no absolutes, no fixed moral laws, no determinant principle of justice and no final authority in ethical matters. The spirit, awakened by our sympathy with the numinous dynamic of the moment, is the surest guide to the good life. While the formalists sought ways to transform nature into accommodating human forms, these artists have stressed the means by which the mind, attentive to ordinary daily reality and everyday experience, can find fulfilment in objective truth (Olson's "objectism") a satisfaction that puts an end to futile search for values among transcendental fictions. In forming an immediate connection with the real, we establish a relation with an order richer and more encompassing than the fictions and abstractions created by the individual will. The strength of self, it is discovered, is located within the self's relation to other-than-self.

These are fundamental beliefs of postmodernism, American-style. In the United States, the transition from modernism to postmodernism was the repudiation of the poetics of formalism and the adoption of the "objectist" belief in an redemptory unmediated connection with the real and of the particularist ontology that belief entails. American-style postmodernism maintains the conviction that there exists a primal self (even if that self is understood merely as the focal point of an ever-changing field of energy) whose relationship with the surrounding environment of discrete particulars (whether those particulars are understood to be things-in-themselves or the

estatic moment within the temporal process or the individuated event within the ongoing Heraclitian flux).

The poetics of objectism thus still lies within the orbit of modernity, founded as it is on dualism, albeit modified and indeed moderated. It is a modern poetics precisely to the extent that it rejects the notion of nature as created. Traditionally not the natural itself but Being has been held to be first in the order of value and the natural loved not for itself but for some presence in it of Being. Within Western Christianity the recognition that there exists a harmony of nature and reason was achieved through the insight that the rational is the principle of the natural and that the natural is the concretion of *logos*. Indeed, ever since Augustine had uncompromisingly destroyed every natural beginning, the order of nature has been regarded within the Western historical tradition as derivative, as created and not independent of thought.

No other position than this is more opposed to the ontology of modern experience, especially as expressed in the United States, the exemplar of modernity. The modern position is embodied, for example, in the forcefully argued nominalism of Nelson Goodman (put forward in a number of rigorously worked out, elegantly written but troubling books: *The Structure of Appearance*, 1951; *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 1954; *The Languages of Art*, 1969; and *Problems and Projects*, 1972), in the nominalism (later repudiated) of William Van Orman Quine's enormously influential 1948 essay, "On What There Is," and most significantly in that unquestioning American acceptance of what Martin Heidegger astutely described as the ontology of the modern era, technology.

What these expressions of modernity have in common is the transference of value from the universal to the natural and particular. Hence, moderns (and paradigmatically Americans) have held that what it is that civil society must guard us against is not (as it was in Hobbes or Locke or even in the American constitution) irrational or arbitrary violence, but reason itself, which as a principle of abstraction threatens to dissolve the particular into an abstract system. In popular American thought, this systematizing force has been reified into the Communist Empire which would (in this view) sacrifice the interests of individuals (particulars) to the interests of the state (the universal).

This fear of the universal is also what is behind both the clamour for direct democracy and the enthusiasm for the idea that the advent of such technologies as radio and television broadcast/receiver systems, the telephone, fibre optics, laser discs and the computer and the development of computer-related disciplines with buzz-word names like "informatics" will soon make direct democracy possible. It is also behind the continuing viability in American political life of appeals to Protestant ethics, with its emphasis on individual conscience. Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan often spoke of freeing individuals (particulars) by getting government (the universal) off their backs.

Finally, this shift towards particulars and towards naturalistic individualism is manifest in attempts to return to primitive existence, to an immediate and yet unsystematized relation with nature, and the tendency to uphold direct contact with (or direct perception of) "the thing itself." These features are evident in the writings (both in his poetry and his theories about poetry) of that paradigmatic American artist, Charles Olson. The first is evident in his attempt to break free from the Western tradition by seeking after the potentially liberating influence of Amerindian (and especially Mayan) world-views; the second is evident in his theory of objectism.

Simply invoking the name Olson also brings to mind the most conspicuous piece of evidence of the firstness of the natural in the modern (the American) worldview – the belief that the site of the origin and the proper end of freedom is "the natural pleasure body." As much as in Olson's projective verse, we can find this belief promulgated in popular psychology, which preaches that people become good (sensitive, open, caring) as they throw off their inhibitions and re-establish an immediate connection with their bodily selves. We see it too in the invincible, even if appallingly foolish, modern American conviction that the will is good and, if humans err in their ways, their errors are to be counted among the effects of reason. That the claims of the natural against the rational – or, at least, against the source of the principles of integration and reconciliation – are the essence of evil is a proposition that appears as simply preposterous to moderns, yet it is the traditional wisdom of the Western tradition and was shared by Christians, Gnostics and Manichees.

Perhaps because the opposition of human and nature is so very extreme in Canada and because the Canadian people are so very diverse, we have needed a philosophy which served, not to emphasize such differences and oppositions, but to reconcile them. This might explain the fact that the most daring wager of Canadian thought has been that the modern worldview and especially the belief in the firstness of the particular are untruths and that, contrary to the modern/American view, it is for the immanence of the universal in the particular that the particular is to be valued. Such a view does not necessarily imply the valuelessness of the particular itself; within the distinctive Canadian brand of Absolute Idealism, the value of the particular is thought to relate to its hierophanic capacity – to the fact that the being of the particular manifests the Being of the universal. On this view, the particular is not ungrounded, as it is in the modern/American view; consequently its conception of value is not empty and formal. Thus Canadians have – at least insofar as we have remained outside modernity, something at which we have been only partially successful – avoided experiencing the real dissolving into nothing or, what is the same, into the procession of simulacra, an experience which those paradigmatically modern philosophies of Nietzsche and Baudrillard have spoken of so eloquently, and which they demonstrate is the telos of the modern conception of the world.

According to this hierophanic/Canadian view, the being of the particular has ultimate value inasmuch as it manifests the Being of the universal. Its being is not to be denied, therefore, nor is it to be dissolved into some Universal Abstract – into a night in which all cows are black (to use the phrase which Hegel used to describe the Objective or Transcendental Idealism of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling). Rather, just as in the philosophy of Hegel, the particular is valued as the embodiment of the universal and matter valued as the expression of the Spirit and the means for bringing the Spirit to self-awareness.

Because we attach such value to the appearance of the particular (believing that it manifests the appearance – the coming into evidence – of the universal), Canadian artists have historically shown little penchant for leaving behind the appearance of the particular and for abandoning it in favour of some abstract form. Modernist formalism (as a movement in art theory and practice) passed us by, largely unaccepted, not because ours is a backward or hidebound culture, but because the most fundamental attitudes towards nature, mind and understanding that modernism embodied were completely inconsistent with those Canadians have gambled to accept.

An art embodying the primal experiences of the new Canadians and consistent with the most basic tenets that derived from those experiences would have to be, in fact, an art capable of reconciling the opposition between consciousness and nature. And the first imperatives of such an art would be that it eschew formalism, since in formalist art the mind imposes on nature, rather than meeting with nature as an equal partner in artmaking.

One style that would seem to meet this demand is the realist style, for it seems to accept things as they are. The realistic image, having at once some of the spatial features of the real and some of the temporal features of mental representations, especially of memories and dreams, can be considered both as an expression of a self and as a depiction of the real. In the realist image, self and world seem to meet, for the very least that we can say about a realistic image is that it is the result of an object-choice of a self who values (usually as a self-object) what is depicted in the image.

Within Romantic literature is an image that suggests another basis for an art capable of reconciling the opposition between self and world. It appears, among other places, in Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" (1821):

Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motions to an ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody, alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motion thus excited to the impressions which excite them.

The same image appears in Coleridge's poem "The Aeolian Harp" (1796):

And what if all animated nature
 Be but organic harps diversely fram'd
 That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweep
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the Soul of each, and God of all.

The image of an instrument¹⁵ which is attuned to its environment and produces melodies by the combined effect of the actions of the environment and its own sympathetic adjustments to those actions makes concrete the notion that art arises from the fusion of self and world, from the point at which universal Being adopts the form of a particularized being.

Canadian painter and filmmaker Jack Chambers articulated an aesthetic position which incorporates the conviction about artmaking that Shelley and Coleridge expressed. In his theory the camera served him where those earlier poets would have used the image of the Aeolian harp. In using the camera and the photograph in this way, Chambers was simply making explicit an attitude that has been widely shared by Canadian artists since the beginnings of a national art movement with the Group of Seven.

A paradoxical twist of fate has befallen Canadian artists and intellectuals as a result of harbouring these beliefs, whose closest relatives are the pre-modern beliefs of Western Christianity. The modern period has been precisely that period whose most fundamental conviction has been the dualistic belief that consciousness is isolated from nature and that in this division all values lie on the side of consciousness. By and large, Canadian artists and intellectuals have maintained a view that more closely resembles the pre-modern one, that nature and consciousness have an intimate, non-oppositional relationship and that nature has its value (as does that reflection of nature in the human body / soul that is known as consciousness) because of the immanence of the universal in nature. And yet ironically just because they have adhered to the core notions of the traditional view about the relationship between nature and consciousness (even if they have, admittedly, developed ideas surrounding these core notions in ways that take into account the failures of the modern view), Canadian artists and intellectuals have been at the forefront in developing postmodern conceptions of reality.

The shapers of postmodern thought have come from Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, the United States, as well as Canada. It is significant that in this intellectual movement Canadians are substantially represented in its vanguard. Certainly there are differences in the postmodern paradigm in different parts of the world, but it is almost as certain that the Canadian version is far more advanced in overcoming the troublesome features of the modern paradigm than any other version.

We can see the contrasting features of the American and the Canadian versions of the postmodern paradigm by comparing the epistemological and ontological ideas of Charles Olson with those of Jack Chambers. The key differences between their models of reality and understanding all derive from the basic opposition between the American proclivity and the Canadian antipathy for naturalistic individualism. Olson's objectism celebrates the form of knowledge that results immediately from direct contact with concrete particulars (which he believed make up "the real"); Chambers's perceptual realism stresses knowledge of the universal (which Chambers believed to be Ultimate Reality) which is gained from close scrutiny of concrete particulars. Hence, Chambers celebrated the particular for its (to put the point almost paradoxically) "also-ideal-as-well-as-material" make-up. Hence, too, their differing understandings of salvation. Both believed that salvation is achieved through transcendence of a sort, but the two differed in their views on the nature of this transcendence. For Chambers, salvific transcendence was recognition of the universal in the particular; for Olson, it was the breaking out of the circle of subjectivity into the real itself that culminates in the capacity to root our being in the order of particulars to which it naturally belongs.

Some have seen this paradoxical twist of fate as a special privilege history has granted to Canadians that has put us in the forefront of the advance towards a new understanding of reality; others have seen it as our tragic fate because it has placed us always "outside our time" – not really moderns in a predominantly modern era, not fully recovered from our mourning for the past as we advance towards the future.

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PART TWO

Introduction

The realistic image seems to have the power to reconcile consciousness and nature, for it possesses both some of the spatial features of the natural world and some of the temporal (and some of the phenomenological) features of mental representations. Although many Canadian artists have reached this conclusion, the type of realism other artists have adopted – in cinema, pre-eminently filmmakers working in documentary, docudrama and realistic fiction – is a realism that assumes that the image can present the whole truth about reality. This position is not without its problems.

First, this type of realism operates by deploying an illusion of presence; that is, some of its effects depend upon our suspending our disbelief and responding as though what is depicted in the image were fully present. This type of realism attempts to conceal the absences on which an image *qua* image is inevitably based. This means that the image must disguise some of its real features, and thus not all of its capacities can be exploited.

Second, the realism of Canadian documentaries and realist fiction films is based upon mistaken epistemological and metaphysical views. The strongest of the epistemological arguments against this type of realism attacks its ideologically inspired equation of the real with the sensible or even, in extreme cases, with the visible. According to Coleridge, "This difficulty ... arises wholly out of That Slavery of the Mind to the Eye and the visual Imagination or Fancy under the influence of which the Reasoner must have a picture and mistakes surface for substance." The ontological problems associated with this type of realism devolve upon particularism (the view that reality is composed exclusively of discrete particulars), for particularist ontologies have trouble explaining the coherence of reality.

Although there are problems with this type of realism, it may be argued that it may yet have real aesthetic strength; for an aesthetic attitude can be founded in colossal epistemological and metaphysical errors and still be artistically productive. This point brings us to our third objection, that the brand of realism we deal with in these chapters (which I label naïve realism) really is artistically deleterious. As I show in the chapter on *Goin' Down The Road*, it excessively limits the variability of elements of the work of art. More specifically, it subjugates aesthetic variation to extra-aesthetic consid-

erations. While there certainly are rare works whose forms are thoroughly determined by representational considerations and which have completely satisfying aesthetic forms, most often extra-aesthetic (content) considerations, by limiting the range of variability of the elements of a work of art, weaken its form. For example, they render it impossible to balance a strong red in one area of the camera with a strong blue in another if that blue is not consistent with the work's representational character. As well I argue that the attempt to integrate representational and formal concerns in a single work results in no increase in its aesthetic force even when the attempt is successful. Thus we are left with Clive Bell's famous conclusion: "Representation may or may not be harmful to a work of art; it is always irrelevant."

In order to obviate possible confusions that could lie on the path ahead, I offer this proleptic note before turning to examine the issues around realism. In the following two sections I use the terms "modern" and "modernist," and "postmodern" and "postmodernist." The terms "modern" and "modernist" should not be confused, nor should the terms "postmodern" and "postmodernist." The term "modern" I restrict to a characterization of those features Western culture possesses as a result of the dominance of a certain worldview that I refer to as "the modern paradigm." The modern paradigm began to develop in the seventeenth century in the rationalistic philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz and reached its apogee in the 1860s. "Modernist" I restrict to referring to a formalist art theory and practice of the twentieth century. Similarly, "postmodern" I use to refer to features of culture of the emerging postmodern paradigm, and "postmodernist" to the successor movement to modernism. I should add that I believe that the theories and practices of modernism and postmodernism do have relations with the modern and postmodern paradigms, respectively.

And, finally, one exception to the general rule just stated: the term "modernist" is commonly used in theology with a meaning similar to "modern" as I have used it in the following chapters. I have gone along with convention and used the term "modernist" to refer to theological writing that takes on issues of what I call the modern paradigm.

CHAPTER 4

The Documentary Film in Canada

The Legacy of John Grierson

John Grierson was the founder of the National Film Board of Canada and served as its first commissioner from 1939-1945. Under his direction, the National Film Board (NFB) produced propaganda films that rivalled the output of the United States and Great Britain and earned Canada a world-wide reputation in documentary filmmaking. Grierson's success, however, came at a cost because his conception of film was narrow. He preached a doctrine that only films using socially effective, realistic imagery were worthy of public support; all other films he denounced as individualistic, self-indulgent, outdated, Romantic clap-trap. In Canada he promoted this view to a group of young men and women who, eager to contribute to the war effort and with little knowledge of film history or of the formal experiments in film happening in Europe, accepted Grierson's ideas unquestioningly. Thus they laid the groundwork for Canadian documentary filmmaking of the next forty years. Grierson's legacy is a cinema that takes few risks with form, that operates under the naïve delusion that film can be an objective window on the world, and that seldom examines its ideological framework.

The reasons the films that Grierson's followers made are so unquestioning and so formally and politically conservative can be discerned at the very origins of the NFB – in the thought of its founding father John Grierson. Who was this man? What were his ideas and why did he have such an influence? John Grierson was born in 1898 in Deanstown, a village near Stirling, Scotland, the son of the Calvinist headmaster of the local school and a left-thinking mother who had also trained as a teacher. In his early life he acquired, from his parents, a high regard for the value of education, and from the village miners a sympathy for the daily struggles of what his generation called "the common man," a sympathy that led him to a brief involvement with the Scottish Socialist Party. He entered Glasgow University in 1915, dropped out to serve on a minesweeper in the North Sea, and returned after the war to study philosophy.

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In 1924 Grierson began three years of study in mass communication, the psychology of propaganda and political theory at the University of Chicago. While there he came into contact with Walter Lippmann and his pessimistic ideas about democracy. Lippmann believed that the ordinary voter lacked both the information and the time to consider the issues and so could never formulate sound judgements on matters of social policy. Grierson appreciated Lippmann's reasons for this position, but he could not accept them. He found a clue for proving Lippmann wrong and defending the democratic ideal in the work of the Soviet filmmakers.

Grierson studied how the Soviets used cinema for social and political purposes and, though he argued the intense dramatizations in their films were effective only in revolutionary situations, he became convinced of the medium's potential for promoting democracy to "the common man." This led Grierson to formulate a rather simplistic theory of propaganda which claimed that working-class interests could be met in a truly democratic society; that a truly democratic society could exist only when citizens participate fully in the political process; that ordinary citizens must possess information in order to participate fully in the process; and that film and other mass media could provide them with this information.

While studying with Lippmann, Grierson was exposed to the journalistic style of Hearst and Luce. Both he and Lippmann, Grierson wrote, "were highly admiring of the dramatic approach implicit in the journalism of William Randolph Hearst. Behind the sensationalizing of news we thought we recognized a deeper principle, and I think Henry Luce at very much the same time was recognizing it too. We thought, indeed, that even so complex a world as ours could be patterned for all to appreciate if we only got away from the servile accumulation of fact and struck for the story which held the facts in living organic relationship together." Hearst's valuable discovery, according to Grierson, was that the story can be used to enliven dull facts.

In 1927 Grierson returned to England and was hired as a film officer at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB). Here he found himself in an amenable environment. Sir Stephen Tallents, who headed the EMB, had already recognized the potential of film both for promoting trade and for creating a sense of unity among the Commonwealth nations. Grierson realized that at the EMB he was in a position to put his ideas about film into practice. His first film, *The Drifters*, appeared in 1929 and elicited such a positive response from government personnel and film enthusiasts that Grierson was able to establish a permanent production unit at the EMB. During his next six years with the film unit Grierson produced forty films; all mirrored the form of *The Drifters* and all embodied his ideas on film and propaganda.

Grierson's belief that the success of democracy depended upon ordinary citizens being aware of their role in the democratic process led him to focus in his films on the experiences of working-class people. Because he possessed a high regard for the camera's ability to record the appearances of everyday

life and a strong distrust of fiction, he rejected both studio reconstructions and trained actors in favour of location shooting with real people. And he knew that the lives of ordinary workers would have to be presented dramatically, that reality would have to be manipulated, in order to attract an audience and to affect it emotionally. To do this he drew on the work of the Soviet filmmakers. In *The Drifters*, a film about herring fishing and the fishermen, life on the ship was presented by constantly intercutting the activities of the men, the ship's engines (using shots inspired by Eisenstein's classic film *Battleship Potemkin*) and swimming fish. Activities like casting the nets were edited in the rhythm of the actions themselves. At one point in the film, Grierson used superimposition, at another, rapid-fire montage and, at another, a series of lingering dissolves. In the end, the fishermen's daily encounter with the sea was presented with such drama that their work took on new importance and dignity.

Grierson became completely committed to the ideal of filmmaking as the creative treatment of scenes drawn from everyday reality. After watching Flaherty's *Moana* (1926), a film about a group of South Sea islanders, he coined the term "documentary" (from the French *documentaire*) and set down the principles:

- 1 We believe that the cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself can be exploited in a new and vital art form....
- 2 We believe that the original (or native) actor, and the original (or native) scene, are better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world.... They give it power of interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanic recreate.
- 3 We believe that the materials and the stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article.¹

Grierson was eager to ensure that his films were original enough to attract an audience, and so he made certain that all members of the film unit and its government sponsors were familiar with the contemporary innovations in the European cinema. He brought in experimental documentaries and occasionally invited their directors to work with the group. One guest who would stay on to become a permanent member of the unit was Alberto Cavalcanti; his film *Rien que les Heures* (1926) had a significant influence on the narrative structure of Grierson's work. Like Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) which also impressed Grierson, *Rien que les Heures* employed such comparatively complex devices as disjunctive cross-cutting, associative montage, rapid-fire editing and impressionistic photography. Much as he admired these works, however, Grierson was annoyed that such efforts were being expended for self-indulgent, aesthetic rather than socially

useful ends. According to him, the Romantic era was at an end, individualism was passé, and twentieth-century art must present people in their public rather than in their private selves. He argued that aesthetic devices had value only when they served a social purpose.² And from the war years on he fulminated with increasing shrillness against the notion of art for art's sake and, as an administrator, actively discouraged members of his unit from engaging in this type of experimentation.

Raymond Spottiswoode, a British filmmaker and film theorist, worked briefly with Grierson in Canada and described Grierson's ideal of the documentary as a "dramatized presentation of man's relation to his institutional life, whether industrial, social or political; and in technique, a subordination of form to content." The curious notion that form can ever be subordinated to content indicates the tension that characterized Grierson's early ideas on documentary. Although Grierson sensed the need for the poetic quality in "reality films" that so-called impressionists on the Continent like Jean Vigo and Cavalcanti had contributed, he insisted that such poetic imagery could be used only to add force to the presentation of descriptive and socially significant content. In the end, Grierson wanted to use Romantically inspired devices, devices generally used to convey the impression that the imagery of film represented the contents of a private consciousness, but within the context of an anti-Romantic, anti-individualistic film practice.

Grierson's theory of cinema was forged largely from his practical experience as a filmmaker and film producer. Whereas most theorists of his time (like Rudolf Arnheim) were propounding materialist theories of cinema – which attempted to demonstrate that the essential nature of the cinema derives from the film materials themselves – Grierson attempted to formulate a contextual theory of cinema, one that demonstrated that the value of particular films depends upon their utility in the social context in which they are produced. And while other film theorists of Grierson's time were busy trying to demonstrate that cinema was an art just like the other great high arts, Grierson referred to his theories and practice as anti-aesthetic. He condemned "the highbrows" who sent Hitchcock and Chaplin off in the wrong ("arty") direction, praised the cinema for still "trailing the clouds of glory with which its vulgar origin was invested" and lauded mass culture.

Like all good neo-Hegelians, Grierson saw the aesthetics of the cinema as a product of the historical process. He realized that the industrial revolution had destroyed the stable, close-knit community and that the complexity of the economic and social organizations of industrial society had rendered the familiar ways of creating social unity useless. He concluded that a new culture must be forged and that film and, more generally, the exchange of information were the means of creating it. The value of film was to be judged by its contribution to the process through which the complex harmony characteristic of organic societies is created – the extent to which it both encourages the citizen to participate in society and fosters solidarity.

In other words, Grierson proposed that the aesthetic value was reducible to social utility and that aesthetics itself was reducible to a social theory based on morality. This itself is a dubious enough claim. However, his theory is also internally inconsistent. If social utility is the basis for making aesthetic judgements, then what makes realism so important? If fiction is more useful in forging a social unity, then why should one eschew its use?

In defence of Grierson's theory, he did believe that information was necessary to the unity of a democratic society. However, he did not offer a cogent argument to this effect; indeed, it seems difficult to imagine how such an argument could be framed. It is abundantly evident in the lives of many landholders in banana republics that knowledge of the plight of others does not produce social unity and recognition of common humanity; it has been demonstrated over and over again that the spread of information itself does not promote mutual understanding among classes. Obviously, what is necessary is something that can move the spirit, something that can change souls. And that is not information. And if fiction suits the bill, why not use fiction? Grierson nowhere answered this question, and so the realist and propagandist lines of his thought remain unreconciled.

In fact, when Grierson came to defend his realist theories he temporarily abandoned his contextualist aesthetic and took up an essentialist position:

Here is an art based on photographs, in which one factor is always, or nearly always, a thing observed. Yet a realist tradition in cinema has emerged only slowly. When Lumière turned his first historical strip of film, he did so with the fine careless rapture which attends the amateur effort today. The new moving camera was still, for him, a camera and instrument to focus on the life about him. He shot his own workmen filing out of the factory and this first film was a 'documentary.' He went on as naturally to shoot the Lumière family, child complete.

It appears that Grierson turned to the earliest use of film because he believed that the essence of a thing could be discovered at its origin, before conventions and false views about its nature have developed. He confirms these suspicions with the next statement:

The cinema, it seemed for a moment, was about to fulfil its natural destiny of discovering mankind. It had everything for the task. It could get about, it could view reality with a new intimacy; and what more natural than that the recording of the real world should become its principal inspiration?³

The essentialist basis of this argument does not constitute its sole anomaly. Grierson was committed to a neo-Hegelianism, according to which the essence of anything is realized in the course of its history; it is not something given in the nature of the thing when it comes into existence. Thus he has no grounds for appealing to the essence of cinema (since cinema is still an

evolving art form) and much less reason for soliciting the support of the position that the essence of cinema is to be discovered at its origins.

One final point. Grierson seems to have assumed in this passage, since photography is essential to cinema, the nature of the photograph is one of the primary determinates of the aesthetics of film. For this assumption to be true it must also be true that, although film involves other elements – for example, sound (including dialogue), movement (including camera movement), and editing – photography has top priority among the elements and is the decisive one in establishing the content of films. But what supports the proposition that photography is the controlling element? It is arguable that the differences between film and photography outweigh the similarities. Grierson failed to give such issues as these a reasonable hearing.

This tension between his aesthetic and utilitarian conceptions of film reflects Grierson's early training in moral philosophy at the time when in Scottish universities a battle was being waged between neo-Hegelianism and Common Sense evangelical philosophy. Grierson's early theory holds concepts from these opposing philosophies in a not altogether coherent synthesis. His anti-aestheticism, his preference for reality over fiction, the stridently anti-poetical strain in his thought derive from evangelical Calvinism and its philosophical cohort, the Common Sense school. The influence that Idealism had on him is most evident in his notion of community as an organic unity of shared interests. For Grierson, the notion of community took precedence over the notion of opposition between classes, which his Clydeside socialism might have led him to adopt. As a result, his propaganda was devoted to encouraging people to identify with the interests of the total organic community, and not with the interests of a specific class.

The combination of neo-Hegelian and Common Sense evangelical ideas was as aesthetically productive as it was philosophically unsatisfactory. But the pressures of the war years and the demands to protect the national democracies broke these oppositions apart. From the war years on, we find Grierson proposing, with increasing frequency and vigour, the ascendancy of the state and state institutions over the individual, decrying the use of aesthetic techniques and proposing realism as the ultimate utilitarian form. His later statements fulminated more and more clamorously about aesthetics and about aesthetes who "cuddle" their works to, as he put it, "sweet smitheroo." To put the point bluntly, he became a hard-boiled Philistine.

In 1937 Grierson decided that he wanted to be free of government sponsorship and to reach an international audience with his views on the educational and social potential of film. He left the film unit and set up an independent production and consulting firm. In 1938 he accepted the position of film adviser to the Imperial Relations Trust, which involved encouraging the governments of New Zealand, Australia and Canada to develop government film centres along the British model so that in the event of war a propaganda network would be in place among the leading Commonwealth countries.

Grierson's reputation was already well known to two prominent Canadians, Vincent Massey and Ross McLean. As Department of External Affairs officials posted in London in the mid-1930s, they had witnessed the effects of the works produced by Grierson's film unit. His view that the communication process could be used both to encourage citizens to participate in the democratic process and to foster national unity had an obvious resonance in Canada, harkening all the way back to the importance attached in the pre-Confederation years to the rivers and lakes of eastern Canada as communications channels and to the role of the Canadian Pacific Railway in extending the Dominion. In 1938 Grierson accepted the Canadian government's offer to oversee its propaganda machine, a position from which he could preach to both a national and an international audience his doctrine about the value of the average citizen's involvement in the democratic process.

As Film Commissioner, Grierson went about providing the government with a program for the production and dissemination of propaganda which was regular in its output and consistent in its message. First he consolidated all government filmmaking under his control and then, with the aid of British colleagues like editor Stuart Legg, he developed a form (which owed much to the American newsreel *The March of Time*) that could be mastered easily by his inexperienced Canadian staff.

Grierson and Legg issued films under two main series, *Canada Carries On*, which began in 1940, and *The World in Action*, which appeared two years later. The purpose of the first series was to foster national unity. In keeping with Grierson's notion that propaganda must at all costs avoid any taint of pessimism or defeatism, the films were inspirational in design, pointing out the important contributions individual Canadians could make to the war effort. The second series was developed for distribution outside the country, so Grierson strove to ensure that the films in this series would bend the political attitudes of international audiences towards his image of a postwar democratic society. The films that belong to the two series are characterized by authoritative narration, rapid cutting and a close alliance of image and text (features that today can be easily identified as NFB trademarks). They rarely depict death and they do not resort to hate-mongering tactics when describing the enemy, as did the propaganda films of the United States and other countries. In this respect, the films anticipated the need for reconciliation and co-operation, issues which would arise in the postwar period.

But are not these films manipulative and dictatorial in their forms? Several decades ago, the Personalist film theorist André Bazin argued that the use of montage constructions violates the democratic freedom of spectators. Grierson's propaganda films were constructed exactly on the pattern that Bazin criticized as being totalitarian and dictatorial; they determine the spectators' field of view by the use of framing, determine what viewers take note of and, by the use of montage, determine what connections viewers will make. Recent theory has shown how problematic and ideologically loaded

this positioning of spectators is, for it really serves to keep spectators fixed passively in place. Grierson's films did not encourage active, free spectatorship; they made use of manipulative techniques that produce passive spectators.

Of the totalitarian tendencies of his views, Grierson wrote:

Some of us came out of highly disciplined religion and see no reason to fear discipline and self-denial. Some of us learned in a school of philosophy which taught that all was for the common good and nothing for oneself and have never, in any case, regarded the pursuit of happiness as anything other than an aberration of the human spirit. We were taught, for example, that he who would gain his life must lose it. Even Rousseau talked of transporting *le moi dans l'unité commune*, and Calvin of establishing the holy communion of citizens. So, the kind of "totalitarianism" I am thinking of, while it may apply to the new conditions of society, has as deep a root as any in human tradition. I would call the philosophy of Individualism Romantic and say we have been on a spectacular romantic spree for four hundred years. I would maintain that this other, "totalitarian" viewpoint is classical.⁴

This passage is a rather glib defence of a view of the state (and of the legitimacy of propaganda methods) that can easily lead to horrible abuses. And simply pointing out that there has been a long history of communitarian social philosophy and a rather short history of individualist views is no demonstration that individualist convictions have no validity. This should be especially evident to people who hold, as Grierson did, progressivist ideas, for they could easily conclude that, coming later in history, individualism is a moral advance over communitarianism.

The conception of state implied here was advanced by such neo-Hegelians as F.H. Bradley, T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet. Like Grierson, they were convinced that the state could best play the role it ought to if it were free of partisan interests. (It was this conviction that allowed Grierson to believe that, so long as he was able to make propaganda for good ends, he was justified in working for whatever democratic party held power.) And like Grierson, they too advanced the idea that history was an independent and positive force for the development of liberty and a sanguine attitude towards the state. This concept of the state had a strong influence on political philosophers in Canada, which indicates just how congenial Grierson's ideas were for Canadians.

Grierson enjoyed the confidence of the Canadian government as long as the views expressed in the NFB's films coincided with their official policy. But late in 1945 a shift in government attitudes occurred. Responding to an escalating Cold War environment, the government adopted an American-type pragmatic foreign policy which did not admit Grierson's "idealism" (to use the term in its popular rather than philosophic sense). Grierson's

enemies, most of whom belonged to the Conservative opposition in Parliament, used this change in policy to discredit him, pointing out that the internationalist approach of *The World in Action* films was at odds with the government's new foreign policy. They even suggested that Grierson was trying to set government policy. Although these accusations did nothing to shorten Grierson's term of office as Film Commissioner – he had already made arrangements to leave Canada in 1945 – they did seriously affect his subsequent career. When circumstantial evidence linked Grierson with the Gouzenko spy scandal in 1946, no government official came to his aid, and these aspersions later prevented him from pursuing a newsreel venture with Stuart Legg in the United States. After being refused entry into the United States, he returned to the United Kingdom greatly dispirited. Never again did he obtain the level of authority he had enjoyed in Canada during the war.

These changes also diminished Grierson's influence on future government dealings with the NFB. Grierson's recommendation for his successor as Film Commissioner was ignored, and in the immediate postwar years, the government accused other NFB staff of having communist sympathies, reduced its budget severely and revised its mandate to exclude the production of propaganda films. In the mid-1950s the government moved the institution to Montreal, thus removing it from the arena of political activity.

The Influence of Grierson

Three claims are frequently made about Grierson's contribution to the development of Canadian filmmaking: first, that he singlehandedly initiated state-sponsored filmmaking with the foresight that it should be documentary; second, that he established a new method for distributing and exhibiting films by creating an alternative network using itinerant projectionists, 16mm film prints and alternative venues such as community halls and church basements; third, that Grierson oriented state filmmaking in Canada towards working-class issues and even gave it a leftist, pro-labour bias.

The first two claims can be disproved in short order. Before Grierson and before the NFB, there was the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau which was established in 1924 and placed under the leadership of Ray Peck, with a mandate to advertise Canadian "scenic attractions abroad" and to help the different regions get to know one another. But even the Motion Picture Bureau was not responsible for the first involvement in filmmaking by agencies directly or indirectly connected to the government. The Canadian Pacific Railway used film to promote settlement on the Prairies as early as the *Living Canada* films of 1903-1904, a series of thirty short films portraying the scenic splendour of Canada, and continued with another series of thirteen films, made in 1913, most of which depicted honest immigrant labourers triumphing over the savage wilderness.

In the same year the federal government established the Motion Picture Bureau, the Ontario government set up its own, with a mandate to produce educational films for farmers, school children, factory workers and other groups. In Quebec, by 1920 the provincial department of agriculture was using film for educational purposes, though it was not until 1941 that the province centralized its filmmaking activities in *Le Service de Ciné-Photographie*. Saskatchewan established the Motion Picture Branch of its Bureau of Publications in 1924 to produce educational films. British Columbia government departments began making promotion films in 1908 and in 1919 the province established its Patriotic and Educational Film Service. Though the films made by the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau and its provincial counterparts were undistinguished, these organizations were important for making the concept of state sponsorship of documentary film production acceptable. And their existence is proof that Grierson did not so much originate as tap a mood of cultural nationalism that existed in Canada between the wars.

Nationalist movements in Canada have typically advocated a progressive communications policy and the nationalist movement of the afterwar years was no exception; it led to the creation of the Canadian Radio League and the National Film Society (which later became the Canadian Film Institute). It also helped pave the way for the NFB.

There is no more truth to the claim that Grierson originated the alternative network of distribution and exhibition. The abundance of 16mm productions by the various government departments in the 1910s and 1920s assured the development of alternate screening venues long before Grierson ever set foot in Canada. Even the use of itinerant projectionists was established before Grierson.

But the main claim that is made about Grierson is that he was at heart a man of the left and wily operator who managed, by cunning or coercion, to persuade the government to found an agency to produce films which, if the truth be told, were designed to encourage the implementation of socialist remedies to alleviate the injustices of unbridled capitalism.

Even though this view of Grierson has become part of our national mythology, it finds little if any support in Grierson's published writings or in the films he or his agencies made. Grierson maintained the neo-Hegelian idea that the state is the means for expressing the common interests of the community. But nowhere does he ask what we would expect a man of the left to ask: Where in a society divided into classes do these shared interests originate? Nor does he give any explanation of the economic basis for his notion of community.

The thinker whose theory of state Grierson's seems most closely to resemble is Giovanni Gentile, the self-styled philosopher of Fascism and Mussolini's first Minister of Public Instruction. It is quite likely that Grierson was acquainted with Gentile's thought, at least secondhand. Grierson

studied at the University of Glasgow from 1919 to 1923, when Gentile's writings were first attracting some interest in philosophical circles in the United Kingdom. Moreover, Gentile was closely associated with the neo-Hegelian philosopher and aesthetician Benedetto Croce; and Grierson certainly was acquainted with Croce's work. He was primarily remembered by an old university friend for his enthusiasm for Benedetto Croce and Leon Trotsky.⁵

Grierson certainly shared Gentile's views on education. Gentile maintained that art, religion and philosophy are essentially phases of knowledge that culminate in the philosophy of education, which is the most comprehensive of the various disciplines by which the Absolute or the Spirit comes to know itself. In a series of forcefully written articles and speeches, Grierson proclaimed that education means nothing if it does not result in action. Education's function, he wrote, "is the immediate and practical one of being a deliberate social instrument – not dreaming in an ivory tower, but outside on the barricades of social construction, holding citizens to the common purposes their generation has set them."⁶ Further, "Education is the key to the mobilization of men's minds to right or wrong ends, to order or chaos...." Or, most tersely, "Education is activist or it is nothing."⁷

Like that of most activist philosophers of education, Grierson's was also a voluntarist's view of education, which holds that education is fundamentally a means of training the will. Thus Grierson argued:

I do not think that education can assume the partnership in national education which I have outlined for it until its technique is revolutionized and fitted for the task not only of demonstrating the living terms of a living community, but of realizing them in action and by action.... One cannot see propaganda become education, except it translates the materials of citizenship into terms which are capable of being grasped and which are inductive of action.⁸

Grierson denied that the purpose of education is the development of the individual. In fact, he advocated that educators mobilize the people by asking them "to forget their personal dreams and pleasures and deny themselves for the obliteration of economic anarchy and disorder all over the world."⁹ He acknowledged that his conclusions on education were totalitarian but, as noted above, he claimed that "you can be 'totalitarian' for evil and you can also be 'totalitarian' for good."¹⁰

So extreme were Grierson's views on education that he even denied that education should lead us to search for truth by teaching us how to gather and assess information:

We think the theory of education itself is wrong, and that, in fact, it proceeds on an altogether false assumption....

That false assumption is the mystical democratic assumption that the citizen can be so taught to understand what is going on about him

and that he and his fellows in the mass can, through the electoral and parliamentary process, give an educated and rational guidance to the conduct of the state....

What we are trying to arrive at is the point where we abandon that purely mystical concept of Democracy which encourages the illusion that ten million amateur thinkers talking themselves incompetently to death sound like the music of the spheres.¹¹

Grierson proposed that the educational methods appropriate to the present age should be directed towards forming the will rather than the intellect and should address the emotions rather than reason:

We keep harping away at the ideas that the only kind of judgement that matters is the rational judgement and, in that respect, there is hardly a teacher who is not, by training and tradition, an intellectual snob. But in so doing we fail to crystallize the emotions and direct men's loyalties.¹²

Like any voluntarist theory of education, Grierson's philosophy proposed a highly directive role for teaching. He maintained that the most important function is to give the citizen a pattern of thought and feeling. He never flinched in the face of the totalitarian implications of that view: "in determining these patterns of thought and feeling which will guide the citizen in his citizenship, education has to give far more direct leadership and far less opportunity for the promiscuous exercise of mental and emotional interests."¹³ Nor did he back away from acknowledging the consequences that his directive approach might have for art. "For example, much of our aesthetic approach ... is still reflective rather than directive. If this analysis is correct ... there is no alternative at the time to throwing dear old Wordsworth and his 'recollections in tranquillity' out the next metropolitan window," he wrote in 1946.¹⁴

While most film students and scholars know that Grierson took pride in having shown how the documentary film could be put to social use and that he advocated that art should become a form of propaganda, few seem to realize that Grierson maintained (and in this he followed Gentile's lead) that propaganda was really a form of education, in fact the only useful form of education in the modern world. And since he believed documentary filmmaking at its best was propaganda, that propaganda was a form of education, and that the state should control education for its own purposes, he concluded that the state should also direct documentary filmmaking and should extend its efforts in this realm.¹⁵

In his most forceful presentation of his ideas on the interrelationships of education, propaganda and film, in "Propaganda and Education" (1943), Grierson set out his reasons for believing that the state should have such an interventionist role in education. The old way of conceiving of society, he

explained, was as a society of free institutions "in which the executive authority of the state is, at best, a necessary evil."¹⁶ Then, restating another of the key tenets of his analysis of modern society, he pointed out that such a state (obviously, the liberal state) can operate only when there is a religious and moral basis for those free institutions. But the modern era has seen the destruction of the fundamentals of any possible religious morality. From this analysis, he drew the typical conclusion of right-wing idealists, that the state would have to take on the responsibility of providing the new moral foundations of society. Grierson buttressed this claim by distinguishing between negative and positive freedom (though he did not use these terms). The negative view is that of American liberals – individual freedom is freedom from something, usually the state. The view of freedom as the absence of restrictions assumes that the choice of individuals is the basis from which freedom must begin, and Grierson rejected completely the individualism of liberal theory. Liberals argue that the value of action depends upon choice, but they do not ask how the desires that prompt those choices are formed or whether those desires contribute to human welfare in the long run, or even whether they genuinely contribute to the welfare of the particular individual. The positive conception of freedom, which Grierson (wrongly) asserts has been the conception that Europeans have always held, maintains that people are free if they act on principles that are in accordance with their real nature and their real interests. When we act on the basis of such principles, which are necessarily universal, we act in accordance with the objective principles of the community; for, as Grierson pointed out, "the state has from the first represented the positive and creative force of the community, operating as whole to positive ends."¹⁷

Grierson's understanding of how the state should foster the spirit of unity that makes it possible for the whole of society to operate as "a single, integrated and unified force" was identical with that promulgated by the Idealists of Gentile's circle: we do so not by encouraging the exercise of reason, as Hegel would have it, but by encouraging a non-rational voluntarism by making use of inspirational methods.

If Grierson's ideas about the importance of communal consensus are troubling, his recommendations on the means to achieve consensus are deeply troubling. He recommended the complete transformation of educational methods to make education identical with propaganda. Educators, he insisted, should make use of the techniques of advertising, yellow journalism, mass merchandising and entertainment, for these techniques are truly inspiring.

What characterizes all such uses of the popular media and what educators ought to recognize and make use of, Grierson proposed, is that they have "created loyalties and formed the pattern of men's thought and action." They have achieved this, not by presenting the facts about the situations they deal with, but by discovering the dramatic story within any situation

that holds "the facts in a living organic relationship together."¹⁸ Grierson explains what he meant by these dramatic patterns: "Something does something to something. Something affects something. Someone is relative to someone."¹⁹ Such dramatic patterns are inherent in all civic relationships, Grierson asserted, and "revelation of these dramatic patterns is the first essential in the process of modern education. For young people and adults alike require a broad and lively picture of society to stir their imaginations and instill their loyalties."²⁰

The danger in this view of education is that it encourages irrational enthusiasm and unthinking loyalty at the expense of critical thinking and thus gives rise to practices that in the end are manipulative rather than liberating. Certainly the films produced by the agencies Grierson headed were propagandistic and, when they were effective, extremely manipulative. Yet Grierson would have considered that, despite their lack of factual information, they are truly educational since they stir people and perhaps inspire them to join in the causes the films serve.

This is Grierson's concept of education. Education is propaganda on behalf of the interests of the state. Education should not attempt to teach the facts, since the common people have not the means to assimilate them. Education should inspire the people to loyalty and to self-sacrifice for the larger interests of the state. To fail to provide the people with identifying goals is to risk what Grierson called "the malaise of disillusionment."²¹ Education should mobilize the will and galvanize people into action; it should not encourage them to cultivate the indolent pleasure of deliberation.

Grierson is his own best critic. The following can only be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of his own philosophy of education:

I arrive therefore at certain conclusions, the first is that the State is bound to take a more direct hand in the terms and shapes of education. The second is that much of what we know as education will become what we now know as propaganda. The third is that a dramatic approach, as distinct from an intellectual approach to education must increasingly develop. The fourth is that the machinery of what is called public information must inevitably be extended far beyond its present scale and purpose.²²

Grierson's influence on documentary filmmaking in Canada was profound. Nevertheless, this influence was not as obvious in the years immediately following his departure from Canada as it was subsequently. It was not until the later 1950s that documentary filmmaking again flourished in Canada, with the work of the National Film Board's Unit B of the period, and particularly, with the films belonging to the Candid-Eye series.

The Candid-Eye Movement

At the end of the 1950s a school of cinema known as *cinéma-vérité* developed in the United States, France and Canada (including Quebec). That these allied movements developed in so many different countries at a single historical moment indicates a substantial change in the rockbed of cinema – a change which continues to affect the development of cinema, turning it towards a greater realism. The fact that all these movements attempted to incorporate aspects of the real into the work of art and so shared common aspirations with other movements in art (*musique concrète*, *objet-trouvé*, *chôisme*, etc.) must be accounted for in order to understand why cinema took this course at this point in history.

All of these closely related movements in documentary cinema evince common features in their reaction against the aesthetic of the preceding cinema. The aesthetics underlying the silent cinema were, for the most part, material-formalist in character; thus the major innovations of the heroic period of the silent cinema were the construction of an independent cinematic space and time, the use of rigorously formal compositions involving closed forms, the patterning of montage devices on a linguistic model, and the use of an increasingly formal narrative with the concomitant increasing alienation of the cinematic diegesis from reality. ('Diegesis' is defined by Christian Metz as "the film's *represented* instance ... that is to say the sum of a film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimension implied in and by the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, insofar as they are considered in their denoted aspect."²³) This meant, of course, that the aesthetic value of these works depended upon the rupture between the cinematic object and reality.

During the 1950s, and allied with movements in modern art, there developed several movements in cinema, the aesthetic of which rested, not upon the formal categories opened up by the transcendence of reality, but rather upon the tensions that could be developed in the dialectic between artifice and nature and, more particularly, between fiction and reality. The strategies which characterize the works of these schools – the photographic respect for the integrity of space and time in the use of the long take, the use of more open and less formal compositional devices, the use of non-actors and real locations – were all calculated to integrate the real into the architectonic of the dramatic form.

While distinctions have been drawn between American and French *cinéma-vérité*, the full measure of the difference between these two schools has not been fully appreciated. It is certainly far more than a matter of the French making use of interviews and intervening in the profilmic event (the event before the camera) and the Americans not doing so. As for the Canadian brand of *cinéma-vérité*, it is considered to be of secondary importance and derivative of either the American or the French version, or some combination of those versions (purportedly found in the works produced by the

francophone members of the NFB's Unit B in the late 1950s and early 1960s). According to most accounts, the fact that Canada developed the style so close in time to the American and French developments reflects the intimacy between Canadian cinematic culture and those of the United States and France.

The trouble with these statements is that they are historically inaccurate, inasmuch as the developments in Canada actually anticipated those in the United States. In fact, the first fully developed direct cinema works in Canada date from 1958, anticipating the Drew and Leacock film *Primary* by almost two years. The roots of the Canadian style can be traced back to at least 1952. Moreover, the style of *cinéma-vérité* developed in these countries differ radically from each other. The work of American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers associated with the *Time-Life* journalist Robert Drew exploited the tensions of the dramatic form. From this use of the dramatic form derive many of the characteristics which distinguish American *cinéma-vérité* from Canadian Candid-Eye cinema.

The Crisis Structure of American *Cinéma-Vérité*

It has often been stated that the Drew films were journalistic in character because they depended for their interest on the noteworthiness of the event documented. In fact, the characteristics of the event necessary to sustain the structure on which the vast majority of Drew films are built can be more precisely specified than this. As Stephen Mamber has pointed out, these films are typically based on a contest-type situation, a struggle between opposing forces which is bound, by the very nature of the situation, to rise to a climax and to be resolved (inasmuch as one of the forces will achieve victory at the expense of another).²⁴ This guarantees that, by simply tracking the event, following the contours of its development and recording its key incidents, one will arrive at a work structured on the crisis-climax-resolution pattern which constitutes the basis of the dramatic form. The selection of contest-type situations is largely pragmatic; by using them, filmmakers can be certain that, simply by following such a situation over a period of time, a workable structure that possesses a measure of dramatic intrigue will result.²⁵

Further evidence of the dramatic quality of American *cinéma-vérité* can be found in its central concern with character. The typical problem underlying the films can be stated as: Will the protagonist succeed in some real contest-type situation? Using concrete examples: Will Hubert Humphrey win the Wisconsin primary? Will Eddie Sacks win the Indianapolis 500? Will Jane Fonda triumph in her first Broadway appearance (which is conceived of as a contest between performer and critic)? Will Susan Starr win her piano competition? Typically, the introductions of these films elicit sympathy for the protagonists by depicting them as engaged in context situations which they are strongly motivated to win. Thus, the conflict situation is calculated

to put a stress on the character. The resolution generally involves the defeat of the protagonist (as it does in the films *Primary*, *Eddie Sacks*, *Susan Starr*, *Jane*, in all of which the protagonists fail to achieve their goals) and portrays the stripping away of the character's false self (defined by his or her ambitious goals) and the emergence of his or her real character.

Although the tensions of the dramatic form are incorporated into American *cinéma-vérité* films, their character is altered. In an orthodox dramatic work, the actions of the characters are determined by a body of conceptual material (and in such films, for a certain idea to be expressed a certain kind of behaviour must occur); in *cinéma-vérité* films, the parallel dialectic is between people's appearances and their real natures, between their personae and their real selves. Thus, the principle of structuration shifts in these films from a body of conceptual material to reality.

Many factors affect the articulation of the diegesis of a fictional film. If verisimilitude is desired, as it usually is in conventional cinema, its requirements will be one determinant of the work. Competing with them, however, will be other factors, those resulting from the conceptual material that constitutes the principal determinant of structure and, particularly, from the internal logic of this body of material, along with those resulting from the aesthetic demands of developing tension, etc. All these factors act to deflect the diegesis from real verisimilitude. In *cinéma-vérité* films, competition among determining principles is eliminated as the structure of the real event itself replaces the logic of the body of conceptual material as the main factor determining the structure of the work and, at the same time, guarantees the existence of dramatic tensions.

The issue here is not simply one of creating an accurate facsimile of the real. A deeper ontological issue is involved. The diegesis of the traditional cinema is an artifice; only for this reason can strictly aesthetic categories be applied when considering its articulation. The representation of the world presented in a *cinéma-vérité* film is not a construct parallel to the real world and articulated in accordance with aesthetic demands; it is a trace of the real world informed by the same structures as the real itself.

This fact profoundly affects the nature of the filmmaking enterprise. Because of it, the task of filmmaking becomes revelation, not creation. The process of making such a work is not a process of forging an imaginative construct through an act of will, but rather one of allowing the forms of nature to manifest themselves through the attentive submission of the filmmaker. The goal of art is seen not as beauty, but as truth. Or, more exactly, more ideally, the goal of art is producing truth in beauty, but that is rarely possible in the age of modernity – that is, the age that believes that what is created by human beings is more significant than what is given by nature or the Divine, that considers the self as independent of nature and free to create whatever significance it will, that denies that human beings are beholden to God.

The Observational Structure of Candid-Eye Films

The history of the Candid-Eye movement can in part be written as a history of the rejection of the dramatic form. One of the most obvious examples of this occurs in the NFB documentary *The Back-Breaking Leaf* (1958). The film begins by establishing a contrast between the well-to-do townspeople who own the prosperous tobacco fields and the itinerant labourers. For a few minutes at the beginning of the film, it appears that this contrast will develop dramatically into a conflict between the two groups. In one remarkable scene, the townspeople are practising archery and the camera holds for a long time on a tautly drawn bow, which seems to symbolize the tensions and hostilities between the two groups.

The conflict which this would appear to foreshadow actually appears to be developing when a group of labourers who are gathered in an employment office rail against exploitative labour practices and unfair wages. This, we sense, is a decisive moment – a show-down between labour and employer that will develop into a crisis. However, our expectations are thwarted as the conflict is abruptly abandoned and the film proceeds to document the manner in which tobacco is picked and dried. The film concludes as a text on the fickleness of nature and weather, and how this makes tobacco farming an uncertain enterprise.

My point can be further illustrated in the contrast between *Lonely Boy*, by Canadians Wolf Koenig and Roman Kroitor, and *Jane*, by Americans Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker. Both are portraits of young performers at early stages in their careers and both were done in 1962. The American film is based on the crisis situation and depicts the initial appearance of the actress in her first major role as a conflict between performer and critic (a conflict in which the performer loses). The Canadian film, on the other hand, eschews any situations involving conflict, and so lacks any sense of drama whatsoever. It restricts itself to documenting the day-to-day activities of the young pop star and the factors behind his success.

Lonely Boy was produced by the NFB and appeared in 1963, after the end of the board's regular Candid-Eye series. A portrait of the young Paul Anka, one of the original pop-rock idols, the film reflects the aspirations of the Candid-Eye, just as *Jane*, in its way, reflects upon the ambition of the Drew-style of direct cinema. At times, *Lonely Boy* is assertively informal and forthright in its claims about its access to the real. A long section of the film is devoted to loosely related, snapshot-like shots of Atlantic City, the setting of much of the film. At times, the film uses devices that remind us that our relation to the reality which the film presents is not unmediated. During one shot of Anka walking down the street – a tracking shot – a microphone pops into the scene and, in a subtle moment, the filmmakers instruct Anka and the manager of New York's Copacabana nightclub to repeat an insincere kiss, explaining dishonestly, as the audience recognizes, that "the camera

moved." In another scene, Anka is startled when he bursts into the dressing-room and sees the camera crew.

If the film reminds us frequently that we are seeing a film, it is because the filmmakers want us to recognize that the film is, finally, a comment on, not a simple depiction of, the life of pop stars. The film opens with Anka singing his song "Lonely Boy" and the film shows us that the pop star really is a lonely boy. In concerts Anka is alone on the stage, isolated from the crowds by a ring of policemen. He talks about dieting and we hear a lonely teenager who is uncertain about his attractiveness and, more importantly, about his ability to be of interest to others as a real person. At the end of the film, we see Anka travelling again, isolated from everybody, travelling to some place which is not his home, a place where he will be received as a pop star, as a media phenomenon, not as a person.

Lonely Boy uses scenes typical of the life of a pop star to make a comment about that life. Its form depends simply on assembling these typical scenes. Consequently, the scenes are only loosely related to one another and there is little development from one scene to the next. How different this is from the dramatic structure of the American film *Jane* with its Aristotelian concentration on the day of the play's opening and its tightly woven form which is based on a dramatic conflict of a truly classical sort.

Two Journalistic Influences

There are several reasons why the Candid-Eye filmmakers eschewed forms that highlighted their own rigorous organization. Some relate to the "end-of-ideology" notion which was current when this style was forged; others have to do with colonial attitudes which are so often expressed in Canadian art. But the main reason lies in the character of the journalism that provided the basis for the Canadian version of direct cinema. American and Canadian versions of direct cinema were essentially journalistic phenomena, but the character of the journalism to which each group was committed differed radically. American *cinéma-vérité* developed under the auspices of *Time-Life*. These *Time-Life* films retained features of Luce-style journalism. Mamber, in his book *Cinéma-Vérité in America*, has demonstrated conclusively the important influence exerted by Robert Drew in the development of *cinéma-vérité* in the United States, and has documented the important role played by Drew's concept of the key picture – an image of the moment in which the full drama of a situation emerges – in the formation of that cinematic movement. The photojournalism to which the Candid-Eye filmmakers held allegiance, on the other hand, reflects the influence of French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.²⁶

Cartier-Bresson's approach breaks with the photojournalistic traditions which prevailed at the time he began working. Earlier photojournalists were concerned with the extraordinary event (catastrophes, photo finishes, etc.); Henri Cartier-Bresson captured the ordinary and the unexceptional.²⁷

Cartier-Bresson's book, *The Decisive Moment*, exerted great influence on members of the Unit-B team; Wolf Koenig, in fact, referred to it as the Bible of the whole Candid-Eye team.²⁸ It includes an introductory essay by Cartier-Bresson in which he delineates his artistic credo. On photo reportage, he wrote: "In whatever picture story we try to do, we are bound to arrive as intruders. It is essential, therefore, to approach the subject on tip toe.... The profession depends so much upon the relations the photographer establishes with the people he's photographing, that a false relationship, a wrong word or attitude, can ruin everything." On the subject, he wrote: "So we must be lucid towards what is going on in the world, and honest about what we feel." On composition: "Photography implies the recognition of a rhythm in the world of real things. What the eye does is to find and focus on a particular subject within the mass of reality; what the camera does is simply to register upon film the decision made by the eye." On technique: "Our trade of photo reporting ... came to maturity due to the development of easily handled cameras, faster lenses, and fast fine-grain films produced for the movie industry." And on the purpose of photo reportage: "The camera enables us to keep a sort of visual chronicle. For me, it is my diary. We photo-reporters are people who supply information to a world in a hurry."

Cartier-Bresson here articulated the conception of photo reportage underlying the *Life* photo essay. Another of the masters of that form was American photojournalist W. Eugene Smith. Two comments Smith made convey the gist of a *Life* photographer's understanding of the nature of the photo-essay.

A personal belief of mine is that all the events in the world which cause great emotional upheavals, such as wars, riots, mine disasters, fires, the death of leaders (such as the reaction to the death of Gandhi) – these and similar happenings which tend to release human emotions from control should be photographed in a completely interpretational manner. *Under no circumstances should an attempt be made to recreate the moods and happenings of these moments....*

... the journalistic field must find men of integrity, openminded and sincere purpose, with the intelligence and insight to penetrate to the vital core of human relationships – and with the very rare ability to give the full measure of their unbiased findings to the world.³⁰

In his second comment, he wrote: "My principal concern is for an honesty of interpretation to be arrived at by careful study and through the utmost possible sensitivity of understanding."³¹

Smith's conception of the ideal photojournalist was that of a sensitive human being who understands events of great magnitude, but who is less concerned with the historical significance of those events than with the way they unleash the most real and deeply rooted human sentiments. In most respects, Smith's idea of journalism was similar to Drew's. And Drew's main interest was transferring techniques of *Life*-style, candid photography to the

broadcast media in order to allow those media to convey the human significance of "newsworthy" (i.e., grand) events. Like Smith, Drew and his associates dealt mostly with large-scale events, whose human side he attempted to expose. Though the Drew films are records of such momentous issues as those surrounding a presidential primary, an execution, developments in Central America immediately following Castro's take-over of Cuba, incidents in New Orleans during a week of a school integration crisis, race relations in Kenya, a showdown between Robert Kennedy and George Wallace over the matter of school integration, a Broadway opening, they bring these events down to a human scale.³²

Drew was aware of the influence *Life*-style photojournalism had exerted on the structure of his films: "I worked at *Life* for a number of years, practicing a form of photojournalism which required you to be constantly present with your photographic subject in order to capture the exact place and time when the climax occurs. I came to conceive of the idea of a movie journalism done in this way with simultaneous sound."³³

Drew's comment about an individual's "real underlying nature" gives expression to a very American conception of the self, according to which the self is given at birth, though one learns through experience to construct a number of false selves, each of which is adopted for a different set of circumstances and purposes, to disguise the real self and protect it from public exposure. A person's real self can be discovered only by scraping away those false selves, those artifices and disguises that hide it from view.

The Canadian Candid-Eye movement did not make use of the crisis structure. One reason it did not is that the view of the self which was implied by the use American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers made of the crisis structure is not shared by the majority of Canadians. Whereas American thinkers typically have claimed that individuals have natural qualities which bring with them natural rights (the notion that individuals possess such natural qualities and rights is a condition of the contractualist theory of state) Canadian philosophers such as William Lyall, John Clark Murray and John Watson have stressed that the individual is not a natural phenomenon, but a social product. Their view collapses the distinction between the public self and the private self on which the crisis structure depends.

For the Canadian Film Board's Unit-B filmmakers, the mobile camera and lightweight sound-recording equipment were not considered to be instruments that permitted filmmakers access to private places like the hotel room in the American *cinéma-vérité* film *Primary* (produced in 1960 by Richard Leacock), where John F. Kennedy watched broadcasts of the returns of the Wisconsin primary. They viewed them, rather, as instruments that could go out into the real (social) world and capture reality as it truly is – even in its more eccentric moments.

An aspect of Cartier-Bresson's work that Candid-Eye filmmakers found important was that it was a forward step for the demotic tradition in photog-

raphy, which presented realistic everyday events in the lives of ordinary people. Photography was called into being when acceleration in the rate of change made evident the radical limitations of human vision. It enabled people to capture and freeze a moment within this realm of flux, preserving it for scrutiny as eyesight never could.³⁴

Photography was created to capture the everyday, the ordinary, that which was subject to change. Accordingly, an early development in photography was a genre that dealt with the street, for the locus of the acceleration in the rate of historical change that has occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the city, and the street has been one of the central symbols of the city. However, an artistic approach to photography soon developed. In an effort to elevate photography to the realm of art, a pictorialist style was created, based upon stratagems for the use of texture, atmosphere, composition and framing which attempted to purge the image of its literalness and worldliness and to raise the subject matter of the photograph to the realm of the transcendental.

By the 1930s American photographers Walker Evans, Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand had initiated a challenge to these pictorialist ambitions. Rejecting painterly devices and stratagems designed to elevate the subject matter of the photograph to the transcendental, they took a more literal approach to the photographic image.³⁵

This conflict between the pictorialist and literalist approaches to photography was the forerunner of the conflict between premodern and modern ideals in the arts, for the battle for a literalist approach to the photograph was part of the struggle for a modern way of seeing, which included the factual, the literal – a struggle for the right of the real, the everyday, the fleeting and the momentary to occupy a legitimate place in a work of art. But this right was not asserted without qualification initially. In the work of photographers such as Evans, Stieglitz and Strand, the real found a place only by virtue of a formal appropriation, through which the real was altered to bring it into conformity with formal aesthetic canons. Indeed the dialectic between the known real and its representation – a dialectic that reveals the formally motivated transformation of the real – constitutes the major source of tension in an overwhelming large proportion of the works of this school.

Once the strength of the work of these photographers established the right of the real to enter into an art object on these terms, the struggle became more and more directed towards permitting the real to enter the artwork on its own terms. The first battles in this struggle were conducted primarily in the field of photojournalism. Some photojournalists began to develop a successful style of documentation in which no attempt was made to bring these images of the reality into conformity with well-established but formal canons. But these efforts resulted only in a partial victory for those photojournalists who selected for their subject-matter scenes from the

underbelly of society, for they transformed the document into an image of the exotic, the strange, at times even the bizarre.³⁸ And though this approach was characterized by much less conformity to formal conventions that do not derive from the subject-matter of the photograph, new conventions, deriving from the choice of the exotic as subject matter arose. Full victory in the struggle for the right of the real to enter the work of art had still not been gained; only because of their conformity to dramatic criteria were some parts of the real allowed to enter into the photograph.

The photojournalism of Cartier-Bresson eschewed these tendencies towards dramatization. It did not treat that special class of events (e.g., the catastrophic, the photo-finish) which lent a dramatic quality to earlier photojournalism. Cartier-Bresson's photographs were drawn from the everyday. However, his turning away from the dramatic towards the ordinary was accompanied by a renewed proclivity for visual formalization, since his decisive-moment approach to photography consists of selecting from the everyday occurrence precisely that moment in which the pictorial elements in the scene interrelate in a well-structured form.³⁹ The interest of his photographs generally depends upon the tension between the ordinariness of their subject-matter and the precision of the formal framework in which this subject-matter is represented.

The lingering influence that the "high art" conception of photography exerted on Cartier-Bresson is clearly evident in the difference between his work and that of Swiss-American Robert Frank. Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment has a dual aspect. The decisive moment is the moment when the gesture, expression or event depicted reaches the peak of its intensity and when elements in the picture cohere into a maximally powerful formal relation. Thus the notion of the decisive moment devolves upon some sort of metaphysical coincidence of form and expression, or, to use an older and perhaps more venerable terminology, Beauty and Truth. Cartier-Bresson sought to find, in the chaos and clutter of mundane reality, the serene and beautiful order of another, higher reality. Frank's work challenged the idea that Beauty and Truth have such an intimate relationship, that the most expressive moment is also the most formally rigorous. Frank's America is too full of broken-down cars, appalling desert shacks, discarded Kleenexes, lunchbag litter and gaudy, witless billboards to have its truth appear beautiful.

Frank's approach to photography was that of a modernist.⁴⁰ More exactly, the approach he took to photography resembled the one that modernist painters took to painting.⁴¹ Steichen, Stieglitz, Strand, Weston, Kertész and Siskind had attempted to bring photography within the realm of advanced art by formulating photographs on models drawn from painting. As Janet Malcolm points out,⁴² Cartier-Bresson's *Sunday on the Banks of the Marne* (1939) derives from Manet's *Boating* (1874); Stieglitz' *The Steerage* (1907) was inspired by Rembrandt; Arbus' photographs of circus freaks, drag queens and giants derive from Grosz and Pascin; Sander's portraits of universal types

result from his affiliation with the Cologne Progressive School; and Strand's and Weston's abstracts are derived from Cubist painting.

While this approach was an effort to elevate photography to the ranks of the advanced arts, it produced large numbers of dissembling works. And since modernists were committed to revitalizing the arts by restoring each to a condition of fidelity to its own being, to its own ontologically inscribed nature, for modernists there was no more deadly aesthetic sin than dissembling.

The history of high-art photography is largely a history of attempts to conceal or to eliminate the photographs' inherent proclivity towards formlessness. The strongly designed compositions, the simple and direct statements of their subject and, above all, the stringent control over tonal values (accomplished by using Ansel Adams' Zone System method of exposure and development), which was characteristic of the work of such photographers as Steichen, Weston, Siskind and White, was employed with the purpose of bringing the photograph's native tendency towards the accidental, the raw, the unformed under a rigorous formal system. But Frank, instead of trying to force on the photographic image the composition and design conventions of modern painting, allowed the photograph to go its own way, to exercise its proclivity towards the accidental, the raw, the unformed. The seeming "accidentalness" of his framing, his chaotic "dis-compositions" with their apparently disorderly conjunction of forms, arbitrary juxtapositions of darks and lights, his grotty print quality, and, overall, the clutter of shapes and forms in his works represented an acceptance of the natural affinities of the photographic medium. Robert Frank, in a sense, was the first non-dissembling photographer. Even if Frank was not able to accomplish the same ontological reduction of his medium to its essential, ingrained properties that abstract expressionists were able to achieve through their method, his approach to photography resembled that of "ab-ex" painters to their medium.

Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment is a moment of formal elegance. It is also a moment when elements of our mundane, everyday reality, which Cartier-Bresson believes is in constant flux, cohere in a form that serves as a revelation of some deeper reality. But even though it was Frank who was the contemporary of the Candid-Eye filmmakers, they patterned themselves not after him, but after Cartier-Bresson and his quest for significant or meaningful form.

While it is certainly true that the decisive-moment approach to photography still rested on the privilege attaching to some fragments of reality by virtue of their conformity to formal canons, it did represent a step forward for the demotic tradition of photography, for in Cartier-Bresson's work and that of his followers this conformity has a different source than it had in photographs of Stieglitz, Strand, Evans and Weston. In their work, the conformity was imposed photographically, by controlling the focus, the framing, tones in the print, etc. Cartier-Bresson refused to impose forms on the image using

photographic means;⁴³ rather he discovered it in the event as it ran its natural course.⁴⁴

The Empirical Character of the Candid-Eye Films

The Candid-Eye filmmakers in NFB's Unit B followed Cartier-Bresson's lead in choosing as their subject-matter quotidian events rather than the momentous occasions so valued by American direct-cinema filmmakers, and in choosing not to use dramatic frameworks within which to represent them. The subject-matter of their films was tobacco harvesting, the daily round of police activity, the days before Christmas, the very ordinary side of the making of a popular music star. And, as did Cartier-Bresson, they allowed the formal structure of their films to evolve organically out of the events they depicted. Moreover, like Cartier-Bresson, the Candid-Eye filmmakers preferred formal rigour to dramatic importance as the basis for the selection of their images. It is for this reason, I believe, that the Candid-Eye films always have a more polished surface than do their American counterparts. This refusal to impose form on their "artistic subjects" and the concomitant desire to allow the forms to evolve organically, stem from a particular conception of the photographic image – one which holds that the particular virtue of a photographic essay lies in its ability to present a detached and objective representation of reality.

This approach has clear limitations. The limitation of the Candid-Eye approach becomes evident when one considers the aspects of Cartier-Bresson's thought that the Candid-Eye groups overlooked. Ultimately, the basic notion underlying Cartier-Bresson's photography is the view that reality is a dynamic, creative energy which generates the forms and appearances of nature. Thus, he wrote: "The objective [of picture taking] is to depict the content of some event which is in the process of unfolding ... the world is in movement, and you cannot be stationary in your attitude towards something that is moving."⁵¹ And further: "We work in unison with movement as though it were a presentiment of the way in which life itself unfolds...." He even expounded the core idea of aesthetics of photography in the following way: "But inside movement there is one moment at which the elements of motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment and hold immobile the equilibrium of it."

Cartier-Bresson speaks of what is, in essence, a living intuition that enters into the heart of reality and participates in those dynamic forces which determine the shape of events. The lack of preconception which Cartier-Bresson's theory of photographic creation celebrated was no expressive theory emphasizing the role of spontaneity or lack of control. Rather, it was an epistemological hypothesis that it is in a state of mind rather like that which Zen disciples refer to as "no-mind" that our most profound insights into

reality occur. In this living intuition, the distinction between subject and object is overcome:

I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us which can mould us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds – the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one.⁴⁵

The decisive moment is the moment at which one discovers, in the flash of intuition, that the forces that produce objects in the world and the events those objects undergo enter a momentary state of perfect equilibrium. In fact, Cartier-Bresson's views are very similar to Hegel's idea of art as the expression of reconciliation of Spirit and matter. "To me," Cartier-Bresson wrote, "photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organisation of forms which give that event its proper expression."⁴⁶

The metaphysical underpinnings of Cartier-Bresson's theory of documentary were ignored by the makers of direct cinema, both in the United States and in Canada. The American group generally stressed the dramatic potential of the decisive moment. Their key picture, in fact, was not Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment, but the moment when protagonists cracked under stress, typically after having lost the contest, and revealed their real or private nature. The Canadian Candid-Eye group stressed the importance of the camera's access to real (unstaged) events – its access to human beings in their ordinary social existence.

Nowhere is the difference between Cartier-Bresson's actual views and his Canadian followers' misinterpretations of them more evident than in their respective views on the portrait. One-time Unit B member Terence Macartney-Filgate states that Cartier-Bresson's main influence on his filmmaking was the photographer's approach to making portraits. Macartney-Filgate professes great admiration for Cartier-Bresson's straightforward method, his constant use of an eye-level vantage point on his subjects and his refusal to make portraits except on real locations, and only after living with the person long enough to become acquainted with his or her psychology.

These are attributes of Cartier-Bresson's that, Macartney-Filgate tells us, he wished to emulate. Macartney-Filgate's claims that Cartier-Bresson's portraits were made in real locations after Cartier-Bresson had made himself intimate with the psychology of his subjects are merely reformulations of the assertions that Cartier-Bresson's strength results from having effectively exploited the potential of his small-format, portable Leica camera to allow unprecedented access to the real. But this is not at all how Cartier-Bresson himself viewed the importance of his portraiture. "One of the fascinating

things about portraits," he wrote, "is the way they enable us to trace the sameness of man. Man's continuity somehow comes through all the external things which constitute him.... It is true, too, that a certain identity is manifest in all the portraits taken by one photographer. The photographer is searching for the identity of his sitter, and also trying to fulfill an expression of himself."⁴⁷

This notion of a common being which connects self, world and other, implies a profound view of reality. The generations of Canadians that preceded the Candid-Eye filmmakers were very comfortable with this notion; it appears in the writing of all the major Canadian philosophers up to the end of the Second World War, in the writings of William Lyall, John Clark Murray, John Watson and James Ten Broeke. But, by the 1950s, empiricist notions, imported into Canada mostly from the United States, had eclipsed the idea of the essential relatedness of human beings to the world. Our central philosophical tradition thus remained hidden from our artists, which explains why the Candid-Eye filmmakers could no longer respond to the idea of essential interconnectedness even when it was expounded by their mentor.⁴⁸

In keeping with their conception of the virtues of the photographic process, Candid-Eye filmmakers developed structures which were observational in character; that is, they represent the observations of a person following the unfolding of some process, event, or situation – or, most often, a situation which represents a type of occurrence (or social process, even if this process is merely that by which one human being becomes familiar with another). This general character, however, was further specified by two additional conditions: first, in order to remain within the realm of the non-dramatic, the events that were chosen as subjects for the films had to be limited to everyday events; second, in order to remain fully consistent with that quality of photography, the structures had to imply a radically detached, non-involved spectator who is neither physically engaged in the profilmic event (in the sense of affecting its course) nor intellectually active (in imposing a preconceived grid on it). On the whole, the most effective structure which evolved to meet these conditions was one whose progression is homologous with the process by which an outsider develops familiarity with an event, character or situation.⁴⁹

The ideological implications of this kind of structure are revealing. Such structures suggest a sense of detachment so extreme that, in Candid-Eye films, it often seems to become transformed into a form of consciousness that is so alienated from the world that its sole activity is passive observation – a form of consciousness, then, that seems to play no role in the structuring of reality or even of our perception of it. The continual reiteration of the process of becoming familiar with the everyday things we see repeated over and over again in Candid-Eye films reveals the extreme alienation of this consciousness as it tries to come to terms with a world beyond itself. And undergirding this conception of consciousness is a conception of reality that holds

it to be in perpetual need of demystification by thought. And the reason reality is so conceived is that it is held to be something utterly beyond any individual's influence. It is hardly surprising – for it is in keeping with the colonized outlook which all of this suggests – that the structures employed in the Candid-Eye films should imply that the attempt to overcome this alienation occurs only at the level of cognition.

Comparing the films of the Candid-Eye school with the American filmmaker Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1985), a splendid documentary on the Indian holy city Benares, at once highlights the epistemological assumptions embedded in this form of cinema and reveals its limitations. *Forest of Bliss* is constructed in such a way that viewers of the film experience similar feelings of displacement and alienation from the reality of everyday life and engage in a similar process of discovering the significance of everyday events and behaviours as Western visitors to Benares experience. Like Flaherty's films, and many of the films produced by the NFB, this film makes use of search-and-discovery structures. We see a man labouring to push a bicycle forward; only later does a pan reveal (discover) that the bicycle is laden with logs. We are shown another man straining to push a bicycle, then a pan reveals the bicycle he is pushing is laden with sacks of grain. We see a bobbin revolving mysteriously in mid-air, then a tilt upward reveals it is suspended by a cord which a man is unwinding (causing it to rotate). We see a small procession of men walking through a hallway and upstairs, one ringing a bell, one beating a cymbal, one carrying a basket. Only later, when we are shown the men attending to a sick, aged woman, do we discover that they are religious healers.

Search-and-discovery structures – cinematic structures based on the emergence of meaning – inform the film's macromorphological level (the level of relationship between large units of the film). Events or behaviours are presented before their function or significance is clear; only gradually are their meanings revealed. We see people carrying logs, loading them onto boats, people rowing boats down the river; we see logs being cut and piled up outside buildings, but only when we are shown corpses being dumped into the Ganges and glimpses of Manikara, Benares' main cremation ground, does it become evident that the wood is used in funeral pyres. We are shown men cutting square holes at regular intervals in a bamboo pole. We see them insert slats into these holes and then mount a second pole on the slats to form a ladder-like object. We watch, admiring the ingenuity, as the "ladder-maker" secures the apparatus with twine. Later we are shown corpses being carried on these "ladders" and discover that the men were actually making stretchers. We also see that twine used to secure the apparatus is also used to fasten the corpse to the stretcher, and to assure that the corpse sinks into the river when a stretcher with a weight attached is thrown into the water.

But the most conspicuous evidence of Gardner's empiricistically inspired desire to let events speak for themselves – to allow the meanings actually

embedded in events and behaviours to reveal themselves to meticulous observation – is the film's lack of commentary. Gardner allows – or at least, seems to allow – viewers to discover these meanings by themselves, simply by observing what lies before them, as no framework for interpretation is provided by a commentary.

It is important when considering Gardner's use of search-and-discovery structures to take into account that in *Forest of Bliss* he attempts to evoke in its viewers some of the feelings of Americans or Europeans travelling in a culture as different from their own as India's is. Indeed, the search-and-discovery structures used in *Forest of Bliss* reflect the alienation one feels in an exotic land. But NFB documentaries regularly use these same search-and-discovery structures when dealing with our own situation and they convey the same feelings of alienation from our own climate, land and culture that Gardner seems to have experienced in Benares. This demonstrates the alienating effect colonization has on consciousness, the alienation Canadians have often felt on their own soil.

But the comparison of these NFB documentaries in this search-and-discovery form with Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* exposes another limitation of the board's institutional style (an aspect of which is the use of observational forms). The idea that *Forest of Bliss* is a purely observational film is only a *prima facie* impression. In fact, it is an intricately structured film that uses repetition to invest many of its images with symbolic significance by linking them to the film's themes of passage, decay and death. Hence, the film's meaning transcends what is given to direct, immediate observation. Accordingly, Gardner's film does not reproduce and recirculate empiricistic concepts but comments on them, showing how they arise (through the alienation of consciousness), and what meaning they have. It shows how art can transcend what is given in perception and can accede to a realm of higher meanings. NFB documentaries have never been able to do this.

All this might well remind one of the Algerian psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon's analysis of the stages of development of colonial art. According to Fanon the development of national art occurs in three stages: the phase of assimilation of the colonizer's art; a phase of the affirmation of past, native culture but articulated from an external point of view – that of the colonizer; and finally a fighting phase in which the artist becomes an awakener of the people.⁵⁰ The consistently nationalistic subjects of the Candid-Eye films situates them within the second phase of Fanon's historical schema.

The benchmarks of this second phase characterize the Candid-Eye work precisely. Fanon states that this phase is characterized by an ironic sort of humour which arises from the dialectic inherent in the position of the artist in this period of development. On the one hand, artists belonging to this phase of national development are committed to a national culture; on the other hand, they view the national culture from a detached, external and

hence often amused point of view. The Candid-Eye films frequently exemplify this kind of detached, ironic humour. *Lonely Boy* is a case in point. The subject is Canadian, but the vantage point taken is a more detached one, from which Paul Anka, the pop star, if not the person, is viewed ironically, as a kind of amusing, manufactured commodity. This is a long way from the point of view taken by Leacock and Pennebaker on Jane Fonda's attempt to achieve stardom, which they see as the stuff of real human drama.

Another contrast between *Jane* and *Lonely Boy*, which is explainable on Fanon's model, is the difference in the degree of rigour of the structures of the two works. The American work employs a very tight structure; all the incidents of the film relate directly to that one single contest-type situation which provides the central focal point for the entire work (the crisis point of its drama). The Canadian film is extremely diffuse and episodic, presenting us with a number of incidents which purport to give us an in-depth portrayal of the man behind the star and of those forces which operate in shaping his stardom. The effect of this lack of a central focusing event is that the incidents in the film tend to break up into a kind of shower of discrete particulars. Fanon's model would explain this in terms of the artist's poor grasp of historical realities at this stage in the evolution of national culture. The artist's detachment prevents him or her from understanding the inner workings of reality or the logic beneath the unfolding of events. As a result, the artist can only see reality as a series of accidental occurrences, that is, only as a kind of assemblage of separate particulars. For this reason, that structure employed in the films of Drew Associates, which depends upon a grasp of the homology between the dramatic form and the structure of the conflicts that characterize the inner workings of reality, is not available to the colonized artist of this phase. Such an artist's work is restricted to presenting the surfaces of reality.

Our analysis of the realism of Candid-Eye films and, in particular, of the mode of narrative transmission they employ has taken us a long way. What was claimed to be the result of a meritorious, wilful detachment has shown itself, on deeper study, to be a meretricious, alienated lack of understanding. This sort of realism surely deserves the appellation it has sometimes been given – "naïve realism." This naïve realism is a product of the end-of-ideology phase in American thought. But belief in the end-of-ideology is itself an ideology – one that operates by disguising its character. In this respect, its effect resembles that of the observational structures which Candid-Eye filmmakers employed, since effectiveness of those structures also depended upon their being inconspicuous. The episodicness of the relationship between scenes, the homology between the film's structure and the normal course investigations follow, even the impressionism they imply – all these features have the effect of concealing the structural relations of observational documentaries.

Not A Love Story

The mere resemblance of a film to an observational documentary often serves to conceal its intricate – and ideologically laden – structure. Such is the case with the NFB's *Not A Love Story* (1981), a film that sets out to explore how we are affected by sexually explicit imagery. To reinforce the impression that the film is unbiased, it takes the form of a quest. We follow stripper Linda Lee Tracy in her search for understanding, a quest that begins in the apparently genteel clubs where she performs and eventually leads her into the world of violent, hard-core pornography. At the end of the film she decides to end her career as a stripper because – as we are led to infer from the form of the film – she has gained insight.

Many who have commented on *Not A Love Story* have found themselves uneasy with the filmmaker's use of Linda Lee Tracy; they have explained that this uneasiness results from watching the filmmakers manipulate an honest, working-class woman into feeling bad about the work she does. There is truth in these claims, but they do not go to the core of the problems. These, I believe, lie in the deceptiveness of *Not A Love Story's* appearance, in the fact that while it seems to begin free from preconceptions about "pornography," while it seems to be a chronicle of a search for information, it actually begins with a definite – even if not very fully worked out – theory of sexuality that converts Tracy's apparent quest for understanding into a mythically structured moral odyssey.

What the film ultimately offers us is not a scientific theory of sexuality but rather a theological view of the effects of abusing human sexuality: it describes the effects of sexually-explicit imagery not in terms of the intrapsychic functions of mental representation, but rather in terms of its potential to corrupt the soul. This theological conception of the effects of pornography transforms Linda Lee Tracy's odyssey from the voyage of discovery characteristic of the empirical documentary into a redemptive journey, for it culminates not with the intellect's discovery of a truth but with the soul's purification and salvation. She, like the viewers of the film who are expected to identify with her, is not supposed to be informed so much as transformed. The film is, in all its aspects, informed by the myth of the fall and the redemption.

CHAPTER 5

Narrative Transmission in American Direct Cinema Films and Canadian Candid-Eye Films

American *cinéma-vérité* has been considered a progressive style of documentary film because it uses neither voice-over narration nor interviews. Canadian Candid-Eye films use both, and have generally been considered less radical and less innovative. Do interviews and narration, as Candid-Eye filmmakers use them, have structuring functions that run contrary to the ideals of the *cinéma-vérité* and/or *cinéma-direct* movements?

To answer this question, we need to look at the Aristotelian distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, which bears on the very nature of narrative discourse itself. The plane of expression of a mimetic work is made up of narrative elements that directly present events constituting the narrative. Thus, in mimetic works, the events represented in the narrative are *enacted*. The plane of expression of a diegetic work consists of narrative statements made to the audience by a narrator, who thus has the role of mediating between audience and events. In diegetic works, then, the events of the narrative are *recounted* or *described*. In simple terms, the difference between *mimesis* and *diegesis* is the same as the difference between showing and telling.

We might be inclined to conjecture that the ideal documentary would be purely mimetic; it would simply reveal – or show – some event or some aspect of reality. The fact is, however, that the ideal of a purely mimetic documentary is unattainable. When filming a documentary, the filmmaker almost always fails to record some events essential to the narrative. And even if it were possible to capture all the essential incidents, the recording or filming might fail to convey some important information about these incidents. It is partly because the purely mimetic is an unattainable ideal that documentary film has throughout its history made use of diegetic devices which serve to set the scene or to recount events that, for one reason or another, have been omitted from the mimetic plane of expression. For example, when the people who were actually involved in the action which the film depicts are interviewed and asked to provide background information that otherwise would not be supplied, narrative coherence is created by

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representing on the diegetic plane of expression events which are unrepresented on the mimetic plane of expression.

Diegetic devices, which furnish interpretations of the film's subject-matter, are required, therefore, to meet the aesthetic demands of narrative coherence of narrative economy. In order to create narrative coherence with any economy, the representation of some events must be transferred from the mimetic to the diegetic plane of expression, using such means as captions, legends, interviews, and voice-over narration.

The question about the Canadian style of direct cinema with which we began this chapter now can be seen to be equivalent to another pair of questions: "Given that a narrative will be incoherent or ill-formed without the use of some diegetic means of representation, is it inadvisable, on aesthetic grounds, to use that means?" and, "Amongst those means, are voice-over narration and interviews especially prone to reduce the aesthetic qualities of the film?"

Narrative Modes of Transmission

Some analyses of the *cinéma-vérité* movement suggest that its destiny was to realize the ideal of the purely mimetic documentary. The refusal to allow the demands of narrative coherence to influence the mimesis, the reduction of the role of narrator to one of minimal importance, and the decision to avoid interviews at almost any cost were seen as means of achieving this goal. One reason often given to support the opinion that the Canadian Candid-Eye films were less radical, less innovative, and more traditional than their American counterparts is that they are more remote from the ideal of a purely mimetic documentary. And Candid-Eye films certainly do make greater use of diegetic representation of the narrative's plane of content, since they employ voice-over narration and interviews more frequently. In this respect, it is said, they resemble earlier forms of documentary to a greater degree than do the films of American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers.

There are two problems with this argument. First, the statement that American *cinéma-vérité* films closely approximate the ideal of a purely mimetic documentary misrepresents the actual character of *cinéma-vérité* films. And, second, the argument provides an inadequately precise account of the exact character of the diegetic devices Candid-Eye films employed.

A moment's reflection on our description of *cinéma-vérité* reveals that it relies on the false assumption that, when there is no conspicuous narrator, the narrative's plane of content is transmitted directly to the audience, with no mediating narrator. On the contrary, however, the shaky, hand-held camera work of the American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers and the peculiar vantage-points on events they sometimes take reveal very clearly to viewers the role the cameraperson/filmmaker plays in transmitting the narrative. Leacock acknowledged this role when he alleged that *cinéma-vérité* films

present "aspects of the filmmaker's perception of reality."

These stylistic features of *cinéma-vérité* films serve to reveal that the narrative's plane of content is not directly transmitted to the viewer, that there is a mediating agent in the transmission of the narrative. This agent can be called a neutral narrator, which is a term usually employed in the literature on point of view. Grave problems are associated with the use of a neutral narrator. To obtain clarity about the nature of these problems, we must develop some analytical tools with which to deal with questions about agents of narrative transmission.

Agents of Narrative Transmission

The most common method of analyzing the structures of diegetic narratives takes as central the point of view of the narrator. It asks, for example, whether the knowledge the narrator possesses is of the sort that a character in the story would have, or that a third party observing the story would have, or that an omniscient being would have. This approach, popularized by the New Critics of Chicago, is really a reductionist reformulation of ideas on narrative transmission developed by the Russian formalists. Since the New Critics' reformulations have seriously hampered fruitful consideration of important questions about narrative transmission, it would be worth our while to reconsider the ideas originally proposed by the formalists.

The formalists based their discussion of the narrative on the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. *Fabula* they defined as that which actually happens, the material of the tale prior to or apart from its literary organization. What formalists called *fabula* is identical with what I have been calling the narrative's plane of content. *Syuzhet* is defined as the way the reader learns of what happens; it is, then, the specific mode of organization of the literary signifiers, what I have been calling the narrative's plane of expression.

In more recent structuralist literature, the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* has been recast as the distinction between *énonciation* and *énoncé*, the *énoncé* being the content of an utterance, the *énonciation* being the ways in which utterances are made. What the formalists had termed the "*fabula*," this literature calls the "*énoncé*"; the "*syuzhet*" becomes the "*énonciation*," which is described as the discourse used to articulate (*énoncer*) the *énoncé*. Though these terms are in most cases co-extensive with the earlier terms (the boundaries drawn by the two distinctions in most cases coincide), the more recent articulation of the distinction has certain clear technical advantages. For one thing, the distinction between *énoncé* and *énonciation* can be made in purely formal terms: indexical terms are present in the *énonciation* but absent in the *énoncé*. Indexical terms include "it," "you," "here," "today," whose meaning changes with changes in the relation of the speaker to the subject of the discourse. Thus, while the *énoncé* is constituted solely by those subject-predicate and actant-action relations

to which the articulating discourse makes reference, the *énonciation* contains indications of the speaker's relation to that which is spoken about.¹ This relation is an important feature of the *énonciation*. Secondly, the fact that the *énoncé* depends upon the *énonciation* is much clearer from the definition of those terms than is the fact that the *fabula* depends upon the *syuzhet*, given the definitions of the terms.

In works which employ diegetic means of representing narrative elements, the *énonciation* mediates between the *énoncé* and the addressee of the *énonciation*. Even if one were to suppose that the events constituting some narrative were being recounted by a narrator who was completely frank and honest and who was able to comprehend immediately whatever was given to him or her in experience, the addressee could get an accurate report of the narrator's perception of the events being recounted only if it were possible for the narrator to describe his or her sensations, thoughts and feelings at the very moment of experiencing them. But this condition can never be met; the manifold of experience is simply too rich and varied to be described in the same time it takes to experience it.

Proponents of the American style of *cinéma-vérité* want us to believe that the *énonciation* has an especially high degree of authenticity because the series of representations that constitute it occur in the same order as the events they represent. They claim, further, that this order is guaranteed by an implicit contract between the filmmaker and the audience, that in editing the film the filmmaker will not rearrange the order of events. The special truth that advocates of the American style of *cinéma-vérité* claim for that method of filmmaking results, not from the strict correspondence between the *énonciation* and the *énoncé*, but rather from the fact that new filmmaking technologies allowed the filmmakers an unprecedented degree of access to reality and the abilities to transmit it without seriously altering it. It was believed that because the filmmaker could go wherever he or she wanted, and could capture the events (elements of the narrative) without profoundly altering them, there was no need to represent hitherto inaccessible events on the diegetic plane of expression. This was supposed to allow the filmmaker to create completely coherent narratives using only mimetic forms of representation. Since the crisis-type events they chose to deal with possess narrative coherence (of, specifically, a *dramatic* form), films representing these events in all essential respects, they reasoned, would also possess narrative coherence. And by representing all the important features of the event on the mimetic plane of expression – something made possible only by the new camera and sound-recording technologies – these films would make a greater impact, by presenting the events they depict with the force of immediacy.

There is obviously a cluster of ideas on which American *cinéma-vérité* was based – and it was only a cluster of loosely associated ideas, with no reasoned argument linking them together. The ideas are these: Film images are bound to the realities they depict by a causal bond; that is, they are effects

produced by their models (in association with such other conditions as the presence of lenses and light-sensitive emulsion) in accordance with the laws of nature. In this they are like visual percepts, mental representations formed at the end of a perceptual process and depicting a state of affairs that obtains in the world outside our consciousness. Film viewers, who know that film images are connected to the realities they represent by causal bonds, recognize that the images must have been created in a close spatio-temporal proximity to the events.² In this respect, too, film images resemble visual percepts. This similarity provides the grounds for the witness character of American *cinéma-vérité* films – the quality of the films that suggests that the cameraperson was actually witnessing the events, which shows up in a shaky camera style and awkward vantage points.

Unfortunately, the idea that film images and visual percepts have strong similarities is based on faulty assumptions. The claim that film images and perceptual images are both effects of what they represent is taken to be equivalent to the claim that the camera sees just as a person or witness sees. Only this equivalence can support the notion that the presentation of a filmed record of an event allows spectators to see the event just as human witnesses present at the event saw it, a notion the *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers clearly want us to accept. But these two claims are not identical, a point that becomes obvious if we consider the following two propositions: 1) Smoke and heat are both effects of fire; 2) Smoke and heat are essentially the same. These two propositions are clearly not equivalent in the sense of having the same truth values in all possible worlds. Just as smoke and heat are not the same thing, camera percepts and human visual percepts are not essentially the same, even when both sorts of percepts derive from identical vantage points on the same event. One obvious difference is that human viewers can fail to register objects in the space they observe while cameras cannot. It was the mistaken belief in the essential similarity of camera percepts and human percepts that supported the conclusion that the evidence provided by *cinéma-vérité* films is incontrovertible because the record of an event provided by a camera provokes a spectator to the same impressions in the same order that an observer present at the event would have.

The evidential authority to which American *cinéma-vérité* film lay claim derives not from a belief that photographic images present reality – from our belief that a photographic image is invested with the being of its model – but rather from the claim that a camera sees an event just as a human witness does. The shaky camera work, the awkward vantage points on events, the camera pans that capture an action or event already in process are really just means of staking a claim to this form of authority. Suppose a *cinéma-vérité* film were considered as offering a series of propositions, propositions of the form “A did B” or “P occurred before Q” or “X has the property Y.” The function of those devices that imbue the film with its witness character can be simply explained on that supposition. Instances of the use of such devices

would offer metapositions that vouch for the truth of the first-order propositions (propositions about the events depicted). In *cinéma-vérité* films each first-level proposition is bracketed by a metaposition since every depiction of an event is offered in the characteristic *cinéma-vérité* style. *Cinéma-vérité* films then do not directly assert propositions of this sort; rather they assert a proposition of the form "I can vouch for the fact that A did B, that P occurred before Q, that X had the quality Y because I was there and I saw these facts to be so." But this rebuts the claim that *cinéma-vérité* films are very nearly pure mimetic constructs, for their diegetic character is insisted upon with every "statement" they make.

Even a school child knows that claims of the sort "I know that x has the property(ies) Y (and Z) because I observed that x has that (those) property(ies)" are on rather insecure footing and, moreover, that the more complicated the set of attributes about which claims are made becomes, or the more complex the individual attributes under consideration become, the more dubitable such propositions about them become. The filmmakers associated with the American direct-cinema movement worked with very complex situations indeed – not just with situations which could be characterized only by using statements of degrees of complexity comparable to "Person A's reaction to person B had qualities X, Y and Z" or "Event P foreshadowed event Q," but with situations which involve confrontations that bring basic beliefs into question (for example, the Kennedy brothers' confrontation with George Wallace and Central American politics just after the Cuban revolution). The claims these films make are therefore very dubious. The insertion of the metaposition "I know the claims I am making to be true because I observed the incidents I am characterizing" makes not a whit of difference to this dubitability.

The reasons that the inclusion of this metaposition might be believed to add a measure of authority to the films' "first-level assertions" relate to social views dominant among Americans. As was pointed out in the first chapter, individualist ideologies are as prevalent in American political theory as they are political realities of the United States. The claim "I saw x and so know proposition Y (concerning x) to be true" is buttressed (and only weakly and illogically at that) by claims for the absolute authority of the individual. The individual holds sway in American-type knowledge. The idea that individual perception is unchallengeable explains the recurrent fascination Americans have shown for relativistic theories of truth and, especially, relativistic theories of value. In American-style *cinéma-vérité* films, the narrator, mediating between the narrative's plane of content and the addressee, provides the work with an authority that derives from the authority of the individual.

Cinéma-vérité as the Mimesis of a Mimesis

But if this is the function of the narrator in American *cinéma-vérité* films, why is he or she never explicitly represented in the narrative's plane of content? Wouldn't the explicit representation of an acknowledged authority add more weight to the film's claims? To answer these questions, we must consider the reasons why American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers adopted a principle that Mamber calls the principle of minimum interference, which declares that direct-cinema filmmakers must not tamper with the progress of the events they record other than by being present with camera and sound-recording apparatus.³ It prohibits the use of interviews and forbids participants from repeating lines, or re-enacting actions, or repositioning themselves. It also precludes the use of any editorial constructions that reorder events or that imply that relations exist between events that were not actually observed. (The last proscription limits drastically the rhetorical effect of what classical aestheticians called *dispositio*, the ordering or disposition of events in the diegesis.)

The minimum interference principle ensured that the narrator's function derives exclusively from being an observer, that he or she would not act, for example, as an analyst who puts events within a contextualizing framework by drawing comparisons between distinct but structurally similar events. We are invited to identify with the narrator/cameraperson and take his or her perception as our own. Thus the cameraperson/narrator could never be actually represented in direct cinema film because that would change the point of view of the film (at least temporarily) from the subjective to the objective. And this would destroy the imaginary coherence of the viewing subject – the very thing the viewer gains by engaging in these identificatory processes.⁴

These films mirrored the coherence of the subject with the coherence of the illusory reality the films depict. Filmmakers accomplished this by refusing to make constructive use of montage and by relying instead on the long take. The combined effect of these two forms of coherence produced a highly engaged viewer, a viewer locked in the grip of the film's illusion. The dramatic structure of these films strengthened their hold on viewers, locking them in this identificatory process.

Since the cameraperson was never shown in the film, the viewer was identifying with a disembodied gaze. The cameraperson and the viewers, who scopically identified not only with what he or she saw (and by seeing, represented), but with the act of seeing itself, while all-seeing, could not be seen. In this way they resembled the voyeur who also observes without being observed and identifies with the act of looking (but who is different in the respect that the subject of his gaze and the source of his pleasure is the fetish).⁵

The American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers seem never to have fallen prey to the voyeurism that was latent in their cinematographic method, but a

Canadian disciple, Allan King, did. Like the works of Drew Associates, King's commercially successful works exploited conflict-laden situations. King is quite well aware of the dramatic character of his films. In response to interviewer Alan Rosenthal's question about the chronology of events in *A Married Couple* (1969), King answered: "The opening of the film was shot about two-thirds the way through; the breakfast scene was shot halfway through.... You wait for one significant arch of events that hang together and give you a core. The holiday, and when they're at the lake and so on, and the party around that – they all occurred very early in the filming *and are actually unrelated to the rest. All I do is take episodes and put them into a dramatic struggle that works for me*" (emphases added). Rosenthal then asked: "So you are aiming towards a kind of emotional fiction?" King responded:

Yes. It is very often the case that episode *a* is put together with episode *b* to produce a feeling of *c*, when in reality they don't have that connection. However, if feeling *c* doesn't have a feeling relationship or isn't true of the characters, then it won't work. *What I'm doing is finding conjunctions of events that create for me the feeling I have about that couple and about life, and what I want to express.*

One has to be very, very clear. Billy and Antoinette in the film are not Billy and Antoinette Edwards, the couple who exist and live at 323 Rushton Road. They are characters, images on celluloid in a film drama. To say that they are in any other sense true, other than being true to our own experience of the world and people we have known and ourselves is philosophical nonsense.⁶

King's comments raise questions about the use of "factual" footage within a fictional structure. Does not the "factual" character of the footage itself lead us to believe that this is a work of reportage? Is this any less irresponsible than a newsbroadcaster forging connections between unrelated events to produce a good story? Was King justified in altering the chronology of events in *A Married Couple* simply because he was attempting to portray the dynamics of a marriage?

In response, we might be inclined to ask whether what King did is any different from what a novelist does. After all, even a novelist observes real people and creates stories (fictions) partly by forging relationships between the real events. But there is a difference, one that is recognized in law. If one creates a story using real events in the lives of real people (who are named and identified) and that story presents some truths and some falsehoods, one can be charged with libel, whereas if a novelist, for example, takes some pains to conceal the identity of the real persons upon whom his fictitious characters are based, one would generally be protected against such legal actions; for no real individual can be fully identified with the character of a fiction. Accordingly, no reasonable inference can be drawn from the behaviour of a character in a fiction to the personality of a real individual. But does the factual char-

acter of King's actuality footage not identify real individuals with the characters of his fiction to such a point where it is reasonable to draw some inferences about the personalities of the real-world characters from the behaviours in which the characters or the individuals are shown to engage? And if some such inferences are allowed, why should others be rejected? What guidelines does King provide for accepting or rejecting such inferences? To say that the film is a mixture of fact and fiction is no adequate defence against the charge that the factual characters of the footage encourages the audience to make inferences that lead to injurious and contrary-to-fact conclusions about real people.

The differences between Leacock's and Pennebaker's *cinéma-vérité* films and Allan King's "nonfiction dramas" (as King inaccurately characterizes the form of his films) are instructive. The Americans, committed as they were to a minimum interference principle, refused to manipulate the chronology of their presentation. They chose to document situations (contest situations, mostly) in which the conflict rises to a crisis moment within a short span of time. King did not, and that is why he could speak of waiting "for one significant arch of events that hang together and give you a core." This is why, too, the dramatic intrigue in American *cinéma-vérité* films produces a very tight structure, while King can enumerate scenes that "are actually unrelated to the rest."

As well, King's instincts for dramatic situations were less sure than those of his American counterparts. While he was successful in exploiting dramatic situations when he came across them, he didn't seem to know how to identify such situations or to have an instinct for choosing them as the subjects of his films. Thus *Warrendale* (1967) meanders along until the beloved cook dies and the film stumbles upon its focus. But in *Come on Children* (1973), a film portraying a number of drop-out adolescents at a rural commune who entertain themselves by taking drugs, no such "fortuitous" event occurred. Accordingly, the film had no focus and found no commercial release. Furthermore, King's dramas are artificially constructed and seen, paradoxically, to be at once both more diffuse (and therefore less intense) and more contrived than those presented in American *cinéma-vérité* films. But areas in which King's films differ most from those of the Americans are in their lack of discretion and their exploitation of the voyeuristic potential inherent in the direct-cinema method. From his *pre-cinéma-direct* *Skid-Row* (1956) through *Warrendale* and *A Married Couple* to *Who's in Charge Here!* (1983) King's *oeuvre* has been highly oversensationalized.

Their use of neutral narrators and their adherence to the minimum interference principle creates the impression that *cinéma-vérité* films are mimetic, that there is no mediating narrator, that events are transmitted to the spectators through a neutral apparatus. This, in turn, creates the impression that the drama which the work depicts is inherent in reality itself, in the unmanipulated reality the film transmits. The *fictional* device of the neutral

narrator really serves these films' *dramatic* apparatus. By masking the narrator's role (by not allowing the narrator to make overt comments or to figure in the film's system as anything other than a conveyor of reality), by limiting the information presented to what can be directly observed and by restricting the film's speech acts to those whose illocutionary effects are directed from one character to another and not from a character to the audience, *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers created the impression their films were purely mimetic. In fact, they are merely the mimesis of a mimesis.

These films are not even close to being purely mimetic. As we have seen, the lack of intervention by the filmmaker in the process which he or she records does not ensure the absence of a mediating narrator, for a mediating narrator is indeed inscribed in the work by the camera style.

Though a narrator can be found in the Drew group's films, his or her presence was not openly admitted to, as it was in the Candid-Eye films. As we noted above, it is this open admission of the role of the narrator that has been the basis for the judgement that these works (because they made a more traditional use of narrator) were less progressive than the work of American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers. Even at this point in our analysis this claim seems doubtful. However, in order to adequately assess it, we shall have to determine whether the narrator in the Candid-Eye films really played the same role in transmitting the narrative as he did in traditional documentaries.

Imagery as Illustration:

The "Literary" Quality of NFB Documentaries

At the time the NFB's Unit B began making the films of the Candid-Eye series, enormous changes were occurring in the way narration was being used at the Board – indeed, in the whole manner in which films were made. A NFB documentary made during the war or in the immediate postwar years was typically very "literary." NFB filmmakers usually began with a set of ideas, for example, about the differences between the Canadian and the American West. They prepared a shooting script that included a tentative version of the narration the film would use and a description of those sound effects and images that would illustrate these ideas. (One of the innovative features of the method of producing Candid-Eye films in the late 1950s and early 1960s was that no shooting script was prepared in advance of the shooting.) The filmmakers would then set out to fetch the illustrative material that was needed, and, if they could not find it in the world, they would construct it, most often by staging events, as they did for the well-known *Mental Mechanism* series of the late 1940s. When this illustrative material was collected together, it would be edited, more or less exactly according to the manner laid out in the shooting script. Finally, a narration track would be added,

which most often explained to the audience what they should think about the pictures.

In 1954 Colin Low made a film that fundamentally changed this method. At the time Unit B was making a series of short, inexpensive films called *The Faces of Canada*, which were intended to give young filmmakers scope to discover that ever-elusive "quintessential Canadian character." Each filmmaker was to create a film about an individual from his or her home town who embodied the character of the town. To make his film, Colin Low returned to the South Alberta ranch where he had been raised. The film he made there is a lyrical film, one of the most beautiful the Board has ever made, which depicted a cowboy cutting a half-broken horse from the herd, deftly preparing the halter ropes and, at the film's end, taking an exhilarating ride. It was originally meant to have a commentary track, but Stanley Jackson, whose job it was to prepare the commentary insisted that the film didn't need one, that narration would be about as useful to the film as a fifth wheel would be to a wagon. Despite protest from some NFB staff, *Corral* (1954) was released without a commentary (or, for that matter, an effects track).

Some of the Candid-Eye films continued this tradition of a rather sparse use of narration, while others continued to use the more traditional style of narration. The contrast between these different styles is exemplified by the narrations employed in *The Days Before Christmas* (1958)⁷ and *Blood and Fire* (1958).⁸

The Days Before Christmas

The Days Before Christmas uses narration sparingly, for only about 1min 55sec of the film's 28 minutes running time. *Blood and Fire* contains nearly twice this amount of narration (1min 55sec) but also contains many more interviews or modified interview situations. These are situations in which people acknowledge that their speech is addressed to a public and so speak in much the same way they would be if they were being interviewed; such situations would include giving a speech or preaching a sermon. *Blood and Fire* contains 5min 6sec of actual interviews, and at least 11min 56sec of modified interview situations in its 29 minutes running time,⁹ while *The Days Before Christmas* contains no interviews or modified interview situations.¹⁰

The difference in the amounts of narration and interviews in the two works reflects more fundamental differences between the two films. Still, as we shall see, their structural principles are not basically opposed. The reason *The Days Before Christmas* contains no interviews and perhaps no modified interview situations is that the film pretends to capture ordinary Montrealers in their Yuletide preparations and activities. The film consists of a series of typical scenes: we see a boys' choir rehearsing Christmas carols, shoppers, children confiding their Christmas wishes to a department store Santa Claus, young boys and their young-at-heart fathers watching electric

trains, people looking at the Christmas decorations in department store windows, travellers in airports and train stations going home for Christmas, children staging a pageant, a young man telephoning home, and revellers at a Christmas party. Like Henri Cartier-Bresson photographs, the film captures ordinary people going about their ordinary activities. Since being interviewed for a film or even engaging in some public-speaking event is hardly on the agenda of a typical day's activities for an average person, interviews and modified interview situations are avoided.

A scene most deeply offensive to me, however, is one of a young immigrant from Scotland telephoning his mother. The young man is obviously lonely and wants to know that he is being thought of at home. His awkward attempts at establishing this is facilely played for its bittersweet humour, if not for open laughs. As the scene begins, there is some difficulty in making an overseas connection, then another silence, a silence of a different sort. The young man asks his mother if she is crying; from his response to her reply (we hear only his side of the conversation), we learn that she, the typical Scottish mother apparently, has denied that she is crying and has explained away the thickness of her voice by stating that she has a cold. He then asks his mother, in a gauche attempt at using humour to disguise his desires, whether she will be setting a place for him this Christmas. Ever so Scottish, it seems, she refuses to acknowledge his sentiments or even the meaning of his question. He finally has to remind her that when he first came to Canada, she used to set a place for him at the Christmas dinner table even when she knew he wouldn't be there. Since all his attempts to let his feelings be known to his mother without directly expressing them seem to meet with evasions on his mother's part, he breaks down and states tremulously, "God, I miss you." While a more sensitive filmmaker might have been sympathetic to what the young man was experiencing, Filgate and his collaborators were not. They merely made fun of his awkwardness.

When the film is not actually ridiculing people's Christmas activities, it portrays those activities as tacky and ugly. It shows a man in the midst of a crowd, completely absorbed in his newspaper, begin to cross a busy street; in this season of good will, he is almost knocked down by a taxi-cab. The film attributes the ugliness of the modern-day Christmas to commercialism. It shows salesclerks working at cash registers and, in one brilliant but somewhat troubling and dislocating scene, Brinks guards collecting the cash and riding through the streets protecting it with shotguns. This booty, the film implies, is the true meaning of Christmas.

The narration in *The Days Before Christmas* states the essential tension that underlies the film, the tension between the illusion that Christmas is a festive season of comradely love and the reality that it is a cheap commercial ploy which inflicts pain and suffering on the many and provides profits for the few. The first piece of narration seems merely to establish the setting, by stating the important facts about the place and time in which the action of

the film is set. The film opens with images presenting details of the interior of a church; the narration accompanying these images announces, "A North American metropolis speaking two languages prepares for its most festive occasion. Montreal in the days before Christmas." In fact, the passage does more than just establish the setting. By juxtaposing this narration against the details of a church interior, the illusion that Montreal is preparing for a festive religious occasion – the illusion which the film will subsequently undercut – is established.

The next scene shows a boys' choir in rehearsal. At the end of the scene, their song ("Ding, Dong, Merrily On High") continues while the visuals change to images of streets full of shoppers. The contrast between the beautiful and the joyous Christmas carols and the frantic, bone-weary shoppers is the first instance of the tension on which the film is based. (A similar but perhaps more obvious juxtaposition occurs later in the film when "Gloria," sung by a francophone men's choir, accompanies images of traffic creeping through the crowded, slushy, early winter streets of Montreal and of pedestrians trying to make their way across them without being hit.) The meaning of this juxtaposition of sound and image is reinforced by the narration which follows immediately.

The shortest days of the year. For most people, Christmas will mean a joyous celebration of the birth of the Saviour, a promise fulfilled. And for all people, it will mean the fulfilment of another promise, a promise that in the due cycle of the seasons, warmth and brightness will return out of the winter's cold. And for some people it will mean sore feet, frayed nerves and an upset stomach.

This passage is presented along with images of shoppers used, apparently, to convey the idea that Christmas is a commercial event. The significance of this aural/visual juxtaposition is reinforced by fading in the sound of cash registers as the narration concludes and, more telling still, by bringing it up to a highly amplified level. As well, the tone of the voice delivering the speech is ironic. The joint effect of the image/sound juxtaposition and the ironic tone with which the narration is delivered is to impress upon the viewer that the final sentence of the passage is its sole moment of truth.

The film continues with a series of typical Christmas scenes most of which mock the Christmas preparations of ordinary, "less enlightened" folk. Its next-to-last scene is a Christmas party, with one fellow rather conspicuously holding a bottle of liquor by the neck and a lone woman obviously drinking away her woes. The idea that Christmas offers religious or festive sanction of what (according to the film) is essentially tawdry behaviour is announced in the penultimate passage of narration which occurs over top of this scene:

The season of renewal and rebirth of the hopes of men. The unchanging spirit of it is touched on in "The Praise of Christmas," a poem written hundreds of years ago:

Tis ill for a mind to anger inclined
 To think of small injuries now.
 If Wrath do thee seek, do not lend her thy cheek
 Nor let her inhabit thy brow.
 Cross out of thy book malevolent looks –
 Both beauty and youth decay –
 And wholly consort with mirth and with sport
 To drive the cold winter away.

While most of the narrative in this film thematically counterpoints the imagery which it accompanies, the final passage of speech thematically parallels its accompanying image. The image is that of an airplane flying south, while the speech, presumably spoken by a flight-crew supervisor, is: "Wish the boys in Bermuda a Merry Christmas." The sarcastic tone of this image/sound juxtaposition suggests the speaker wishes to escape from the cold, from winter, from Christmas. It is as though the speaker were thinking, "We'll pretend to wish them the good fortune we have but we all know they're far better off in the south where Christmas has so much less meaning." The airplane flight is then an image of what is wished for, escape from the cold, mean, tacky, commercial Canadian Christmas.

In *The Days Before Christmas* narration is used, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with images, to establish the conceptual tensions that structure the film. Most of the images in the film (and nearly all of those that don't accompany passages of narration) illustrate ideas announced in the narration. This illustrational and didactic use of imagery runs counter to the aesthetic of American style *cinéma-vérité*, according to which the only legitimate function of images is an evidential one. The American aesthetic implies that one discovers truth merely by analyzing reality (this is why it aspired towards a mimetic mode), while the Canadian aesthetic implies that truth is discovered through a synthetic act of understanding and that specific instances only partially embody that understanding. Canadian Candid-Eye films, because they admit to being informed by certain conceptual notions, because they don't rely on the myth that pure final truths can be transmitted merely by presenting raw facts, have no reason to pretend that they are purely mimetic constructs, which lack altogether in diegetic features. In fact, in a few documentaries made in Canada between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s (these are not direct-cinema films), the role that the understanding plays in coordinating and synthesizing facts and in developing a theory to explain the facts is explicitly acted out, as those films make use of an *histor* who embodies the process by which one sifts out facts and develops a theory to account for those facts.

I have said, though, that Canadian Candid-Eye films are built on a less evidential view of the image than their American counterparts. Does this not contradict earlier assertions that Canadian films are generally empirical in their form and beliefs? Do the Candid-Eye films represent an exception to this general rule? I don't really believe so. My reasons for believing this, however, will take some labour to explain.

Candid-Eye Films and Common Sense Philosophy

Some of my reasons have to do with the structural features of Canadian Candid-Eye films. While the dramatic structures of American *cinéma-vérité* films offer an interpretation of the dialectics of the situation which the film deals with and expose the conflict between underlying forces that drive its evolution, the typical scenes that constitute a Candid-Eye film are not presented as so organically interrelated.¹¹ They are related to one another only as illustrations of a single thesis. Hence, no analysis of the relationship between the perky Québécois consumer, the Brinks armed guards, and the Christmas carollers shown in *The Days Before Christmas* is offered by that film: they are presented merely as scenes that illustrate the thesis that Christmas is commercial. No attempt is made to explore the forces which underlie the events they depict or to discern the underlying relationships among these apparently disparate, unconnected elements. We are not presented with an analysis of the structure and dynamics of the cash nexus, for example. This explains why Candid-Eye films so frequently seem disjointed and disunified.

Instead of presenting an analysis of underlying forces, Candid-Eye films attempt to generalize from the particulars they present. The typical scene in a Candid-Eye film is the result of an attempt to subtract all specificity from the photographic images of events – to subtract all those features which make any incident an *individual* incident distinct from all other incidents – and to present only those features that are common to a number of incidents. The Candid-Eye filmmakers used typical scenes precisely because a typical scene is a specific event (photographic media can present only specific events) that is as near as possible to a generalized situation. A typical scene is presented as a scene of a certain type, as a sort of concrete universal. As the work of Carnap demonstrates, there is nothing in this that is incompatible with empiricism.¹²

In the end, these films rely on an empiricism of the Common Sense variety. They don't really dissolve the world into a phenomenalism of the sort Hume described; as in the Common Sense philosophy, the world continues to be thought of as real, "out there" and separate from us. Yet their particularism – their vision of the world as composed of atomistic entities which bear no essential relationship to one another – is of the sort into which all varieties of empiricism lapse, even the Common Sense variety.

Blood and Fire

Terence Macartney-Filgate's 1958 film, *Blood and Fire*, is a portrait of the Salvation Army Corps in action. It, too, is built around many typical scenes; we see the Salvation Army marching band parading and its officers engaging in street-corner preaching, singing hymns, selling *The War Cry* in a downtown tavern, feeding the hungry and making visits to prisoners. Though *Blood and Fire* makes much greater use of narration, interviews and interview-type situations than *The Days Before Christmas* does, it hardly uses them differently.

Blood and Fire is fundamentally a film of irony, and the irony is (as is typical of Candid-Eye films), a misanthropic one. The film portrays the officers of the Salvation Army as deeply misguided in their moral earnestness. While they might think they are waging a battle for souls, people come to them for physical sustenance. Those who don't view them as the source of a free meal consider them simply odd. There is, of course, no easier achievement in empirical filmmaking than that of holding up for ridicule actions whose significance lies in their inner meaning or in their spiritual dimensions. The mere separation of the action from the inner states associated with it is enough to do the trick, and this is exactly what the empirical style of filmmaking does.

The narration, the interviews and the modified interview situations the filmmakers used create irony by two means. One relies on juxtaposing the Salvation Army officers' delusion that they are saving souls with the actual fact that the Army is, for most of those it serves, the source of a meal and a bed. This juxtaposition sometimes takes the form of a juxtaposition of a passage of narration with the image or series of images that accompany it; at other times, it takes the form of the serial juxtaposition of one verbal utterance to another. The second relies on presenting members of the Salvation Army and their activities as odd and, tying in with the first means for creating irony, misguided.

The first piece of narration, which occurs about 30 seconds into the film over some street scenes, is "In this city marches an army whose motto is 'Blood and Fire'." By telling us this, the narration creates the impression that the city harbours a corps of people out to savage, brutalize and raze the city. The incongruity between this suggestion and the recognizably peaceable city is the initial irony of the film. When we then see the Salvation Army band marching, the idea that they are an army out to draw blood and to burn seems even more ridiculous.

There is no more narration for about three and a half minutes. The next piece of narration continues to stress the oddity of the Salvation Army, again by stressing the anomaly of their having taken the term "Army" for themselves and the apparent incongruity in the juxtaposition of the terms "Salvation" and "Army": "The Salvation Army, what a strange name. What does it mean?" asked General William Booth, its founder." The narration continues

with a quotation from Booth, which progresses from an absurdity, to a non-sequitur, to what is, from the filmmaker's point of view, a pretentious claim. "And he answered himself, 'Just what it says. A number of people joined together in the fashion of an army and therefore it is an army and an army with the purpose of carrying salvation through the land'." This accompanies scenes of street preaching. About forty seconds after the end of this passage, another is presented: "The officers in this army expect to spend their lives in its service."

The vehicle here is a statement of lofty dedication but the tenor is informed by irony. This ironic tenor is essential, for this passage of the film functions as a bridge into its next section, a series of three interviews with Salvation Army officers. In the first interview, which runs for close to a minute, an officer talks about the embarrassment he felt when, after a riotous youth, he first appeared in his neighbourhood wearing a Salvation Army uniform. In the second interview, a woman officer speaks for half a minute about eating tomatoes during the Depression. In a third, another male officer speaks for one minute and ten seconds about the tricks he uses to get drunks out of his office. The concatenation of the introductory narration and the interviews exposes the distance between the Army's lofty ideal of a life of service and the ordinary (perhaps even less than ordinary) individuals who are expected to live this ideal.

Twenty-eight seconds after the last of these interviews ends, another passage of narration is presented. " 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord,' said the Psalmist, 'Make a loud noise and rejoice and sing praises. With trumpets and the sound of cornets make a joyful noise before the Lord. For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting'." Predictably, the passage appears along with images and background sounds of a Salvation Army congregation singing a rather sludgy version of a hymn, to the accompaniment of a Salvation Army band. To reinforce the effect, lively martial music is used to lead out of this section. The juxtaposition of text and incident is once again used to imply the distance that separates the lofty ideal and the less than noble fact.

Narration next occurs a mere thirty-six seconds later. In this instance, the opposition between the ideal and reality is presented serially in the narration itself; the accompanying images depict quite straightforwardly officers entering a tavern to sell the Army's newspaper. "*The War Cry*, published in seventeen languages. For ten cents, news and reports from around the world. A report on hospitals, hostels, missing persons bureaus, orphans, villages, homes for the aged, help for unmarried mothers – all the worldly work of the Salvation Army. And for the one man in a thousand who wants it, a word for the spirit." The next scene is a modified interview situation, an Army officer speaking to a prisoner. Here the irony results from the opposition between the lofty, reformist zeal of the officer and the intransigently evil and imposingly unalterable setting (features which surely suggest the prisoner himself,

who is never shown). This irony is used to mock the officer's aspirations by accusing them of being unrealistic.

What follows is a compound bracket syntagma,¹³ composed of shots, first, of the middle class, then, of the underclass. This construction conveys the idea of people falling on bad times. It is followed by another bracket syntagma, composed of shots of people beside a hostel and a shot of the hostel's sign. Over these sequences are these words: "'Men sleep on the very verge of hell,' said General Booth. 'Their business, their pleasure, their sorrows, their miseries hold them in a slumber nearly as deep as death itself. Nay they are dead while they live. You must fight to awaken them'." In this instance irony results from the contrast between the loftiness of the rhetoric and the squalidness of the reality it describes.

The scene changes to the interior of a hostel, at mealtime. We see sorry men eating their humble meals. The accompanying narration is: "The army provides a meal and a bed for those who come in need. But they hope to give more than that. They believe that every man has an immortal soul which can be lost or won." Of course, in a distasteful way, the filmmakers are using the contrast between this talk of immortal souls and the grottness and ugliness of the situation to demonstrate the Army's inability to come to terms with the hard facts of reality. The narration continues: "Beyond the satisfaction of physical needs lies the real battle, the battle for saving souls. And the army pursues that battle wherever it leads." Accompanying images of men fallen to a sad condition, eating and drinking in an Army hostel, this passage of narration is also ironic and its irony lies in the suggestion that the Army's goals are unachievable.

Next, there is an interview with a former preacher in the Army, in which the officer tells about the crisis of his life – losing his voice. The scene is not exactly played for laughs, but it does present his feelings as something of an overreaction. The incident is construed as a drama of the flesh betraying the spirit, and so presents in another form the tension between the ideal and the real. The final eleven minutes and thirty-three seconds of the film are a long modified interview showing officers preaching to the indigent. Their realist rhetoric contrasts sharply again with the squalor of men's appearance. This, the film implies, is what the battle to save people's souls amounts to, misguided army officers preaching hope to those who are utterly beyond hope.

This analysis of the use of narration, interviews and "interview-type situations" reveals how intricate and subtle are the image/text and intratextual relations in *Blood and Fire*. Like *The Days Before Christmas*, *Blood and Fire* is a diegetic construct. It is an illustrational film and illustrational works necessarily belong to the diegetic mode. While we may be saddened by the authority the photograph possesses – an authority that derives from its power to link a notion with the very stuff of reality itself – this naturalizing of the notional we have discovered in Candid-Eye films is much to be preferred to masking its role, a shortcoming found in mimetic and presentation films, including those of the Drew group.

CHAPTER 6

The Reality Principle: *Goin' Down The Road*

The type of realism that characterizes our documentary cinema is based in photography, and because of its commitment to maintaining the impression that it accurately presents the way reality appears, it is restricted to dealing only with the surfaces of situations and cannot involve itself with the dynamics underlying them. This type of realism – documentary realism – is associated with a consciousness alienated from the dynamics of reality.

In Don Shebib's film *Goin' Down The Road* (1970), we can see the impact that its documentary realist style has on its dramatic structure. This film is a particularly good example for several reasons. First, the film is clearly central to Canadian cinematic tradition; many consider it the first fully mature work of the "New Canadian Cinema." Second, the film looks in parts like a *Candid-Eye* documentary. As cinematographer for the film, Shebib used Richard Leiterman, whose camera style was heavily influenced by his experience in documentary cinema, and specifically in *cinéma-vérité*. Third, in *Goin' Down The Road*, the ideas of exile and alienation (themes belonging to the colonial mentality) are at least implicitly related to the notion of the documentary realist style. And, finally, evidence of the constraining effects of documentary realism is strong in this film, particularly in the filmmaker's repression of the drama's crisis scene.

I must point out before proceeding that this will not be a comprehensive analysis; it will leave many important features of the film undiscussed. My purpose here is to analyze the effects the documentary realist style has had on the dramatic film. Readers should not conclude that the sort of problem that *Goin' Down The Road* exhibits is typical of the narrative filmmaking of English Canada. But in a large portion of English-Canadian narrative films the desire to maintain the appearance of reality is purchased at some cost to the film's dramatic structure.

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What Do Pete and Joey Want?

The Bruce Cockburn song which provides the musical accompaniment for a scene in Don Shebib's *Goin' Down The Road* characterizes those Maritimers typified by Pete and Joey, those "who make the treasure grow" and as "victims of the rainbow." Together the two descriptions focus on the contradiction between human aspirations towards better life and the actual condition of our existence, of being mere objects that perform labour. A similar dichotomy appears when Pete plays a recording of one of Satie's *Gymnopédies* in his cheap boarding-house flat. Pete's interest in the music suggests his awareness (admittedly vague and undefined, but no less real) of a dimension of reality that contrasts sharply with his material existence.

The characters in the drama are caught between these two poles. The film begins with Joey and Pete, disgusted at the oppressive conditions of life in the Maritimes, setting out for self-fulfilment in Toronto.¹ In the terms of our schema, they long to move from being oppressed victims to spiritual and personal self-realization. Even the differing characteristics of the two main characters fall into these two opposing categories. Joey desires material comforts – a home and a television set – while Pete longs for a more spiritual success – the chance to express himself, to realize his potentials, to become more fully human, to leave his mark on the world or, as he puts it, to leave something after him which will tell the world that "Peter McGraw was here."²

The conflict involved in this film, which is a version of the conflict between people's basic drives and the social and economic condition of their existence, is standard fare in realist and naturalistic novels. What is unusual – and something of a problem – is the particular nature of the relation of this dramatic concept to the film's narrative exposition.

That the heart of the film is an opposition that could be developed into a dramatic conflict leads one to assume that the film's structure is dramatic and that its realistic features constitute elements of the film's style which, though not essential to the work's structure, at least are not inconsistent with it. However, this is not the case. It is important to consider the reasons for this, since they have relevance to the central tradition of English-Canadian cinema and are indicative of the limiting nature of that tradition.

We get some inkling about the nature of the problem by considering Shebib's use of the Satie *Gymnopédie*. Not only are the two occasions when this musical selection is played of considerable importance to the film, but similar moments occur in Shebib's other films with such frequency that they have become a part of his "directorial signature." In *Between Friends* (1973), there is a tender love scene of Ellie and Toby entering her bedroom; the raunchy, drunken carousing and singing fades and is replaced with another sound (which like the Satie music, is diegetically rooted, for it comes from a radio) – a section of Puccini's *La Bohème*. And towards the end of *Second Wind*

(1976), there is a moment when Roger takes a break from his running and quietly stares out across Lake Ontario, the natural, environmental sounds fading out as the music again takes over on the soundtrack.

These occasions have common features. All occur in especially troubling times for the characters. Because they are stylistically distinguished from the rest of the film, and because they arrest for a time the forward movement of the plot, all have a contemplative nature. In all cases, too, the individuals are reflecting upon their condition, and something which they touch upon in that reflection imbues them with a particular sort of dignity. Finally, all of them are suggestive and allusive rather than descriptive and explicit – also qualities unusual in a Shebib film.

But suggestive of what? The question is fraught with difficulties. In his careful and insightful essay on Shebib entitled "Men of Vision,"³ Peter Harcourt makes the following remarks about these moments. "It is a quiet moment in the film [*Second Wind*], a speechless moment, the actual significance of which remains unspecified. There is nothing within the context of this sequence to tell us exactly what Roger may be thinking. His face expresses nothing precisely. Yet, helped by the music, such a moment creates a feeling of inwardness, of self-reflection – as if he is weighing up the values of his life." And about another moment in the same film, he writes, "Roger seems ill-at-ease with the party, indeed with his own success, he goes off alone into the boardroom and looks out of a window down onto the cityscape below. This too is a quiet moment, an introspective moment: but the context of the party encourages more precision in our speculation. Surely there must be something more, Roger's face seems to be saying – something that is more difficult, something that will truly challenge him. Successful though he is, *he seems aware of an absence, of something out there*" (emphasis added). About the moment in *Goin' Down The Road* when the Satie music is first played, he states, "there is something ... in the style of the music that represents to Pete the world he has been excluded from – the world of the cultivated, well-to-do middle class. This is the world that allows for contemplation, that provides the leisure in which feelings can be defined." About the second occurrence of the music, he writes, "Peter returns from his job at a bowling alley and puts on the Satie record, as if a reminder of the world they are excluded from. This is the moment of greatest inwardness in the film.... As the music plays we cut from tired face to tired face, each one registering something personal but unspecific." And finally, of the moment in *Between Friends*, he writes "Like the bits of Satie in *Goin' Down The Road*, this music, and the elegance of Ellie's red dress, set this scene apart, as if aware of other values. It is placed in parenthesis in the characters' lives."

Yet despite the insightfulness of Harcourt's comment that Pete's sense of frustration at his impotence and irrelevance is deepened by his inability to define those feelings, there is a tone of indefiniteness to all these comments –

indeed of too great an indefiniteness. They seem to oscillate between describing the longings portrayed in these moments as longings for the bourgeois life and describing them as longings for something more than what even the bourgeois life has to offer. But Harcourt's uncertainty characterizes the film itself. It is unclear from the film whether Pete wants the bourgeois life with its refined music, high-paying jobs, girls with "the biggest knockers," or whether he wants something more – true comradeship and self-fulfilment. His comments that he wants "to do something that matters, something that shows for myself, that says I was here, *Peter McGraw* was here" is similarly vague. The indefiniteness of these moments – which I find to be more a lack of clarity than an enriching ambiguity – very troubling, and it is important to try to explain why.

Ideas and Actions

Even if these moments do not explain themselves, we hope they acquire a clear significance from their context. Such hopes are dashed when we analyze the work, for the work as a whole turns out to possess an identical ambiguity, as we discover if we attempt to identify the central thesis of the work and to specify the relation between this thesis and the work's narrative. The problem here is also reflected in the incidental character of the relation between the work's central thesis (or theses) and its main narrative line. In a key moment, Pete *tells* Joey of a calculation he has made: he has calculated the number of pop bottles the two of them have stacked in the time they have worked in the bottling factory. In a tone that reveals at once both his anger about what he has come to understand and his frustration that this understanding is so limited, he asks Joey what they have to show for all their labour.

Pete has announced one of the film's central ideas – that the labour process in capitalist economies is alienating and thwarts human aspirations for self-realization. The fact that Pete is used here as a mouthpiece for this quasi-Marxist thesis about the nature of the labour process – that this idea is *spoken* rather than *demonstrated* – raises doubts about the extent to which this conceptual material actually becomes part of the flesh and blood of the characters and of the dramatic action.

These doubts increase as we proceed with an analysis of the relation of this central concept to the film's plot line. A dramatic structure which has this thesis as the source of its informing principles would have to meet the following conditions: first, it would define the character's goal as the transcending of economic reality in the fulfilment of the human aspiration for self-realization (this would constitute the character's motivation); secondly, the beginning of the drama would have to establish that the protagonist suffers by being at some distance from that goal (this ensures that there is a less than ideal state of affairs which needs to be transformed, one of the condi-

tions essential for dramatic conflict); and thirdly, there would be a force that thwarts the characters in their attempts to reach their goal (the existence of a countervailing force is another condition for dramatic conflict).

The purpose of stating these conditions (which simply specify how the general conditions that make for dramatic conflict could apply in a limited range of cases) is to provide a schema that can assist us in understanding the relationship between what I shall call, somewhat inelegantly, the "drama-making features" of this work and what, with equal inelegance, I shall call "representational features." But before commenting upon the relation between these two classes of features in *Goin' Down The Road*, I must point out important differences among these various conditions. Obviously, the second of these conditions is of a different sort than the first and third, for while the first and third conditions demand that there be *active* forces capable of generating the dynamic of a drama, the second states that a certain state of affairs must obtain.

This difference helps in providing an account of the qualities which dramatic works may possess. The relative weight given to any one of these factors helps determine the general character of a dramatic work. A drama that places a great weight upon the second condition will tend to be a depiction of a state of affairs. A work that places greater emphasis on the first and third will be more dynamic. Furthermore, when the state of affairs depicted as less than ideal and needing to be transformed closely relates to (or, even, is identified with) people's economic and social environment, the work will have the nature of social drama. And when the depiction of the social environment assumes primacy, and the dynamic, "drama-making forces" are relegated to a secondary position, the work will have that relatively informal, quasi-documental quality which characterizes naturalistic (as opposed to realistic) works.

All of this, of course, rests on the assumption that the story that the film tells concerns two Maritimers struggling to "make it in Toronto." Though this certainly is an aspect of the film – and a very important one – it is only one. The film is also the story of Pete and Joey's friendship, its troubles and its moments of happiness. Many of the film's strongest moments belong to the latter story; the scene on Toronto Island of Pete becoming angry with the "broads yakking"; the scene in the washroom when Joey tells Pete he is getting married; and the scene at the wedding reception, of Joey asking to borrow money from Pete, who already is annoyed and hurt by the "loss" of his male friend to a woman. The relationship between these two stories – the story of two Maritimers trying to make it in Toronto and the story of the vicissitudes of the friendship between the two young men – must be sorted out.

Goin' Down The Road accords relatively little importance to our model's first and third conditions. We are provided with some clues about what Pete desires; he longs both for a more human existence, as is evidenced by his

application for a position in an advertising firm, and for male comradeship, as is evidenced by his jealousy at the intrusion of women into Joey's life. Of Joey's aspirations, we know far less. We have little evidence of any burning desire to change society for the better, to make it accommodate his desires, to leave his mark on it. What he desires, in fact, society can and sometimes does provide – to some people, at least. He wants a home of his own, a television set, money, etc. We feel he could be successful (in his terms) if he could just change himself; he does not need to change society in order to get what he wants. His victimization seems more a result of our economy of scarcity than any lack of identity between the type of rewards society offers and what human beings really need.

The relative importance of the two main characters reflects the comparative weight given to each of our three conditions. Though Pete is invested with greater dramatic potential, Joey is the more important character in the work. Elevating Joey to the more important role reduces the importance of our drama-making conditions and elevates the importance of our second, our representationalist condition. This accounts for the film's documental character.

According to Joey the place of prime importance also affects the film's ideological dimension. For Joey, despite his buffoonery and faint-heartedness, acquires a certain dignity from his ability to accept his situation. One of the tragic costs of Pete's ambition is that it prevents him from attaining any similar dignity. To attain such dignity, he would have to accept willingly the burden of supporting not only himself but also Joey and his wife Betts.⁴ And to do so, he would have to forsake his strongest and most human feeling, his love of male comradeship. He is, then, a tragic figure, for he is caught in a dilemma. Either he forsakes his humanity and acquires dignity or he clings to it and loses nobility. Neither alternative lacks its price. Accordingly, whatever Pete chooses to do will, in the situation, be attended by pain.

The impact of this hierarchization is felt throughout the work. The elevation of the representationalist condition to a primary position drains the story of the characters' struggle to overcome their economic obstacles of its dynamic (dramatic) potential. As a result, only the story of the characters' interpersonal relation invests the film with dramatic strength. Still Shebib could have handled this hierarchization, this lack of drama, in the same way that writers of naturalistic novels do – according priority to the depictive aspects of the work and underplaying its dramatic aspects. But rather than downgrading the dynamic aspects of the story and developing it in the naturalistic mode, he chose to reinvest the work, whose dramatic potential had been attenuated by his choice of theme and of leading character, with the drama of Pete and Joey's relationship.

The film's naturalistic features are integral to the story of the Maritimers' efforts to make it in Toronto, for they are evidence of the less than ideal conditions in which the characters find themselves (and any dramatic work, in

order to initiate dramatic conflict, begins with the demonstration that conditions exist which thwart the protagonist's desires and which, therefore, the protagonist feels compelled to change). But they have no essential dramatic role in the story of the interpersonal conflict. Since they serve no essential dramatic function in the latter story, they stand in danger of becoming mere stylistic accoutrements as the latter story is elevated to the position of the film's primary story. But this alone is not an aesthetic problem. After all, the naturalistic style of many Italian neo-realist films (*Bicycle Thief* is a prime example) is not essential to their structures, for similar narrative structures could be realized in other styles without undergoing any fundamental change. Neo-realists used a naturalistic style primarily to authenticate the fiction, to imbue it with the weight and force of reality, but that style did not determine the structures of those films, which were basically traditional melodramas. What is open to question is whether Shebib successfully resolved the tensions between the demands arising from the use of a naturalistic style and those arising from the dramatic form itself.

The Repressions of the Reality Principle

Characteristic symptoms of problems in resolving such tensions are the gaps created when the demands of one system (the dramatic system or the conceptual system or the stylistic system) are allowed to influence another system for which those demands have no relevance, or a lack of a focal point for the drama. Both can be found in *Goin' Down The Road*. The most extreme example of both is in the way Shebib leads up to the scene of Pete and Joey's robbing a grocery store. What motivation does Shebib provide for committing this crime? There are three possibilities. It might have been motivated by their desire to participate in the feasting and festivities of the Christmas season – something their economic plight would otherwise have prevented them from doing. This would be consistent with the idea that the film revolves around the frustrations the Maritimers feel at being excluded from the world of the Toronto bourgeoisie. Or it might have been motivated by Pete's desire to separate Joey from his wife and to get the two of them back together. This would be consistent with the idea that the film revolves around the frustrations Pete feels at being denied male comradeship. Finally, it might be motivated by a non-specific frustration resulting from both these desires and perhaps from some additional causes. When weighing these alternatives, we discover that the film provides no basis for deciding; the motivation for their action is unclear. The problem emphasizes the difficulties arising from the conflict between the different stories the film tells (and more generally the different systems that inform it). As the motivation for the crime apparently shifts during the final scene from the pair's shared longing to improve their economic conditions and to escape from the dehumanizing situation in which they find themselves to Pete's desire to maintain his close

and exclusive relation with Joey, we see how unsettled the film's dramatic centre is.

If we consider the plot development that precedes the events, we see that they do not establish the possibility – or, at the very least, do not establish the plausibility – that Pete and Joey might commit a crime. Pete has withdrawn into himself and Joey has resigned himself to his situation and, in fact, internalized the role Toronto has provided him with. What could bring them to commit robbery?

The question cannot be answered precisely for there is an hiatus in the narrative. Something which would allow us to understand the action is absent. What conditions produced this absence? What forces repressed the representation of scenes which would have provided the motivation for committing the crime? To answer these questions we are required to imagine what might have prompted the young men to commit their crime and then to discern the dramatic function which the repressed scene(s) would have served. The scene would likely be one of Pete presenting Joey with the idea of the robbery and persuading him to take part. This scene would be the turning point in the drama – at least, in the drama concerning the Maritimers' interpersonal relations – for, once Pete had convinced Joey to participate, the obstacle keeping him from achieving his goal of getting Joey back for himself would have been removed.⁵ What we have here, then, is an example of a work whose crisis scene is missing.

This remarkable repression resulted from the demands of maintaining a realistic surface. Surely it is obvious that the primary insistence of a naturalistic work is for non-hierarchical form; what produces this is the equality of emphasis given both to small details and to grand objects, the concentration on particulars, and the use of an epic-type construction (in which events are concatenated rather than linked in tight cause-and-effect relationships as is usual in realistic works). Clearly articulated dramatic forms are eschewed, because they are structured to conform to the classical ideals of unity and economy of means, because they involve a clear subordination of parts under the control of a leading idea, and because they obviously rely on the steady, progressive development of themes, and these features make them redolent of artifice. The dramatic form is too focused, too determined by its drive towards its central focusing event to be acceptable as naturalism. The epic, with its greater degree of diffuseness, is better suited to the naturalist's ambition to portray, not the grand disasters which befall the tragic hero, but the steady, plodding, wearing pace of daily existence.

Our hypothetical scene would have involved action that bordered on being too intense, too out-of-the-ordinary and too dramatic for a naturalistic work. It was repressed precisely because, as the crisis scene, it would have provided a focal point for the drama. Like the vanishing point in the perspectival system of the Quattrocento or the tonal centre of pre-twentieth century music, the dramatic climax is an axial point which dominates all other

elements of the work. To have included this scene would have made the film's structure evident, thus revealing its artifice. Including it would therefore have destroyed the impression that the film has an epic-like form. By repressing this scene, Shebib maintained the impression the reality presented in the film exists on a single plane and is composed of individual, particular events which have no precise, unambiguous significance.

Moreover, the clarifying powers of including our hypothetical scene would have effected a textual closure, for it would have dispelled any ambiguity surrounding Pete's motivation for committing the crime. Such closure would have three features that would have disrupted or at least disturbed the film's realist illusion. First, it would have thrown the shape of the film into clear relief, revealing its artifice. Secondly, it would have reduced the social dimension of the work, a dimension whose strength must be maintained in order to place equal emphasis on character and environment – a feature essential for demonstrating the inseparability of motivation and setting that is so indispensable a notion in the naturalist's credo. Finally, it would have revealed that the determinants of the film's form lie in a body of thought about human character and motivation rather than in the demands that arise from the task of conducting a scrutiny of reality.

In *Goin' Down The Road*, there are two dramatic systems. One concerns the conflict between Pete and Joey; the other concerns their shared struggle to achieve a better life, to find a place for themselves in a society that shuts them out. The latter story begs for a naturalistic treatment, while such features play no essential role in the former story, which, in fact, begs for a non-naturalistic treatment. The film is torn between these demands – hence, the problematic repression. The two sets of demands conflict with one another, and the one set of demands – for sustaining the realist (actuality) illusion essential to the naturalist's endeavour – finally creates a rupture in the dramatic form.

In order to secure the realistic (actuality) quality of the work, Shebib repressed a scene which would too clearly reveal the interpersonal dynamic behind Pete's behaviour. That omission sustains the impression that social and economic pressures prompted the crime. It introduces an appearance of ambiguity and results in our apparent lack of closure that resembles the openness of naturalistic work. That the openness of *Goin' Down The Road's* dramatic form is merely an illusion is demonstrated by the need the filmmakers must have felt to repress the interpersonal dynamic motivating the crime, since that need demonstrates that the two motivations cannot co-exist. No true ambiguity surrounds the motivation for Pete's behaviour. Rather, his motivation is indeterminately situated between two conflicting textual systems, each of which suggests a motivation incompatible with that suggested by the other.

Why would the filmmakers have felt compelled to sustain this realistic illusion (and naturalistic form) when it is essential to neither of the film's

narratives and downright harmful to that story which is the film's primary source of drama? The only possible answer is apparently that this choice conforms with the dominant style of English-Canadian cinema, the empirical style. The dominating power of this is testified to by films such as this, in which the style has so hardened as to become unquestionable, to seem so natural it is used even when it is out of place.

The Non-Empirical Cinema of Quebec

The French-Canadian film *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971), one of the most popular and highly acclaimed Canadian films, was received in English Canada as a realistic, quasi-documentary work. Its reception was influenced by the horizon of expectations established by the history of English-Canadian filmmaking and, more generally, by English-Canadian culture. While it was discussed as having features similar to *Goin' Down The Road* (which truly is a quasi-documentary), in fact the structuring principles of *Mon Oncle Antoine* are very different. Rather than attempting to present a likeness of reality, it is committed to incarnating a dramatic conflict that illustrates a body of ideas.

Most of the critical response to Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* has tried to demonstrate that the film belongs within the mainstream of Canadian filmmaking. According to those promulgating this view, the film can be considered as a fictionalized documentary which makes use of a transparent and rather insignificant narrative of an adolescent boy's sexual, moral and social awakening to "document" life in a small village in Quebec. The charm of the film is, in this view, said to lie in the exquisitely sensitive and somewhat ironic portrait of small-town life in French Canada, that is, in the documentary aspect of the film, an aspect of filmmaking in which Canadian films have traditionally excelled.

This interpretation has two very serious shortcomings: first, it fails to take into account the thematic significance of the time and place in which the film is set; second and more serious, since this interpretation considers the merit of the film to lie primarily in its documentary aspects and views the narrative only as a means of binding it together and extending the significance of the various tableaux depicting life in the small village, it underestimates the importance of narrative in the film. The most explicit statement of this view was made by no less a critic than American Herman Weinberg (though similar statements were made by many anglophone Canadian commentators), who speaks of *Mon Oncle Antoine* as though its value lay in its documentary aspect and says that he regrets the filmmaker's decision to graft a narrative onto the work. I would argue that when the film is properly considered, its many tableaux are seen to be related in a subtle and complex progression which carries forward a narrative whose significance, far from being of secondary interest in the film, is its central focus.

The film's time ("not too long ago") is clearly the 1940s and 1950s during the premiership of Duplessis; the place is shown as "the country of Quebec,

in the asbestos mining area." Both time and place are associated with the Quiet Revolution and the strikes at the asbestos mines which led to the downfall of a corrupt government.

The political implications of the work are evident in the action of Jos Poulin leaving his family to return to the woods (as did many disillusioned Quebecers) and the story of Benoit's awakening to the conditions around him. He shows his contempt for authority, for religion, for the hypocritical social conventions of his elders and for the deceptions of those in power by rebelling against all authority.

His reactions result from his recognition of the differences between what seems to be and what truly is. All his actions result from this knowledge. The events in the film – the funeral, the trip with the coffin, pelting the boss with snowballs, his relations with Carmen and Antoine are all part of the narrative thread.

We can read in the narrative of *Mon Oncle Antoine* a meaning of considerable import. Far from being, as the majority of critics have suggested, merely a means of binding the film together or of extending the significance of the document, the narrative is the central focus of the film. The documentary aspects of the work do not absorb but rather are absorbed by the narrative. To conclude from the fact that the film has a realistic texture that the film is a documentary, albeit a fictionalized documentary, is to ignore the intricate dramatic progression in the series of tableaux presented to the viewer. The reason for this repression has everything to do with horizons of expectations established by the main tradition of feature filmmaking in English Canada.

The Problems of the Empirical Style

Certain Canadian films have suffered from the inability to reconcile features of the empirical style which dominates the Canadian film tradition with those other systems (kinetic, visual, semiotic, colouristic, dramatic) which inform the work's text.⁶ One point remains to be clarified, and that is why a style which is founded on an empiricistic system of representation is so constricting – why, rather than working in concert with those other systems as a tension-evoking device, it restricts the work's ability to modulate tension.

The first clue has already been presented. The fact that the empirical system – which comprises a number of subsystems, such as a colour system, a volumetric system, a perspectival system, several interlocking systems governing the exchange of shots – creates patterns of interference with those other systems that constitute the work's "text"⁷ should be sufficient to establish that the problem is one of contradictory demands being exerted by the various systems. The problem with which we are dealing, then, can be translated into the problem of determining the condition under which vari-

ous systems can co-exist in an artwork so as to mutually support each other. After all, we might raise the objection that the colour system and the fictive system interrelating the poles of technology and nature in Antonioni's *The Red Desert* (1964) interact with one another in a mutually enhancing fashion, since each actually increases the other's capacity to modulate tension. Why should the empirical system and other systems not interact in the same way?

In responding to this objection, we suggest that the empirical system and the highest-level system regulating a work's internal relations are both "totalistic systems," both need to control every feature of the work. It might be argued that systems can co-exist only when they act on distinct feature-domains (as when, for example, one system regulates the use of colour, another the use of volume). Clearly, totalistic systems cannot operate on distinct feature-domains.

This view seems to me to be only partially true. For one thing, domains on which the various systems that order the work's internal relations are, in fact, rarely distinct. Even in the example of Antonioni's *The Red Desert*, the colour system and the fictive system (which relies on an opposition between technology and nature) are not distinct, inasmuch as one means of contrasting the opposing poles of technology and nature depends on Antonioni's use of colour – natural objects always appear in earth tones, in warm blues and greens mostly, while technological objects appear in cold, hard, synthetic colours.

Obviously any claim that states that, whenever different systems operate on the same feature-domains, debilitating conflicts must inevitably result, is far too sweeping. Claims about difficulties arising from conflicts between different systems in a text must be stated more precisely. And to make our claims more precise, we must begin with a few basic considerations.

Artworks modulate tension. The possibility of some property modulating tension depends upon the possibility of creating different levels of tension by employing that property in different ways or in different relations. A property (or feature-domain) is capable of creating different levels of tension only if it is (theoretically) possible to order those elements associated with that feature, and those relations into which that property can enter, into a hierarchy on the basis of their capacity to cause tension.

An example from music will help make the point clear. The pitch elements of any tonality can be ordered into a hierarchy on the basis of the degree of restlessness or reposefulness the various pitches possess within a certain tonality, the degree of tension which they evoke. A musical composition will modulate tension by ordering pitch elements into progressive, regressive, static or erratic tensional patterns.

Expressing this idea in another way, often the modulation of tension in an artwork depends upon the articulation of contrasts: the greater the degree of contrast between two elements, the greater the tension evoked. For there to be a variety of levels of tension (something necessary if tension is to be

modulated), it must be possible to order the work's material relations into a hierarchy with respect to the property that creates the contrast. The elements of art, therefore, can be ordered into a hierarchy with respect to those properties that enter into relations of contrast: lines can be ordered with respect to their rectilinearity, for example, colours with respect to their saturation, or textures with respect to their matte. Only because such a hierarchization is possible do these graphic elements possess aesthetic potential.

These properties all share one condition. Neither singly nor in combination with one another are they, in themselves, sufficient for the formation of a structural complex. They must be spatially embodied (or, in the case of music relations, temporally embodied). One could say that spatial or temporal structure is an essential aspect of all these relations formed from these features.

The example of *The Red Desert* points up a related and very crucial difference between the "representational" system and the textual systems that regulate non-representational systems. Both sets of systems are anti-narrative or, at least, quasi-narrative. It is this that permits the stylization of the fictive system based on the opposition of the worlds of nature and technology and it is just this polarization that allows the colour system to be so formalized. Were *The Red Desert* just the story of a woman in crisis (as Dwight MacDonald believed it to be), then the colour coding Antonioni developed would have been inappropriate. Only Antonioni's stylization of the opposition of the realm of nature and the realm of technology legitimizes his use of colour.

As this example points out, there is a fundamental difference in the role of those systems that control features intrinsic to the artwork (its "internal relations") and representational systems (systems concerned with reference to features extrinsic to the work). Representational systems are not freely variable, but are determined by demands arising from the attempt to construct a set of structures which are homologous with those of the real world. Systems governing a work's internal relations are not constrained by demands arising from the need to maintain a resemblance to the real.

We must strive to achieve clarity about this difference. Recent developments in aesthetic theory make this particularly important. The mainstream of aesthetic thought of this century has held that a work of art consists of a material construction whose perceptual form evokes a highly structured, highly complex pattern of modulated tension. What properties must the relations between the material elements and the elements in the relationship have if their form is to evoke such a complex and highly structured pattern of tensional modulations? One requirement is that relationships exhibit that property logicians refer to as "connexity." (A complex of related elements is said to exhibit the property of connexity when, between any arbitrary set of elements in the field, the same relationship exists.) This property ensures that, given a set of elements, there will be a possible ordering to which all the elements belong.

Furthermore, insofar as the tensional features of works of art are generally dependent upon the articulation of contrasts between elements, if the contrasts are to admit of determinate and controllable variations, then the elements will have to be such that they can be arranged into a serial hierarchy with respect to a certain quality (as series of musical pitches can be arranged in a series, each being higher than the other). This affords the possibility of creating complex, determinate and intelligible structures using these elements.

It is possible to create works possessing a degree of autotelicity only to the same extent as it is possible to articulate the sensuous properties of material of which the work is constructed. (The autotelicity of a work depends upon the extent to which a work's structure is determined by considerations of factors intrinsic to the work itself rather than by such extrinsic considerations as the relationship of the work of art to reality.) In the spatial arts, such as photography, the various degrees of colour saturation or the various weights of visual forms or the various curvilinearities of lines allow for such possibilities. However, the impossibility of realizing aesthetic structures which are based purely on any of these properties forces us to recognize that there is a third requirement which relationships must fulfil to be of a nature that can be termed aesthetic.

One quality upon which the success or failure of any work of art depends is the satisfactoriness of the artist's solution to the problems of creating relationships among the elements of any given order such that the relationships can enter into relations of a supra-order in which all the relationships of all the infra-orders mutually reinforce one another and which itself constitutes a single all-comprehending whole. This third requirement is that subordinate structures must enter into what I call an "essentialistically comprehensive," superordinate structure that organizes, in tensionally interesting patterns, all essential properties of the work's material.

The Limitations of the Reality Principle

This leads us directly to the heart of the aesthetic difficulties posed by empirical forms. Perhaps the best way of describing the nature of the problem is to consider the impulse towards the formalization of spatial relationships which has been typical of much recent art. By reducing space to a purely formal quality, the spatial elements of the superordinate, all-comprehending form can be made subject to the same kind of determining principle as any other sensuous property. Thus, consistent with the widespread tendency towards the use of non-hierarchical forms, one mainstream of recent art has made the spatial and temporal features of the work subject to precisely the same sort of determining principles as those which inform the structures regulating other sensuous qualities of the work. As a result, the problem of integrating other sensuous features with the work's spatial and temporal forms ceased to be a problem of integration of different structural orders.

This total formalization of an artwork accomplished by eliminating or greatly reducing the difference between the various structural orders of a work of art is only one – even if the most radical – solution to the problem of creating a totally integrated, all-comprehending superordinate form. In fact, the preservation of the different qualities of the various orders has potential aesthetic value, for it affords the possibility of establishing contrasts between the different qualities of these different orders. However, this aesthetic potential can be realized only when the inherently non-representational sensuous qualities themselves can be independently varied, as it is only under this condition that purely aesthetic factors (loosely, factors relating to creating and modulating tension) can determine these relationships. When the spatial field is not formalized, but is determined by considerations of representational fidelity, then the challenge in making a (unified) work of art becomes one of creating a single, all-comprehending superordinate form from orders which are subject to determinations of two quite different sorts, those of the representational system and those that determine the formalized relations. And since these two sets of demands tend to be incompatible, solutions to the problem tend to be tentative, unstable, and fraught with difficulty.

This is the case because the demands of representation tend to introduce certain distortions into the abstract schema and to vitiate their capacity to elicit tension; demands arising from the representational system conflict with demands arising from the formal system in such a way that the potential of the formal system is never fully realized and the holistic form is not as rich as it might be. Thus, the formal system may require that a strong, processive colour be used at some point (perhaps to balance surrounding recessive colours), while the representational system will demand that, for example, blue (generally, a recessive colour) be used. Or a rhythm of processive and recessive volumes alternating with one another across a canvas may demand a processive volume at some point, while the system of linear perspective (imposed by the representational system) may demand a recessive volume. Furthermore, to whatever extent the demand for spatial fidelity determines the articulation of the spatial field, to that same extent the determination of spatial field will be subject to non-aesthetic factors. The empirical style elevates the representational fidelity to such dominance that the verisimilitude of the spatial field becomes so overriding a principle that it precludes, or at least inhibits, the free and independent viability of all the medium's sensuous properties.

This is not to argue that non-referentiality is the ideal condition for an artwork. Obviously, categories of complexity can arise in the interaction of representational features and formally determined features – between, that is to say, mimetically based and materially based forms of construction. But I do believe I have demonstrated that these interactions are extremely vulnerable to problems of dissonances resulting from the interaction of the two orders.

Still, these problems are more problems of degree than they are absolute problems. The greater its degree of realism, the more the work's style determines what decisions must be made for the handling of the work's sensuous properties and the greater the degree of difficulty in constructing a formal system which permits a sufficient scope in the free variability of the medium's sensuous properties. And certainly, among realisms, the realism of the Canadian feature cinema and much of the Canadian documentary cinema is one of the most debilitating, for it is one of the most empirically determined. This realism is rooted in the photograph.

CHAPTER 7

Modes of Representation in Cinema

The claim that the value of a work of art is enhanced by achieving a great complexity in its internal relations using only modest means relies on the insight that an artwork has a systematic aspect, that the elaboration of its surface elements and relations is guided by a few basic principles or rules. In this chapter, we will look at the relationship between a work's diverse surface elements and the unifying rules that govern them in order to assess the aesthetic potential of realism.

We will approach this issue through the concept of style. What constitutes style is the artist's total set of choices for all the features of a work of art. (Some of these choices are effective rather than actual choices; artists do not actually realize that they have chosen some options. Sometimes choices are made for artists by certain historical conventions; others do not present themselves to their consciousness, either because they possess an incomplete understanding of all the possibilities of the materials they are working with or simply because the possibilities do not fall within the range of the artists' concerns in any particular work.) In analyzing the problems of style, we must deal with two features: first, the range of choices for any specific feature, or any sensuous property, of a medium; and second, the possible interrelations among the choices for the different features.

The range of possibilities for any feature of an artwork is defined by the material of its medium, which presents a number of possibilities that can be either chosen or not chosen. For example, in the case of coloured media, we can conceive of a choice of colour for a given area of some work as the decision to use or not to use red, to use or not use green. This is equivalent to the claim that the feature chosen is, in semiotic terms, paradigmatically related to others that could take its place within the set of relationships among signifiers it comes to occupy. These decisions amount to a set of for-or-against choices, which suggests that we can use a polar model in our analyses, for any possible feature of an artwork can be conceived of as ranging along an axis whose poles are defined by its two extremities. For if degrees of homogeneity of local colour areas range along an axis, one pole represents

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completely flat and unvaried areas of local colour and the other, local areas which are deeply modulated – to the extent of containing radically different hues and chromas. Between these poles, there is a continuum of possibilities.

The choices artists make regarding one feature of a work may affect, or even determine, their choices regarding another. The choice about the extent of the variation in colour within a local area would be affected by an artist's decisions about the spatial characteristics of the work. For example, the decision to create a moulded surface would demand that local colour areas be modulated.

A medium's sensuous features may be ranked into a loose hierarchy,¹ since the choices for some features of the work affect or determine the range of choices that can be made for certain other features, even though they are not in turn influenced by those choices they themselves affect.

The Cinema of Presentation, The Cinema of Illustration, The Cinema of Construction

In our discussion of cinematic modes of representation, we are concerned only with the range of possibilities that lie along the axis that has, as one of its poles, the style determined by the demands of creating a resemblance of reality, and, as its other, the style determined by relations that are wholly immanent in a work, relations that involve no reference to the real world. Somewhere in between these two poles is a point representing the style that is determined by the demands of illustrating a body of thought. (Throughout much of the history of art, this body of thought has consisted mainly of views about human motivation and human behaviour or about a human's relation to a deity or deities, though in recent times conceptual structures deriving from mathematics, linguistics and information theory have found a prominent place.) We will be dealing in detail, therefore, with a single aspect of the total complex that constitutes style, namely, with the relation between a film's style and the real world.

This axis ranks very high in the hierarchical order of the features of the film medium and influences almost all other aspects of the work. In fact, the determining effects of the points along that axis are so pervasive and so thoroughgoing that each point on the axis virtually constitutes a mode of cinema. The first mode, constituted by the demands of creating a resemblance of reality, we shall call the cinema of presentation. The mode represented by the mid-point of the axis and constituted by the demands of illustrating a body of thought we shall call the cinema of illustration. And the mode represented by the other pole and constituted by the demands of constructing a nexus of internal relations we shall call the cinema of construction. In this chapter we shall focus on the differences between the cinema of presentation and the cinema of illustration and consider the cinema of construction only to highlight aspects of the other two cinematic modes.

A Paradigmatic Contrast

To point out the differences between the cinema of presentation and the cinema of illustration, we can look at how an argument between two individuals might be filmed in each mode, specifically, how the moment when a second person becomes provoked into making a retort would be presented. A director of the classic era of Hollywood film (roughly 1935-1945) would probably use a master-scene followed by a series of close-up shots which would be cut together on the shot/reverse-shot patterns, with possibly a medium shot in between. The change from shot to shot would be cued by the evolution of the dramatic action. Suppose that at one moment, the dramatic centre shifts from one person hurling an insult, to another person, who is called upon to respond. Here a cut would occur; indeed, the change of shot might ever so slightly anticipate the second character's verbal expression of his anger, presenting us first with the angry expression on his face and then his verbal retort.

In an American *cinéma-vérité* film of the early 1960s² (in a hypothetical film by an hypothetical member of the Drew group, for example), a pan rather than a cut would most likely be used to articulate the shift of the dramatic centre from one individual to the other. This pan would probably not be as precisely co-ordinated with the shift of the dramatic centre; in fact, in all probability, it would follow rather than precede the interruption by the second character.

What can be inferred from the differences in the two ways of filming this incident? The classical Hollywood construction depends upon a process of first dividing the profilmic event into parts and then of recombining these cinematic units. The form into which these units are synthesized depends primarily on the dramatic structure of the passage. A principle of transformation is implicit in the process that determines how the selection and arrangement of units in the resulting syntagma differs from the order and combination of details in the actual incident. This principle effects a rupture of the diegesis from reality that frees the film's structure from determination exclusively by mimetic concerns and brings it under the control of an informing principle, the character of which is determined both by the demands of articulating a body of thought in concrete photographic images and sounds (the materials filmmakers use) and by demands that result from conventions of the film's period. (Since the final sort of determination falls outside the scope of our inquiry, we shall, despite its obvious interest, exclude it from consideration.)

We can explain this simple example in the following way. The structure of the sequence is based on an understanding of human psychology.³ For example, if it appeared in a certain context, the passage could illustrate that aggressive acts serve to protect those who commit them from humiliation.

Not only would this be conveyed by what is commonly referred to (metaphorically, I presume) as the "content" of the passage, it would also be reflected in the very structure of the passage. The fragmentation of the proflmic event, the synthesis of the cinematic units, the angle from which the shots are taken, the placement of the cut in relation to the insult, for example, would be determined (in part) by the demands of illustrating this understanding of human behaviour.

The second method of presenting the incident, the one typical of *cinéma-vérité* documentaries such as those which were made by members of Drew's group, suggests something quite different. The imprecise coordination between changes in the camera's field of view and shifts in the dramatic focus, the use of the hand-held camera to facilitate rapid changes of field, and the use of continuous sequence-shots rather than of sequences involving an intricate synthesis of a number of precisely defined cinematic units imply that the events represented unfold beyond the filmmaker's control. The purpose of including this suggestion is to bolster the claims for the authenticity of the representation.⁴ Because this *cinéma-vérité* film is committed to the ideal of authenticity, the forms it employs are shaped by the demand for representational accuracy.

That the proflmic event is not under the filmmaker's control and that the film's style is informed by the demand for authenticity (for an unmanipulated depiction of reality) suggest the film is not designed to illustrate an already formulated view of reality. We are shown the product of the filmmaker's exploration of reality, a reality which, inasmuch as it is not controlled, is not tamed by a conceptual understanding. Reality is presented as complex and ambiguous.

The panning and zooming movements of the camera so prominent in this kind of cinema convey yet another impression. This is perhaps best explained by considering an example from an actual work. (Though the sequence is from a film of the illustrational mode, the device we will focus on is really typical of the cinema of presentation.) In Canadian documentarian Terence Macartney-Filgate's *The Back-Breaking Leaf*, there is an interview with a tobacco-picker, during which the worker is asked if tobacco-picking is hard work. The picker boasts that he finds the work easy, but as he does the camera's field of view closes in on him to show his face twitching anxiously, revealing that he is not being entirely honest.

The use of camera movements to disclose a particularly revealing detail is a common feature of *cinéma-vérité*, both in North America and in France.⁵ Though this device is a close relative of commentative montage, it differs in important ways from that form of construction. Commentative montage usually involves a reference to an object which lies outside the diegesis containing the event or person upon which it comments; hence, it gives evidence of its intellectual origins. When it is a camera movement that

discovers a commentative detail, the integrity of the diegesis is maintained; this is why when a camera movement (rather than a cut) is used to present the commenting object, we feel assured that the object really is a part of the diegesis. This naturalizes the commentative detail, for it removes it from the intellectual realm and places it in the real world. Oftentimes, this creates an ironic effect by suggesting that discontinuities of the very sort that exist between facts and sarcastic (or, more generally, simply humorous) comments obtain in the order of nature itself.

The subjective dimension, or the witness character, of *cinéma-vérité* films gives this sort of camera movement another significance. In *cinéma-vérité* films, the moving camera seems to scrutinize the surfaces of reality, to be engaged in a quest for something that will dispel the ambiguity that surrounds the real, to be seeking for something that will consolidate the filmmaker's and the viewer's understanding of what is depicted. In short, it seems to be looking for a revealing detail. Thus, a search-and-discovery formation is embedded in the film's micromorphological structures (the structural form of small parts or local areas within a work of art). This itself is significant: as we shall see when we come to consider the work of early American documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty, this related structure informs the macromorphology (the overall shape) of many films belonging to the presentational mode.

A Contrast of Epistemologies

The ambiguity and uncertainty that attends so many films of the cinema of presentation follows from the epistemological assumptions underlying this mode, which are quite different from the assumptions which underlie the illustrative mode. In the cinema of illustration, the interplay between close shots (which often provide information about a character's motivations) and long shots (which often present action resulting from these motivations) mirrors the relation between will and overt behaviour. The conception of a causal relation between psychological states and behaviour which undergirds this editorial structure implies a coherence of a sort that can be achieved only in conceptualizations of the inner dynamics of behaviour; indeed, the very idea of will is a conceptual construct, since no such entity as the will is ever directly experienced. It is this conceptualization, or model, that determines the form used to present human actions. Indeed, it is just because this sort of cutting pattern illustrates a model of human behaviour that I refer to such formations as illustrative.

The cinema of presentation proposes an epistemology that is more descriptive than analytic. The descriptive quality of this mode of cinema is nowhere in greater evidence than in its avoidance of conceptually based structures. The cinema of presentation eschews concepts that extend our inquiry beyond the immediately observable. In films of this mode, we simply

observe characters' behaviour; we are not presented with suggestions about why they behave as they do. Its exponents claim that asking about motivation or about reality's inner dynamics carries us beyond the limits of what we can observe, beyond the limits of certainty, and into the realm of speculation. Because this mode of cinema adheres so resolutely to what we can know through observation, we can safely say that the stance assumed by the cinema of presentation is empirical.

The empiricism of the cinema of presentation is confirmed by its evidential character. This mode of cinema accepts claims for the cognitive importance of mimeticism. We should not overlook how recent this belief is. Plato's condemnation of art was based in the belief that works of art, being mimetic, trade in mere appearances and thus cannot be a source of knowledge. Even the aestheticians of the Romantic movement, who admitted that art has noetic significance, claimed that insights provided by a work of art do not derive from its representational character. Only with the rise of philosophical positivism did claims for the cognitive significance of mimeticism gain much acceptance.

Photography serves well as a paradigm for mimeticism's cognitive claims.⁶ It is hardly surprising that, as Susan Sontag has pointed out,⁷ the sort of photography most commonly prized presents not Beauty but Truth. But what is it that a photograph proposes as a form of cognition? Certainly, it is not anything like what has traditionally been understood as knowledge, for knowledge has always been thought to require analysis, reflection, and organization – to demand that details be subsumed under general explanatory principles. A photograph, however, merely presents a plethora of unsorted facts, as they are before being analyzed and classified using conceptual tools. As a medium, photography provides merely a stockpile of impressions not at all unlike that which, thoroughgoing empiricists claim, constitutes the contents of the human mind. The similarity of the empiricists' conception of the human mind as a theatre of impressions and the cinema as showplace of illusions is too obvious to be missed (and we know that cine-empiricists have not missed it). Small wonder, then, that advocates of the cinema of presentation, such as Amédée Ayfré, expound a type of phenomenism, or that the forms which the cinema of presentation assumes reflect this same view.

The empiricism of the cinema of presentation holds that human insight is severely restricted in its range.⁸ Thus, an extraordinary number of English-Canadian documentary films (though not Candid-Eye films) trade in tensions which arise from lack of conformity between the questions the films propose and the methods they use for inquiring into those questions. These tensions are organized in a variety of forms. All of them, though, begin with a question, a riddle, or an enigma – What was Norman Bethune really like? is posed in Brittain's *Bethune* (1974) or What is man that a machine is not? is the question in Koenig and Kroiter's *The Living Machine* (1961). They then proceed to demonstrate that the question is unanswerable using empirical

methods. And those are the only methods of inquiry these films acknowledge. The variety of these modes of organization results from the different means used to demonstrate the unanswerability (in empirical terms) of the initial question.

One mode, exemplified by *Bethune*, depends upon the use of a number of commentators who collectively present conflicting ways of thinking about a question. In these films, any strategies or forms that might imply that one viewpoint is to be preferred to another are avoided.⁹ *Bethune*, for example, presents us with various viewpoints of Norman Bethune's character and the reason he rejected his privileged background and even his *grand-bourgeois* rebelliousness to dedicate himself to, and ultimately to sacrifice himself for, the cause of the common people of China. But in the end, none of the accounts seems satisfactory. The question of what Bethune discovered in China that so profoundly transformed him remains a mystery, and any conjecture about its nature is shown to be as only as good as the next. This creates the impression that all forms of understanding can be reduced to opinion or belief. The relativity of truth, of course, is a linchpin of empirical philosophy.

A related form of organization, exemplified by Colin Low's *City of Gold* (1957) and Wolf Koenig's *The Days of Whiskey Gap* (1961), depends upon casting the film's narrator in the role of *histor*, a person who sifts through historical documents (diaries, journals, historical relics, newspaper reports) in an attempt to discover a clue to answering the question upon which the film is based. These films usually end up demonstrating that one consequence of the evidential character of documents, their being constituted by facts that are immutable to our will and indifferent to our questioning, renders them intractable to inquiry. Thus *The Days of Whiskey Gap* provides us with ample evidence in support of the claim that Canadians have a different attitude towards law than Americans do, but does not provide us with explanations why this is so. It implies, in fact, that it is impossible now to discover what led to this difference.

A third form, similar in many respects to the second and also exemplified by Colin Low's *City of Gold*, involves the attempt to use photographs in an effort to decipher the past. Films of this form rely on the belief that a photograph's iconography is a product of a particular *milieu* and, hence, that the understanding of that iconography will disclose something of that *milieu*. These films generally conclude by demonstrating that the past imbedded in a photograph is obscured by the forcefulness with which the photograph asserts itself as belonging to the present, and that the clues to the past lie more in the absences towards which the photograph points (but which they never capture) than in the abundant and precise detail that constitutes the photograph's major attraction, more in the events which led up to making the photograph than in the events it actually depicts.¹⁰ Accordingly, it is films of this mode which most clearly present the limitations of

empiricism, for typically they culminate in the discovery of a dilemma which subverts not just the film's program of inquiry but the very type of cognition which a photograph embodies.¹¹ In *City of Gold*, for example, Colin Low asks what kept the men of the Yukon Gold Rush going when it became clear that no more fortunes were to be made and concludes that the question leads us to a mystery.

Here another of the characteristics of the cinema of presentation comes into evidence. Some films of this mode exploit the photographic image's richness of detail to evoke a feeling of nostalgia, while others exploit the temporality inscribed in a photograph to evoke a feeling of loss. In either case, the films merely trade in the emotions elicited by these features of a photograph. Structures are seldom developed to organize, to say nothing of revealing (of "foregrounding," in Makarovsky's terminology), the material properties and structures of the photographs which elicit these feelings.

The lack of such structures is a defining characteristic of the cinema of presentation. To understand why, we can compare one of these films with a pair of works from the cinema of construction, Canadian filmmaker/artist Michael Snow's *One Second in Montreal* (1969) and American filmmaker Hollis Frampton's *Hapax Legomena Part I (nostalgia)* (1971).

These two films, like the NFB films we have been discussing, are based on ideas about still photography or, more exactly, about still photographs that are incorporated in a film. But what differentiates these films from those is their exclusive reliance on features of the photographic and cinematographic imagery to provide the basis of their structures. In *One Second in Montreal*, the feature of filmic imagery Snow relies on is the temporality inscribed in them, and *One Second in Montreal's* formal construction depends entirely on Snow's understanding of filmic temporality. To make *One Second in Montreal*, Snow first took thirty-one still photographs – all of which are marked by a poverty of form but a richness of allusion to events beyond the spatial and temporal frame of the photograph – then transposed them, by rephotographing them with a movie camera, to film. Each still appears in the film for a protracted period, the exact length of which depends upon where that particular photograph appears in the film. The first photograph appears for a relatively short period, then each of the next few succeeding photographs – up to half the number of photographs that appear in the film – is held for a longer period until, after half the photographs have been shown, each succeeding photograph is presented for a shorter period. As in Andy Warhol's films, the prolonged, non-moving image deflects attention to the material processes of recording and projection, to the flow of the celluloid strip through the projector and, hence, to cinema's temporality. The awareness of the flow of time it thus encourages, along with its allusions to events other than those represented, make us anticipate events that might succeed those depicted. Accordingly, the form of the film derives from features that temporal events share with narrative events (in fact, it derives from the profound

insight that all temporal experience is narrative in character).

Similarly, the form of Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*) derives from the anticipation and recollection provoked by the narrative armature. The film presents a series of twelve still photographs, accompanied by a sound track which comments on the succeeding photograph in the series. This displacement of the verbal description provokes the mind to a forward-and-backward-looking activity, as we anticipate an image when listening to its description or recollect the description of the image when viewing it. This tension between a forward-looking and a backward-looking regard is similar to that conditioned by a narrative.¹² Furthermore, the descriptions of the photographs Frampton offers link narrative to features inherent in still photographs, since the descriptions collectively present a catalogue of ways of "reading" a photograph, many of which are based on the narrative. (Those which are not so based are derived from the methodologies which dominate art criticism: there is an hilarious "Panofskian" commentary on the religious iconography in a photograph of a two-seater outhouse and a gently mocking Greenbergian analysis of an image of grapefruit lying in a flooded field.) The tentativeness of the descriptions, which for the most part are presented as conjectures or as incomplete and inadequate recollections, reveals the insuperable difficulties of anticipating the future (whose only certainty, as the narration suggests, is that our death lies ahead of us) or of recovering the past (as well as making an allusion to the mystery with which a photograph confronts us).¹³ This aspect of the descriptions constitutes a comment upon the feeling of uncertainty which the narrative strives to evoke by its retrospective and anticipatory devices.

The characteristic difference between the cinema of presentation (of which some of the works of the NFB's Unit B are examples) and the cinema of construction (which the films of Snow and Frampton exemplify) revolves around the difference between using the material features of the cinema for emotional effect and using the material features of the cinema as the basis for the film's structure. *City of Gold*, our example of cinema of presentation, simply uses photographs to evoke the sentiments of nostalgia, mystery, and contemplation. *One Second in Montreal* and (*nostalgia*), on the other hand, develop structures that formalize the features of the work which evoke those sentiments. Thus, the cinema of construction takes what in the cinema of presentation is unconscious and unformed, raises it to the level of consciousness, and brings it under formal control.¹⁴

There remains one final form of organization which is based on the inability of photographic and cinematic imagery to answer questions of a certain kind. This form, exemplified by Koenig and Kroiter's *The Living Machine*, depends on posing questions that raise the ultimate riddles of existence.¹⁵ The empirical tools the filmmakers employ fail to unravel the questions they set out to untangle and, out of this failure, a quality of mystery develops. It is this quality of mystery Peter Harcourt was responding to when he spoke of

Unit B films as possessing "the quality of suspended judgment, of something left open at the end, something undecided."¹⁶

This form of film simply exploits the capacity of the photographic image's factual character, the fact that it seems nobly indifferent to our will and loftily indifferent to our desires and that it remains mute when we question it. Even more unfortunate is the way it exploits the capacity of riddles to intrigue us and to arouse our curiosity. Great art never achieves its ends through riddles; it achieves them through a rigorous clarity of organization.

All four of these modes of organization employ forms that depend upon an empirical turn of thought, for they reveal the radical limitations of knowledge in order to open the doors to belief. The *ethos* of these films relies on an image of human beings common in the writings of empirical philosophers, an image of human beings as enormously limited in their powers to understand the cosmos, bewildered and sustained by faith alone. Though this is not a very progressive image, it is one that has been expressed, and indeed implicitly condoned, not just by quite a number of English-Canadian documentaries, but generally by many Canadian films belonging to the presentational mode.

The Search-and-Discovery Structure in the Cinema of Presentation

While discussing the implications of the two ways of presenting an exchange between two people, we considered how some of the micromorphological structures characteristic of the cinema of presentation reflect a lower degree of preconception than do those typical of the cinema of illustration. Differences in the macromorphological structures employed in these two kinds of cinema reflect the same difference. The macromorphological structures typical of the cinema of illustration are teleological in nature – that is, they articulate a steady development towards a climax. The evenness of the progression towards the climax suggests that, in this mode of cinema, the conclusion of the work is known in advance. The cinema of presentation uses macromorphological structures of a different sort. Their nature is clear in the major works of Robert Flaherty, an American filmmaker who spent much of his childhood in Canada.

Flaherty's films present the daily life of people of various civilizations. This examination, however, is merely propaedeutic to the truly significant moment of the anthropological inquiry which they chronicle, the moment that reveals the real truth about life in that civilization – namely, that life is a struggle for survival. This is what is revealed by the seal hunt in his *Nanook of the North* (1922), the tattooing ordeal in *Moana* (1926), and the whale-fishing expedition in *Man of Aran* (1934). In effect his films possess the search-and-discovery structures of the typical camera movements of all the major *cinéma-vérité* films, including those of France, the United States, and

Canada, as they chronicle a quest for the revealing moment. This relation between Flaherty's films and American *cinéma-vérité* films is not surprising considering that a formative influence on one of the innovators of the American style of *cinéma-vérité*, Ricky Leacock, was the experience he gained working with Robert Flaherty on *Louisiana Story* (1948). Leacock was obviously deeply impressed with Flaherty and it is obvious from statements he has made that he knows Flaherty's films very well. But Flaherty's style has an even more profound relationship to the general intellectual attitudes which (notwithstanding the differences in character these attitudes assumed in Canada and in the United States) have dominated the intellectual histories of the two countries – attitudes that can broadly be described as empirical.

Two features of this search-and-discovery structure are particularly important. First, this structure suggests that the films involve a minimum of manipulation, that they merely chronicle life until a particularly revealing moment occurs.¹⁷ This suggestion is important for it conveys the empiricistic idea that the primary determinants of the form of Flaherty's films are the demands of conveying a truth that can be discovered on the surface of events (even if these events are of a somewhat special sort). Obviously, evidence of interference in the profilmic event would betray an empiricism that is supposed to guarantee the film's truthfulness.

Secondly, because the form of the film is that of a chronicle of the filmmaker's quest, the end of which coincides with the filmmaker's discovery of the truth, the process by which the work is generated is incorporated into its final structure. This gives the text a quality of openness, since a chronicle lacks the tight closure which typifies the classic text. And certainly Flaherty's films are episodic; the relations of the various sequences to one another and to the climax are rather loose. Furthermore, the inclusion of the process by which the work is produced denaturalizes the work, dispelling the possibility that the work might be thought to present a corner of reality. In fact, this inclusion brings the whole notion of the work's objecthood into question because it displaces the focus of our attention away from the film's formal *gestalt* towards the process by which it was generated. And this implicates its maker in the work, for it provides evidence of his or her role as a witness/recorder. As well, the evidence of process inscribed in the film tends to alter the film's temporal characteristics; the time we are aware of when watching these works is not a fictive, diegetic time but rather real time, that at which the film was actually made. It is for just this reason that such search-and-discovery structures have frequently been put to work in fictional films of the "you-were-there" variety. But finally and most importantly, the use of the search-and-discovery structure implies that the filmmaker undertook a quest towards a destination that, at the outset, was unknown and was discovered only during the quest itself.

Some Historical Background

Though our paradigm of the stylistic differences between the cinema of presentation and the cinema of illustration affords some understanding of some of the differences between these modes, it cannot help us arrive at a comprehensive account of them. Furthermore, features of the style considered (for example, the use of the handheld camera typical of *cinéma-vérité* films) characterized only a portion of the films of their respective modes. What is needed now is a more comprehensive account of these two kinds of cinema, one capable of characterizing the broad differences between these two practices rather than the sharp differences between specific stylistic approaches within these general modes of cinema.

The distinctive features of the cinema of presentation can be related to general features of post-classical art, which developed in reaction to the canons of classicism (here we would include such movements as Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism). In classical art, the art object was thought to have, due to the perfection of its form, a transcendental status. Consequently, classical art's subject matter was idealized and the real distorted in order to achieve the perfection and harmony characteristic of the transcendent. In classical art, then, the formative impulse consumed the real. Post-classical art, on the other hand, attempted to incorporate that which is quotidian, transient and material.

Post-classical art can be related to empiricism in which the subject is reified out of the processes that constitute it. It denies the primacy of the subject's role in the activity by which the subject and the other-than-subject (the Kantian *noumenon*) cooperate in producing that which is given in experience (the phenomenon).

This reification of the subject is what grounds the emphasis that post-classical art has laid on the subjective aspects of a work of art. But this reification of the subject also makes empiricism oblivious to consequences of the fact that the objective is never available except through processes of the subject and that what comes to be present in experience is always inflected by the subject. Thus it maintains that the world can write itself, apart from the subject's drive to discover/constitute meaning, and that the world, considered as an ensemble of significant relations presented to the subject is simply pure, brute, concrete reality. The idea that pregiven reality is ambiguous is one that is easy to associate with these fundamental beliefs and it is that very idea that constitutes the basis for those NFB documentaries that conclude by offering the insight that in the end reality is simply mysterious. In those works, the fact that the nature of a photograph is by and large determined by what it is a photograph of is used to model the mind's being a mirror of nature, passively reflecting what is out there and what is out there is ambiguous.

The forms of post-classical art are related to the increasing emphasis throughout the modern era (since the time of Descartes) on things that are

time-bound and material. This led to the spread of the conviction, which became virtually hegemonous by the beginning of the nineteenth century, that everything that exists within time's thrall and, consequently, to the belief in the fundamental dynamism of existence. The teaching of the possibility of a state of *aptharsia* (imperishability) beyond both time and human making all but disappeared and with it the notion of a God who rests in his immovable transcendence. The faith of earlier, premodern times, that reality is transcendently ordered, was lost and its place taken by the conviction that it is not possible for humans to transcend their finitude. An anxiety resulted, full of frustration, anger and despair.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many disciplines came to accept the fundamental importance of time and the capacity of time to effect change in what formerly had been held to be changeless, eternal and transcendent. According to Stephen Toulmin and Jane Goodfield: "But about 1800, historical attitudes and ideas were ready to crystallize in many fields from the matrix of 18th century thought, and men began for the first time to recognize the full extent of time and the crucial importance of development."¹⁸

A number of disciplines were transformed by this new emphasis on time and history. Premodern biology, for example, had been basically a taxonomic enterprise, suggesting that it was founded on a doctrine of unchanging species. Modern biology, on the other hand, attempts to provide an account of the origin and development of the species. A similar change occurred in nineteenth-century geology, transforming it from the study of the earth as something whose created nature was unchanging into the study of the history of the earth.

Similar changes occurred in the way that reason was conceived. In premodern times, reason was held to transcend all change; its regulatory principles and manner of operating were thought to be identical in all times and all places. In the writings of Kant, Hegel and Marx, we see reason come under discussion as something that has a history. Process theologians such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne even write about God, who traditionally was the exemplum of transcendent, unchanging and eternal being, as though He had a biography. Indeed, as is most apparent in the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, nineteenth-century thinkers came to believe that in order to know anything it is necessary to know its origins and development. And to maintain this is to maintain that change (call it process or history) is that to which everything, including God and reason as well as created nature, is subject.

In the nineteenth century as well, progress came to take the place of God as the supreme redemptory power. The transcendence of progress replaced the transcendence of God and thus the *eschaton* was immanentized. The immanentizing of the *eschaton* has been associated with a greater emphasis on futurity than on the other temporal modes, while the stress put on

temporal process resulted in dynamism coming to appear as time's most important characteristic. This dynamism took two forms: first, the dynamism of the temporal process itself, by which the future becomes present; and second, the dynamism of the individual attempting to shape the future. From these there follow two modes of experiencing time. Anticipation is the active mode; it is the mode of experience of the individual who actively drives towards the future, who, understanding the structure of circumstances, attempts from that understanding to make the future. Expectation is the passive mode; in expectation the individual awaits the future as though the whole of the future were concentrated in the moment of becoming and were about to roll over us as a hostile mass.

The rise of the regime of technology has made the first mode the more common one. Modernity has an active orientation towards the future precisely because the very heart of modernity is the acceptance of the proposition that the central challenge of human existence is the challenge to the will to make a future world that fulfils the maximal number of truly significant desires. But if the actualization of a moral world, a world which meets as many possible needs of as many human beings as possible (or in another more chilling variant, meets as many as possible of the truly significant desires of truly significant human beings), takes place through acts of will, then the world as it is given before being reshaped by the will must be a morally indifferent world. The world of nature is conceived as indifferent, while the human subject is left with the task of creating meaning. The process through which this creation takes place is history.

Traditionally, making was understood as participation in a trusted eternal order, and what came into being through that participation was thought to display the harmony and meaning of that order. Thus Plato argued that the craftsperson's skill depends upon his or her grasp of the eternal principles (the forms) which structure everything that is. The modern conception of making has brought making much closer together with that which traditionally was understood by divine creativity, for it understands human making as the forging of meanings out of a primal chaos, an activity very like creation *ex nihilo*. What is unformed by the shaping influence of will is thought of as having no significance, for it possesses no divinely instilled order. But if what the will uses as material is understood as having no intrinsic value, then there exists nothing in that material to limit the will's willing, nothing that might place restrictions on what the will might do with that material. Thus for moderns, there can be no good reason to preclude anything, no matter what, that the will might wish to do to nature, nothing to prevail against the will's having its way with nature. The essentially unrestrained and godly character of creative making is as manifest in the aesthetics of Romanticism as it is in the ethics of technocracy. And when, as in Romanticism and technocracy, human excellence is thought to reside in the strength to engage in creative making, then that mode of temporal experience that is most highly prized

comes to be anticipation, for all acts of creative making depend upon willing that what is present shall not be and that some other state shall be.

The modern paradigm divides the totality of what is into two realms. There is the realm to which what is given belongs and there is the realm to which what impels creative making belongs. There is the realm of determination, of what is, and there is the realm of transcendence of what is given towards the possibility of what ought to be. In the language of Immanuel Kant, in whose writings we so often encounter the first statement of key features of modern existence, there is the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. In newer language, the distinction would probably be between nature (or at least nature as immediate givenness) and history (as the process of creative making which is the essence of human existence), though that way of putting it is probably less satisfactory, for moderns believe that even nature has a history, though not a history of creative making.

But however we put this distinction, it remains evident that the modern paradigm is dualistic and that thinkers who have lived within that paradigm have expended great energy in trying to discern how the two realms could possibly co-exist and have intercourse with one another. It is no less evident that from this fundamental dichotomy come others which have had an equally important role in determining the conditions of modern existence, such as that between facts (that which is given an unformed nature can belong only to the realm of facts) and values (which came into being through creative making). From the distinction between facts and values comes the tendency to deny cognitive status to all modes of knowing which do not exemplify the scientific method, for facts are determined by objective inquiry rather than by intuition, love or mystical participation. And from this follows a tendency to reduce reality from a mystery we can love to a problem we must solve – whence springs the will to mastery, which is at the heart of modernity. The notion of modernity will prove crucial as we explore the differences between classical and post-classical art.

Classical and Post-classical Art

By extending the discussion of contrasting features of classical and post-classical art to apply specifically to the cinema, we shall see that the features of the cinema of presentation relate to the features of post-classical art in general. It would not even be hyperbolic to claim that the cinema of presentation is the exemplary manifestation of the forces that shaped post-classical art.

Underlying classical art was a religious world-view which denigrated the importance of the transient material world in favour of the transcendent realm of eternal forms. This world-view came under mounting attack from the eighteenth century onward, as positivist philosophies developed. Contributing to the increase in interest in the material world too was the increasingly rapidity, during and after the Industrial Revolution, with which the

appearance of the everyday world altered. As a result of this acceleration, people became aware, as they had never been before, that change was a key feature in their lives. Accordingly, there developed the desire for a form of expression which could fix transient phenomena, saving them from the ravages of time and reserving them for scrutiny. This impulse gave rise to such artistic movements as Impressionism. Another factor contributing to the development of post-classical form was that, during the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of people were forced to leave their farms and villages for the larger centres where manufacturing was concentrated. This accounts in part for the somewhat paradoxical fact that landscape painting and paintings of urban scenes grew simultaneously in importance. The impulse leading to the first was that of preserving a receding past which increasingly appeared to have been paradisaic, while the impulse leading to the second was that of accommodating oneself to a new, even if somewhat discomfiting, present.

The displacement of people from the rural environment to the slum-ridden city led to feelings that human beings had become alienated from the natural environment. Thus, the philosophy of positivism which arose at this time conveys the sense that a nearly unbridgeable chasm separates human beings (consciousness) from the external world. In fact, the roots of this feeling are clearly evident in the work of that predecessor of positivism, René Descartes. Descartes had argued that only consciousness could be known immediately; the existence of the material world, he believed, could be guaranteed only through a tortured line of reasoning that even involved demonstrating the existence of a benevolent deity who would not mislead us in our belief that matter exists.

We sense here that the relation of human beings to the material world was beginning to appear fragile. Indeed, philosophers after Descartes argued that the problem of the relation of human consciousness to matter was not well resolved in Cartesian philosophy. While agreeing with Descartes that only ideas in consciousness could be known immediately, they argued that his demonstration of the existence of the material world was fallacious. That world, they claimed, could not be shown to exist. Obviously, such ideas give expression to a climate of feeling and belief in which a form of art which would strengthen our sense of being rooted in the real world of matter would be salubrious. Documentary art, or any art which emphasizes the "as-it-is-ness" of nature could have such an effect.

In addition, the rise of the scientific attitude during this period led to a deepening interest in nature. This eventually confronted human beings with the grandeur and mystery of nature. The well-known enthusiasm which English Romantics such as Shelley and Coleridge showed for such scientific hypotheses as animal magnetism, galvanism, Mesmerism and somnambulism, as well as the era's enthusiasm for Swedenborgianism, French naturalism and *Naturphilosophie*, indicate how widespread was the notion that science had become the new oracle of the Powerful and the Mysterious – a

Power which was now understood to be not transcendent but immanent. (In this way, the extraordinary was brought down to earth and domesticated.) This understanding invested physical nature with the values formerly attributed to the Godhead. As a result, art became increasingly engaged with the world of nature rather than the transcendent realm of eternal forms.

Moreover, as science revealed that, contrary to the previous conception of the order of the cosmos, the superlunary realm was very little different in kind from the sublunary realm, the argument that the precise, mathematical harmony of the cosmos was evidence of the exquisite order of the ideas in the mind of God lost much of its appeal. If the order which sustained the being of the material world had been thought, in pre-Elizabethan times, to lie outside material reality, to belong to a transcendent realm, by the time of the Romantic period it was believed to be immanent in nature. Increasingly, the order of the heavens appeared dead and mechanical (in Blake's poetry, this order is even portrayed as being of a demonic sort) and the organic part of nature thought of as its noblest part; for it was held that it is that part which is imbued with vital being. Thus the favoured scientific model changed from a mathematical to a biological one. Correlative changes occurred in the aesthetic ideal; the precise mathematical harmony which had been the ideal of classical art gave way to the ideal of organic form.

These changes were incorporated in the shift towards the modern paradigm. By this we do not mean the reign of the modernist ideals. Although the modernist movement undoubtedly was animated by the desire to create art that would be appropriate to the modern age, modernism was a specific, highly defined and rigorously worked out art theory. In this context, "modern" is something much broader, a state of mind or a type of experience characteristic of a specific historical epoch.

The modern paradigm became firmly established in the 1860s. The years before that decade began saw the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), a work very much "involved" in the modern era (I use the inelegant term "involved" to avoid making a less accurate reference to the historical importance of this book, which was both a contributing cause of the development of the modern paradigm and a reflection of its growing importance). The decade of the 1860s saw the publication of Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863) and the First Vatican Council (1869-1870).

The significance of these works and events, as well as others, emerges most clearly in the questioning of the status of the Scriptures in the work of people like Alfred Firman Loisy and Heinrich Julius Holzmann and other French and German biblical scholars. The principles of interpretation and scholarship these scholars applied in their works were distinctive to their era – distinctively modern, that is to say, inasmuch as they insisted, as people belonging to the modern age, on bringing religious faith into conformity with the discoveries of modern science. Alfred Loisy, for example, stressed the notion of divine immanence and the individual religious experience. Thus, in

the work of Alfred Loisy (and of many other Catholic modernists as they named themselves), modernism is associated with naturalism. Among Protestants (for example, German church historian Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack and later the American theologian H.N. Wieman) modernism stressed the experiential aspects of Christianity over its creedal and dogmatic aspects. Generally, the Protestant modernists stressed what John Watson stressed: that reality is a manifestation of the Divine Mind (Reason), God is immanent in reality and can be found in the whole of life; God acts by progressive change and natural law. Many of these modernists were also supporters of the Social Gospel movement. Protestant modernism also produced a Personalist school; one of the leading exponents was the American E.S. Brightman, who argued that religion must be based upon empirical experience, our religious beliefs must be consistent with the whole of knowledge and experience, including what we learn through science, and that a personal God – personal both in the sense that He possesses a rational will and in the sense that humans may have a personal relationship with Him – is the only hypothesis consistent with our experience.

The Catholic version of modernism was strongly criticized in Pope Pius X's encyclical, *Pascende*, issued on September 8, 1907. In this work, Pope Pius condemned sixty-five propositions basic to the modernist position and called modernism "the synthesis of all heresies." In particular, Pope Pius rebuked the modernists' effort to bring religion into conformity with modern science and the modern scientific temperament. In addition, he directed priests to scrutinize the beliefs of professors who were under their jurisdiction and the contents of books used by their students. And in 1910 he ordered all priests to take the "Oath against Modernism," a requirement still in force.

The spirit of the movement was a questioning one. Personal experience was proclaimed as a basis for interrogating ecclesiastic authority; science – and especially the modern scientific attitude – was heralded by many modernists as a basis for critiquing moral principles, conventional ways of behaviour, and even religious beliefs. Personal convictions were held to be an adequate basis, indeed the only proper basis, for attacking conventional collective attitudes and even the authority of the state.

In sum, the modern paradigm involved a turning inward and an affirmation that certainty and truth resided in the realm of the subjective; it held that only that which belongs to consciousness is certain. As a result, it set up a contrast between the internal realm and the external world, which Nietzsche parodied in his hypothetical "Manual for Internal Cultivation of External Barbarians." It also produced the attitude that since one's true life is lived within one's self the external world is something of little importance. Modernism, in short, was an attitude that "being-in-the-world" is simply of functional concern and that it is "the self-in-itself" that is of greatest value. A key feature of the modern paradigm is the attitude that there is a sharp division between the inner and outer life, that one's true self is one's subjectivity, and that the self that functions in the external world is merely a specious self.

Martin Heidegger's concepts of "thrownness" and "forfeiture" forcefully express this feature of the modern paradigm. His philosophy describes human beings as "thrown" into a world not of their making (though it belongs to human beings in the sense that human beings can freely appropriate and assimilate it). This sense of finding oneself in a troubling confrontation with a world one did not make became something of a commonplace in the art of the modern period, even in coffee-house discourse and the routines of espresso-avant comedians of the 1950s.

Furthermore, Heidegger points out, our involvement in the world – in the terms we have been using to describe the modern paradigm, in externality – cause us to forget Being for particular beings. We fail to grasp the creative potential of the present, fail to become what we might; because of a distracting involvement in the cares of the everyday, in the things and people that surround us, the authentic "I" is sacrificed to the persistent "they."

And how do we escape from this forfeiture? Heidegger suggests that a mood is instrumental in lifting us out of this fallen state, the mood of Dread. Dread discloses Nothing to us, and in doing so, restructures our relation with externality, by reducing the importance of the external, for Dread lifts human beings out of self-forgetfulness and brings them to authentic knowledge of themselves (brings them to recognize themselves as being-to-death).

The attitude that subjectivity is the abode of truth, that the external world is a fallen world, led modern artists such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot to develop strategies of inwardness. Because non-human nature was thought to be appallingly discontinuous with human nature, artists attempted to transform non-human nature, giving it some of the features of human nature (hence the emphasis on the objective correlative), to make "the stream of impressions" part of the personal world by showing that its rhythms were those of the subjective realm. They tried to rescue the external world from its degraded state by converting it (or at least parts of it) into the forms of the internal world. (This is the core meaning of Hegel's philosophy as much as it is the literary criticism of Northrop Frye.) In its social views, modern art adopted an adversarial stance to conventional society. Too, spontaneity became a prized feature of the creative process and evidence of spontaneity a prized feature of an artwork because spontaneous expression can easily be believed to arise from the true self.

Jackson Pollock is perhaps the artist who best exemplified the idea that artmaking is spontaneous activity involving the taking of those extreme risks in which a true self is forged. In *Permanent Red*, John Berger offers a series of comments on Pollock which elucidate the interrelation of the various features of the modern paradigm. On Pollock's (and the modern artist's) isolation, he noted:

Imagine a man brought up from birth in a white cell so that he has never seen anything except the growth of his body. And then imagine that

suddenly he is give some sticks and bright paints. If he were a man with an innate sense of balance and colour harmony, he would then, I think, cover the walls of his cells as Pollock painted his canvases.¹⁹

While Berger's intention in writing the essays collected in *Permanent Red* was clearly to criticize the modern paradigm from the vantage-point of a Marxist, he often spoke from within the paradigm itself. Indeed, the very idea of a human being, who has had no experience of society at all, possessing "an innate sense of balance and colour harmony" is itself a modern idea, for in proposing that consciousness can exist apart from social conditions, it accords a primacy to subjectivity. Berger continued by describing what a human being who lived all his life without contact with other human beings would want to paint; his description refers again to biological phenomena: "He would want to express his ideas and feelings about growth, time, energy and death." Berger completed the sentence with a comment that relates to the modern artist's desire to return to zero, to his or her urge to dispense with tradition and to start again from the beginning: "but he would lack any vocabulary of seen or remembered visual images with which to do so. He would have nothing more than the gestures he could discover through the act of applying his coloured marks to white walls."²⁰ This last remark sheds light on the modernist artist's desire to incorporate signs of the process by which a form is generated into the form itself – in fact, to fashion all the signs that a work of art incorporates from signs that are inextricably linked to that process. But in making this comment, Berger reinforced his earlier claim that the "creative process" develops from the artist's "biology," and that it is from the artist's biology alone that he or she can generate his or her work. If this claim is true, then the signs which are the natural and inevitable result of the creative process the artist employs would be all that he or she has available with which to work. Thus Berger's comment would go a long way towards explaining the self-enclosed character of much modernist art.

Berger's next comment connected the notions of "isolation" and "subjectivity," two key features of the modern paradigm:

I believe that Pollock imaginatively, subjectively, isolated himself almost to that extent. His paintings are like pictures painted on the inside walls of his mind. And the appeal of his work, especially to other painters, is of the same character. His work amounts to an invitation: Forget all, sever all, inhabit your white cell and – most ironic paradox of all – discover the universal in your self, for in a one-man world you are universal!²¹

This last comment suggests a great deal about the relation of the modern paradigm both to American individualism and to Absolute Idealism. The differing philosophical traditions of Canada and the United States can be seen simply as different ways of working out the modern paradigm. And this is

just what would be expected of the intellectual life in two countries developing in the historical era in which Canada and the United States did.

Recent years have seen the break-up of the modern paradigm and its replacement with a postmodern paradigm. This is most evident in the fact that, rather than adopting an adversarial relation to the images of postmodern culture, postmodern artists (such as Laurie Anderson, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Venturi and, seminal to the entire postmodern corpus, Robert Rauschenberg) accept them with promiscuous cool. Allusions are not used in Donald Barthelme's fictions, for example, as memories (internal images) stored in consciousness to shore up the subject against the possibility of the collapse of the external world, but simply as elements from a stockpile of texts and images that can be re-used and recirculated without guilt or embarrassment. The untroubled consumption of objects and artworks in postmodern culture (and the postmodern paradigm makes little distinction between artworks and other objects) is also closely related to postmodern art's proclivity towards pastiche and anthological forms. The acceptance of narrative in postmodern avant-garde – in works like Patricia Gruben's *Sifted Evidence*, Peter Mettler's *Scissere* and Peter Dudar's *Transylvania 1917* – provides further evidence of the postmodern artist's acceptance of the external world.

A key feature of the postmodern paradigm is the acceptance of the belatedness of experience. Modern art was driven by the desire to "start from zero," to cleanse art of the accumulation of surplus features that has occurred through history (this was the driving force of Viennese modernism of the years 1900 to 1920 and connects this and other modernist movements with the modern paradigm), and to wipe the slate clean to allow for reinscriptions of the few precious images that would be true expressions of the soul. Since the core spiritual insight of the modern era was that human beings are thrown into a world not of their own making, a world replete with images they did not make, modern art attempted to construct a refuge for the self, and the first requirement for doing so, modern artists believed, was to do away with the accumulated hoard of images that had turned out, on the modern view, to be nothing but a devil's treasure. Postmodern painters, on the other hand, have accepted without disgust this storehouse of imagery. They have even highlighted their character as "derivatives" by foregrounding them as quotations. (This is one of the reasons postmodern artists have favoured the medium of photography, a feature that connects postmodernism to the postmodern.) Spontaneity has lost out to cool behaviour as the preferred method for producing art, since in the postmodern era the self is no longer believed to be engaged in a constant battle for survival with the external world – a battle re-enacted over and over again in the self-affirming life lived as the persistent and repetitious undertaking of the risk of engaging in actions whose consequences are not foreseen.

There was a paradox at the heart of the modern paradigm. On the one

hand, the modern paradigm developed out of the successes achieved by science from the time of Newton, and, in particular, by the biological sciences after the development of the theory of evolution. This led to a growing interest in the external world and even to the attitude that the Creative Principle is immanent in nature. On the other hand, the belief that the external world was governed by principles that were utterly mechanical and wholly predictable, and so utterly unlike the soul, produced the attitude that there is an appalling discontinuity between human and non-human nature. But these contradictory attitudes had a common result, for they demanded that human beings attempt to establish a new and more adequate relation with the external world. (The implications this demand had for the making of art I explore in the next section.)

These developments did not come to an end with the Romantic period. The Romantics merely brought the Creative Force that sustained the being of material reality down from the heavens and installed it in the realm of nature itself. It did not abolish the idea of a Creative Force. But Romanticism has been the only modern movement of continuing importance to cling to the conviction that there exists a creative ground of being; this accounts for the Marxists' traditional hostility towards that movement. Modernity (of which Marxism is one expression) has not seen a need to conceive of a ground of being, for modernity believes material reality to be self-sustaining, at least for the duration of its existence, and contingent upon nothing outside of the realm of matter.²² These of course are the fundamental tenets of modern materialist philosophies and the current prevalence of these beliefs is certainly an index of how far the conviction that material reality can be accounted for in its own terms (without making reference to any non-material reality) has spread. This conviction also strengthened the desire to make a place for the real in the work of art.

The redirection of interest away from the transcendent realm and towards material reality necessitated changes in both the subject matter and the stylistic features of a work of art. During the classical period, artists relied on mythological subjects since they transcended any specific time and place. Post-classical artists, on the other hand, avoided these subjects, preferring those which were drawn from the real. Furthermore, classical artists had typically used compositional forms which employed elaborate balanced structures stabilized around the central vertical axis, closed forms and, frequently, bounding devices at the frame edges. All of these served to create a form of discontinuity between the work of art and the real. In post-classical art, these compositional forms were replaced with forms which were less precisely balanced, less often used formal symmetry, were more open, and frequently lacked bounding devices.

In fact, post-classical artists often used forms which appeared to "run off" the edges of the canvas or represented objects which seemed to be "cropped" at the frame edge. Thus an impression of continuity between the work of art

and the real was created. The preference for compositions which exhibit forms symmetrically arranged around the central vertical axis waned and a preference developed for more asymmetrical compositions. The single centre of interest, typical of classical works, was replaced with multiple centres of interest. Perspectival systems based on planar recession were replaced with more dynamic perspectival systems based on diagonal, linear recession.

Similar changes occurred in the narrative form of literary works. The classical canons of harmony demanded there be a single, dominant plot to which all subplots were subordinated. Post-classical literature has employed narratives which are made up of a number of plots, none of which dominates others. Thus such techniques as the nesting of narratives, as in Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* (1939), have become common. As well, the linear pattern of development characteristic of the classical narrative, with its steady development towards a single climactic incident, has been replaced with a mosaic-structured narrative with shifting foci of attention (for example, William S. Burroughs' "cut-up" novels). Narratives in which incidents were hierarchically ordered according to their proximity to the climax have been replaced with narratives in which all incidents have more or less equal weight. The temporal quality of the narrative has thus changed from anticipation to immediacy and flow. (It was Gertrude Stein's great accomplishment to carry innovation with structures which evoke a sense of immediacy and growth through to a conclusion.)

Classical artists favoured tightly knit narratives which suppressed intrusion of the real. These have been related in post-classical literature with looser, more episodic plots, which are more permeable to the real. The thoroughly determined form of the classical literature, in which every element had a precisely specifiable relation to the whole, has been replaced with forms like that of the Zolaesque novel which rely on "hypothesizing" characters with certain traits of personality and situations of a certain sort and then working out, by a process not very different from that of scientists observing the results of the interaction of different forces in an experiment in physics, the narrative consequences of such a hypothesis.²³

These contrasts between classical and post-classical art illuminate the differences between the cinema of illustration and the cinema of presentation. As an illustration, we shall use Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946) as examples of these respective modes of cinema. It has already been suggested that many of the strategies of classical art were designed to seal off the artwork from the world. This is an aspiration consistent with the features of *Alexander Nevsky's* style. Even the film's subject matter creates a rupture between the film and the world of its time.²⁴ The costumes, settings, and props differentiate the film from reality since they are designed to play a role in the elaboration of its theme, and not to be mimetic. Thus, the invaders wear inhuman metallic face masks while the Russians wear soft, chain-mail hoods. So too does the design of the film's

imagery serve the interests of thematic articulation rather than of mimesis, as evidenced by the frequently used triangular compositions with Nevsky at the apex. The composition of most shots is closed and balanced and these features seal off the film's imagery from the world.

The subject matter of *Paisà*, on the other hand, is contemporary rather than historical. Its costumes, settings, and props are mimetic and give the film an appearance of the real world. Unlike the closed and balanced compositions that typify *Alexander Nevsky*, most of those in *Paisà* are open and, to all appearances, casually balanced. They seldom employ boundary devices; this creates the impression that there is a continuity between the film and the world.

The narrative structures of the two films are also different. Like the narrative form typical of the classic literary work, the form of *Alexander Nevsky* is based on the canon that all parts should be subordinated to a single dominant element. Thus, in *Alexander Nevsky*, the incidents constituting the narrative lock together in a rigorously precise, hierarchical order that culminates in the battle on the ice. Like the narrative form of most post-classical literary works, the narrative structure of *Paisà* is a less rigorously integrated form. The episodic relation between the various narrative incidents means the relation of part to part is less than tightly knit, while the lack of hierarchical relations between subordinate and superordinate patterns, means the relation of the parts of the film to the whole is looser.

These two modes of cinema are also characterized by different editorial strategies. Like classical art's formal devices, the editorial devices characteristic of the cinema of illustration serve to differentiate the film from reality. They create a narrative form²⁵ which intercedes between the cinematic diegesis and the real world. Reality's spatial and temporal features are transformed by the use of such figures as ellipses and prolongations, and a new space and time, different from those of reality, are introduced. (Hence space and time are made into signifiers, and signifiers must, in order to convey meaning, exclude the real.) In implying that there exist dramatic cause-and-effect relations between successive events in a plot, Eisenstein created a dramatic ligature connecting the various spatial and temporal elements in his films that took the place of relations determined by representational fidelity. *Alexander Nevsky* (and films belonging to this sort of cinema in general) also use editing to construct formal patterns which interrelate the visual forms of successive shots. For example, by juxtaposing shots whose graphic patterns are similar, Eisenstein constructed a nexus of internal relations which have no reference to reality.

Rossellini, in making *Paisà*, used editing for very different ends. Like many of the devices of post-classical art, his strategies were designed to give the film an appearance of reality. While editing had been used in *Alexander Nevsky* to articulate a complex pattern of internal relations, the editing style of *Paisà* relied on the use of long takes. Accordingly, the spatial and temporal

features of long segments of the film are identical with those of reality. Rossellini's use of long takes also changes the role that editing plays in the presentation of the events that constitute *Paisà's* plot. In *Paisà* (and in other works like it), the partitioning of scenes into shots does not coincide with the film's narrative segmentation; consequently *Paisà* cannot rely on editorial means to construct narrative functions (such as ellipsis, prolongation, causal relations, etc.), as *Alexander Nevsky* does. A two-fold integration with the real world results: since the long take forces us to articulate all plot relations in the profilmic event, it authenticates the narrative; at the same time, since constructions created by editing no longer intercede between a narrative event and its presentation, the resulting form is mimetic, not diegetic (in this instance, these terms are being used in their Aristotelian sense). The use of long takes also affects *Paisà's* visual style, or more precisely their use influences the types of visual relationships the film employs. The length of the takes in *Paisà* reduces the number and the strength of the relationships that can be created by using editing. As a result, the patterns of the imagery in the work tend to be congruent with the patterns of the world itself. In fact, the entire category of shot-to-shot relations are accorded a relatively slight value.

Though it nowhere appears in *Alexander Nevsky*, a type of editorial construction that Eisenstein had used extensively in his later constructivist films, especially in *October* (1929), illuminates the function of editing in the cinema of illustration. That construction is the one Eisenstein referred to as "intellectual montage." Several features of this formation are relevant. Its logomorphic structure, patterned on the verbal form of the simile, reveals that it has no legitimacy as a natural signifier, that it is a construction. The fact that the relation between the juxtaposed images is conceptual makes it evident that constructions of this sort are designed to express ideas. Indeed, nothing better reveals the illustrative character of this mode of cinema than the fact that it could avail itself of this figure. Despite its relative rarity, it can well stand as a paradigmatic figure of this sort of cinematic practice.

Obviously this construction has no place in the cinema of presentation. Its closest relative in this mode of cinema would be the commentative use of *mise-en-scène*. The differences between this device and intellectual montage point up the differences between the cinema of illustration and the cinema of presentation. When an element of the *mise-en-scène* is used to make a comment, the commenting object is found in the same space as that on which it makes a comment. This provides the device itself and the comment it makes with naturalistic legitimation. Indeed, it might even persuade us to the mistaken conviction that the device is a natural (non-arbitrary) signifier. As a result, the formation appears less obviously constructed; its expressiveness seems to be less contrived and to be rather an accident of nature. (This is why the device so frequently seems to involve an irony.) And finally, because the commenting object is not imported from outside the privileged space of

the diegesis, the relationship between the commenting object and that upon which it comments is less hierarchical.

Another characteristic difference between the two modes of cinema is that the cinema of presentation makes more extensive use of the moving camera. In part, this is due to its use of the long take; the moving camera provides for variety without a change of shot. In fact, the system of point-of-view change within a long take sometimes imitates the system of shot exchange in classical cutting, but without fragmenting the natural unities of time and space. But the use of the moving camera holds other advantages for the presentational mode of cinema. The cropping of objects at the frame edge or the use of open compositional forms which lack boundary devices, so typical of the presentational mode of cinema, suggests a continuity between the space of the image and that of the surrounding world. The moving camera sometimes serves a similar end, for it continually consigns the space it leaves behind into a merely provisional absence. This absence seems merely provisional partly because the space the move has left behind can be remembered and partly because it actually brings that space it moves towards out of absence and into presence (thus highlighting the fact that the absent space surrounding what is actually depicted can at any moment be made present). When watching a moving camera shot, we are acutely aware that the frame is simply a mask that isolates a small portion of space from the larger space that it is being moved across.

Another feature prevalent in the cinema of presentation is the use of what many film historians and film critics rather loosely refer to as "composition in depth" (that is, the use of a wide span of pictorial depth, all of which is in critical focus, and across the whole of which important compositional elements are distributed). This feature too can be understood within the framework of the ideas about the stylistics of post-classical art. Post-classical artists, such as the Impressionists, frequently used compositions that employed elements distributed over the foreground, midground, and background. Such compositions, they believed, could create that sense of instantaneity and multiplicity which are hallmarks of the post-classical aesthetic. Composition in depth is simply a photographic device which enables similar compositions to be used in film, and its use was motivated by similar post-classical concerns. The multiplicity of compositional elements within a single frame can also be understood as a response to the reduction in the complexity of internal relations which resulted from the refusal to employ anti-naturalistic montage formations. The use of elaborate *mise-en-scène* constructions established a new category of complexity to take the place of that sort of complexity that had been eliminated by the decision not to create patterns of internal relations using editing. Relations falling in this category have what appears, from the point of view of Naturalists, to be the advantage of not violating the integrity of real space and time.

Much the same point can be made in regard to the narrative structures

typical of the cinema of presentation. Like the montage constructions characteristic of the cinema of illustration, the illustrational cinema's narrative structures involve a tightly knit web of internal relations, embodied within a single, highly focused intrigue. There is no such highly formalized structure in the individual narratives of *Paisà*, where complexity depends on the intricacy of the interrelation between its multiple plots rather than on the complex structure of a single one.²⁶ To put it differently, the illustrational mode of cinema makes more extensive use, even in its narrative form, of relations between subordinate and superordinate orders than does the presentational mode.

The differences between the rhythm and phrasing characteristic of our two cinematic modes is the final contrast. Even though the styles of both types of cinema feature strong rhetorical continuity, settled phrasing, and a minimum of dislocating effects which might disturb the flow of energy that carries the viewer through the work, there are discernible differences in the qualities of rhythm and phrasing of the two modes. In the cinema of illustration, each scene is usually resolved into a number of discrete units; consequently, its rhetorical style involves frequent, highly accented rhythms. Almost any sequence from *Alexander Nevsky* shows that editing is used to create rhythmic figures which, like verse rhythms, involve regular, repeated units²⁷ of accent and rhythm. The phrasing characteristic of the cinema of illustration also involves highly organized internal relations, frequently based on repetition and symmetry. Indeed, even the elementary structure, of long-shot / close-up / reverse close-up, involves symmetry and mirror-phrasing. In the cinema of presentation, on the other hand, scenes are not resolved into as many discrete units. As a result, accents recur less frequently and so are not as amenable to patterning. Hence, the rhythms typical of the cinema of presentation are more like prose rhythms than verse rhythms. Much the same can be said of the phrasing typical of this sort of cinema. Because the rhetorical units are longer, less frequent use is made of symmetry and repetition in phrasing. Like the contrast between many other features typical of these two modes of cinema, the contrast in rhetoric, rhythm and phrasing is that between the hieratic and the demotic tendency.

The *Telos* of Total Realism

An aspiration central to the realist tendency of modern art was to construct a form of representation which, inasmuch as its formal patterns are congruent with those of the real world, is continuous with reality.²⁸ If we consider the implications of realizing this aspiration, we have a form of representation whose every feature is identical with a corresponding feature of the real world and which leaves no feature of the real world unrepresented; for any given feature of the real world there exists some identical feature of the representation that corresponds to it. Such a form of representation may not be as

implausible and as far-fetched as it seems. Bazin hypothesized²⁹ that such a form of representation, which he termed "Total Cinema," dominated the dreams of artists in the mid- and late nineteenth century – exactly when features of the modern movement coalesced to form the dominant paradigm of the era. The brilliant contemporary German filmmaker Hans Jürgen Syberberg also alludes to the idea of such a totalizing/totalitarian form of art in his masterwork, *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1978), and the notion of such a form of representation does indeed, as Syberberg realized, bear some relation to Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

If this form of representation is considered to be ideal (mental) in nature, we have Schelling's variety of Absolute Idealism. If it is not, then it must be considered either to be existentially identical with the real itself or to be merely an exact reproduction of the real. If it is considered to have the latter status, then it is considered to be the simulacrum so much discussed of late (and so profoundly deliberated upon in Syberberg's *Hitler*). If it is considered to have the former status, then not only has the imitation turned into that which it imitates by acquiring more and more – and, in the end, all – of its features, but modernity has turned into postmodernity. This, precisely, was what I believe the historical destiny of certain versions of Romanticism to have been, which was the step taken in the work of Jack Chambers.

This analysis of present-day culture as a culture on the cusp between the modern and the postmodern era affords an understanding of the vital unity underlying the apparently divergent, even conflicting, traditions in Canadian intellectual history – the Empirical, Common Sense tradition and the Idealist tradition. The Common Sense school produced a dualistic philosophy, that is, a philosophy that argues that there are radical ontological differences between mind and matter, and that undertook to demonstrate that mind, by virtue of its common sense principles, can know matter, just as it can know the axioms of mathematics and their applicability to the real, and just as it can know the precepts of morality. Common Sense philosophy, in adopting such a dualism, embodied the essential feature of the modern paradigm (the idea that there exists a fundamental opposition between mind and matter), while in undertaking to demonstrate that the mind can know matter, it attempted to alleviate what was potentially the most deleterious feature of that paradigm, a view of mind that so completely accepts that consciousness is isolated from whatever is around it that it must even adopt solipsism.

Idealist philosophy involves a more radical response to modernity. Idealists did accept the primacy of subjectivity (one of the hallmarks of the modern paradigm), but they dared to propose that consciousness is not isolated from the real, because, in a variant of Hegel's phrase, the Real is the Rational and the Rational is the Real (i.e., mind and reality are not ontologically distinct). Or, as the Canadian philosopher, John Watson, put it:

What Speculative Idealism maintains is that while the "world" is a "cosmos of experience," and therefore exists for each thinking subject only in experience, it is a "cosmos" [i.e., an *ordered* world – R.B.E.] just because the thinking subject is capable of grasping the permanent or essential nature of reality. There is no object apart from a subject, and yet it is only as the subject is capable of grasping the universal or necessary constitution of reality that there is for him "a world of things." This implies that, while in each subject there is a process of intelligent activity, through which alone his experience of a world of things originates, he yet is able to comprehend the true nature of the world because there is in him the principle which is involved in the actual nature of reality. The supposition that a world assumed to lie beyond intelligent experience is identical with what it is within intelligent experience is manifestly absurd, since it implies that the whole process in which the "cosmos of experience" is gradually formed through the exercise of intelligence is superfluous.³⁰

The culminating expression of the "modern" philosophy of Idealism was thus the "postmodern paradigm" itself; Idealism was fated, by its very nature, to give rise to postmodern thought.

In Chapter One, I showed that a primal Canadian experience, the encounter of European settlers with the Canadian landscape, resulted in the development of an intellectual attitude of which only a dualistic philosophy could give a ready account; for these European settlers a dualistic philosophy seemed the most true because it spoke of the apparently total opposition of mind and matter. Accordingly, in Canada, the potentially troublesome features of "the modern paradigm" found their most complete expression. It is hardly surprising, then, that Canadian thinkers have felt the imperative to find a way to resolve the problems of "the modern paradigm." Their first response was to develop a very special brand of Idealism, a philosophy which, while formulated within "the modern paradigm" itself, would lead inevitably to "the postmodern paradigm." It is equally unsurprising that Canadian thinkers have been in the forefront in forging postmodern thought and that Canadian artists have been in the forefront in developing postmodernist art. The rest of the book will be given over to considering the work of some of these postmodern/postmodernist artists (those who have worked in film), and to answering the question of why their art has the degree of strength and originality that it does (for, as we shall see, Canada has produced some of the world's most important postmodern filmmakers).

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the tradition of "photographic realism" has had a constricting effect on the ability of realist filmmakers to elaborate autonomous formal relations (i.e. formal relations that are disengaged from the world outside the work and determined only by features internal to the work itself), since it restricts the free variation of the

medium's material parameters. In chapters dealing with the cinema of construction, I shall demonstrate how a realism that, while based in the photograph, attempts to inquire into the conditions of that realism rather than merely to use them for affective ends, escapes from those restrictions by opening up a new set of possibilities.

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PART THREE

Introduction

According to P. Adams Sitney, the American avant-garde cinema, from the trance film to the mythopoeic film, aspired "to create a cinema in which his [the filmmaker's] imagination and his will would be more evidently powerful than the actuality of objects in front of his camera." Throughout the first two parts of this book, I have referred to an emerging postmodernism aesthetic. And one of its key notions is that the will of the artist must not be allowed to impose on the actuality of objects. Yet what is the alternative when permission to impose upon reality is withdrawn? The belief that we can invent a realism in which the artist will stand aside and allow reality to speak in its own words is obviously baseless. Even an attenuated realism of the sort offered in our documentaries and realistic fiction films is not unproblematic, as I have shown in the last five chapters.

Where are we left, then? On the one hand, we are confronted with a delusory and artistically stifling realism. On the other, we have the American example, the withdrawal from reality into inwardness. But the problems of the American alternative are clear, for the history of Romanticism shows the threat at its worst – a retreat of the Spirit into humanism so extreme that it raises the spectres of solipsism, paranoia and nihilism. We lose touch with reality. All that is solid melts into air.

Commenting on the inwardness of Romanticism, Hegel stated: "although this inwardness must – in art – show itself outwardly, it yet triumphs over the external and shows its victory over it by reducing it to relative insignificance." History bears Hegel out on this point: the emphasis on inwardness in Romanticism transports our interests away from the things that Romantic arts depict, transforming them into a domain too insignificant, too drained of strength and power to be able to embody the Spirit. Thus, as the American avant-garde cinema also makes clear, the only subject suitable for Romantic art is the self.

If there is a place for objective reality in this brand of Romantic art, it is only for the quasi-Platonic "Real" of, for example, Schopenhauer's aesthetics in which Music is Reality. As Schopenhauer's philosophy testifies, such an aesthetics can offer only the Gnosticism of the secular apocalypse: the world is empty and without value, only the soul/imagination has worth. This is

hardly an aesthetics of reconciliation. Rather, it is another expression of the dichotomizing influence that the modern paradigm has exercised in all area of thought: either matter has value (naïve realism) or the soul has value (Romanticism), but not both. But if this way of thinking were correct, then undoubtedly Hegel's stunning and melancholy prediction for art would come true (as indeed it often has seemed, over the past decade and a half): progressivism is to be one of the casualties of the passing of the historical era.

But a few Canadian artists have shown us that there is a way between the Scylla of naïve realism and the Charybdis of solipsistic spirituality, a way which is opened up by turning realism against itself, by constructing a metaleptical realism. The path from naive realism to metaleptical realism runs exactly parallel to the one that the philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein took between the earlier philosophy of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and the later philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). In the earlier philosophy, Wittgenstein proposed that a proposition is a picture of reality. As a picture, it must have something in common with what it pictures; its "form of representation" must be the same as "the form of reality." In other words, to be true the elements of the picture-statement must share a form with the things in the work the picture-statement depicts.

Between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein lost his faith in the categorical relationship between words and the world. He abandoned that article in the traditional metaphysician's credo, that there exists a necessary and certain correspondence between the human cognitive faculties and the constitution of the world. He lost the conviction that had once allowed him to say: "Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world." Language, he told us in his later philosophy, does not deliver the world; rather, the various specialized uses of language reflect the social conventions governing that use.

Like the prose of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, the realism of the Canadian avant-garde cinema is a critically aware realism – one that comprehends that every creative act is also a critique of the medium in which it is embedded and that every work of art is troubled by doubts about its own possibility. Thus, it is a realism that escapes the problems of naïve realism. Self-reflexivity undoes the bonds between the image and its model; accordingly, metaleptical realism does not trade in the illusion of absolute presence. Michael Snow points out insistently that an image is always invested with absence. Metaleptical realism is profoundly sceptical about its relation to the world; accordingly, it offers none of the facile epistemological and metaphysical absurdities that naïve realism does. Finally, metaleptical realism is not as aesthetically deleterious as naïve realism is, since it does not so severely limit the variability of the elements of the image. Snow put it very nicely when commenting on his working methods: "Making a work of art is like playing a game – you follow the rules. Only I make up the rules. If I find

I'm losing, I change the rules." The use of the different stocks, lighting conditions and filters in *Wavelength* make the same point, that the image, though realistic in its effect on our perceptual mechanisms, is nonetheless very plastic.

Still, if language or imagery merely reveals the social conventions governing its use – if it does not have a necessary relation to the world – then are we not, even though we adopt an apparently realistic style, still trapped within the circle of our consciousness, with nothing speaking to us but our own language? Here is where the unique capacities of the camera come to the fore. As Jack Chambers states and as Michael Snow implies by the forms of some of his works, the photograph is a product of the interaction between photographer and world. It may not map the world exactly (as Snow makes clear in the opening section of *Presents*), but it is still a product of the world. Being derived from the camera ensures that their imagery will do what art has so often been charged with doing in the sundered world of modernity – “Only connect!” It is in this sense that their works are pointers towards a post-modern paradigm.

In the following chapters, I explore the way that conception about the nature of photographic imagery has influenced the forms of our strongest cinema, the avant-garde.

CHAPTER 8

Michael Snow's *Wavelength*

The cinema seems to be a privileged art form for artists concerned with epistemological questions.¹ For some the cinema's epistemological privilege is grounded in the belief that the flow of images in a film can directly represent the changing contents of consciousness.² For others, it is based in the belief that the cinema offers a structure or set of structures isomorphic to certain structures of consciousness.

Epistemological problems have occupied a central place in the work of Michael Snow since the beginning of his career. The works in his famous "Walking Woman" series collectively constitute a table of the possible modes of illusionism. But it is with the film *Wavelength* – a film which even according to Snow's own testimony³ represented both a summation of this previous artwork and an advance into a new level of understanding and a new, greater degree of complexity in his work – that the total range of his epistemological preoccupations was pressed into the service of a single unified work rather than being explored piecemeal. *Wavelength* demonstrates the way in which epistemological and formal inquiry converge in Snow's work.

A Minimal Film

Snow's own description of *Wavelength*, prepared for the 1967 International Festival at Knokke-le-Zoute, reads in part as follows:

The film is a continuous zoom which takes forty-five minutes to go from its widest field to its smallest and final field. It was shot with a fixed camera at one end of an eighty-foot loft, shooting the other end, a row of windows and the street. Thus the setting and the action which takes place are cosmically equivalent. The room (and the zoom) are interrupted by four human events, including a death. The sound, music and speech, occur simultaneously with an electronic sound, a sine-wave which goes from its lowest (fifty cycles per second) note to highest (19,200 c.p.s.) in forty minutes.

The notes to Chapter 8 begin at page 423.

To add to this description we need to add only five things. First, the event Snow unambiguously refers to as a death is not presented so unambiguously in the film: a man staggers into the room and falls on the floor, apparently drunk or dead. Later, when a woman places a telephone call referring to the body lying on the floor she insists it is dead. Second, there is a striking dissimilarity among the four human events, since each successive event occurs in a flatter space than the previous one and marks an increase in mobility and dramatic effect over the previous. Third, as a result of changes in the film stock used, in exposure and in the time of day when sections of the film were shot, the space inside the loft and that outside the loft vary in visibility: at times only the loft is visible, the windows being blocked up by light or darkness; at other times the loft is itself next to invisible while the streets, store, offices and light outside are clearly visible; and at still other times, the loft and the outside are both clearly visible. Fourth, the film concludes with the zoom centred on a photographic image of a wave. And fifth, the zoom is not smooth and continuous but is disrupted by events of four sorts: a stammering or faltering in the progression of the zoom; colour flashes of an extraordinary intensity; changes in the colour and grain of the image, created by the use of filters, negative printing and a variety of film stocks; and the superimposition, over the progression of the zoom, of images with a wider field, echoing images from a previous point in the film.

A Phenomenological Film

A central aspect of the film is the exploration of various modes of cinematic experience. This exploration is initiated right at the beginning of the film, by the use of two very different cinematic styles. The film opens with the first of the human events – two men, supervised by a woman, move a large bookcase into the room. To be precise, for the first two feet of the film (i.e. $3 \frac{1}{3}$ seconds), we are shown an empty room. A woman appears, entering from the right of the frame, and leading two men carrying a bookcase to the left side of the loft. They exchange comments like, "How's that?" and "That's fine." Several devices are used to give this portion of the film a highly mimetic appearance. The use of the shortest focal length of the zoom lens, the placement of the camera at an oblique angle to the wall, and the recession of people and objects through that space all help to create an impression of a haptic space. At the same time, synchronous sound and naturalistic colour and lighting contribute further to the image's "realistic texture." Shortly after this human event is completed, however, the impression of simple mimeticism is dispelled using a number of strategies. One is to thwart the expectation of narrative transitivity that has been established: this first event does not initiate a series of subsequent dramatically related events. And secondly, the zoom begins to stammer and falter its way forward, while light and colour changes of extraordinary intensity occur.

We react to these two portions of the opening section in different ways. At first, we respond much as we would to any traditional illusionistic drama. This response, however, is soon undercut. The use of intense changes in the qualities of the colour and light, the extended duration of the zoom and the absence of dramatic action (or, at least, dramatic action as we usually conceive it) cause the audience to redirect its attention in the second section of this portion of the film to the film's material nature.

The differences in the nature of these two kinds of responses need to be further elaborated, since we must understand these differences in order to comprehend Snow's thoughts on illusionism. When viewing the first section, as when viewing any well-plotted film, our attention tends to focus upon the elaboration of the intrigue. We expend our energies on arriving at an understanding of what is happening, on giving a reading of the text of the film, on deciphering the meaning of objects and action it presents. Because our energies are expended upon such activities and because, in a plotted film, the objects on the screen undergo frequent displacement, we apprehend these objects in the mode of distraction, merely noticing them rather than opening ourselves to experiencing them sensually.

As the plot thins and disappears, and as the objects presented remain on the screen for longer periods of time, the nature of our response changes. Our mode of apprehending the objects becomes based less upon identifying them and their significance, and more upon purely perceptual activities. Our energies begin to be directed less to determining the signifying function of the various objects in the film, and more to actually scrutinizing their appearance and appreciating their sensual properties. (Consider, for example, the care one takes in examining the yellow chair.)⁴

This second type of response is the typical mode of experiencing the traditional static visual arts. At one level, then, the differences in response to the two cinematic styles points up the crucial difference between the way we respond to a work belonging to the static visual arts and the way we respond to a moving picture, and thus it demonstrates the effect of the introduction of movement into the image.⁵ But more profoundly, it marks a reflection upon and a vigorous refutation of the notion that the experience of presence can be used as an index of disillusionment. Traditionally, the experience of presence in a drama has been considered a way of combating illusionism or, more precisely, the virtuality of the dramatic image. In showing that by concentrating our attention on the individual objects, we can evoke a sense of presence, Snow is demonstrating that the experience of presence does not depend upon the degree to which the actuality of the objects presented in a work of art asserts itself over the illusion fostered by the work. It depends rather on the degree to which the work focuses and concentrates our perceptual energies. Thus Snow refutes the traditional theories of presence.

A Durational Film

The conjunction of these two cinematic styles also reveals facts about how we apprehend time's passing when viewing a film. While viewing the dramatic section, as when viewing any plotted film, we are frequently almost unaware of the passing of time. It seems as though the attention which we devote to giving a reading of the action diminishes our awareness of the flow of time. How we apprehend time while we view this section (when we are aware of it at all) is influenced more by the intensity and tempo of the dramatic action than by the length of time that actually elapses. During the colour section, however, wherein nothing happens but changes in the focal length of the lens and in colour and light, we are – precisely because nothing much happens – very much aware of actual duration. Thus, the conjunction of these two cinematic styles demonstrates the difference between actual duration and apprehended time.

A Dramatic Film

The use and subsequent elimination of the dramatic form carries yet another meaning. When viewing the opening section of the film (representing the first of the human events), we anticipate succeeding human actions. This event, then, establishes the expectation that it will be the initial member in a series of interrelated human actions. This expectation is frustrated when, for a considerable period of time, no further human events occur. We eventually realize that changes in the focal length of the zoom lens constitute the major action of the film, and we begin to anticipate, not the human action to follow, but the next adjustment of the zoom.

This demonstrates that the experience of film-as-drama is anticipatory in character, that the experience of viewing a film that uses the dramatic form evokes a sense of anticipation, of expectation of a forthcoming action. It also identifies the structural feature of a drama which elicits anticipation – namely, that the events in a drama function not as independent entities but as relational units whose nature is determined by the way they lead to subsequent events. Thus, the trajectory described by the continual progression of the zoom stands as a grand metaphor both for the viewer's experience of a drama and for the dramatic form itself. The motivation for this metaphor lies in the isomorphism among the temporal structure of the progression of the zoom, the trajectory of our experience of a drama and the structure of dramatic form itself, an isomorphism which depends upon the way in which all these structures project forward in time.⁶ This isomorphism establishes the possibility of using the continual progression of the zoom as a structural principle for a form which, although lacking in action which involves characters (action of the sort that is commonly believed to be quintessentially dramatic), will nevertheless possess the structural tensions of a drama. It also makes it possible to use the inherent features of the zoom's forward move-

ment to comment upon and to elucidate the essential features of the viewer's response to drama and of the dramatic form itself.

We have seen, then, how the structure of the film evokes a sense of anticipation. One important effect of the sense of anticipation the film evokes is that it tends to annihilate our sense of the present. At the same time, however, we feel the effect of a force working against this annihilation – a kind of perceptual tug which pulls us back from the anticipation of what is to follow to the apprehension of the image in (to corrupt an expression from A.N. Whitehead) the mode of presentational immediacy. This tension alerts us to a duality in the temporal characteristics of any filmic image which has been subsumed into a drama. Because of its photographic character, a filmic image demands to be experienced in the mode of presentational immediacy; at the same time, when it is subsumed in a drama, it evokes an anticipation of actions or events. It is as though the image demands to be experienced both as something existing in the present and as something pointing away from the present and towards the future – both as an entity in itself and as a relational unit.⁷

At its very heart, and central to all the issues it raises, is the fact that *Wavelength* is a film that works with and is structured by the tensions between anticipations evoked by the predicability of the film's course of development and strengthened by its extended duration and the feelings that seem opposed to those elicited by the forward momentum which that sense of anticipation elicits. Paradoxically, the latter impressions are also elicited by the extended duration of the film, as well as by the extraordinary colour effects which are introduced and which act to rivet attention to the moment. The opposition between forward-looking temporality and an instantaneous one involves the same dialectic as that between drama and photography. It is the conflictual relation between these two features of the film that makes this film structurally a drama.

Snow's art (and this is true of all great art) is fundamentally concerned with perception. Like the Russian Formalists, Snow considers that the purpose of artworks is to vivify perception, to make us aware of the sensations involved in experiencing something – in fact, to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived. To accomplish this, Sklovskij and the Formalists realized, it is necessary "to increase the difficulty and length of perception." With *Wavelength*, Snow achieves this heightening of perception; moreover, by using such a minimal form, he makes evident the means by which he achieves his ends. By turning, early in the work, away from the form of the conventional, plotted film toward a more austere and minimal form, Snow defamiliarizes the object of perception (the film), thus enhancing the difficulty of perception, and by using prolonged duration and minimal content ("minimal" in the sense that there is not a lot of clutter, either decorative bric-a-brac or distracting human elements), he increases, as Sklovskij indicated the artist must, the length of the perception.

The very simplicity of the film's form and its obvious determination by a simple generating principle make apparent the means by which this prolongation of perception is achieved. The most fundamental of the Formalists' convictions about form was that each work has one dominant structural principle – one single organizational principle around which other structures of the work cluster. The conspicuous simplicity of *Wavelength's* form makes its dominant principle evident, while the analogy the film proposes between its form and that of drama suggests the presence of a dominant principle in all dramatic works.

Moreover, the Formalists pointed out that because aesthetic perception is prolonged perception, all artworks must employ various devices for creating delays. Since artworks are nonpractical, their length (or difficulty) is not determined by any practical considerations, such as the nature and complexity of the ideas they are destined to convey. (The Formalists were insightful enough to deny that a work of art has any communicative role. Works of art do not clothe ideas in artistic form. If they do express ideas – and some clearly do – the ideas are the materials of which the artistic form is created, not the substance which the form is designed to convey. The inclusion of deep philosophical ideas confers no merit on a work of art; the work should be judged strictly on the basis of the perceptual play the form of the work sets into motion.) Accordingly, works of art can be any length. To keep them from ending too soon, devices such as prolongation, repetition and the roughening of form must be used. One of the brilliant features of *Wavelength* is the way it literalizes the insights of the Formalists into the manner by which artworks achieve their effects in order to demonstrate, exactly, that they operate by creating tension between the dominant which strives toward resolution and a system of delays and prolongations, and that the effect of such tension is the intensification of perception. Not only does the purity of the film contribute to the further intensification of perception; as well, it raises the film to the level of self-reflection, by making the means by which it operates so conspicuous.

An Experiential Film

Soon the mesmerizing power of the soundtrack,⁸ the film's minimal form and its extended duration take effect, and we find that at times our attention is directed not towards the film but towards our mental processes. In this state of self-reflection, we become aware of another important fact – that the temporal character which we have described as belonging to the experience of drama belongs in fact to all experience. All experience, we realize, is anticipatory in nature and projects itself forward towards an horizon.

We discover, then, that the isomorphism which we have described as existing among the basic structural features of the overall shape of the film, our experience of the drama and the dramatic form itself can be extended to

include the basic temporal structures of experience in general. The addition of this new term opens a new and profound dimension of meaning. Because temporality is basic both to drama and to experience and because there exists an isomorphism between the temporal structure of drama and the temporal structure of experience, it becomes possible to use the structural features of drama to comment on and to elucidate the essential structures of experience. One of the reasons for Snow's historical importance as a filmmaker was that he realized such homologies of structure could provide the basis for a new kind of epistemological cinema. The earlier epistemological cinema⁹ utilized the flow of images in a film and its illusion-conjuring potential to explore the influence of material objects on the perceptual processes of the viewer, so as to conduct an inquiry into the varying, ever-changing nature, conditions and validity of experience. With *Wavelength*, a new epistemological cinema emerged, one which utilized the structure of the film to comment upon the structure of experience. (This contrast is similar to that between the work of James Joyce and that of Gertrude Stein.)

The fact that the film is built upon the continual progress of the zoom has other implications. An effect of building the film on a single operation is to create the impression that what constitutes the film is a single shot. This suggests there is a unity to (or a continuum spanning) the different types of events occurring in the film. The unity or continuum which is evoked alludes to the transcendental unity of consciousness which underlies all ideas in consciousness and unifies them in a single flow.¹⁰ Building the film by employing a single operation articulates an analogy to the unity underlying experience, while the fact that this operation creates the impression of a forward movement articulates an analogy to the way in which, within this continuum of experience, one event leads to another. Snow directed attention to this aspect of the work in an interview: "Then I thought about the kinds of connections between events, and I wanted to have a range of connections."¹¹

Because the film gives the appearance of having been recorded in a single shot, it seems to unfold (or, at least, it raises the notion of a claim to unfolding) in continuous, real time. And analogously, because the major action of the film is confined to events occurring within the space of the loft,¹³ the fact that the action is recorded in a single real (non-synthetic) space is emphasized. Snow thus creates the illusion that the film's space-time is single, fixed, real and continuous.

Drama, Space and Time

One important basis of drama, as Bazin repeatedly pointed out, is the continuum of space-time in which the different elements in the action are held together in a dramatic tension. Snow's use in *Wavelength* of what appears to be a single shot therefore serves both to establish the continuum and to draw

attention to the fact that this continuum is a condition of drama.

The consequence for the film's temporality resulting from its being built on a single operation is even more important and embodies an insight that appears all the more remarkable when the film is considered in the context of the experimental filmmaking tradition. One feature of the avant-garde cinema in all its phases has been the use of disjunctive strategies, ranging from the deconstruction of narrative transitivity to the use of an assertive editing style or to the gestural use of camera movement. The motivating impulse for this disjunctive style has been the desire, among innovational artists of the past half-century ranging from the surrealists and Gertrude Stein to Maya Deren¹⁴ and Stan Brakhage, to create a sense of immediacy, of a perpetual present with the art-work. The effect of this characteristic was to destroy the sense of the future, to annihilate the feeling of anticipation and expectation upon which the tension of a drama depends. In the end, this tradition led to the repudiation of drama itself. With remarkable insight, Snow repudiated disjunctive strategies. When making this film that possesses the structural tensions characteristic of the dramatic form, he re-established the continuum of time that underlies dramatic actions and reasserted the sense of the continuous flow of time, whose modulations and articulations undergird the tensions evoked by a drama.

In a similar way, the traditional concerns that shaped the evolution of the style of innovational filmmaking led to the widespread use of such strategies as the flattening of space, painting on film, and associationist editing to recreate on film a subjective space – the space of vision and imagination. In reaction to this, the fixed, unblinking stare of the camera in *Wavelength* re-established the real continuous space that subtends dramatic actions and made the viewer acutely aware of that continuity.

However, the impression that the film is constituted by a single shot recorded in real space and time is contradicted by an important feature of this film. During the central portion of the film, a number of alterations in the quality of light occurs, which indicate a change from day to night or back to day again. The contradiction between these alterations, which indicate that the film time has been synthesized from a number of different takes, and the general shape of the film which, being based upon a continual zoom, suggests that the film is recorded in real time, exposes the differences between film time, real time and narrative time, reveals the synthetic and constructed character of film time, and comments on the conditions which give rise to our belief that certain film constructions (and, more generally, certain experiences) occur in single, non-synthetic, real time.

Drama, Light and Sound

About 100 feet (approximately two minutes and fifty seconds) into the film our attention is suddenly diverted from the continual advance of the zoom as

the second human event occurs: the woman (who supervised the moving of the bookcase) and a second woman enter the room, again from the right, and walk to the far end of the loft. The second woman shuts a window, and the traffic noise that we had been hearing for the first 100 feet of the film is attenuated. We hear what most people are inclined to construe as a radio broadcast of the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever";¹⁵ supposedly, the sound of the radio, like the traffic noise it replaces, is diegetic, though the supposed origin of this diegetic sound is interior rather than exterior to the loft (a shift involved with the film's theme of enclosure and transcendence). Approximately 148 feet (about four minutes and five seconds) into the film, the second woman gets up and walks out, exiting at the bottom right of the screen. At 184 feet (approximately five minutes and ten seconds into the film), the first woman gets up, shuts off the radio, and exits also at the bottom right of the screen. When the radio (still playing the Beatles' music) is shut off, the traffic noise once again becomes audible. At this point a sine tone, which continues to rise in frequency throughout the rest of the film, is introduced.

In part, this portion of the film reiterates the contrast between the two cinematic styles. There is, however, a marked contrast between the manner of presentation of this human event and the first. Prolonged use of a filter renders the image representing the later event, at least for a considerable part of its length, unnatural in its coloration. The contrast between the naturalism of the representation of the first event and the non-naturalism of the second demonstrates the important role that accurate mimesis plays in sustaining the dramatic illusion. The function that realistic sound plays in sustaining the illusion requisite to dramatic intrigue is demonstrated in a contrast between the first and the second human events, for in the first the woman's footsteps are accompanied by synchronous sound, in the second they are not.

Just as suddenly as the second human event begins, it comes to an end and some of the most striking visual effects of the entire film occur. For a moment the image disappears entirely and the frame becomes a solid colour field. This portion of the film marks Snow's most intense reflection upon light as a material of film. This meditation bears on several topics and is articulated in several ways. In the first place, the disappearance of the image and the resultant transformation of the frame into a solid colour field creates an environmental condition that shifts viewers' attention away from the illusory depth which appears to lie behind the screen and towards the space in front of the screen. As a result, the viewer becomes intensely aware of both the light reflected from the cinema screen into the viewing room and the light transmitted through that space in the form of the projection beam.

The pure colour fields of this portion of the film are replaced by startlingly coloured negative images of the loft, which depict the same visual field as does the image which preceded the pure colour fields. The first image is followed by several others, all in non-naturalistic colours of comparable

intensity. As these images succeed each other on the screen, the zoom continues its (apparent) forward movement.

This portion of the film has several significances. The non-naturalistic, negative coloration of the images causes an apparent flattening of space. This directs the viewer's attention to one of the essential facts concerning the material of film, namely, that the filmic image consists of an arrangement of forms on a two-dimensional surface. Moreover, the startling colour of the image (especially since it follows on that portion of the film just described) draws attention to the projection beam. And when we notice that Snow is contriving a number of devices to draw attention to the projection beam, we realize that the overall structure of the film, based upon the continual progress of the zoom, figures a brilliant spatial analogy to the projection beam and the screen.¹⁶ The progress of the zoom has a two-fold effect on the image: it causes a continual flattening of the image, and it results in a progressive restriction of the visual field covered by the image. Thus the course of the film describes a pyramid lying on its side – a figure similar to that formed by the projection beam – adjacent to a flat surface. The overall shape of the film and the shape of the projector beam are in fact homologous. *Wavelength* offers a four-termed homology between the overall shape of the film, the structure of drama, the temporal structure underlying drama, and the temporal structure of experience in general. The shape of the projector beam is a fifth term in the homologous series.

Snow's reference to this sideways-lying pyramid undoubtedly was conceived to allude to the perspectival characteristics of the camera image, for reference to this visual pyramid was commonplace in Renaissance artists' and theorists' explanation of perspective. As Leonardo da Vinci explained: "Perspective is nothing else than the seeing of an object behind a sheet of glass, smooth and quite transparent, on the surface of which all the things may be marked that are behind this glass; these things approach the point of the eye in pyramids, and these pyramids are cut by the said glass."¹⁷ The famous Renaissance artist and art theorist Leon Battista Alberti employed the same image when discussing perspective: "A painting [an image] will be the intersection of a visual pyramid at a given distance with a fixed centre and certain position of lights, represented artistically with lines and colours on a given surface."¹⁸

In using this figure, Snow is pointing out the analogy between the projection beam and rays of light converging on the eye and that between the cinema screen and the plane intersecting the visual pyramid described in the traditional theory of perspective. As the quotations from da Vinci and Alberti suggest, Renaissance theorists spoke about images as though they were expounding geometrical concepts. They spoke as though visual images are formed by rays which connect the eye with the object it is looking at when they intersect with a plane, the points on the surface of which correspond with points in points in the three-dimensional solid being rendered. Accord-

ingly, the theory of perspective provided a scientific and rational basis for scaling down three-dimensional objects and situating them relative to one another on a two-dimensional surface.

The system of perspective that developed in the Quattrocento was understood as providing not just a description but also an explanation of how the eye sees. The laws of the Euclidean geometry of rectilinear forms were thought to be capable of accounting for optical phenomena. There occurred in the Renaissance, then, a rationalization of sight based upon the implicit assumption that there exists an identity between seeing and picture-making, and that vision operates according to the same laws that govern pictorial representation derived from the camera obscura.

It should not be surprising that, given his commitment to expressionism, Brakhage has issued some of the most forceful denunciations of Renaissance perspective. For Brakhage, the use of Renaissance perspective marks the fall of imagery from the realm of imagination into that of conception, from personal idiosyncratic vision to socialized ways of seeing. "Imagine a world unruled by the man-made laws of perspective," his *Metaphors on Vision* begins. Later in the book, he describes a vista in Père Lachaise cemetery as "a play of planes wherein one makes marionette of one's eye's sight for the vanishing of lines into perspective, to say 'O' to have x-changed one's owned sight for the first ring of a chain of other vision."¹⁹ He also described to an audience after a screening of his film *The Text of Light* his struggles to overcome something that was constricting his sight, namely his "training in this society in Renaissance perspective – in that form of seeing we could call 'westward-hoing' man, which is to try to clutch a landscape or heaven or whatever, that is a form of sight which is aggressive and which seeks to make any landscape a piece of real estate."²⁰

Brakhage has challenged the now commonly accepted belief that the system of linear perspective explains the way the eye naturally sees. He insists upon its being arbitrary and without any real scientific basis; it is, rather, a way of seeing the conventions we learn in the course of childhood development. And it is not obvious that the structures of our visual percepts are determined simply by the straight line rays between our eyes and the object perceived.

Unlike Brakhage, Michael Snow has not attempted to present on film the way we actually see. Rather, he has endeavoured to make evident the forming influence of the various media in which he has worked. Snow would likely argue that to reduce cinematic images to representations of seeing runs the risk of concealing the mediating role of the film material. In part, this concern is a reaction against the extreme Romanticism of Brakhage and his followers. Basic to the Romantic quest has been the hope that it would be possible to discover a symbolic language for art that would be natural, that is, a language that would not depend upon the arbitrary conventions embodied in the tradition. By dispensing with the accretions of socially inscribed mean-

ings, artists could come down to the meanings inherent in sounds, shapes and forms of nature itself. Hölderlin, Constable and Wordsworth were convinced that it would be possible to discover a language independent of culture and immanent in nature, that it would be possible to let nature speak without any cultural intermediary.

It is only against the background of Romantic aspirations that we can understand why the natural and scientific character of the photographic image has so often been argued for, the absurdity of the claim notwithstanding. Photography appeared to realize the great Romantic hope of transmuting reality to art without the need for human artifice. While Snow's films, along with his works in other media, show many allegiances to Romantic aesthetics, on this matter, he does not seem to partake in this hope. Rather, he has consistently attempted to make evident that his photographic and cinematographic images are derived from the camera apparatus and that paramount among the factors determining the structure of photographic and cinematographic images is the lens, a device that is constructed to operate precisely in accordance with the laws of geometric optics. We tend (somewhat bizarrely) to conceive of photographic images as mechanically produced natural images and to overlook the fact that camera and lenses are tools designed for a particular use and are not natural implements at all. The particular function that the camera is fitted to serve is to produce images structured by the principles of geometric optics.

Starting with the Renaissance, Western artists have endeavoured to construct pictorial equivalents to seeing, primarily by attempting to secure a scientific basis for image construction. Such aspiration depends on the existence of a natural form of vision uninfluenced by education and upbringing. It turns out, however, that there is no natural vision, that what we see is affected by our beliefs – beliefs both about what really exists and about how we see. Associating vision with a scientific account of seeing based on the principles of geometric optics has produced the ground work for an explanation of image-making that is no more natural or less arbitrary than accounts given in pre-technological or non-Western cultures. In fact, a picture structured according to the scientific and mathematically endorsed form of pictorial construction really presents us with a set of rationally determined pictorial judgements, for it uses a geometric model as a method for analyzing the visible realm so as to arrive at a correct representation.

Perhaps this is the basis of Brakhage's objection to the system of linear perspective, that an image structured on that system is based upon a completed set of judgements which come after long, hard observation while Brakhage wants to depict momentary fleeting impressions – the raw material of judgement. But this ambition is evidence of Brakhage's radical empiricism, for it is tantamount to the desire to discover the sense data on which all our perceptual judgements rest. He wants to escape language and judgement and to get to the underlying reality as it is in itself.

Snow, on the other hand, by basing the shape of *Wavelength* on the visual pyramid, points out to us that the camera lens is not natural but is an instrument fitted to serve a particular purpose, that of giving us an image which resembles that advocated in Renaissance art theory, and that Renaissance perspective is accurately characterized by the name by which it was originally called, *perspectiva artificialis* (artificial perspective).

In one of his most famous papers, "Die Perspektive als symbolische Form," the great German art historian Erwin Panofsky proposed arguments which can be used to further explain the significance of Snow's allusion to a system of linear perspective. Panofsky described perspective as being "by its very nature a two-edged weapon.... It subjects the images of art to fixed, that is mathematically exact rules, but on the other hand, it makes them dependent upon man, even on the individual, insofar as these rules refer to psychophysical conditions of visual impression and insofar as the way in which they are carried out is determined by the freely chosen position of a subjective point of view."²¹ Indeed, the system of linear perspective mediates between the two worlds of subjective and objective experience. As Panofsky stated: "So the history of perspective may be understood with equal right as a triumph of the feeling for reality, making for distance and objectivity, and as a triumph of the human struggle for power, denying distance; it may be understood equally well as a fixing and systematizing of the external world and as an extension of the ego's sphere. It had therefore constantly to pose for artistic thought the problem as to the sense in which this ambivalent was to be used."²²

But the desire for a method for conciliating between the two worlds of subjective and objective experience – a method that would result in forms which belong indeterminantly to either realm – is one of the basic aspirations of Canadian art. And so too is the aspiration to subsume individual experience in a natural order larger than the individual human or even the collective order. And both these efforts are desires to which the system of linear perspective also testifies. This is yet another reason for the realism of the mainstream of the Canadian artistic tradition.

Dramatic Form as a Narrowing of Possibility

As the zoom continues its slow progression across the room and the visual field continues to be reduced, we become conscious that, on the central panel of wall facing the camera, there are a number of rectangular objects. We sense that the camera's movement is destined to end by centring on one of these objects.

This feature of the work demonstrates further aspects of the homology of the overall structure of the film and the structure of the viewer's response to film-as-drama. Our initial response to the film is one of uncertain anticipation: we wait for some action to follow the first, though we remain uncertain

about exactly what to expect. As it becomes clear that the overall shape of the film is based upon the continual progression forward of the zoom, our response changes. We still expect some further action, but now an expectation exists about the general nature of that action – that it will be a further extension of the zoom. Up to this point, however, a considerable uncertainty has characterized our anticipation, for as yet we have still been in doubt about the eventual destination of the zoom's forward movement. But as the rectangular objects on the central panel of the wall facing the camera come to occupy a larger and larger portion of the screen, this uncertainty is reduced, as the expectation that the film will end with the camera centring on one of the objects becomes more certain. As the zoom's progress continues further, all uncertainty is eliminated as it becomes clear that the forward movement is leading towards the image of the sea waves. At this point, we become so certain about the eventual outcome of the film that the camera's movements seem inexorable and determined, as though fulfilling some destiny. In short, the overall trajectory of the change of the viewer's response to the film is from uncertain anticipation to certain expectation.²³ In the structure of the film as a whole, based as it is upon the continuous forward extension of the zoom, a brilliant spatial metaphor to this general trend is developed: the extension of the zoom results in the continual restriction of the visual field covered by the image. This parallels the growing certainty we feel about the future course of the film. It could be said, therefore, that the long, open space of the loft seen at the beginning of the film stands for the open possibilities which evoke our initial response of uncertain anticipation, and that the restriction of the space brought on by the continual extension of the zoom stands for the diminishing of the field of possibilities which results in our response changing from uncertainty to certainty.

The restriction of space resulting from the use of the longer focal lengths of the zoom lens also stands as an analogue to certain structural features of drama and serves as a further demonstration of the isomorphism between the structure of the film and the structure of drama. The long, open space at the beginning of the film stands as an analogue for the wide range of possible action which characterizes the beginning of a drama, while the continual restriction of space parallels and emblemizes the progressive restriction of the range of possible further actions which occurs during the course of a drama. The presence of the rectangular objects on the wall facing the camera and their subsequent elimination develops a similar idea, for their multiplicity stands for the range of possible outcomes of the drama,²⁴ while the elimination of some of the rectangular objects by the forward progression of the zoom stands for the elimination of some of the possible outcomes during the course of the drama.

The presence of these rectangular objects and the subsequent elimination from the field of view of all but one of them also develop further the analogy between the overall shape of the film and the structure of experience. Just as

the zoom projects forward towards the rectangular objects on the wall, so also much of our experience is intentionally oriented, projecting forward to an horizon of anticipated outcomes. And just as the visual field of the image narrows, resulting in the elimination of all but one of the images on the wall facing the camera, so too in the course of an experience the range of possible outcomes is progressively reduced until one outcome becomes inevitable.

The advance of the zoom also effects a reduction in its spatial field (the area captured by the lens); this is something the overall conical shape of *Wavelength* seems designed to point out. This reduction suggests the loss of possibilities that attends every increase in certainty and the loss of potential that inevitably occurs with the passing of time and the consequent conversion of possibility into actuality (non-being into being). Particularly admirable in this respect is the intimate ontological relation of the reduction of the field of view and the contraction of the image's depth with the forward movement of the zoom. Furthermore, the film concludes by presenting an image of an image, for at the end of the film the zoom has closed in on a photographic image of waves – a device we presume was calculated to emphasize the unreality of what we see at the end of the film. Snow seems to have used this conclusion to suggest the idea that we leave behind the real as we pass into the oceanic realm of endless being. Thus, he seems to be pointing out, transcendence and loss are intimately related.

Once we have felt that the zoom has a destination, we sense that the forward movement of the zoom is in the sway of forces that determine with absolute inevitability all that will happen. At the same time, however, a series of events occur, whose effect is the polar opposite, for they subject the room to the influence of three sorts of arbitrary happenings.²⁵ One class of events includes random alterations of the colour characteristics of the image caused by the changes in film stock and the use of filters. The second class includes the sudden and arbitrary changes in light caused by shooting the film at various times of the day and night. The third class includes the events which occur outside the loft²⁶ as seen through the windows of the wall facing the camera – people and cars passing, etc.²⁷ The opposition between the arbitrariness of these events and the dramatic inevitability of the zoom's forward progress creates a contrast of response, the effect of which is to highlight the structural tensions at work in a drama and the way these tensions hold the events in the drama in a nexus of apparent inevitability.

But even in this emphasis on inevitability and fate, Snow is pointing to a feature inherent in the film medium itself. In a very early article, entitled "L'art cinématographique,"²⁸ Sartre asserts that the arts of movement (music, theatre and cinema) have the task of representing the irreversible order of time and its absolutely determined march forward. He talks of the "totality" of the melodic progression in a melody and of tragedy's "forced march towards catastrophe," which he likens to the fatality inherent in the cinema's temporality. Snow seems to think too that the cinema, by making

us feel *durée*, makes us sense the inhuman necessity in the progress of time, and develops a form which highlights this potential inherent in the cinema.

Drama and Temporal Continuity

About 625 feet (about seventeen minutes and twenty-two seconds) into the film, the progression of the zoom across the room is disturbed suddenly by the sound of breaking glass and of someone climbing stairs off-screen and apparently stumbling or scuffling. Finally, a man staggers into the room (again from the right), stumbles across the loft space before falling on the floor, seemingly drunk or dead.²⁹

There immediately follows a passage of filter effects, colour changes and superimpositions of considerable length (approximately 468 feet or thirteen minutes). Then, with the same suddenness that introduced the previous human event, the fourth in the series of human events begins. At 1,107 feet (thirty minutes and forty-five seconds) a woman enters the room and places a call to a man named Richard. She reports that there is a dead man on the floor and asks for advice, reiterates, seemingly in response to a query from Richard, that he is dead and not drunk, arranges to meet Richard downstairs, and leaves (at 1,143 feet or thirty-one minutes and forty-five seconds into the film). Then, for the next seventeen feet (twenty-eight seconds) superimpositions of two images appear, one showing the woman on the telephone, the other presenting the same space, but with the woman absent. Presumably the latter image is to be interpreted as presenting the film's present, while the former is to be interpreted as the film's memory of its most dramatic moment.

The interrelationship between these two events (the second presents a dramatic development of the first but is separated from it by an interpolated passage) is remarkably intricate.³⁰ In part, the significance of the interrelationship lies in its demonstration of additional features of the temporal structures of film and drama, and of our experience of temporality in film and drama. During the second of these events, the woman refers to a corpse lying on the floor, and our thoughts are immediately cast back to the time when we saw the man staggering into the room and falling on the floor. The temporal separation of the two events by the interpolated passage (and by the diegetic change from day to night) intensifies our experience of passing between the reference and event referred to³¹ and makes us aware of the processes that are involved in acts of recollection. Secondly, the relation between these two events demonstrates how subsequent developments in a narrative clarify earlier events and reduce their ambiguity. Thus, at the end of the first of these two human events, we are left in a state of doubt as to whether the man we have seen collapse on the floor is drunk or dead. The woman's subsequent insistence (in the second of the two events) that the man is not drunk but dead serves as clarification, thereby reducing a nagging lack of certainty

associated with what we have experienced. This reduction of ambiguity too is isomorphic with that pattern of the reduction of the visual field, which is an important feature of the work.

These aspects of the relation between the two dramatic events develop further the demonstration of the isomorphism between the structure of the film-as-drama and the general structure of experience. For, just as in a drama, later events reduce the ambiguity associated with previous events, so too in experience we look back from later events to earlier events in order to clarify our understanding of them. And in both cases a reservoir of past information informs our present experience and allows us to understand or interpret it.

A further aspect of these events demands comment. The film is symmetrically structured, for near both the beginning and the end of the film a human event takes place. Nevertheless, an important asymmetry attaches to the spatial character of each of the two events. At the beginning of the film, the zoom is set at its widest field and an illusion of deep space is created. Consequently the first human event is presented in a truly naturalistic manner. By the time the last event occurs, the zoom is far extended and consequently the space is rather flat; the space of the later event is not naturalistic. This asymmetry between the two sets of events and the contradiction between the spatial demands of dramatic illusionism and the quality of space actually used to present the second dramatic action (a contradiction heightened by the intensity of dramatic effect of these episodes) demonstrate why the illusion of hapticity is a requisite for creating dramatic intrigue.

The relation between these two events is also used to extend the commentary on the relation between the temporal structure of drama and the temporal structure of experience. Certain features of the work cause us to anticipate events, whereas others cause us to experience events in the mode of presentational immediacy. The reference in a later event to an earlier event invites us to think back to that original event, and we are brought to see that experience also has a retrospective aspect.

This serves partly to further demonstrate the homology among the structures of this film, of drama and of experience, for in drama, as in experience, present events are qualified by past events and events yet to come, just as all experiences involve and are influenced by memory. Perhaps more important is the fact that these devices encourage us to experience events in three ways: events are first anticipated, then perceived, and finally remembered. By contrasting these three kinds of experience, Snow demonstrates, with remarkable cogency, the way the temporal character of intensional objects affects the nature of experience. We can view the inexorable forward movement of the zoom, which continually brings the more distant nearer, as articulating an allusion to the passing of time which continually brings the future into the present, and to the process of passage from one kind of experience to another. Thus, another aspect of this rich work is that it constitutes a phenomenological inquiry into temporality which resembles Sartre's in its

concern with the process of temporality and with the relation between the temporality of the intensional object and the nature of experience of that object.

The continuity of the zoom and the monomorphic shape of the film point to the fact that time is a continuum in which both past and future influence the present. Snow later developed this idea along Derridean lines; in films like *Presents* (1981) and *So Is This* (1982) he formulated the idea that the present incorporates traces of the past and the future. *Wavelength* indicates how time appears from the vantage point of eternity, how the moments constituting the temporal continuum appear from the aspect of eternity. From this vantage point, all moments in time are co-present. The differences among past, present and future moments depend upon where within the temporal continuum we are situated (the analogue offered by the film is how far the zoom is extended).

This is a concept of time shared by most Canadian Idealist philosophers. Unlike the British Idealists who tended to deny the reality of time and things in time, they argued for a reconciliation of time and the eternal which denied the reality of neither. For John Watson, and most other Canadian Idealists, time and change were modes of a reality that was changeless and timeless and could ultimately be understood only by seeing them from the vantage point of the eternal or an absolute reality. Snow's use of realistic imagery of timebound forms, on one hand, and of simple, diagrammatic forms which subsume such imagery in a realm of the timeless and the eternal, on the other hand, implies a similar reconciliatory view of the relation of the timebound to the timeless; for him, as for Watson, an interest in the eternal does not deny that things in time are real.

Another of *Wavelength's* episodes suggests the way later events in a drama connect with earlier ones. Shortly after the last human event ends, and before the tension generated by it has dissipated, a ghost image, in negative superimposition, of the woman making the phone call appears and is repeated several times. The phantom images of the woman making the call (in which she made reference to an earlier event) are used to allude to events in the past.

But more importantly the relationship between the actual human event and this, its more abstract echo, extends Snow's discourse on the kinds of connections between events. The image in negative superimposition carries almost the same dramatic and emotional burden as the initial realistic version. The image-echo thus is made the equivalent of the event and this suggests, among other things, that memory images also present themselves with the force of reality. (It was brilliant of Snow to think of making this point, for it is indeed the logical basis for the idea that temporal experience is always synthetic, comprising past, present and future modes.) The connection between the event and its image-echo is further strengthened by a causal relation between the actual event and its image-echo that seems to be

suggested, since the dramatic intensity of the actual human event seems to cause the film to bring forth the negative superimpositions.

A commonplace of descriptions of negative images is that they have a ghostly appearance; they appear to be like the disembodied spirits of bygone events or of people who have passed away. In using these negative superimpositions, Snow is reflecting on the manner in which the past re-presents itself in the present. (This, perhaps, is one reason Snow incorporated a drama involving a death in the film and, furthermore, has the camera "pass over" the corpse as though unperturbed.) In using these negative superimpositions, he is pointing out both the nihilating power of the passage of time and how recollection captures only a spectral image of the past, not the past itself. As well, he is indicating the transcendent power associated with time's passage, for the passage of time disembodies persons (and events) – as the film literally shows – and spiritualizes them.

In the last few minutes of the film, the meditation on illusionism conducted throughout the film is recapped and even further extended. During this portion, the zoom continues its apparently inexorable march across the final few feet of the empty loft. The progress of the zoom eliminates the floor and ceiling from the image, leaving only a portion of the wall opposite the camera in view. As a result, the illusory space in front of the wall, articulated by the converging lines of the floor and ceiling, is removed from view and we are presented with an image of a flat field. Thus, during the film, the representation changes from one creating the illusion of deep space to one that appears flat.³² In this respect, the movement of the zoom could be seen as a progressing towards the true nature of film.

In the final five minutes another process occurs, the emergence into clarity of the photographic images tacked on the wall opposite the camera. As they become clear, we see first that there are three images and then what they represent. One, centred on the wall below the other two images, is a shot of waves. Above this and to the right is a front and back composite photograph of a nude girl. To the left, there are two white on black silhouettes of the "Walking Woman." The larger of these two is tacked onto the smaller and separated from it by a white border.

This array of images sets up a field of possibilities for the outcome of the film and in so doing articulates an allusion to fundamental structural features of our experience of the film-as-drama, of drama itself, and of experience in general. But it also offers comments on features of cinematic illusionism. Particularly significant are the silhouette figures of the "Walking Woman." By setting the larger figure on top of the smaller, Snow shows how a difference in the sizes of objects lying on a single flat plane can create the illusion of depth. This manner of creating the impression of haptic space is characteristic of representational images, in film as in other media. The white border separating the two figures extends this commentary, for it exposes the means by which the illusion is created.

The film concludes with the zoom centring on the image of sea waves. Of all the images on the wall, this is the most illusionistic. Thus, as the image fills the frame the illusion of deep space, which was destroyed in the course of the film by the flattening of the image that occurred as the zoom extended to its furthest ranges, is re-established. The film therefore possesses a cyclical structure inasmuch as it begins and ends with a naturalistic image. However, at the end of the film, we are aware, as we were not at the beginning, of the illusory character of the deep space. The oceanic character of the image also gives us a sense of the unity of continua, an idea which greatly interested Snow when he made this film and which was to become one of the bases of his filmmaking. A similar relation might exist between the ocean and the continual flow of events as exists between the waves and the events within this continuous flow. No better image could have been found to define a space which appears to stretch beyond what could be enclosed by the loft, a feature of the image used to articulate thoughts on the nature of consciousness and on the possibility of transcendence. Finally, the image alludes to a key work in Snow's *oeuvre*, *Lac Clair* (1960). *Lac Clair* was one of the first non-abstract canvases Snow painted. It too took the issue of framing as central, for here the image was surrounded by brown paper tape. The reference to clarity in the title is certainly ironic, for the image is anything but clear; in fact, it is another instance in Canadian art of nature being depicted as unknowable, as intractably other. Snow presents us with a body of water but shows that we cannot enter into it, cannot recover oceanic feelings (of the sort Freud wrote about). Snow conveys the effects of contradictory desires – both to merge with and to control our desire for merging with the other. Jack Chambers' *Circle* expresses contradictory feelings of similar sorts.

But the impression that the waves stretch out, far beyond the loft, is only an appearance. Snow uses this status of the image to extend his inquiry into photography which he associates with both transcendence and loss. The shape of *Wavelength* indicates that all through the film, even in its final minutes, the camera is outside the real world, unable to enter it. It is characteristic of the camera apparatus (in both still photography and film) that it is always outside the world, looking in on it. The camera is not present in the world, at least in the sense of being an object among other objects. This is what it means for the camera to be unable to take a picture of itself. Thus, as the illusory nature of the final image indicates, a photographic and, especially, a cinematic image seems not to occupy the same world that we (who, in viewing a photograph or a film, identify with the apparatus) do. The image seems to be on the other side of a line that demarcates the world we occupy from the world we view in the image. The image, therefore, seems to lack connection with our world, to stay back from where we are. Viewing a photographic or a filmic image, we thus experience a sense of loss.

The photograph of waves which ends *Wavelength* emphasizes this aspect of photography. Waves are a common image of flux and change. Here flux is

transcended (and the idea of transcendence is suggested by the fact that the ocean is also an image of wholeness) by being converted into an image. Timelessness and changelessness are achieved, but at the cost of reality; this is the price that must be paid – the *length* that must be travelled – to reach the wholeness symbolized by the *waves*.

In the concluding section of the film the zoom approaches more and more closely a photograph of waves pinned on the wall, until the photograph nearly fills the frame. Then there appears, superimposed over the first image of waves, a larger image of waves (presumably a closer shot of the same photograph) which fills the frame. The first image is then very gradually faded out. The photographic superimposition of the closer image upon the farther makes a point similar to that made by the physical superimposition of the two photographs of the "Walking Woman" pinned to the wall, that is, it points up how we obtain our clues about depth relations in two-dimensional artworks from size relations. The elimination of the surrounding frame in the second, closer view highlights the actual nature of the zoom – that is, highlights the fact that a zoom is actually a reframing of space, not a penetration into space. Thus, in this gesture, Snow combines a reference to both the illusory and the actual effects of the zoom, the filmic device which, after all, provides the basis of the entire structure of the film. The ability to invent devices which have dual significances that seem to be in virtual opposition to one another is not the least among Snow's powers as a filmmaker.

Remarks on the Zoom

This description of *WaveLength* suggests that the zoom really did advance across the room and that most of what has been said about the film would apply equally well to a film record of a 45-minute long tracking-forward shot. But the zoom does not advance across the room and we must account for Snow's choice of a zoom rather than a tracking-forward shot. There is a key difference between the two: there is no change in perspective during a zoom as there is during a tracking-forward shot. During a zoom, the central portion of the image is blown up larger and larger (but undergoes no change in linear perspective) and the parts of the image closer to the edges of the frame are eliminated from the field of view. A number of issues lie behind Snow's choice of zoom rather than a tracking-forward. For one, that there is no change in perspective during the shot affirms the virtuality of the image-space. Furthermore, although what a zoom does is merely enlarge the central portion of the image, it can be seen as though it were the product of a camera's travelling forward through space. Accordingly, a zoom embodies the tensions that arise from relationships among the illusory conical space (actually an obelisk-shaped space) that projects backward from the picture plane to the vanishing point, the picture plane itself, and the real conical space (of which the first is a virtual image) projecting forward from the

picture plane to the viewing point – tensions which *Wavelength* explores. Moreover, the zoom has no precise correlate in human experience; it does not exactly imitate anything in human perception. Thus use of the device highlights the fact that what we see when watching a film is a representation derived from a camera, not imitations of acts of vision. By so indicating that the images of the film are representations derived from a camera, Snow points out in yet another fashion that in making images we convert the real object into something unreal (or at least, something possessing a different and more phantasmal sort of reality). A sense of mourning for the lost object – an object that has been substituted in a representation – is one of the constants of Snow's art. Moreover, the phenomenon of seeing one thing as another (seeing a zoom as though it were a movement through space) is the very essence of representation, and *Wavelength* takes representation as one of its fundamental concerns.³³ Thus, Snow uses the zoom to ask questions about the relation of the reality of the two-dimensional surface to the illusory three-dimensional image-space which would be impossible to pose with a tracking-forward shot. Since the zoom does not really penetrate space but only enlarges a section of it, its use emphasizes that we can never really traverse the space of the image, can never go through the vanishing point into the other, transcendental space.

Furthermore, a zoom-shot is essentially an adjustment of the frame, not a change in point of view. A zoom is a continual reframing and not a camera movement. By using a zoom rather than a tracking-forward shot, Snow can highlight the significance of the frame. Concern with framing is widespread among Canadian artists and is related to the impulse to limit and control a frightening environment. A desire to go beyond the contained world (suggested by the push towards the other space evoked by the use of the zoom) and the terror of succeeding (implied in the way Snow associates the concepts of the transcendent and the unreal), is an evident source of tension in *Wavelength*, as well as in \longleftrightarrow . In that respect, his work has strong roots in a longstanding Canadian tradition.

A Film of Purity

An important aspect of *Wavelength* is the impressive purity of its spatial and temporal forms. The film opens with a scene that involves characters (a man and two women), incident (two men, supervised by the woman move a bookcase into a loft), and employs deep-space (naturalistic photography). This scene elicits expectations that a narrative will follow. One reason for our expectations is that this opening appears conventional and conventional films make use of narratives. Another reason is perhaps the more important. The very fact that the scene begins the film prompts us to expect that it stands at the beginning of a chain of events. Simply because of its place in time (to use a metaphor that seems singularly appropriate to the film), we

expect that this event will lead to others. So strong is our belief in the necessity that cause-effect relations follow one another in an endless and unbroken chain and so influenced are we in our conception of the nature of an event by what we believe to be its potential as a cause that we can hardly imagine an event without imagining how it might lead to others.

The occasional stuttering forward movements of the camera seem inappropriate for presenting a conventional narrative, and so we begin to question our expectations. And when, after the bookcase has been moved in and the people have left the loft, no further narrative events occur for some time, we become completely disabused of them. Because the space contains no narrative action – and so contains less than we expected it to – it seems empty. As Sartre points out in the famous passage in *Being and Nothingness*³⁴ in which he describes looking for (the absent) Pierre in a café, our expectations make us perceive the absence-in-space; that is, they bring the emptiness of the space to our attention. Because we are not distracted from it by characters or incidents, we observe the (empty) space attentively. Thus, while the representation of pure space is not possible in cinema (since the cinema can only represent what space contains and not pure space itself), *Wavelength* comes as close to provoking an intuition of pure space as it seems possible for a film to do. Usually we attend to the events or objects space contains and are aware of space itself only in the mode of distraction. *Wavelength's* minimal form, its lack of a fast-paced narrative, and the near absence of character points us towards the apprehension of pure space itself.

The fast-paced narratives of conventional films (especially American films) similarly distract us from perceiving pure time. On the other hand, *Wavelength* provokes the experience of duration; the relative emptiness of the time of *Wavelength* brings us as close as seems possible to the apprehension of pure time, that is, the perception of time itself, disassociated from any occurrences in time.³⁵

But *Wavelength* is a film about possibilities and the (almost) pure space and time of the film seem to be invested with potential. Snow might even be proposing a hierarchy of the potential for creativity of various sorts of beings, ranging from the creative field of pure space and time through the spectral forms of the mind (the imagination, for example) to artistically (imaginatively) transformed reality to ordinary reality. Space and time are presented as having creative powers, or at least as being that from which beings (that is, that which can be represented) emerge and to which they return.³⁶ The range of visual forms the film incorporates, from constructions composed of pure colour and light, to ghostly images, to extraordinarily concrete images, suggests this modulation from the creative realm of possibility to the concrete and particular.

This reference to the ghostly qualities of the superimposition is loose and even metaphoric. But after the final "human event," involving the making of the telephone call, the metaphor is literalized (at least in some partial extent)

as the woman who made the call comes back to "haunt" the scene of the death. This allusion to a ghostly nature is significant. A ghost is someone who is dead but is yet not wholly without life. A ghost is someone who, though departed, still possesses some measure of presence. The presence, however, is not that of a real person or real entity, but that of one who returns to haunt us as an Absent One. Thus, in the figure of the ghost, presence and absence commingle. This fusion of presence and absence also characterizes photographic images. It is clear that Snow uses the death and haunting of the scene by a ghost to point towards an inevitable consequence of the making of photographic images and of representations of all sorts – the fact that representations "kill off" their live models and return in their stead ghostly, "semi-real" representations which, while presenting their models (in the sense of offering a likeness or at least representative of them), still render them absent (inasmuch as the "representative representations" stand in for and take the place of the originals).

The figure of the ghost also operates as a transitional device, for the absence of what is presented in a photograph is one of the central concerns of the next section of the film in which the forward movement of the zoom closes in on an image of waves. Even this specification of what happens in the final minutes of the film misrepresents the film's conclusion. Actually the zoom progresses towards and then inside the lowest of the three small photographs on the central wall. As this happens, a police siren is heard, and its rising and falling pitch, not dissimilar to sine-wave sounds, merges with the steady, high pitched pure tone. The "progress" of the zoom continues beyond the edges of the photograph. When the zoom is well inside the photograph, a superimposition of a wider image of waves presents a larger portion of the same photograph from the same vantage point as though it could be a repetition of a section of the film many sections earlier. As the wider image becomes predominant, the zoom appears to retreat a little. The effect is of a replaying of time; the way memory and representation replay time suggested by this device is a crucial aspect of Snow's fascination with the relation between time and eternity. The zoom progresses again, appearing to press so close in on the photograph that the image blurs out. Ever so tiny, typewritten credits appear briefly on the screen to end the film. The use of the figure of the ghost as a transitional device makes the absence of what the photograph presents all the more palpable – it emphasizes the unreality, so to speak, of what it presents.

The ghost also serves as an image of the contents of memory. Its status as a memory image is an ambiguous one, for it could be an image that is remembered by the spectator or one that is remembered by the drama of the film. But however we interpret its status, and regardless of whether or not we accept fully the consequences of this ambiguity, one thing is clear: Snow uses the figure of the ghost to comment upon the contents of human consciousness and, more specifically, to point out that the images that inhabit our

consciousness are also amalgams of presence and absence. Memory can make present to our mind what is not immediately present in the (so-called) real world around us. This is also true of fantasy, dreams, speculation and all non-perceptual acts of consciousness. In fact, perception itself never really presents the real world object itself to the mind; at most, as Spinoza and others so often pointed out, it only registers the effect of a "real world object" on the perceiver's body/mind. This similarity between photographic imagery and the contents of consciousness, that both are amalgams of presence and absence, was undoubtedly a contributing reason why Snow would have found the cinema, a photographically based medium, an ideal tool to investigate epistemological issues.

Snow himself referred to *Wavelength* as "a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, etc." When we push any question about being far enough, he has suggested, we end up with ultimate questions, questions of a religious sort. Snow's interest in pure space, pure time (and his associated interest in pure, coloured light) coincide with his interest in the transcendent; about *Wavelength* he has also said that it was about "the beauty and sadness of transcendence." In all these ways, but particularly in the way that he attempts to deal with the transcendental while working with "realistic" images – indeed in the way he shows that the transcendent is embodied in the real – Snow is an artist whose concerns are close to those of the Canadian Idealists.

The Achievement of the Film

It is no more true of Snow than of any other innovative artist that he simply rejected the traditions which preceded him. His relation to the traditions of experimental filmmaking involves rejection, assimilation, extension and transformation. To show now how certain features of Snow's work are founded on a transformation of features of the traditions of experimental filmmaking, we will look at Snow's relationship to a certain aspect of the work of the greatest of the American avant-garde filmmakers, Stan Brakhage, since Brakhage epitomizes that tradition.

Brakhage's work is justly celebrated as an exploration of camera movement. By positing a somewhat extraordinary convergence between vision and expression, Brakhage used camera movements in such a way that they possess both gestural and mimetic significance. The traces that his camera movements left on the screen were records of acts performed by the filmmaker in which his subjective/emotional states at the time of engaging in the acts were revealed. At the same time, his moving camera attempted to capture the movement – the shifts and changes – of our visual field. In a movement towards reification,³⁷ which has characterized many recent developments in art, Snow avoids camera movements of any behavioural or mimetic import and uses movement instead as a formal principle for the

organization of the film and, extending this process, makes one simple operation the principle of the formal organization of the entire work.³⁸

In emptying the camera movement of expressionist and mimetic import and by using the transformed movement as the generator of the work's form, Snow alters the way the conceptual import of the work is conveyed. In *Wavelength*, the content is not expressed through the structure of the work; the structure of the work is the content.

This has important consequences for the way we read the film. No longer do the events in the film constitute a sign system which must be interpreted in order to decipher the film's meaning. The film is simply an object to be experienced, and it is through a consideration of the experiences evoked by the work that its meaning is discovered. Films like this invite us to reflect upon the mind in the processes of experiencing. And on this ground, artistic production converges with epistemological inquiry.

If Snow is often cast as the antithesis of Brakhage, another Canadian artist-turned-filmmaker – Jack Chambers – stands somewhere in between the two. While Snow's work is as cool and as pellucid as arctic air, Chambers' is not. It is often as dark, as sepulchral, as brooding as Brakhage's. Like Brakhage, Chambers has made extensive use of autobiographic and diary material in his art (films and paintings), while Snow really has not. Nevertheless, there are striking similarities between Snow's and Chambers' films as well, as is revealed by comparing Snow's *Wavelength* with Chambers' *Circle* (1968), the making of which overlapped with the making of *Wavelength*. The central section of *Circle* is monomorphic, just as *Wavelength* is. Like *Wavelength*, the central section of *Circle* explores a single space. On the evidence of these two films, Snow and Chambers would seem to evince similar interests in the power of light to articulate spatial illusions. Finally, underlying both films, there are Romantic, even Idealist, ideas. In fact, Chambers is an exemplar of a Romanticism of the full-blown, Teutonic sort that Brakhage also exemplifies, but whose ideas Snow too utilizes, if somewhat ironically. Chambers, like Snow, was an artist who, while he had profoundly religious, even mystical beliefs, nonetheless made use of realistic imagery (and employed such imagery even at a time when it was very unpopular to do so). In fact, like Michael Snow, and John Watson, Chambers' work showed an interest in reconciling the everyday and the mystical.

CHAPTER 9

From Painting into Cinema: A Study of Jack Chambers' *Circle*

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something.... To see clearly is poetry, philosophy and religion all in one.

JOHN RUSKIN

When Jack Chambers began working in film in 1966, he was already solidly established as a painter, but his popular fame rests largely on a series of canvases completed between 1968 and 1971 which were admired for their objective description of everyday reality. The films Chambers made during these same years are not well known though they are an integral part of his *oeuvre* (as are his writings). It is my conviction that Chambers' art and thought are Romantic in character because his preoccupations, far from being centred on objective description, are really idealist in nature. These were the interests that led him to the cinema, a medium which enabled him to further his exploration of perception.

Two Tendencies in Twentieth-Century Art

The range of artwork concerned with important epistemological questions includes two basic and conflicting strains. The first is concerned with affirming the status of the artwork as object and with encouraging us to understand the perceptual effects of the material from which a work is made, rather than with prompting us to feel effects which derive from its illusory subject matter.

The development of this practice was predicated on a particular understanding of the nature of the aesthetic response. It was alleged that for our response to be genuinely aesthetic it must be characterized by distance, it must involve setting aside our everyday concerns and focusing our attention exclusively on the art itself.¹ Such a view leads logically to the attempt to eliminate subject matter or content from a work, on the understanding that a preoccupation with such content tends to cause what was commonly called "underdistancing." Underdistancing was viewed as problematic because it

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interfered with that disinterested contemplation through which the work itself was apprehended and its aesthetic value experienced.

Behind this lay a critique of the role of "illusion" in traditional representational art. The "illusionistic" features of a work of art, it was argued, served only the artist's attempt to provide a convincing impression of reality. We might say, oversimplifying matters enormously, that the craftsmanly concern with the convincingness of the "illusion" was predicated on the belief that the greater the degree of likeness between image and model the better the work. "Anti-illusionists" pointed out that this belief had odd – and unacceptable – consequences; if the degree of likeness between image and model determined the value of a work of art, then the best art would overcome all distinctions between image and model. It could almost be said that, in the traditional view, the work of art aspired to become the object it represented. That would suggest, however, that the work itself is ontologically deficient and that the degree of reality it possessed was lower than the object represented.

Recognizing that this conclusion was unacceptable, formalists argued the strength of a work of art lay in the integrity of its form. This, they alleged, constitutes a criterion that allows us to distinguish between art objects and other sorts of objects, for the form of other sorts of objects (except perhaps *qua* art objects) does not appeal to our sense of pleasure. Some formalists even argued that their form provided artworks with a unique ontological status. They also argued that the form of a work of art need not resemble the form of any other object, inasmuch as the form of a work has importance in its own right, an importance that does not derive from the work's relation to some other entity or entities. In other words, the formalists proposed that reference to the world take secondary place to form as the focus of attention.

This precipitated a major change in art making. The principal source of the effect of illusionistic artworks is subject matter. During much of Western history, the formal construction of a work of art was considered important only as it served to enhance the effects that arose from its content. The formalists rejected this view, arguing that effects arising from subject matter make psychic distancing difficult. To avoid the problems associated with underdistancing, strategies for eliminating referentiality and for laying stress on a work's material construction were developed, such strategies as eliminating illusionistic forms of construction and references to any space or time other than that in which the work is actually seen or heard and including marks or other scars that accidentally appear when materials of a medium are subjected to the physical processes involved in creating a work.

The history of this artistic practice has been characterized by rapid changes of style. But underlying the many styles generated in the few decades of this endeavour has been a rigorously reductionist logic of development; all the major breakthroughs in the practice have involved the discovery and repudiation of yet another expressionistic, illusionistic, or accidental

feature of an artwork. The object of this developmental process is the formulation of a specification of the essential features of the various artistic media.² It was inevitable, therefore, that it should lead to the production of monomorphic structures, now familiar from minimalist art, structural cinema, "task-based" dance, and the music of gradual change (the music of LaMonte Young, Steve Reich and Philip Glass), the dramas of Richard Foreman, and the choreography of Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk and Deborah Hay. All these artists worked in New York during Michael Snow's sojourn there, between 1963 and 1972. All these artists tend to construct works of consistent (rather than diversified) materials, to use duration, to eschew psychology and to retard or protract the few actions upon which the works are based, and to use stasis and an extensive unvarying repetition of identical units (the sort of repetition Stein thought impossible).

In opposition to this line of analysis, there has emerged another body of work that explores epistemological questions. Animated by spiritual considerations, this work represents the idealist concerns of our religious past, and particularly of one of its most tenacious styles – namely, expressionism. While this work is firmly committed to speculative, metaphysical inquiry, it is also informed by an epistemological conviction about the nature of vision and imagination. According to this conviction, vision is not the result of a simple process by which the perceptual organs respond passively to the influence of particular objects in the environment; rather, vision, or the visionary experience, is understood as a complex and mysterious process whereby the mind transcends the realm of observed particulars and holds them in apprehended unity.

Many works of art within this tradition, such as some by Stan Brakhage, have had the nature of this visionary experience as their primary subject. The ways of embodying this concern have been varied. Some artists have attempted to develop complex, polymorphic forms which directly represented the diversified characteristics of the experience; others have attempted to use simple structures to offer a model, or analogue, of the essential structures of that experience.

For almost two decades, the experimental cinema was sustained by such idealist aspirations. Beginning with Maya Deren and continuing in an unbroken line through the work of Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, Ed Emshwiller and Bruce Baillie, visionary filmmakers were consistently at the forefront of cinematic art and were responsible for formulating a new cinematic language. The recent past has seen a significant change. With the emergence, around 1967, of Paul Sharits, George Landow (a.k.a. Owen Land), Ernie Gehr, Ken Jacobs, Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow as the major filmmakers, simple and reductive forms virtually displaced the polymorphic forms of the visionary cinema as the dominant mode of experimental film practice.

Chambers' Painting Considered as a Prelude to Filmmaking

It was precisely at the time this displacement was occurring that Jack Chambers began making films. His first completed film, *Mosaic*, was released in 1967, though he had worked on it for nearly two years. That an artist of such obviously metaphysical inclination turned to the cinema at this time to express his beliefs represents an important conjuncture of concerns. To understand Chambers' films is to understand how he reconciled his own concerns with the formal interests that dominated the experimental cinema of the time. But before discussing Chambers' films, we must consider his earlier work in other media, since it indicates something of his views on the photographic image, temporality and light – the elements from which he was to forge his cinema.

The essential concern of the paintings Chambers produced between 1963 and 1965 was the ongoing rhythm of life and death. In these works he used imagery derived from photographs, most often from snapshots of family and friends. Sometimes the figures in the paintings appear in the same environment (cemeteries, fields or gardens) as in the photographs, but as often they are excised from the landscape in which they originally appeared and placed in a new space – for example, *Olga at the South Pole* (1963), *Olga Near Arva* (1963), *Olga Along the Thames* (1963), *All Things Fall* (1963). Usually the works involve a contrast (albeit muted or attenuated) of the tonal range between the subject and the background (which in these paintings sometimes approached monochromaticity) and depict the subject in a self-contained posture. The effect of these devices creates a sense of discontinuity between figure and ground, a result that makes the subject appear isolated.

Typically, the colours in these works are pale-toned, almost to the point of appearing bleached. While they have a rather dense painterly texture, they are also suffused with an intense and barely contained light which seems to struggle outward. The effect of this manner of handling light is to evoke a sense of something otherworldly.

The way Chambers used discontinuities in these works foreshadowed his later shift to cinema. In certain works of this period, discontinuities in the spatial field suggest discrete moments of time. In *Olga and Mary Visiting* (1964-1965), for example, Olga Chambers' hand is held as though she is sipping coffee. Her cup, however, is not held in her hand but is above her and to her right, in the position it might have occupied before she sat down or might occupy after she stands up. Through the use of constructions like this, a painting becomes a record of several distinct movements rather than, as is usually the case, a record of the single instant.

Thus, from the earliest of his works that bear this distinctive stamp, Chambers showed an interest in forms which synthesized discrete moments and discrete impressions. The significance of such devices is related to his

views about the way a perception is constructed: "A painting gets put together just like an experience – in particles. *Mary and Olga Visiting* isn't the description of a visual moment; it's the accumulation of experienced interiors brought into focus." He further developed this idea of experience as synthetic, as incorporating a multiplicity of sensory inputs: "... I don't paint an exclusively visual reality. The visual is only one aspect of an experience. Each sensory organ records reality in its own way: a smell, a sound, temperature, texture, a landscape can reawaken their own image of an experience. The merely visual is enriched through associations."³

Implicit in this statement is the view that perception is more than the conscious registering of a state of affairs that exists at a single moment, accessible to any of the senses independently of the others. The idea that perception is a synthetic process, integrating impressions of states of affairs existing at different moments, and given by a number of senses, is one of the benchmarks of Romantic thought.⁴ We can see an obvious similarity with Wordsworth's lines in Book XII of "The Prelude": "those passages of life that give/Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how/The mind is lord and master – outward sense/The obedient servant of her will."

If Chambers' works of this period seem, in their concern with temporality and with their analogues of montage construction, to be strongly affected by certain formal characteristics of the cinema, they also show a growing appreciation of the characteristics of photographic vision. Typically in these works, the deep space of traditional painting is flattened by the removal of an environment for the figures or by the fragmentation of a unified, continuous, deep space. The single surface of the painting is broken into a number of self-contained, but related, images. This flattening results in the objects in the painting appearing to be spread out equidistant from the viewer, much as they appear in the camera's, but not the eye's, field of view. Furthermore, in these works Chambers eschews the use of variations in colour to create form-in-depth. In fact, colour variations are restricted to a very limited range so that tone becomes a property of the surface of the work, much as it is in the the photographic image. Some of Chambers' works of this period (like *Daffs*, 1964-1965) even resemble a photographic negative or bas-relief; the colour is handled in such a way that forms appear to be modulated by light, and forms are sometimes visible from one angle though not from another. At this time Chambers also began to experiment with structuring form out of a constellation of points rather than by using outline; thus the particular character of these pieces bears a strong affinity to the grainy texture of photographic enlargements.

Many of these paintings consist of a number of objects or people – sometimes (as in the case of *Daffs*) portions of objects (a doorknob, part of a table top, a section of a door and window) – against a monochrome background. Chambers used such monochrome surfaces in a highly original way. Since Matisse, the use of monochrome surfaces had become something of a

commonplace; conforming with the modernist ideal, it tended to flatten the pictorial surface. But the use Chambers made of the monochrome surface served altogether different ends. The portions of objects depicted in such works as *Daffs* represent remembered details; the monochrome background represents the vaguely recollected background against which the details are remembered, the unspecific "field" – to use the phenomenological term – of the experience. But even this aspect of the paintings hints at something more. While every experience has a field, what that field contains is undisclosed in that experience. Its contents, therefore, have an almost paradoxical quality; while they are immanent in experience, they also transcend its grasp. A field of an experience provides an interesting and rich image, one that has some of the quality of the mysterious, for the mysterious is something that enters our experience but without revealing its full nature.

Chambers' use of portions of objects also relates to the close-up vision so characteristic of Canadian art. The use of the close-up view arises from the attempt to contain and limit whatever provokes fear. Like many Canadian artists, Chambers' work expresses paradoxical feelings about his environment: on the one hand, its otherness is fearful; on the other, it calls out for us to merge with it.

Chambers' paintings of this period rely heavily on the depiction of familiar persons, objects and environments. In part, this is to evoke the sense of a periphery of personalized objects with which he surrounds himself and onto which he can project his own self. Familiar objects are objects that tend to elicit personal associations. Their images seem almost to be internalized; indeed, images of these "others" constitute our experience. In Chambers' work they suggest the dissolution of the limited self and the discovery of that grander self that encompasses the other. The use of light, colour and discontinuity and particularly the chilling frozen-moment quality in the postures of his figures, which is so extreme that stasis sometimes appears paradoxically as an almost foreboding presence, tend to idealize the subject matter of these works. In this way, Chambers suggests that the experience of even the most common places and familiar persons can be invaded by a sense of the mysterious, the marvellous or the numinous. Indeed a fundamental characteristic of much of Chambers' work is the tension between the terrifying otherness of objects (which he sometimes associates with death) and the peace discovered in personalized objects, between the sense of the fragility of human beings, surrounded as they are by a terrifying world, and the extraordinary strength of the point at which the internal and the external worlds meet to form a unity.

A series of canvases completed between 1966 and 1967, known as the silver canvases, are marked by an intensified concern with light. In this series, the reduction of the form-creating function of colour, and the correlative enhancement of the formative role of light, are carried to their extreme. Working with large-figure compositions, Chambers painted in close tones of

silver. The metallic aluminum paint he used makes the surfaces of the paintings highly reflective. These paintings are, quite literally, compositions of light. The impression that these works are composed of moulded light is enhanced by the paradoxical spatial features of these light representations. The reflected light creates forms that appear to protrude from the surface, rather than recede from it, as is typical in painting. Conflicting with these plastic effects are the effects produced by the monochromaticity of the paintings' surfaces. The elimination of the subtle gradations of tone and colour which painters use to model forms, along with the strongly reflective properties of the surface, act to flatten the image. Thus, the silver paintings simultaneously produce an impression of extreme flatness and of startling depth.

These works also reveal Chambers' interest in the photograph and in the perceptual discoveries it affords. The positive modelling which these works exhibit (the forms seeming processive rather than recessive) is a feature prevalent in most photographic images, but not in paintings. The absence of detail and the rendering of large surfaces of paintings in undifferentiated tones further strengthens their resemblance to photographs, particularly unconventionally exposed photographs which are rather light or dark overall and lack detail and differentiation in their highlight or shadow areas.

These works indicate a substantial shift in Chambers' attitude towards the subjects of his paintings. The subjects of the works produced between 1963 and 1966, which were based on snapshots of family, friends and relatives, were drawn from the artist's personal life. From them we sense Chambers' strong rapport with his subjects – as well as a typical Canadian desire to remain within a closed, tightly circumscribed space. The silver paintings, on the other hand, are characterized by such a strong sense of detachment that they could be described as analytical works. Chambers' concern in this period is no longer with incarnating the feeling of his intuitive participation with the figures of his life, but rather with examining the act of perception itself, with studying the method by which objects and figures are known. He is no longer content with celebrating the fact of intimate knowledge; rather he wants to explore, to know, intimate knowledge.

These paintings, nevertheless, do possess idealizing features. Because the image in the paintings is a virtual image, its forms and tones depend upon the viewer's vantage point. Looking at these paintings, we notice that the image apparently changes from negative to positive and back again, which integrates the space and time of viewing into the structure of the work itself. But it does something else as well: it literally transforms the work into a construction of light. The interest, both in light and how and what the perceiver perceives, can be characterized as Idealist.

Chambers' Idealist convictions are particularly evident in a remarkable painting he did in 1966, *Tulips with Colour Options*. The work consists of two silver panels. The smaller one to the right is a narrow vertical rectangle depicting a seated nude viewed from the back; the larger panel is a horizontal

rectangle approximately the size of a movie screen depicting tulips, which appear to be set in a vase, though the vase is not seen because it would be below the bottom of the canvas. But the most remarkable feature of the work is the four colour patches along the top of the canvas. Somewhat as Chambers used the tinted plexiglass overlays in other paintings, we are to use these patches to colour the silver monochrome depictions and to produce colourized images in our minds. In this way, Chambers alludes to the mentalistic or ideal character of all perceptions and all representations.

The silver paintings elicit a form of temporal experience different from most representational works. Our response to a representational painting involves a contradictory experience of time. On the one hand, we sense intensely the real time in which the work is viewed; on the other, we identify with the illusory, historical time which the representation seems to embody. Since this illusory, historical time is tied to the content of the work rather than to its form (to its representational rather than its presentational aspects), modernist artists developed a series of strategies to eliminate all reference to historical time and to emphasize the real time of the experience. In the works he produced between 1963 and 1966, Chambers presented a series of discrete temporal incidents on a single canvas, thus disassembling the unified historical time of illusionistic painting and replacing it with an idealized temporality. But the temporal experience still involved conflicting aspects, for it encompassed the moments of time in which the various events took place as well as the time in which the experience of the work itself actually took place. The silver canvases elicit a much purer form of temporal experience. When looking at them, we are so acutely aware of the way in which our movements affect the object viewed that the experience of the time of viewing the work overwhelms any possible experiences of any other times.

With the silver paintings, the time and space in which the work was viewed became part of what was experienced, part of the work's structure. Chambers himself was aware of this: "As you move, the positive forms become negative and vice versa coming back.... The time implications are important. Time as a new dimension has come into view. The temporal insistence (the time it takes to view the variations as a whole or the time spent in waiting for the variations to be revealed) is the real difference here. It's a different realism: space has become time." This concern with temporality, as Chambers well realized, pointed him towards the cinema:

These silver paintings are instant movies ... the temporal dimension belongs to movies, though only a few independent filmmakers have made any use of it. In painting, descriptive space (perspective, colour modulation) equals illusion. It confuses self-awareness. Now in the commercial movie, the same thing happens with descriptive time. Lawrence on his camel at sunset; Lawrence on his camel at dawn,

equals Lawrence riding his camel all night.... Images again for the sake of the story. You're drawn away from yourself, your own self-awareness, to star in somebody else's fiction. Entertainment equals distraction equals false-life plot.⁵

Between 1967 and 1968, following the silver paintings, Chambers created a series of graphite drawings in which he used his earlier formal discoveries to explore the tension that arises from the contradiction between surface and articulated form. Chambers achieved a great deal simply with his unusual way of handling colour tonality. In both the graphite drawings and the silver paintings, there is a spatial illusion, the simultaneous impression of flatness and depth. The flatness comes from Chambers' use of a very restricted tonal range that eliminates the depth-structuring effects of colour. In the graphite drawings, the depth effect is original and startling; parts of the space seem to recede from the surface of the work (as in traditional representational painting), parts seem to protrude forward, projecting themselves towards the viewer.

In conventional chiaroscuro drawing, the artist uses the white of the paper as highlights and creates progressively darker tones for the range between the highlights and the darkest shadow areas. The paper-white highlights are also generally used to represent those portions of the scene closest to the viewer and the darkest tones those farthest away. Since the lightest tones coincide with the paper's surface, the scene could appear to advance forward no farther than that, while the gradation of tones down from paper-white articulated an apparent recession away from this surface. In his graphite drawings, Chambers handled tones differently. He first covered the entire paper with a layer of graphite, establishing a mid-tone for the drawing. He added more graphite to darken certain areas and erased some to lighten the image. The surface of the paper, instead of representing the nearest point of the illusory space, appears to fall on a plane at middle depth, with some of the space protruding in front of the paper, some receding behind it.

In the graphite drawings Chambers also developed some highly unusual and extremely clever methods for working with light. When he finished one of these drawings, he repeatedly sprayed it with clear water to produce a kind of glaze. He then mounted the drawings in plexiglass and sealed liquid plastic and sometimes painted over the surface of the plastic with oil. The plexiglass modulates the light passing through it, producing a diffused effect which was sometimes enhanced by an overlay of oil. The contrast between the diffuse oil overlay of the surface and the undiffused image underneath has a remarkable way of revealing the effects of light. The compression of the tonal range also creates interesting light effects. Like the silver paintings, some of these drawings (such as *Teacup in Madrid Window*, 1968) undergo variations with changes in the direction from which they are illuminated or in the point of view from which they are observed, appearing sometimes clear and distinct,

sometimes hazy and indistinct. Again, Chambers uses the device to suggest the subjectiveness of perception, very much an Idealist notion.

The oil glaze and the plexiglass also act as reflective surfaces which form images of the viewer or of the environment in which the works are hung, the same sort of play between transmitted and reflected light that we get in a photograph. The effect of these reflections is complex. Their use complicates the light effects which Chambers created in the drawings; to the effects created by transmitted light, they add effects created by reflected light. These virtual images add further elements to his already complicated montage of figures and frames. But their most significant contribution is to the work's temporal construction. Superimposing reflected images on the images drawn on paper involves superimposing an image from the present on an image from the past. The tension between past and present is characteristic of the experience of representational painting; with his graphite drawings, Chambers reworked this tension and modified its nature. For one thing, the montage construction of many of these drawings allows the works to admit different times, including the present, into the work. This was itself a very significant revision, for in traditional painting a unitary past – the historical time of the represented scene – is pitted against the present – the time of viewing – in a simple relation of opposition. In these works the use of such dichotomous constructions is repudiated in favour of a more complex relationship incorporating a wider range of temporal elements. Furthermore, in the variation of these images with changes in ambient light or the observer's point of view, Chambers found the material to create a form that embodied ideas about the relativity of the present, an element not found in traditional painting.

The shadowy, even fragile, character of these reflected images results from the fact that their existence depends on the way viewers position themselves in relation to the image and on the conditions of the ambient light, which gives them an almost subjective existence. The use of such light images is another of Chambers' idealizing strategies. More specifically, it suggests the process by which consciousness superimposes its own elusive forms on images transmitted to it from the outer world. (The imposition of a mental form on the external world is described in many Romantic lyrics.)

There is a great deal of similarity between the images of the graphite drawings and photographic images, such as the concern with light and the quality of detail. The powdered graphite creates a screen of dots from which the image congeals, and which closely resembles the grain of a photographic image. Furthermore, in some of the graphite drawings, the edges of objects possess soft outlines or a soft-edge quality that resembles the soft-focus quality of some photographs. At the same time, this softness can be compared to the indistinctness of much of our mental imagery. The similarity between the properties of both photographic and mental imagery is one of the dominant features of Chambers' film work.

If these works show a strong influence of the formal characteristics of photographic representation, they also reveal a strong influence of the cinema. Frequently they are composed of a number of separate, though related, images which are often juxtaposed in such a way as to create an "open-form narrative." In *Regatta No. 1* (1968), for example, each image constitutes a moment in the story of a family tragedy, the drowning of a young son in a regatta. Though the story is not entirely clear, the effect of the juxtapositions of the various images is intensely disturbing. In part, this is attributable to the eerie stillness that pervades the work. More important, though, is the effect of the montage. The fragmentation of the narrative effectively lifts the story outside of any real, historical time and transforms it into a subjective construct. This act of synthesis involves a process of "re-membering" or "re-collection" in both the senses of these words. It elicits reflection. That which is reflected upon is necessarily something past; consequently, a sense of things past is inscribed in the work through the use of the fragmented narrative. But along with this sense of the past is a sense of the present created by the intensity of the viewer's engagement with the work. The anxiety arising from the tension between these two temporal modes creates the fear of transience that seems to haunt so much of Chambers' work and accounts for so much of its power.

The relationship between the various images in the painting *The Hart of London* (1968) is equally noteworthy. A strip of small images on the right-hand side of this work depicts various attempts to entrap and shoot a deer; the larger image on the left involves a reaction to those attempts. Collectively these images constitute a narrative, with each separate image representing a discrete moment. Chambers seems to have loaded his montage construction with this narrative import because our response to a narrative involves that same tension between conflicting times that Chambers so frequently exploited throughout his *oeuvre*. On the one hand, a narrative demands to be considered as a linear form in which the various events exist in a temporal sequence; successive events come into existence and then pass away. On the other hand, the narrative form also possesses an architectonic which must be grasped as a whole, not in succession, and in which time is a principle of order, not of existence. From the one standpoint the narrative events are successive and fleeting; from the other, they are eternal. A narrative, by its very nature, involves a tension between the fleeting and the eternal, between the past and the present, between the part and the whole. Chambers exaggerates this tension by using a form in which a number of frozen-moment images, representing distinct phases of the action, are presented simultaneously. Thus he uses the part-whole relations of the narrative to suggest the relation between the fleeting moment and eternity. There is an obvious close relation between the form of construction of this narrative and its content, which involves the slaughter of an innocent deer.

The fact that the works depend for their impact on the synthesis of a

number of elements reflects Chambers' views on the nature of experience. Throughout his career, Chambers devised strategies to point out that "experience gets put together in pieces," that in forming experience the mind synthesizes discrete elements, and that each element of an experience derives its impact from its relation to the whole. Many of the works of the late 1960s include a number of images which revolve around a single emotional centre as though they were associations being made with a single "felt theme."

Unlike more materialist artists, Chambers does not use forms based on fragmentation to make evident the constructed character of the object. He used these strategies for idealist rather than materialist ends. Reinforced by the dated content of the images (the fashions people wear or the automobiles they drive reveal the era in which the source photo was taken), by their incipient narratives (many suggesting decay, death or the passing of time), and by the subjective character of the associational relations between the various images (suggesting the act of remembering itself), the fragmentary character of these works implies the synthesizing activity of the mind. The object of inquiry in Chambers' paintings and drawings (though this is not true of his films) is primarily the act of awareness, not the material art object itself. Insofar as the material art object is the subject of scrutiny, it is examined not simply or even primarily as a material construction but rather for the clues that it might provide about consciousness.

This form of construction has another significance, one that relates to the more fearful side of Chambers' work. The grouping together of isolated images stresses their multiple frames, and this emphasis is another example of Canadian artists' proclivity to use strongly bounded forms and to compartmentalize elements within the field of vision. The resemblance of Chambers' work of this period to Michael Snow's *Atlantic* (1966) and *Of A Ladder* (1971) and to Joyce Wieland's *Boat Tragedy* (1964) is very striking and indicates just how persistent Canadian artists have been in their use of the limited view. Use of such devices in the attempt to contain the object of experience reveals the terrifying nature of experience, a prevalent theme among Canadian thinkers and artists who have seen nature (the most basic Other) as numinous.

Chambers' paintings of the late 1960s represent the culmination of his synthetic phase. Through the emphasis he put on the character of these works as assemblages, Chambers highlighted the synthetic character of perception. In the next phase of his paintings – the perceptual realist period – there is much less evidence of the constructed character of the artwork; in fact, such evidence was deliberately suppressed.

Perceptual Realism and Romanticism

Chambers' period of perceptual realism spanned the years between 1968 and 1977 and includes most of the work that won him popular fame. He set down

his thoughts on perceptual realism in an article which appeared in *artsCanada* in 1969. This article is so rich in insight that, despite its rather tortuous style, it merits quotation at some length:

The organic process of nature which man shares is the way mankind as a fruit is shaped on his tree and by all in which the tree is rooted. This process containing each man and animating him from within and from without is also the process he spontaneously emits to the outside world again. I call this primary pattern which swings back and forth through man and nature and is the sense of all the moving parts of a moving whole, *perception*.

... The intention to imitate experience by art-craft, I call *perceptual realism*.

... The senses constellate to experience the impact [of an object of experience] as a total circuit, registering the entry as a complex ...

... Before the camera was invented painters developed a painting style to compensate for the lack of visual information available to them. A constantly changing scene with no way of freezing the instant offered the painter little alternative but to find some intentional means of expressing the unity he felt for the thing he was painting. Style filled the gap as it were, where the artist had no more specific references to go on. The personality of the artist conceived stylistic innovations that became his hallmark; where style deteriorated into a mannerism painting derived from the lyrical ego and the mind-aesthetic rather than embodying the primary impact. Where style is the intention and unifying element of a work ... the aesthetic object fixed as it is in time does not embody a presence of now....

... What happens in general is that natural phenomena remain invisible to the conditioned mind: it prefers a substitute-stereotype to making personal contact with visible experience.

... The impact on the perceiver looking through the visible to a general vision awareness of the whole will register impartially an experience because it is not intercepted by the mind....

The integration value of the foto as a new tool for perceptual painting resides in the camera being able to do its specific descriptive job so well. The printed colour description renders obsolete such time-style license on lyricism, subjective selectivity and emotional impurities that haphazardly deform and exaggerate objective reality....

Since the nature of perception and its experience is spontaneous, there is, in receiving some experiences an enthusiastic response to the beautiful which enunciated can be: "wow". The beautiful impact has the effect of bursting in and knocking you over before your door is all the way open.... The more we become familiar with the experiences that perception brings, the more we become aware of an inherent

gentleness in the intercommunion of oneself with things. So gentleness of reception is also a communication that influences the outside world. Finally, perception itself becomes a "forgotten" awareness that just *is* with all the common naturalness of those common things seen out the window or inside the house or any place.⁶

Chambers is stating his personal reformulation of the aesthetics of Romantic idealism. The major benchmarks of that tradition are here: the concept of nature as organic and of art as growing out of nature like a living being, the sense of the numinous in nature,⁷ the belief that our creative faculties are animated by drives also found in nature, the view of the artist as visionary observer, and the notion that art derives from a higher order of awareness.

For Chambers as for the Romantics, seeing is not just another form of knowing, but the highest form of knowing. Unlike the empiricists, the Romantics did not believe that seeing – or any other form of sensing for that matter – involves merely the presentation of raw sense data which are later organized by the higher faculties of the intellect. Rather, they understood it as involving a synthetic activity, whose product is complete, well-formed and capable of providing ultimate knowledge. Because perception – and this is especially true of vision – involves an organizing activity, no higher faculty is needed to organize the material it presents.

Chambers' belief in the active character of the perceptual process explains another of his reasons for attaching a high value to the visionary experience. Vision, when understood as an activity of the subject, can be seen to be instrumental in fashioning the subject's world; in vision, the subject and the object of awareness work together to form cognition. The world known through vision is one that is structured by the subject (and is known to be so). The intellectual act, on the other hand, opens up a gap between the subject and the object; a separating of the subject from the object seems necessary to the analytic enterprise. Vision involves closing this gap between subject and object, because in the act of seeing the subjects bring into being the very thing they are perceiving.

Even the experience which Chambers refers to with the term "WOW" can be understood within the framework of Romantic orthodoxy. More specifically, one of the most obvious frameworks for understanding the experience would be Coleridge's famous distinction between reason and understanding. Both are faculties that join together separate things or ideas (for example, the ideas of redness and a ball). Understanding joins separate ideas only according to the mechanistic principles of association. Reason is an altogether higher faculty; it reduces multiplicity to unity and succession to an instant. It achieves the organic fusion rather than the mechanical juxtaposition of parts produced by the understanding. It also unites subject and object. And in doing so, it produces a uniquely ecstatic awareness.

This ecstatic awareness, what Chambers called the "wow" experience, is embodied in the timeless character of the perceptual realist painting. By freezing a single moment and rendering it with intricate detail, Chambers made the momentary action depicted in the work seem eternal. The experience suggested is one of transcending the realm of change, and rising to a realm that is changeless, timeless, even peaceful (this is suggested particularly by the later perceptual realist paintings).

This frozen-moment quality of painting suggests that vision is a lofty form of awareness, for it implies that what is known in that luminous moment of vision is beyond change and so belongs to a higher order of being. But the frozen moment is also a characteristic feature of photographic vision. Chambers, it seems, compared the vision characteristic of a photograph with the vision attained in the moment of ecstatic awareness; given the resemblance he discovered between the two, it is a small wonder that he should have used photographs as models to fashion his perceptual realist paintings, or that the cinema should have exerted such a strong attraction for him. Nevertheless, what he discovered in "the foto" led Chambers to transform the Romantic tradition, making it a distinctively postmodern form.

Perceptual Realism and Photography

In formulating the theory of perceptual realism, Chambers stressed the importance of photography, in particular its role in revealing features of human vision. He opposed the idea that the invention of the camera had rendered painting's traditional enterprise of creating a likeness of the observed world obsolete, leaving painters to deal with only formal problems. Rather, he insisted that the invention of the camera helped realize the age-old aspiration for realistic painting, since it enabled painters to progress in their pursuit of objectively accurate description. A photographic record, he pointed out, is complete; painters were no longer forced to invent details they might have forgotten. Chambers also claimed that the camera made the development of styleless painting possible. Before the camera, painters were forced to invent devices to fill in the gaps in the representation of an event with details drawn from their own psyche. After the camera, the conditions requiring painters to rely on devices influenced by their subjectivity had passed and completely objective description became possible. Representational painting had at last come to a point where it could fulfil its original ambition.

Chambers' desire to rid his paintings of "mannerisms derived from the lyrical ego and mind" recalls Charles Olson's notion of objectism. Olson, like Chambers, makes poetics an ontology:

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which Western man has interposed himself between what he is as a

creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, ... if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. And by an inverse law his shapes will make their own way. It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man.⁸

Chambers and Olson shared the belief that escaping from objects into inwardness threatens us with the loss of contact with the vital energies that flow into us from the cosmos. For them, perception, at least in its most elevated forms, results from a dynamic union of subject and world, a union so complete that each shapes the other's being. This belief challenges the view of the nature of consciousness contained in the modern paradigm, a view that had dominated Western thought at least since Descartes and that, in a specifically Kantian version, was involved in modernist theories of art. According to this view, the mind contains images that represent reality, and the truth of what is in consciousness depends upon the correspondence between that mental image and the real object or event. This idea of the separation of mind from matter is fundamental to the notions of the ego, the individual and human freedom which lie at the basis of our culture. It is also fundamental to empiricists' account of meaning. Along with other early post-modernists, Olson and Chambers challenged these ideas, insisting that meaning is unmediated and does not depend upon representation.

The ideal of styleless painting that Chambers proposes is part of his post-modern transformation of the Romantic tradition. This transformation has a basis within the Romantic era itself. Though most Romantics held that the work of art is an expression of the self, throughout the history of Romantic endeavour there has persisted an alternate notion, which finds exemplary expression in Emerson's essay, "Nature" (1836). In a famous passage, he describes how, when he visits Nature, "all mean egoism vanishes." He says further: "I become a transparent eyeball; I *am* nothing. I *see* all."⁹ While the much exalted ego of the more orthodox version of Romanticism finds expression in style and particularly in the evidence of brushwork, the transcendence of ego that Emerson described – or at least the limited ego – was traditionally conveyed by a meticulous realism that effaced all evidence of style and brushstroke so that no alien presence would interpose itself between the image and the spectator. The work of the American Luminists (c. 1825-1875) – Fitz Hugh Lane, Martin Johnson Meade, John F. Kensett, Stanford Robinson Gifford, Jasper F. Cropsey and Frederic Edwin Church – exemplifies this style and exposes its motivation.

The alien presences that threatened to sabotage the experience of the fusion of the self with the world were understood as including not only the self of the painter, but also the painted surface. It is important to understand the reasons for hiding the material features of the artwork. The idea of transcendence of the self usually has been associated in the visual arts with the ambition to create a painting that appeared to be a pure construct of light. If the fact that we are looking at a painting should force itself upon our consciousness, then we would realize that we are dealing not with a construct of light but rather with a mere representation of light – that we are looking at a mere image of a higher level reality, and not that reality itself. The revelation that works of art have only the status of imitations brings into doubt the belief, so essential to the Romantic credo, that a work of art, because it is brought forth by the same creative process as the one that produces the realm of nature, possesses the same degree of reality as the objects of nature. For this reason, nearly all Luminist painters have found it necessary to disguise their materials by adopting a meticulously realistic style.

Here lurked a problem that threatened to subvert the entire Luminist program, including Chambers' reworking of it. The problem is that a painting is a construct – it is something an individual creator creates by hand – the suppression of evidence in the brushstroke notwithstanding. A painting is not really a construction in light, but can present only the illusion of being so. It is composed of paints, of pigments, of darks rather than light. Thus Luminist painting was forced, by the incompatibility between its ambitions and its materials, to be deceptive, to be something less than completely honest about its material and its methods.

Film, on the other hand, truly is a construction in light – and one that, as Bazin stated, does not demand the intervention of a maker.¹⁰ The cinema therefore was an ideal form for Chambers to pursue his program of perceptual realism, for in it he could honestly and fully embody his Luminist convictions. There is another reason why Chambers turned to cinema at this time. The concept of perception upon which his theory of perceptual realism rests holds that the act of perception is a synthetic one and that in the act of perception a number of discrete elements are joined together in a luminous moment of insight. This understanding of the nature of perception provides some of the ideas that structure his film *Circle*.

Circle

Circle (1968-1969) consists of three parts. The middle portion of the film, by far its longest section, is a series of 365 four-second shots of a backyard, each taken from very nearly the same place, with lenses of the same field of view and with the same lens aperture. Preceding and succeeding this portion of the film are passages that appear to be much less highly structured. The opening section consists of footage showing, in order of appearance a monochrome

field; an unidentifiable object that appears merely as an area in relief; concentric circles of light; the handprinted title "*Circle*" in superimposition; concentric circles of light; an unidentifiable object; the title "By Jack Chambers" handprinted on a piece of paper that is divided into rectangles of varying tones; a light fixture hanging from a ceiling (which remains on the screen for a comparatively long time); a person (Chambers) winding a movie camera, then bending over to rephotograph a series of still pictures of the same backyard which we see in the central portion of the film [these stills appear to be taken from the same vantage point and with apparently the same field of view as the images in the central portion of the film; they may even be still prints of frames from the central portion of the film]; a close-up of the man with a camera shooting the strip of pictures; the series of pictures rising upward through the screen; a picture of the backyard swelling into an intense closeup, and finally going out of focus.

The transition to the final passage consists of a shot of the movie camera and its case lying on a table, another flare passage and a very short shot of running water. The latter two shots evoke the elemental relation between fire and water; the image of water also alludes to the idea of flow and thus makes a reference to the material of the film. As the image settles, a shot depicting a woman teaching a dog to count appears. The woman asks the dog a simple arithmetical question ("What is five take away two?"), the dog barks a number of times, giving the correct answer and is rewarded with a biscuit. We then see, successively: shots of the wheels of a train; passengers disembarking and stacking their luggage into a line; a procession of people walking downstairs (probably at the railway station); a crowd breaking up and getting into cars; a man feeding a machine with a long rod of flexible striped material which is first bent into a nearly sinusoidal shape and then cut into separate portions which, it becomes evident, are candies; a woman pouring these candies into a Christmas stocking; people swimming in a stream; some men milling around a culvert and then disappearing into it; a number of people swimming in a large stream; two children dragging their boots in a dewy field to make four continuous tracks; two girls writing in the heavy dew on the rear window of a car; three children lifting a fourth onto a large snow bird, then running away in a line and being pursued by the fourth who has hopped off the snow figure; a close-up of the head of a large bird; a flock of birds flying in the sky; people shooting movie film of a bird flying; a single bird flying; and finally, a hand opening to reveal a still bird which, shortly after the hand opens, flies away. Throughout this passage, there occurs intermittently, in short bursts, a circular figure in the upper right hand corner of the screen.

Circle: Section One

At first, the relation between the film's three sections is puzzling, but with further thought the relation becomes splendidly clear. The film begins with a

prolonged passage during which the screen is filled with a homogeneous pinkish-beige/sepia colour field. On the soundtrack there are periodic bursts of white noise. The extended duration of the passage together with the rhythmical recurrence of this sound has a settling effect upon viewers, leading them into contemplative repose.

The camera sweeps about the room; as it moves across objects, they divide on the screen into sectors. Finally, the camera comes to rest and the first clear image of the film is presented. It begins, in fact, as an out-of-focus circle of light and only gradually comes into focus. We recognize, in retrospect, that the monochrome field, out of which an object – a light – materializes, embodies the three major concerns of the film: light, the unity constructed in the act of perception, and the unity of Being or Reality. Indeed, it is a nearly perfect expression of Chambers' emanationist notions.

The titles following this introductory image develop these themes. The first title, a handprinted "Circle," refers to the overall organizing shape of the main body of the film. It denotes, in a concise, referential operation, a shape that is to unfold across a field of time. It also makes reference to the structure of a year. The second title, also handprinted, shows first the word "By," then, separately, "Jack Chambers." The ground on which these words are set is composed of three vertically stacked rectangles of varying tones, each of which is similar in shape to a cinema screen or a film frame. The camera moves down the vertically arranged titles, causing the rectangles to move up the screen. This upward movement of these screen-shaped rectangles alludes to the movement of the filmstrip through the projector.

Allusions of this sort have become common, at least within the context of the avant-garde film. They usually function self-referentially, commenting on the materials of the cinema medium. However, in this film – a work based upon a notion that perception is a synthetic process – the device suggests an analogy between the composition of film, which is constructed of separate frames, and the composition of a perception which, according to Chambers, is likewise constructed of a number of bits of information. It was this analogy, among other of its features, that made the cinema attractive to Chambers, for in the cinema he found an art form whose very basis embodied his theories of perception. He believed that the most basic cinematic structures corresponded to the structures of perception, and this suggested to him that, within the arts generally, film held a privileged place in the depiction of consciousness' mode of operation. The acceptance of and defence of this belief implied, for an idealist like Chambers, the notion that the cinema has a privileged relation to what is ultimately real. For Chambers, as for all Idealists, the relation between epistemology and ontology is a close one.

The images of the opening section are derived of home-movie-like footage; the soundtrack consists of bursts of white noise, the whirr of a camera being operated, and a song with lyrics which seem to include (though after some twenty viewings of the film I am still uncertain) the words "Came back

home, came back home." That a sense of place, especially of that personal environment which we call home, was one factor that prompted the making of the film is truly obvious. The use of the home-movie footage reveals Chambers' commitment to a sense of place. But its use serves other ends as well. Home-movie footage resembles, in both content and form, our memories, and Chambers was able to use home-movie footage for the mimesis of consciousness. But this is not quite precise enough, for the home-movie footage's documental nature guarantees that its imagery has a relation to objective reality. What the home-movie footage really represents, then, is imagery that exists at the boundary where self and world meet. Chambers refers to such images as perceptions.

The next image in the film is that of a light bulb. How this image acquires its signifying function is particularly interesting. It is radically isolated, both by the tight framing of the shot and by the lack of any clear diegetic relation between itself and the preceding image. This isolation forces a simple denotative function upon the image, making the shot a virtual declaration that this is a film about light.

Chambers' fascination with light in this film derives partly from his interest in the cinema's material base. But the structure of the passage (as opposed to its individual elements) reveals another reason. The film's opening images consist of homogeneous colour fields – fields of light rather than images of material objects. As the camera pans, at first a vague, then progressively a more sharply defined series of concentrically arranged circular figures appears. Finally, the light bulb comes into view and it becomes evident that the concentric circles emanate from a light bulb.

The passage has a clear trajectory; undifferentiated light becomes, first a pure form and then an object. Within the context of the Romantic concerns that animate Chambers' work, the two movements of this trajectory can be understood as isomorphic one with the other: the first movement charts the transition from the realm of pure being to the realm of form, the second the transition from the realm of form to the realm of material objects. The passage as a whole, then, moves down along the chain of being. There is also some significance in the fact that these various levels of reality are all represented within a single shot. Chambers uses the single shot here to suggest that all the different levels of reality contained partake of a single being. The unity of the single shot, then, is an analogue for the unity of being.

There is a similar pattern of evolution in the spatial features in this passage. The opening section, consisting of an undifferentiated colour field, affords no clues as to the nature of the space being photographed. Shortly after the concentric circles appear, the screen is bifurcated into two tones (a darker tone on the top half of the screen and a lighter tone on the bottom) of indeterminate reference. Only when we see the light fixture on the ceiling do we realize that the two tones define a ceiling and a wall. Thus the passage progresses from unity to differentiation to material form.

The camera lingers on the light bulb for a few moments then tilts down from the ceiling, along a wall, to an area with a vertical row of windows which, like the off-white rectangles on which the credits are written, are of the same proportions as a cinema screen or a film frame. This analogy to the screen or the film frame is emphasized by the movement of the camera. By tilting the camera downward along the windows, Chambers makes them appear to rise upward through the screen. And like the similar camera movement in the credit sequence, this movement suggests that a film creates the illusion of continuous motion by presenting a number of discrete frames.

In the next passage we see, from two points of view, someone open a case containing a motion picture camera, a shot of the man lifting the camera, a shot of him shooting and then a shot of what he is filming – a piece of cardboard upon which are several photographs of a backyard, arranged in two vertical rows that resemble strips of film. Again, as though to reinforce this analogy, the camera tilts down the rows, causing them to rise upward through the screen.

There are several flares of light in this passage. Their presence serves a number of interrelated purposes: it points up the material features of the medium, deconstructs the illusion of reality, and alerts the viewer to the fact that this film is, among other things, a film concerned with light. But it is what is implied by the interrelations of all the purposes that is of particular interest. The flare, as it washes over the image, obliterates it. Moments when this happens effectively constitute a demonstration that light determines the beings of material objects. At the same time, they affirm that light is an essential material feature of the cinema. The interrelation between these two functions constitutes an argument that cinema is a metaphysically privileged medium, since the being of cinematic images, like that of any material object, belongs to light.

A black border at the edge of the frame and the intermittent appearance of a sprocket hole at intervals during this passage accentuate the material of the cinematic medium. The presence of such materialist references in Chambers' films is particularly interesting because there are no similar references in the perceptual realist paintings he made at the same time. In these paintings, he used every means possible to conceal the nature of the material or at least to prevent it from obtruding on the viewer's consciousness. This difference between Chambers' paintings and his films is probably explained by his belief that the materials of painting can only give the illusion of presenting a moment of consciousness. The materials of cinema, on the other hand, offer structural analogues to consciousness. Chambers seems to have believed that inquiry into the materials and forms of cinema would reveal features of the structures of consciousness, while inquiry into the materials and forms of painting would not.

Chambers' Luminist beliefs also help explain the difference in the way he handled the two forms of expression. Cinema is a form that embodies light; at

best, painting merely gives the illusion of embodying light. While the revelation of film's true nature is therefore consistent with his emanationist ideals, revelation of painting's real nature is not. In the cinema, Chambers found a medium whose nature suited his beliefs. Thus, he did not have to disguise its nature; his fundamental aesthetic notions allowed him to use cinema honestly and to admit to its material reality.

The sequence continues as the shot of the photographs is replaced by the shot of the man with the camera; he winds the camera and then resumes shooting. Then, once again, we are presented with an image of the photograph which he is shooting. The passage does not merely reveal the filmmaking process – and indeed, there is nothing else in the film which even hints at the production process (as distinct from the materials and the forms of cinema). Rather, the alternation of images of shooting with images of what is being shot suggests the relationship between consciousness and its object. The construction of this segment hints at a phenomenological notion, since it makes reference to the visionary subject behind the act of seeing. Here again Chambers' interest in the subject-object relationship is evident. The fact that the photographs derive from the central portion of the film implies the existence of a transcendental subject for that section as well. We are reminded that these are images not of the world itself, but of someone's perception of the world.

The sounds used in this passage reinforce the themes suggested by the visuals. The first sounds accompany the undifferentiated colour field and consist simply of white noise. The unreality of this sound gives a metaphysical significance to the pure colour image, just as the white noise used by popular music groups frequently connotes other-worldliness. For much of the rest of the section, the track is composed of alternating sounds of a camera motor being wound and the motor running. The whirring sound of the running camera reminds us that what we are seeing is the image of an event produced by a camera, not the event itself. Another component of the track is the song whose lyrics seem to include the words "came back home, came back home" (though after many viewings of the film, I am still not absolutely certain this is so). The final component, off-screen sounds of a radio or television and of children, sets up a tension between on-screen space and off-screen space and so, by implication, between the realms of the seen and the unseen.

The co-ordination of the sounds of the winding and the running camera with the visuals is intriguing. At first, the sound and the image appear to be synchronized: the sound of the camera motor being wound occurs at the same time as the image of its crank being turned, the sound of the motor running occurs when images produced by running it are presented. This synchronization lasts for a brief period; soon the sounds and image move out of phase with one another (the sound of cranking starting slightly before or after the image of that action). This temporal discrepancy increases until, at the conclusion of the passage, we see the man stop cranking the camera shortly

after the sound of winding begins. This shifting relation has an interesting effect. The use of synchronous sound and image is most often used in film for naturalistic ends. In this film, the sound produced by operating a camera begins just after the first realistic images appear. At this point, the synchronous sound exercises its usual function of reinforcing the naturalistic texture of the image. As the sound and image move progressively out of synchronization, the constructed character of the sound-image relation – and, by implication, the unreality of the filmic image – becomes evident. But the deconstruction of the illusion does not serve exclusively – or even primarily – the end of self-reflexive inquiry. Rather, it serves to remind us of the essential fragility of the illusion of reality and, by extension, of our perception of reality, for it reveals that the illusion depends upon the precise co-ordination of elements which are, by nature, diverse and unrelated.

The section concludes with an image produced by moving the camera in so close to the photographs that their features become blurred, followed by a dissolve which concludes with the appearance of an image with the same subject matter as was seen in the still photographs, which is now in colour. The dissolve acts as a transitional device leading into the film's central portion.

The opening passage serves to suggest the important role of light in this work; to define various levels of reality in the work (subject matter, filmic construct, transcendental reality); and to suggest a correspondence between certain structural features of the film and structural features of perception. The central passage of the film further develops these ideas.

Circle: Section Two

This section consists of something like 365 four-second shots of a backyard, all taken from very nearly the same position as were the black and white photographs in the previous section. Specifically, the shots all show a backyard with a tree on the right-hand edge, a clothesline running through the left of the frame at an angle, a tree in the centre at the far edge of the lot and, beyond that, the back of a rather large white frame house. Within this extremely rigid framework, there are five significant variations in the shots. First, the framing and field of view sometimes alter slightly, between shots. Second, incidental subject matter included in the shots undergoes frequent change: objects, or on a few occasions, people, appear in one shot and disappear with the next, or a few shots later. Third, the appearance of the yard undergoes seasonally related changes: the tree leaves are first green, then coloured; the leaves on the trees become sparser while leaves accumulate on the ground; later, snow appears. Fourth, the shots possess various degrees of distinctness: at times they are quite sharp, at others, quite blurry and out of focus; the space of the softer focus images appears shallower, of the sharper focus images, deeper. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the intensity of light

varies from shot to shot. The conformity of the changes in the intensity of light with factors related to atmospheric conditions (presence or absence of shadows, haze or mist) suggest that these variations are the result of Chambers' decision not to use those techniques which photographers and filmmakers generally employ to compensate for the naturally occurring variations in light intensity. These variations seem simply to reflect the change in light from day to day. They are, in a sense, the direct rendering of nature on film, not the creation of the filmmaker.

It is obvious that the form of this section is based on the cycle of the year, with each shot representing a day within that cycle. The form reveals a concern with time and, as in the silver paintings, this revelation is presented in the way that the work structures light, for the fluctuations in the intensity of light define the passage of time. And as with much Romantic art in general and Chambers' montage constructions in particular, the concepts of time and death are interrelated in the formal structure of the piece. The appearance or disappearance of objects and people in successive shots suggest both the passing of time and the transitory nature of existence.

We need to analyze further the relation between the film's form and these metaphysical concerns. The subject matter of the film is of two sorts: first, the scene – the backyard that is recorded along with the objects and people that populate it from time to time – and second, the continuously changing light. Of the two, the light is clearly the more important. While the changes in light have an essential relation to the form of the film, changes in the scene have only an accidental relation to it; this feature implies that Chambers sees light as having a greater metaphysical significance, a higher reality value, than ordinary matter. Indeed, the circular form of this section conveys the idea of wholeness a form that is based on the modulation of light which seems to indicate that Chambers believed that a close relationship exists between light and the idea of unity. What exactly this relationship is remains to be specified.

The form of this section provides further insight into the reasons Chambers was attracted to the cinema. For him, light is the ultimate reality. His decision to allow the changes in the intensity of the image to be determined by the day-to-day changes in light, in ways that are determined by the film's inherent properties rather than by the filmmaker, reveals a belief in the relationship between the inherent characteristics of film and those of ultimate reality. Since film naturally registers the effects of this reality, Chambers implies, there must be some sort of affinity between the characteristics of the film medium and the properties of what we could call the ultimate being. Someone who held these beliefs would likely hold another, namely, that among all the arts the cinema occupies a privileged position because of its affinity with the Ultimate Being. And this Chambers did believe.

This decision not to adjust the camera to compensate for the daily variations in light hints at another of the cinema's attractions for Chambers. The

strategy appears to have been designed to allow one form of nature, the film's recording emulsion, to respond, exclusively according to natural processes (for there is no human intervention), to another form of nature – in fact, the highest form of nature, light. It establishes that cinema is the instrument that can unleash that creative power inherent in nature, the power to create an image of itself. Hence, this technique incarnates the Romantic ideal for a work of art.

The use of many out-of-focus shots, even of series of out-of-focus shots, serves a related function. They suggest that light is the ultimate reality and that material objects are merely modulations of light and that, when light is modulated in ways other than those which produce material objects, the material forms return to the Ultimate, to Being without form. The cinematic apparatus, as a machine that shapes light, is a metaphor for the creative process by which material forms come into existence. Furthermore, the appearance of these out-of-focus shots resembles the appearance of shots taken on foggy days. This resemblance highlights the close relation of creative processes through which the forms of nature, on the one hand, and cinematic images, on the other, are brought into existence and it emphasizes that they have their basis in transformations of the Ultimate Reality – light.

Turning from the metaphysical significance of *Circle* to its epistemological aspects, I want to demonstrate how formal and perceptual inquiry converge in this work. The nature of this convergence can be understood by considering the segmentation used in the central section. Because each of the shots had a predetermined (four-second) duration and because the time each day's shooting began was pre-established, many of the incidents depicted in this section – any that exceeded the predetermined length and any that began before shooting commenced – were left incomplete and often without any apparent connection to actions that precede or succeed them. Furthermore, the changes in illumination are not gradual and progressive, but abrupt, and begin exactly when a new shot begins. Consequently, each shot is presented as a separate unit. The distinctness of these units refers to what must have been, for Chambers, one of the most intriguing properties of the cinematic medium, namely, the discreteness of its individual frames. The slight variation in field of view from shot to shot, which bears a strong resemblance to the slight changes that occur between successive frames in a shot in an ordinary film, further emphasizes the composition of the film strip. In fact, the entire central passage of the film closely resembles the effect that would be created by slightly distending a film until each individual frame became perceptible.

Why did Chambers stress the frame-after-frame constitution of the film strip? Because he saw perception as a synthetic act in which discrete pieces of information are synthesized, and believed that cinema's structural principles are the same as those of the perception it depicts (or is capable of depicting), the cinema seemed the ideal medium for embodying his insights about

perception. Explorations into the material and form of the cinematic medium would lead to insights about the nature of perception itself.

The monomorphic form of this section of the film is uncharacteristic of Chambers' work. Modernists used monomorphic forms in their attempt to strip all artistic media to their essences, by eliminating forms of constructions that have no basis in the essence of the material of the medium in which they are realized. In *Circle*, Chambers used monomorphic form in a different manner and for different ends. His belief that a homology exists between the structures of cinema and the structures of perception implied that the discovery, by reductive means, of the essence of the cinema would provide insight into the nature of perception. Hence, the use of reductive forms could serve not only artistic self-inquiry but also perceptual and epistemological inquiry.

The monomorphic form of the middle of this film has effects on the viewers' state of consciousness. The extreme repetitiveness of this section of the film, its lack of large-scale variations, its protracted duration and its spare soundtrack, all serve to induce a self-reflexive state of consciousness, in which viewers are aware of their thought processes. At the same time, the similarity of the images prompts viewers to make comparisons between them and to construct a coherent pattern from them. The mind is encouraged to engage in a process of attempting to construct a whole from a number of discrete parts and, at the same time, is attentive to the process by which it attempts to unify these distinct elements. Thus, in this way too, there is a fusion of aesthetic inquiry (inquiry into part-whole relations in film) and epistemological inquiry (inquiry into the mind's activity in forging these and, by extension, other analogous part-whole relations).

Not only does the film show that the form of unity that characterizes a perception is similar to that which characterizes a work of art, it also suggests that the same form of unity characterizes a period of time, for it illustrates that single whole that is a year is composed of a number of discrete parts, namely, days. Thus, the structure of a work of art, a perception and a period of time are shown to be homologous. This, in turn, implies that consciousness and cosmos have the same structure as does a work of art.

The significance of this homology depends upon its relation both to the film's circular form and to its manner of being articulated in light. Both features suggest the notion that the unity of the work of art is an analogue of the unity of Being, a unity which subsumes all the differences among particular things. Thus, the unity of a work of art – or at least, this particular work of art – is an analogue for the Ultimate Reality. But if this is so, then, according to the homology which Chambers has established, the synthetic character of a perception must also resemble the unity of the Ultimate Reality. Perception, like a work of art, and like reality itself, involves the resolution of tension between opposites – a resolution which leads to establishing a condition of harmony and peace. For Chambers, epistemology is not primarily an

intellectual discipline, but a moral one, for the act which it studies leads to a discovery of the peace that lies at the heart of apparently conflicting elements and, finally, a change of spirit. And thus, for Chambers, making art is a means of reflecting this moral activity, a vocation.

The intimation of a realm in which all differences are overcome provides some of the film's most powerful emotional effects. Throughout the central section of the film, objects and people appear briefly and then vanish, demonstrating that existence is transient and fleeting. At the same time, however, the form of the film implies that all things are part of a higher realm in which all differences are overcome, including the difference between existence and non-existence, between life and death. Thus the film balances the tragic sense of the transience of individual things with a peacefulness that comes from knowing that, while individual things pass, the whole does not. In a note written in 1972, Chambers stated: "if you were totally convinced now that we do not really die, that there is no pessimistic death as we understand it, the feeling you may have by believing this, is a closeness, a friendship for the animate and inanimate things around you. You may feel that the objects in nature, nature itself is easily loved. Your love for life is the celebration that life does not diminish or end."¹¹ This sense of the gentle relationship with the loved environment and of the vulnerability of important people and objects explains much of this passage's impact.

Circle: Section Three

The final section acts as a kind of gloss on the film's middle section. Like the middle section, it consists of imagery dealing with the relationship between parts and wholes. Near the opening of this section, we see crowds of passengers disembarking from a train. This mass of people is then broken down, by the use of close-ups, into several units. Somewhat later, a large tube of some unidentifiable, flexible striped material is shown; we then see this single mass being cut into a number of separate candies which are then seen being placed into a Christmas stocking – a new whole. So the section proceeds, constructing one part-whole relation after another: the first sequence in the passage shows a dog doing simple arithmetic, announcing the results of simple arithmetic operations in a number of barks – each number is a whole consisting of several individual units (barks); children are seen writing words (the wholes) by making marks (the parts) in snow on an automobile windshield; a flock of birds (the whole) is shown, then a close-up of a single bird (the parts).

While this section of the film is thematically related to its central portion, it also complements that passage, for it possesses several quite distinctive features. For one thing, it is composed of newsreel-like footage. Hence, the film as a whole progresses through a number of distinct stages. It begins with images of pure light, moves to images depicting ordinary reality (which

Chambers calls "consensus reality") modulated by light, and concludes with images of that "consensus reality" itself represented in the newsreel footage. These three classes of imagery suggest three levels of reality: light alone (Ultimate Reality); light giving form to matter; and finally, ordinary matter itself. The three-part form of the film, like so many other features of the work, is informed by Chambers' emanationist metaphysical notions.

The documental character of the footage in this section has other significances. The footage announces itself as a record of bygone events. For this reason, it creates an elegiac, reflective mood. Its elegiac tone is very much in keeping with the essential tension of the central passage of the film, the tension between a sense of vulnerability and loss, elicited by the recognition of the transience of things, and the sense of peace that comes from knowing that finally there is no difference between life and death. The nostalgic reflection evoked by the documentary footage incorporates a similar tension, for the footage implies that, even though the actual events depicted in the footage have gone out of existence, photographic records of them do endure.

The collage-type character of the section, the fact that it is composed of disparate fragments showing events that are unrelated in space and time, is in pronounced contrast with the monomorphic shape of the central passage. The fact that the various events depicted in this footage could not all occur in any local space-time region suggests that the footage represents images in consciousness, not real-world events. They are interior images, images that belong to the imagination. Accordingly, the collage-type construction used here should be taken as demonstrating the synthetic character of the imaginative process. So too Chambers' reference to the ability of the photograph to preserve events through time should be taken as a demonstration of consciousness' ability to sustain being. Need it be said that only an idealist ontology can undergird this conviction?

Periodically throughout this section of the film there occurs a graphic circle in the top right-hand corner of the screen. It is an emblem of wholeness, of completeness. It bears mentioning, however, that this symbol occurs in Chambers' early work as far back as *Slaughter of the Lamb* (1961) and *Five Shepherds* (1961-1962). It reappears in his later film, *Hart of London* (1970).

More explicitly even than the middle section, the end section associates the idea of an ultimate reality with the idea of death. At one point, we see workers standing near a culvert, ready to enter. The light outside the culvert and the darkness inside suggests, respectively, life and death. At a later point, we see a hand opening to reveal a bird which appears at first to be dead but which suddenly takes flight. The sequence provides an image of life arising from death. Life and death also move in a circle: life gives way to death, death to life.

In *Wavelength*, Michael Snow uses a minimal form to open up a large range of issues – aesthetic, epistemological and religious issues. For the most

part, in *Circle*, Jack Chambers also uses a simple form based on a systematic procedure to pose a number of fundamental metaphysical and epistemological questions. Despite the differences in outlook, and in the models of experience they propose, both filmmakers make use of a self-reflexivity that allows them to incorporate realistic imagery without their being restricted to merely constructing "likenesses of the real." My analyses of *Wavelength* and *Circle* reveal that both these works represent a marked departure from the traditions of modernism. In the next chapter, I discuss the nature of that departure.

CHAPTER 10

All Things in Their Time: Michael Snow's \longleftrightarrow

Like *Wavelength*, the organizing principle of Michael Snow's \longleftrightarrow derives from a single sort of camera movement and that movement's relation to architectural space and human actions. But the structure of \longleftrightarrow is not as linear as *Wavelength's*, nor does it make such an investment in directionality. It is much more concerned with reversals and repetitions.

The film commences with a moderately slow back-and-forth panning motion of the camera across the exterior of a one-storey, institutional-looking building of no particular architectural distinction. At one point, the panning movement catches and follows the movement of a passerby who crosses the space in front of the row of windows in this exterior wall; the rhythm of the swinging camera is broken to follow this person, but soon the camera abandons him to return to its regular, periodic, back-and-forth movement. Soon after, a short passage of black leader appears which separates this first section, the only exterior scene in the film, from what follows.

Next is a long section which involves the same sort of repetitious back-and-forth movement of the camera (or, for the sake of purists, of the apparent movement of the interior space depicted through the screen, a movement we interpret as one that derives from panning a camera back and forth). At one extreme of its swing, the camera reveals a bank of windows, nearly (but not exactly) perpendicular to the axis of the camera; at the other, it exposes, in a view from an angle, a corner, an open door and green chalkboard in the distance, and a classroom space between the camera and the corner. Whenever the camera reaches either extreme, a clicking sound is heard, and so this metronomic ticking accelerates as the rate of panning increases. And, throughout the film, a motor-like sound is heard, which reminds us that the presentation of what we see is mediated by a camera apparatus.

The major variable in \longleftrightarrow is the rate of the panning. When the film commences, the camera is panned at a moderate rate. Throughout the early part of the film, the panning slows down until it reaches a very slow pace, and from then on (at least for the most part, though there are some local variations on the pattern) the rate of panning speeds up to the point where, about

The notes to Chapter 10 begin at page 428.

1000 feet (that is, 28 minutes) into the film, the windows appear as a mere streak, then, by about 200 feet (five and one half minutes) later, the contents of the frame appear merely as a blur of colour and light. At first this abstraction appears as geometric shapes travelling across the screen, but as the speeding up continues, even these geometric figures dissolve into blurred streaks. At this point, colour asserts itself above form, so that the forms of objects represented are transfigured into pastel blues and pinks.

It was probably this conversion of objects into rapidly changing patterns of pure hues, luminosities and activities that Snow was referring to when he stated that, whereas *Wavelength* is concerned with metaphysics, \longleftrightarrow is concerned with physics, and specifically with Einstein's equation $E=mc^2$. What he seems to have meant by this is that the film transforms matter (mass) into energy (motion) by speed. When we experience the dissolving of representation into moving patterns of coloured light, when speed eliminates all referential descriptions from the film, our experience becomes one of jubilant fascination, not unlike that evoked by the later paintings of J.M.W. Turner (such as *The Bay of Uri from Brunnen*, or *Lake Lucerne: The Bay of Uri from above Brunnen*, or *The Lake of Geneva with the Dent d'Oche*, from *Lausanne* series), by the later work of Claude Monet (his Giverny paintings generally, or more specifically, his *Water Lilies* series) or even by the later work of Paul Cézanne (for example, *Mont Sainte Victoire Seen from Bibemus Quarry*).

And yet, just as it is not correct to say of Turner, Monet or Cézanne that their later paintings have been completely emptied of all referentiality, so too it is not correct to say this of even the hyperaccelerated sections of \longleftrightarrow . And this is especially true of \longleftrightarrow because these parts of the film contain traces of anterior moments, moments when the panning had been slower and the imagery more depictive. In other words, these sections of \longleftrightarrow have features of both representational and abstract forms of construction, as does the later work of Turner, Monet and Cézanne.

Just when the panning has reached its maximum speed, a change takes place; the camera movement shifts from a rapid panning movement to a rapid tilting movement of about the same velocity. This action gradually decelerates until a fluorescent light on the ceiling, a window and a pattern of sunlight on the floor reflecting the shape of the window become distinguishable. The tilting movement continues to decelerate, and at one point we see, quite clearly, a policeman peering into the window.

Soon after, titles appear, written on the chalkboard. Most viewers conclude that at this point the film is over. But it is not. A coda follows, recapitulating, in apparently arbitrary order, various actions and moments presented in the previous section of the film, in up to four layers of superimposition. This device seems to have been contrived to suggest that a point has been reached at which linear progression is suspended, in which inside and outside coexist and divisions are undone.

In the film a number of human figures appear. Many of the figures, like those tossing a ball back and forth, the men shoving one another at a party or gathering of some sort, or the teacher instructing a class, engage in exchanges which have a structure corresponding to with that of pan and tilt. One of the figures, who appears in a section of the film in which the camera movement has almost reached its maximum, is fragmented when the camera pans across him and appears to strobe as he walks. It seems that this was done to indicate how stable representations disintegrate under the force of the camera movement. Other figures seem to appear or disappear mysteriously, popping in or out of the image at the beginning or end of their appearance. This is the case with, for the sake of an example, the couple who enters through the door and embraces in front of the windows. The camera pans away from them as they embrace and, when it swings back to where they should be, they have disappeared. These mysterious appearances and disappearances create a play of presence and absence; the relation between these phenomena has some of the features of the relationship between representation and abstraction, terms which are central to the structure of the film. Moreover, the contrasts among our responses to spaces in which human beings appear, to spaces in which human beings are expected to appear but do not, and to spaces in which human beings do not appear but are not expected to, points up how presences, especially human presences, concentrate the viewer's attention.

The Background of the Film

Snow's use of the visual sign \longleftrightarrow rather than a verbal one for the title of his film seems calculated to elude that singularity, that lack of ambiguity, typical of a verbal construct – or at least any verbal construct which is referential rather than poetic in nature. The strategy is to use a diagram of the film's action for the title. Despite its referentiality, that diagram (especially when considered in relation to film) conjures up many thoughts – movement, activity, energy, rhythmical oscillation, flatness of the picture plane, a non-narrative, non-teleological structure (since the arrow points in both directions rather than simply ahead) and the correlative idea of an accretionary modular construction, as well as the idea of the balancing of opposites or, more precisely, of complementary pairs.

But what are the complementary pairs that are brought into balance? The most obvious answer is the direction of movement. But almost as obvious are extended (haptic) and contracted (optical) space or, more precisely, the illusion of a haptic space and a materially-grounded optical space; a virtual image and a real construct; a cinematic reproduction (an image in which the transformational capacities of the cinema are deliberately minimized) and a cinematic construct (an image in which the transformative capacities of the camera, in this case, the moving camera, are maximized or at least made

evident); representations and presentations; description and construction; illusion and object; as well as image content and image production.

In the art-theory notions which dominated the fields of critical and artistic practice at the time of Snow's formative years as a painter and sculptor – the late 1950s and early 1960s – these oppositions are all well known. They were at the centre of critical discourse when Snow began painting in the early 1950s. According to the critical orthodoxy of the time, the course of development of recent painting tracked an evolving definition, *modus differens*, of the medium of painting itself. The making of works of art and artworks themselves, especially when considered historically, were said to have ontological implications. To be more specific, painting, or at least the painting of recent times, was said to have developed from representation to abstraction, from employing haptic space to the exclusive use of an optical space. And, it was alleged, in the course of this development painting discovered its essence. Thus, recent painting was said to be dedicated to the attempt to construct an ontology for its medium.

The process of discovering the essential character of any medium involved a series of discriminations. In order to discover the features specific to any medium (that which made a painting, for example, a painting and not some other sort of image), a series of binary oppositions was proposed and distinctions were created between media based on these oppositions. If painting was to be ontologically distinct from sculpture, its space should not be tactile but optical; similarly, if painting was to be ontologically distinct from drawing, outline and the use of hard edges must be eliminated.

Snow's Multifaceted Work

It is within this context that the radical nature of Snow's work becomes most obvious. In common with other artists formulating that art which is now commonly referred to as postmodernist, Snow's work involves a repudiation of the modernist ideas of "purity" and "essentiality" as well as the aspiration to construct a reductive ontology of the medium based on the simple principle of oppositional exclusion. In essence, Snow's strategies were based on the fundamental principle of non-exclusion. He demanded the right to use both representation and abstract imagery; his work employs both "illusionistic" devices and devices which emphasize the objecthood of a work of art. Thus, while modernist art was clearly based on principles the effect of which was to exclude certain characteristics from painting, sculpture, etc., Snow has worked systematically to re-instate those features into each of these media as he proceeded to work in each in turn and to revise it using those features to balance the features which modernist art included. But, in a sense he has worked them to devise a kind of art work which could also conform to the ideals of modernism – other than its principle of

exclusion. In a sense, with \longleftrightarrow , as the double-arrow title indicates, he has wanted to have it both ways – modernist and otherwise.

In this sense, Snow's work demonstrates that the modernists' belief that the pairs of features we have identified are related to one another in a relation of simple opposition is a misconception. The forms of Snow's films (for example the continuous and apparently unbroken zoom of *Wavelength*), demonstrate that, since these apparently opposing features (e.g. illusionistic constructions and constructions that emphasize the work's materiality), and since one can be transformed into another by a simple operation, they are not essentially opposites but only variants of an underlying common nature. In the words of Aristotle, "interaction between two factors is held to require a precedent community of nature between the factors."¹ It must be pointed out that this conception of the relation of complementary opposites is different from that held in such dialectical philosophies as Hegel's which try to compose a common ground between opposing features that is not originally given. For Snow, it seems, the common ground is always already there and many of the forms and strategies he devises serve to reveal that unity. In a sense, that unity of subject and object, which for Hegel is the end of philosophy, is for Snow its beginning, its ground and its origin.

The forms of Snow's films, then, seem to rest on the notion that complementaries attain their nature, and become what they are, in their relation to their complements. Thus, the relation of complementarity is shown to be, not one of discord or strife, but one which lifts each of the complementaries towards self-realization. The idea that each thing achieves its being in its relation to that which it is not implies that being is defined through non-being, presence through absence. Not only does this idea bear a relationship to the photograph itself (in which the presently existing object obtains its status as an image through its relation to a bygone past), it is also a profound challenge to what the great French thinker, Jacques Derrida, refers to as the metaphysics of presence, since a fundamental belief of that metaphysical tradition is that being has precedence over non-being, inasmuch as non-being is defined as the negation of what is primarily real, namely being.

Nor is this the only sense in which Snow insisted on having things more than one way. Snow's career has been characterized by a perpetual movement from one medium to another, then back again. He began his career as a painter in the early 1950s; in the later 1950s, he turned to sculpture, then in the middle 1960s to photography and filmmaking. At the same time he has also worked in music with various modern jazz groups (including The Artists' Jazz Band), first playing boogie-woogie piano (Snow was tutored in this performance style by some very fine Chicago musicians), then trumpet and piano, later with groups involved in "the music of gradual process" (in the 1960s, he worked for a while with Steve Reich) and most recently with a group that engages in a form of collective improvisation more closely related to some "new musics" which explore indeterminacy than to collective jazz

improvisation (even the improvisations of the earlier Ornette Coleman or the Art Ensemble of Chicago).

To anyone committed to modernist ideals, this circulation between a number of fields of endeavour would appear somewhat promiscuous; for modernists had advanced the notion that the endeavour to explore the specificities of any given medium – an endeavour they claimed as central to artistic practice – could only be realized by a protracted process which, inasmuch as it involved the identification of a very delimited range of problems and a thorough working out of those problems, resembled research as much as anything.

Modernism proposed a purist conception of the materials of which artworks were made (and, in this respect, minimalism was the destination towards which modernist developments were headed, inasmuch as it was committed to the most thoroughgoing purist conception of materiality imaginable). Moreover, modernists maintained an untroubled allegiance to those exclusionary descriptions of the materials of the various art media according to which the essence of any medium was thought to be defined by what differentiated it from all other media. On this conception, the history of the progress of art (and modernists did indeed believe that there is progress in the arts, another feature of modernist thought that relates it to the modern paradigm) can be conceived of as the progressive refinement of a table of opposites upon which are charted the differences among the various art media – for the sake of an example, the differences between painting and sculpture, between painting and drawing, between painting and literary narration or illustration.

The advantages of this aspect of the modernist enterprise were most clearly laid out by Michael Fried, in his article "Art and Objecthood."² Fried argues that "the concept of art is meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts" and that "art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre," theatre being, according to Fried, "what lies between the arts." It is easy to see that Fried's point here is, certainly at the very least, a partial truth, for it is obvious from the history of the arts that the more eclectic and syncretic art forms become, the more they are given to easily won spectacular effects and baseless rhetorical flourishes. (The more degenerate of the rococo and mannerist styles furnish good examples.)

Snow's plural endeavours constitute a repudiation of Fried's formulation of the concept of purity of medium. Snow points out persistently that paintings – even paintings that are true to the medium of painting – have features also possessed by photographs, sculptures, and the other visual arts (and even by some non-visual arts, as *So is This* demonstrates) and that films – even films that are true to the nature of the cinematic medium – have features that pieces of music, photographs, or even works of literature also possess. Given this fact, it is hardly surprising, in light of Fried's remarks on theatre, that Snow should have made a film, *Presents* (1980 / 81), that

emphasizes the interrelations among film and various other arts and employs self-consciously theatrical devices to do so.

Snow's work developed to full maturity in New York City in the 1960s, and at that time artists working there were strongly committed to the systematic exploration of the interrelations between various artistic practices. Ken Jacobs' shadow works, for example, constituted an inquiry into the various possible modalities of interpenetration between film, theatre and painting, while Yvonne Rainer's dance/performance works constituted an inquiry into the modalities of interpenetration between sculpture, performance, dance and storytelling.

The effect of the multiple nature of the enterprise in which these artists engaged was to displace modernist ideas of purity, discreteness, essentiality and its claims for the irreducibility of one art medium to any other from the centre of the forum of critical discourse, a position which they had occupied from the beginning of the postwar years. At its deepest level, we could understand this displacement as representing the repudiation of the American quest for purity, for the artists in question all turned to a more synthetic, European tradition for their ideas about how to open up the closed system of American modernism.³ It was from Constructivist cinema, Bauhaus photography and machine art, Dadaist events and even Surrealist representationalism that these artists drew the strategies to oppose and balance the ideals they had assimilated from the history of modernism.

In Snow's own multifaceted work, plurality is deployed in the effort to accommodate and to reconcile diversity. Snow's *oeuvre* is committed to the attempt to locate possible points of convergence between apparently divergent activities; it is almost as though, as Annette Michelson claimed, "Snow's obsessively systematic investigation excludes the notion of disparity."⁴ Almost, but not exactly. It is certainly true enough that Snow's imagery and materials have circulated from medium to medium. Nonetheless, whenever the materials of one work in one medium become the content of a work in another medium, they are reformed according to properties specific to the medium which comes to contain them. Thus, the *longueurs* of the presentation of the still photographs in *One Second in Montreal* (1969) make us aware of the specifically cinematic phenomenon of duration. The very title of the piece wittily points to the essential tension between the temporal characteristics of the two media upon which the piece is so cleverly built. There are thirty-one still photographs in this film. A very common exposure time in photography is one-thirtieth of a second; the sum of the exposure times of all the photographs in the film is just about one second (the one second mentioned in the film's title). The difference between that time and the actual duration of the film (twenty-six minutes at 16 frames per second, the recommended running speed) represents the contradiction between the two media which derives from the fact that the temporality of the photograph is an instantaneous one, while that of the cinema is durational.

This contradiction also points out the difference between the time at which a representation is made and the time in which it is viewed. Snow has reworked this opposition with an almost obsessive regularity; *Plus Tard* (1979) is just one example of a later work which takes it as its primary concern. And this is again an aspect of Snow's postmodernism. Modernism was, by and large, committed to a notion of temporal purity according to which only the real time – the actual time spent apprehending a work – should be felt; by using a set of various devices, modernist artwork strove to make palpable the immediate present in which the artwork is viewed and to eschew all other forms of temporal experience, since they were understood as being representational or fictional in nature. Snow's strategy is to deny this reductive purity by incorporating diverse temporal characteristics in his work. And he does so because he recognizes that this contradiction between temporal characteristics is inherent in all imagery.

The recirculation of materials from medium to medium suggests once again that Snow wishes to have things many ways. The same material can be used, as the title and form of *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) indicate, to constitute paintings, slides and a film. It represents, then, another tactic for breaking out of the confinement of the modernist orthodoxy into the open space of postmodernism.

From Modernism to Postmodernism

Snow's work can best be understood as being just at the breaking point of modernism. Modernism, developing out of the work of Cézanne, the Cubists, the Futurists and the Constructivists, had been intent initially on breaking down subject matter (by fragmentation and superimposition) and, later, on rejecting it from art (by employing exclusively non-referential forms) and then, later still, on analyzing the image. Thus, with the work of Abstract Expressionists and most Post-Painterly Abstractionists, representational aspects were forcibly eliminated and the material, colour and shape were foregrounded so that painting (in both its ontological and historical dimensions) became itself the subject of painting. Finally, with minimalist art, the objecthood of the work was pushed to its extreme limit. This emphasis on the objective, material character of a work of art entailed an idea of unity different from that held during the century and a half preceding modernism (during which, to speak in broad generalities, the most commonly prized form of unity was organic unity). This form of unity was understood as a complex, undefinable and mysterious interrelation between every part (even every aspect) of a work and the whole, in which the individual parts lost all their distinctness and individuality. (Thus even the words in a poem were said to take on entirely new meanings when they became part of a poem.) Late modernist theory generally held that the unity of an artwork is rather like that of a simple, readily apprehensible *gestalt* – similar then to that which is usually understood to characterize a material object.

In an important way, minimalism carried the program of modernism to its conclusion. Minimalist works, by the simplicity of their shapes, their elimination of referentiality, their repudiation of symbol and metaphor and their use of industrially manufactured materials – manufactured to specification, so as to remove any suggestion of subjective handwriting – radicalized that insistence upon self-containment which had characterized modernist art throughout its history. Indeed, it carried that insistence to its limits, for with the elimination of symbol and metaphor, subjective association and referentiality and with the development of unitary structures, the highest reaches of the ideals behind the modernist movement had been attained. Moreover, minimalist works frequently made use of deductive structures that were determined by properties of the medium in which they were realized. Thus, a prime example of a modernist minimal film is *Print Generation* (1973-74) by the American filmmaker J.J. Murphy. The “material” from which *Print Generation* is generated consists of sixty one-second diaristic images, of friends and situations surrounding Murphy’s home. This choice of material reflects the realistic snapshot-like nature of true cinematography and the conviction that film begins with an image of the real, everyday world. This image was then printed through fifty generations and presents first, in the A-Wind section, the even numbered generations from the fiftieth to the second, and then in the B-Wind section, the first to the forty-ninth. It begins, consequently, shimmering red, points of light that through successive generations reveals an object which it then represents in increasing detail, as first white, then blue-green, then blue and green separately are added. The process is retraced, in reverse order in the film’s second half.

But minimalism also represents the closing of one era and the opening of another. When Robert Morris began to use devices which suggested the incompleteness of his work and Sol LeWitt began to include in exhibitions of his works, objects which represented various stages in the conception and realization of works of art, the idea of process and of the centrality of concept, rather than material, was articulated. With statements such as these, the modernist ideals of self-containment and its reductive conception of mediomistic virtues were repudiated.

Similar tactics can be found in most of Snow’s pieces. Indeed, the devices by which he makes reference to the frame – devices which uncontestedly occupy a central place in his work – can best be understood within this context. The modernist idea of the frame (a rather geometric understanding of its nature that would undoubtedly have been passed along to the young Snow when he was a student at the Ontario College of Art) was that the frame was a boundary form whose nature influenced all the relations it contained. Against this singular concept of its function, Snow, like Duchamp before him, insisted on pointing out the multiple functions of the framing gesture. The frame, Snow demonstrated, acts to define a channel of attention and a point of view (*Scope*, 1967); to establish a tension between a defined bounded

field and a point of view (*Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film*, 1970); to isolate one field of view from among a number of possible fields (*Atlantic*, 1966 or *Field*, 1973-1974); to create an opposition between what is contained within a frame and what lies outside it (*Sight*, 1967); because the point of view a photographer adopts affects the forms within the frame, to generate of forms (*Of A Ladder*, 1971); and finally, to produce arbitrary aesthetic effects. Time after time throughout his *oeuvre*, Snow points out that, rather than simply isolating the art-object, thereby ensuring its ontological independence and enhancing its purity, the frame acts both as a kind of container and as a bridge between the area within the frame and outside its bounds. Once again, Snow insists on having things more than one way.

The transformation in the formal characteristics of artwork represented by minimalism was so profound and far-reaching that a change occurred in the very program to which artistic endeavour was committed. And in its turn, this change was so profound that it reached down into and radically altered the theoretical context underlying the practice of making art. The theoretical underpinnings of the earlier stages of modernist art (especially surrealism, dadaism, German expressionism and abstract expressionism) were drawn from expressionist theories of art, phenomenology, Jungian psychoanalysis and existentialism. With the development of post-painterly abstractionism, and especially minimalism, notions drawn from these fields were replaced with notions drawn from perceptual theory, structuralism and linguistics. The change was towards a decidedly more positivistic approach to artwork and took the form of replacing many of the ideas drawn from the more speculative tradition of Continental philosophy with ideas drawn largely from more down-to-earth Anglo-American philosophy. The effect of this replacement was to shift the primary concerns of artistic practice away from essentialistic and ontological problems to epistemological problems. Thus, minimalism represents a turning point in recent art history: some of its formal strategies manifest the enduring effect of the modernist tradition; others reveal the profound transformation which occurred in the conceptual base underlying artistic production and which continues to affect postmodernist art as it has developed up to this point.

Experiencing Snow's Films

As they are for other postmodernist artists, for Snow questions of perceptual theory are paramount: as evidence we need only consider that the titles of several of his works – *Blind* (1967), *Sight* (1967), *A Wooden Look* (1969), *Scope* (1967), *Glazes* (1973), *Hearing Aid* (1976-77), and *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964) – reveal an interest in the nature of the perceptual response. But what are the specific types of experience Snow deals with and what is the relation between his analysis of perception (for his work is decidedly analytic in character) and the forms which his artwork assumes? Most of his films,

and many of his artworks in other media, possess very simple, predetermined shapes. While such simple shapes are undeniably correlates of the simple *gestalts* which characterized minimalist art, they have, in film, a specific function. The uniqueness of their function in film depends upon the fact that film, alone among all the visual arts, is an art of time. For this reason, the simple shape of a film can (and in Snow's work usually does) act as a diagram of its temporal form. It serves to convert a temporal into a spatial form, giving to that temporal form the same definiteness as a form existing in space has. It would only be slightly hyperbolic to say that such simple shapes, by containing fluid temporal forms within diagrammatic spatial forms, act to arrest the flow of time, making time an enduring thing, and – to use a figure from Plato's *Timaeus* – that they allude to the eternity of which flowing time is the moving image. The diagram gives us the shape of time, thus allowing us to see time whole. And, as Heidegger pointed out, "in the whole of its essence ... time rests."⁵

A diagrammatic shape, therefore, acts to hypostatize the experience of time. How radical a departure in experimental filmmaking the use of such simple forms represented can best be understood by comparing temporal features of Snow's minimal films with the temporal features of innovational cinema at the time when Snow came to filmmaking.⁶ It was Stan Brakhage who was largely responsible for developing the temporal rhetoric of that cinema; the speed of his cutting, the intensity of his camera movement and the continual displacement of one sort of imagery by an entirely different sort (for example, flat imagery by deep, hand-drawn or scratch-created forms by photographic imagery) acted to deny to the viewer any sense of a temporal continuum and to provoke a gaze so intense and fascinated that it can properly be called ecstatic. Thus, we feel when watching a film by Brakhage that the past and the future have been eliminated (we engage neither in recollection of past events nor in anticipation of future events); the primary temporal impression afforded by these works is that of a continuous present.

The modality of temporal experience elicited by Snow's films is different. Far from being caught up in the flow of time, we are, by the hypostatization of the experience of time which the diagrammatic shape of several of his films propose, as well as by the *longueurs* which characterize them, encouraged to stand back from the experience of time and to inquire into the manner in which it is constituted. His films elicit an analytic rather than an ecstatic response.

The analytic act depends upon identifying and splitting apart differentiated units. For this reason, it is essential for Snow's work to create a temporal form which includes a variety of characteristics (pastness, presentness and futurity) rather than the singularity of the continuous present of Brakhage's work (*Dog Star Man*, 1961-64; *Cat's Cradle*, 1959; *Scenes from Under Childhood*, 1969). Moreover, by its very nature, the analytic act involves the division of an object into static parts. Thus, the mode of experi-

ence elicited by Snow's work has, as its intentional object, a static object of reflection constituted by an intellective act.

John Watson, with whom Snow shares so many similarities, comments on the implications of the view of time and of consciousness, which the diagrammatic forms of Snow's films embody:

So far as he has merely immediate presentations or feelings, man is but potentially rational; it is only as these are lifted out of the flux of immediacy, and grasped in their relation to the world as a rational system, that he realizes his birthright as a self-conscious intelligence. It is in virtue of this inalienable capacity that he creates arts, sciences, and political institutions, all of which imply the elevation of what immediately presents itself to the rank of an intelligible object.... Now, when man, as a rational subject, finds, or believes that he finds, the world to be a cosmos and human life intelligible, and refers both object and subject to a supreme principle, he adopts the attitude of religion.⁷

Snow's interest in an hypostatized temporality is not unique in Canadian arts and letters. Frank Davey writes of Margaret Atwood's poetry:

In ... seven books of poems ... [the] opposition between the static, the mythological or the sculptural and the kinetic, the actual or the temporal has been a central concern.... The sources of this antithesis lie in the earliest days of Anglo-American modernism. Its deepest roots are in T.E. Hulme's rejection of nineteenth century empathic realism for "some geometrical shape which lifts him [man] out of the transcendence of the organic," and in the searches of Proust for "the real without being of the present moment" and of Pound for "a fragment of time in its pure state." Throughout Margaret Atwood's poetry, such goals are presented as attractive, attainable – in terms of both life and poetic form – but ultimately unsatisfying. The formal garden can be created and entered, but its marble flesh cannot be lifted from still dance into dancing life.⁸

Snow, too, laments the "lifelessness of artistic representations, even while celebrating their timelessness."

But up to this point, I have been a little too casual about the description of the experience of watching a film by Michael Snow – or at least too one-sided, since I am failing to indicate the double-sided nature of that experience. Snow also reinstated the sense of the continuum of time, of the flow from past to present to future, in avant-garde film. Thus, in addition to a static, reified and substantial object of reflection, there is a second object, the object of perception, which unfolds in a fluid, ever-changing temporal process. The opposition between these two objects is analogous to the difference between objects (whose mode of existence is primarily spatial) and events or processes (whose mode of existence is primarily temporal). The duality between these

two suggests the duality between the object film (a strip of celluloid) and the event film which plays out on a projector.

Correlated with each of these two objects is a specific mode of experiencing. The importance of this duality in part lies in the way the distinction points out a tension that exists in all aesthetic experience, for the aesthetic experience involves both an engrossed, even an empathetic, manner of viewing and a detached and distanced critical response. To further explore the importance of each of these modes of response, some further clarity about their nature will be necessary.

Snow's Transcendental Self

Husserl wrote in 1931:

I, who am here reflecting upon myself, become conscious that under a consistent and exclusive focusing of experience upon that which is purely inward, upon what is "phenomenologically" accessible to me, I possess in myself an essential individuality, self-contained and holding well-together in itself.... Continuing this self-reflexion, I now also become aware that my own phenomenologically self-contained essence can be posited in an *absolute* sense, as I am the Ego who invests the being of the world which I so constantly speak about with existential validity, as an existence (Sein) which wins for me from my own life's pure essence meaning and substantiated validity. I myself as this individual essence, posited absolutely, as the open infinite field of pure phenomenological data and their inseparable unity, am the "transcendental Ego"; the absolute positing means that the world is no longer "given" to me in advance, its validity that of a simple existent, but that henceforth it is exclusively my Ego that is given (given from my new standpoint), given purely as that which has being in itself, in itself experiences a world, confirms the same, and so forth.⁹

The effect of the reflexive mode of experience elicited by Snow's films is to reinstate the sense of the transcendental subject in film, or at least in filmmaking. Indeed, the extraordinary allegiance Snow's work has attracted – an allegiance felt by many whose primary commitment is to cinematic practices other than those found in the avant-garde – can be explained in these terms. Brakhage's hallucinated gaze disrupted and dismembered spatial and temporal continuity, leaving no place and time, no site, for the subject. More particularly, it left no place for the sense of the transcendental subject, for the intensity of gaze that Brakhage's films elicited demanded a subject totally occupied with perceptual rather than apperceptive acts.¹⁰ Snow's cinema, by re-establishing a coherent space and time and by thus re-establishing a site for the transcendental subject, was for many particularly gratifying, for the sense of the transcendental subject is that of a point of

stability, of an enduring centre underlying all change. This point is indeed "the central region" – *la région centrale* referred to in the film of that title.

We have, in Snow's cinema, two subjects – a subject engrossed in the act of perception and the subject revealed through self-reflection – related to two objects of awareness, the film in flux and its hypostatized relative. The various interrelations possible between these two subjects and two objects becomes, for Snow, an important resource to be explored. In this way, his work becomes a consideration of the varieties of aesthetic experience itself.

Snow's work involves a balancing of the eternal and the time-bound, of the universal and particulars. In this way, it resembles the philosophy of John Watson, which was largely devoted to the attempt to reconcile the universal and particulars, time and the Timeless.

Snow's Postmodernist Associates I: David Rimmer

Snow's \longleftrightarrow has played an important role in the history of the avant-garde film in Canada. The film itself and its theoretical context has had profound and far-reaching effects, but none of them is more important than the manner in which it created dual objects of awareness and modes of experience. The strategies Snow used to achieve this have been absorbed into the work of many Canadian experimental filmmakers, like David Rimmer.

Rimmer is a West Coast filmmaker whose best-known film, *Surfacing on the Thames* (1970), is based upon a ten-second piece of "found footage" of two ships passing each other as they move in opposite directions along the River Thames. Each frame was refilmed for several seconds, using rear-projection, then lap-dissolved into the succeeding frame. Like Snow, and unlike the generation of modernists who were largely committed to abstraction,¹¹ Rimmer's work takes as an ideal the inclusion of representational imagery. Like Snow's, it aspires towards (in Snow's words) a balancing of "illusion" and fact; in his works, we find the representational illusion both presented and subverted in *Surfacing on the Thames*, as in certain others of Rimmer's films – for example, *The Dance* (1970) and *Watching for the Queen* (1973).

In Rimmer's work, as in Snow's, the non-illusionistic aspect of the work does not displace the illusionistic; it simply, in Snow's words, "balances" it. Thus neither filmmaker generally uses teleological structures based upon the film's progress towards abstraction or any other structures which might imply the progress towards recovering film's essential purity.¹² Indeed, one of Rimmer's more admirable qualities as a filmmaker is the extraordinary delicateness of the means by which he subverts the illusionistic effects of cinematic imagery.

This quality is much in evidence in his handling of movement and time. *Surfacing on the Thames* reduces the film's kinesis to an almost, but not quite, imperceptible level. This reduction is accomplished primarily by extending quanta of movement across greater than normal periods of time.

As well, the use of the freeze-frame, the device upon which the film finally rests, produces lengthy periods of complete stasis.

This reduction has three effects. By minimizing the broad movements of the recorded pro-filmic event and by extending them over protracted durations, Rimmer directs our attention towards moments which are usually so subtle and quick that they go unperceived. That movement is constituted by the interval from frame to frame. Furthermore, the extending of this interval across a period of time of sufficient length as to make it perceptible, even in subtlest details, makes us aware of the material substrate which conditions the "illusion" – the image – which this film also includes as another of its levels.¹³ This effect is reinforced by other features which also call attention to the film's materiality; just as Rimmer expands the frame-to-frame interval in order to render a normally imperceptible feature of the medium palpable, so he exaggerates and brings to our attention the normally imperceptible grain which constitutes a film image. We begin to notice, too, wrinkles and scratches and spots and blemishes on the surface of the film that also normally go by unnoticed. By emphasizing these surface blemishes and by exaggerating the granular texture of the filmic image, Rimmer accords to the picture plane an additional degree of strength and so establishes a play between the image's depth and the screen / film surface. A "balance" is created between the three-dimensionality of the image and the two-dimensionality of the picture plane, between background and foreground. This sort of balance (which is also a trait of Snow's work as well as that of other postmodernists), is uncharacteristic of the work of modernists, for in their work all visual elements are reduced in depth so that, across all their surfaces, they lie flat on the picture plane. Thus modernist works affirm the purity of two-dimensional space.

A second effect of extending the recorded movement is to deflect our attention away from the film's micromorphological structures towards its macromorphological structures, that is, towards the film's holistic shape. This lends further strength to the impression of stasis as the shape of the film provides a spatial form which models the temporal flow of the film. A final effect is a consequence of the preceding. By arresting the flow of time, the vagaries of temporal experience are opened to analysis. The use of a simple structure elicits an analytic mode of consciousness. In a characteristically postmodernist fashion, *Surfacing on the Thames* opens up epistemological questions and leads us into questions about the temporal qualities of experience and, in fact, about how experiences evolve over time.

Another feature that situates this film within the corpus of postmodernist works is its inclusion of evidence of accidents of the sort that inevitably occur in the process of making a piece of art, in this case, in the process of rephotography. Rimmer did not rework or exclude those portions of film in which particles of dirt or hair appeared while reprinting film. Rather he

allowed these accidents to reveal themselves in order to indicate the process by which the work is generated.

Modernism had conceived of the artwork as totally autonomous; its ideal for the form of a work of art was a structure which would be completely comprehensible apart from the factors involved in the production of the work, whether they are features of the artist's personality, the society and culture in which he or she lived or the production process itself. A work of art must be capable of being completely exhausted in the act of perception itself. The inclusion of references to features of the production process (like those we find in *Surfacing on the Thames*), while not unknown in the era of modernism, did tend to free a work of art from this imposing ideal of self-containment which artists of modernist persuasion had prized so highly.

Rimmer's work shares another postmodernist trait with Snow's, though that concern is less evident in *Surfacing on the Thames* than in some other films Rimmer has done, such as *Canadian Pacific I and II* (1974 and 1975). In those films, a line around the periphery of the frame and one-eighth of the way into the area of the frame (but leaving a gap in the top right hand corner) is used to reinforce the boundary of the image; in using this device, Rimmer reworked a strategy which Snow had used as early as 1960 in *Lac Clair* and, like Snow, Rimmer used this strategy to express ideas about framing. And, like Snow's, Rimmer's references to the frame edge do not reinforce the edge of the framing, making it into an absolute boundary; rather, like Snow's, they point out that the frame is a provisional marker, beyond which the world is much the same as it is shown in the image within the frame.

Snow's Postmodernist Associates II: Joyce Wieland

Joyce Wieland's early film work displays similar postmodernist traits. An important feature of her work is the relaxation of the rigours of formalist/materialist work. Wieland is usually identified with the structural movement within avant-garde cinema, which also includes such prominent American filmmakers as George Landow (a.k.a. Owen Land), Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton and Ernie Gehr, as well as the British filmmakers (who actually claim the name structural/materialist filmmakers for themselves, in order to differentiate their work from that of American avant-garde filmmakers of the same period who worked in very similar forms, though with, the British insist, a very different aesthetic motivation) Malcolm LeGrice, Peter Gidal, Mike Leggatt and the exemplary and too little known film artist Chris Welsby, the Austrian Peter Kubelka, and the Austrian/German/American Kurt Kren, the Germans Wilhelm and Birgit Hein and Heinz Emigholz, as well as Michael Snow and David Rimmer. The relative weakness of her work, however, may be attributable to the fact that the structural film is not really her form; this conjecture receives some degree of confirmation in the success, comparatively speaking, of *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968) which is by far and away Wieland's best experimental film.

The relaxation of the rigours of structural filmmaking in Wieland's films is indicated in the way her work often includes anecdotes, symbols and sentimental references. More important still is her use of diverse materials, including representational imagery, written texts and surface infractions – patterns created by perforating the film. *Solidarity* (1973) is exemplary in this respect. The film is composed primarily of images of the feet of people marching on a strike-bound plant, filmed with a hand-held camera, with the word "solidarity" superimposed into the middle of the screen. The soundtrack presents the off-screen voice of one of the strike leaders.

The image is resolutely realistic. The ideal of abstraction, so important to many formalist filmmakers, is completely ignored. Furthermore, the meaning of the written text is of real importance.¹⁴ Previously, when written texts had been incorporated in experimental films – in *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), for example – it was usually because of the capacity of the written text to reinforce the two-dimensional plane upon which it rests.¹⁵ (One exception is Duchamp's *Anemic cinema* [1924], but Duchamp is clearly a precursor of postmodernism. Another is Ray's *Etoile de Mer* [1928], but that film was designed to rebut proponents of *cinéma pur*, an early modernist cinema.) In this case, the "illusion-defeating"¹⁶ potential of the written text, its ability to subvert the "illusion" of depth, is only a secondary reason for its use. Written texts in Wieland's films are used partly to establish a set of relations between the text in the foreground, on the picture plane itself, and background elements, those portions of the image which lie in its apparent depth. Even in this regard, the postmodernist character of Wieland's work is apparent. Modernists eschewed foreground-background relations because such relations depended upon the use of forms that appear to exist in deep space. There is also a political motivation for the use of text in this film. The film was shot with a mobile, hand-held camera, kept in nearly continuous movement. The word "solidarity," superimposed to appear in the foreground (in fact, right on the picture plane itself) remains static, fixed in the centre of the screen, but because the hand-held camera was moved almost continually, the image – "the background" – seems to be constantly moving. As gestalt psychologists have proven, a shot with a moving background and a static foreground will appear to have a moving foreground and a static background. Hence, in this case, the word "solidarity" appears to slide over the marchers' feet, in precise correlation to the camera's movement. Thus, it highlights the camera's movements.

The implication is clear. The hand-held camera, brought into prominence by the use of the superimposed lettering, points towards the filmmaker. The word "solidarity" is used to provide evidence of the filmmaker's complicity in the construction of the representation and thus evidence of her support for the marchers' cause. In short, it makes clear that making this film was a gesture of solidarity with the striking workers. This openness to other-than-formal concerns, a feature of much of Wieland's work, is not typically

modernist. The reference that the use of the titles make to the act of filming is postmodernist in yet another respect, for it sabotages any efforts to consider the work as an autonomous, completely self-contained object.

In other films, Wieland has dealt with the relation of word and image differently; indeed, she has virtually catalogued the possible forms the relationship between word and image can assume as she does in the film *1933* (1967). In *Reason over Passion* (1967-69), a printed text of the words to "O Canada" appears on the screen for an extended period of time. This section is followed with a person mouthing those words. Somewhat later in the film there occurs a section devoid of imagery but with a soundtrack that consists of a re-recording of a phonograph disc of a French lesson. The person giving the lesson is supposed to be speaking to someone named Pierre. At first the name refers only to a fictional character but later it is attached, in marvellously parodistic manner, to Pierre Trudeau. Thus the French lesson is transformed into an oblique reference to Trudeau's bilingual policies.

The tension between word and image in all the examples from Wieland's work which we have described is based on the opposition between the unambiguous literalness of the word and the ambiguity – the "polysemicness" – of the image which, by being associated with a word, is reduced by a process known as anchoring. This anchoring would have been abhorrent to modernists since it ties the image to its "other," to language, from which modernists wished to divorce it. Moreover, modernists prized ambiguity, since ambiguity loosens the bonds that tie a signifier to a signified.

Like the films of Snow and Rimmer that we have considered, *Solidarity* takes framing as one of its central concerns. Because the voice on the soundtrack emanates from an off-screen space, and because the field of view is confined within very narrow limits, the spectator becomes acutely aware of space beyond the edge of the frame. Thus Wieland's work, like that of Rimmer and Snow, demonstrates that the frame functions not only in the way that modernists believed it to – to contain and isolate the space which is to be "filled" with an aesthetically significant form. Modernists had argued that the space enclosed by a frame determined the nature of the forms which could be used to fill it. This is what was at stake in the use of "shaped canvases" in 1960s colour-field painting. This view of the function of the frame depends on the idea that all aesthetically significant relations are internal to the work itself – that relations between an image and its referent, or between what is actually contained within a frame and what that implies about what lies beyond the frame, can have no aesthetic significance whatsoever. Wieland proposes a more pluralistic conception of the frame: she argues that since the frame-edge demarcates on-screen space from off-screen space in a rather arbitrary fashion, it acts as much as a transitional device as it does a bounding device. It also acts to generate metaphors and meaning, merely by its function of isolating a segment of the world (since whatever has boundaries has an identity, and whatever has an identity has significance). Wieland

suggests that the frame itself, in generating distinctions among units from which relations are then constructed, serves a diacritical function, and structuralist linguists have pointed out that systems of meaning are always diacritical systems.

That all three of these film artists (and many others could be added, filmmakers like Richard Kerr, Phillip Hoffman and Chris Gallagher) should all have a similar conception of the frame, a conception that is at odds with that held by American modernists, is not surprising, in light of the way Canadian artists have traditionally thought about framing. It is common to discover in the history of Canadian art artists who use devices (close-up views, low-angle views, boundary-reinforcing forms) that give evidence of a desire to contain and control the landscape which is felt to be intimidating. Their work exploits the tension-creating potential of the conflict between a boundless, overpowering landscape and the efforts to impose a containing form on the landscape, to isolate some part of it or otherwise reduce it to manageable dimensions. To adopt the modernists' view of the frame as something that completely and utterly isolates the space within it from the space that surrounds it would eliminate this source of tension. Snow, Rimmer and Wieland all work within the Canadian tradition of image-making and use the frame the way Canadian artists have traditionally used it; it was this that led them to reject the modernist doctrine.

Furthermore, like Snow, Wieland cycles material she uses from medium to medium. She has worked not just in film, but also in painting, printmaking and quiltmaking – she has even made a film, a quilt and a painting with the same title, *Reason over Passion*. When making *Handtinting* (1967-68), she used the same dyes she was using in her textile works to colour the film stock. She applied the dyes to the film by hand, and this hand application caused the dyes to streak, drawing attention to the colour as colour, as well as to the art process by which it is applied. The "handwriting" apparent in Wieland's handtinting has none of the emotional intensity of "personal signature" so boasted about among the Abstract Expressionists. Wieland's use of "handwriting" is similar to Rimmer's use of scratches and surface blemishes in *Surfacing on the Thames*; it points towards the process by which the work is made rather than the emotional climate in which it is produced. In addition, the irregularities of the handtinting, the variation in the intensity and the location of colours from frame to frame, point towards the film strip and the projection apparatus. Moreover, the handtinted sections between the shots create effects of a purely abstract and material order. These "abstract" references to film's material substrate are reinforced by the use of "descriptive" imagery, some of whose features make a similar reference, for the grain of some of the images appears swollen, drawing attention to film's emulsion, and occasionally a sprocket perforation appears, highlighting another of the physical properties of the medium. All in all, the film includes different types of visual constructs: purely descriptive imagery, descriptive

imagery which has been reworked, and purely abstract forms. In fact, the film contains the full range of visual forms that the cinema is capable of presenting and indeed provides an inventory of those forms. The incorporation of such a diversity of image types has become characteristic of postmodernist filmmaking.

The "illusion-defeating devices" used in *Handtinting* operate in concert with the film's other devices. *Handtinting* incorporates material from a Job Corps documentary on which Wieland had worked as cameraperson in 1965 and 1966; in making her own film, Wieland re-edited the footage according to principles that would ensure disjunctiveness and repetitiveness of the sequence of images. No action depicted in the footage was allowed to run to its conclusion, material unrelated to the recreational activities of the poor women was incorporated into the film in order to further disrupt continuity, and some actions are repeated several times in order to foreground the representational nature of representation.

These "illusion-defeating devices" utterly dismembered pictorial continuity. The use of dyes functions somewhat differently. The tinted sections between the shots create no illusion of depth whatsoever; the colours in these sections appear to lie on the picture plane, thus making a reference to the surface of the screen.

CHAPTER 11

The Photographic Image in Canadian Avant-Garde Film

Artists in Germany and France began making experimental films in the early 1920s, American artists in the late 1920s, and Canadians not until the late 1960s. Canadians played virtually no role in the experimental film scene during the heyday of modernism in the two decades following the Second World War, a period when American avant-garde filmmakers produced their finest work. But Canadian artists were pioneers in the development of the post-modernist forms of cinema that dominated avant-garde film throughout the 1970s, and since then they have continued to make significant contributions.

This short but rich history of avant-garde film in Canada has its roots in the photographic image. A photograph is a form of realistic representation and a product a person makes with nature. These are especially attractive features for Canadian artists who have behind them intellectual and aesthetic traditions of recognizing the untenability of distinguishing between human consciousness and nature. These are, as well, features that make the photographic image a decidedly postmodern form, one that Canadian filmmakers have used to challenge the aesthetics of modernism.

Postmodernism vs Modernism

In 1964 American art critic Clement Greenberg wrote: "By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture; thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture – though not necessarily as a successful one."¹ Greenberg was the foremost exponent of modernist aesthetics which claimed that progress in art occurred through eliminating from an artistic medium everything that is accidental, so that only that which is essential would remain as the material an artist would work with. Consequently, much of the experimentation that took place under the banner of modernism can be described simply and succinctly: artists tried to

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make works that remained within the boundaries of the media in which they were realized, that is, to write novels or pieces of music that remained novels or pieces of music even though they lacked certain traits (for example, narrative line or tonic centre) that are commonly believed to define these media.

At the origins of the modernist tradition, there are such works as the Russian artist Malevich's *White on White* paintings (c. 1918), in which the materials of painting are reduced to what seem to be the fewest conceivable elements that still admit the possibility of being ordered according to the syntax of painted forms. Among more recent works are the novels of the French *nouveau-romancier* Alain Robbe-Grillet. As stories about stories, they are works that reflect upon their own nature; they present the structure of their own internal relationship rather than represent the external world. At the source of this tradition are the novels of French Parnassian writer Gustav Flaubert, particularly the project he announced in 1878, a novel that would be about nothing. Flaubert unfortunately succumbed to nothingness before he ever caught nothing in the net of his fiction. However, his proposal has taken on something of the status of a legend, for it defined the *telos* towards which the artistic currents of his century were leading. In the last three decades, many have come to realize, as Flaubert had a hundred and more years ago, that the process of emptying an art form of all but its essential elements was destined to culminate in a work that was about nothing at all.

Modernism's attraction was widespread. Among the arts only photography seemed reluctant to submit to its appeal. Photography's resistance to being reformulated to conform with the modernist ideal is hardly surprising. Can we try to imagine what a photograph would look like once it reached Flaubert's ideal of being a work about nothing?² While we have no difficulty conceiving of a painting that represents nothing, to conceive of a similar photograph seems impossible; it would be no more than an empty piece of paper or an empty screen.

One important difference between photographic images and most other artistic images is that photographic images are, in Peirce's lexicon, indexical signs; that is, as signifiers they are ontologically related to what they signify (as the presence of smoke is ontologically related to the fire it signifies), as an effect is related to a cause. Because a photograph's being derives from its model, a photograph can only come into being in the presence of what it depicts. For this reason, a photographer never confronts the same originary absence that artists working in other media do. While painters confront an empty canvas and writers confront a blank page, photographers never confront their raw materials in a completely formless state. Their raw materials are the stuff of the world, observed from a certain point of view and transformed by the optics of lenses; they have a form that depends jointly upon the order of things and the laws of geometric optics. This form is only discovered by photographers; it is not created by them; it is present before they begin to work. That absence of form, that nothingness, which has

haunted so many artists working in other media, has no part of the photographer's creative experience. The desire to make a work about nothing relates to the originary absence that, as we know from artists' biographies and autobiographies, haunts most creative people. And photography neither possesses the ontological means nor creates the psychological demand to produce works that are about nothing.

Film has not proven to be so resistant to modernist reformulation as has photography. Indeed some of the finest examples of modernist art are found in the cinema. The American avant-garde filmmakers Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad, the Japanese-American Taka Iimura, the Austrian Peter Kubelka, the British-American Peter Gidal, and the British filmmaker Malcolm LeGrice (at least in his earlier period) have all devoted their very considerable talents to developing cinematic forms that are fully consistent with modernist ideas. While no one has yet found a way of making an interesting film that would consist of nothing but projected white light, these filmmakers have come close, for they have created rich works out of nothing except bursts of white or coloured light projected for various durations.³

There exists no similar body of work in photography. The reason that filmmakers have been able to come so much closer to Flaubert's zero-point of artistic construction than photographers is because film possesses a property that photographs lack, the property of unfolding at a measured and regulated rate. The works that I have just cited can, in fact, all be understood as pieces in a demonstration intended to prove that, because film is essentially a medium of light and time, its greatest ability is the capacity to articulate forms that provide a temporal structure for changes in light. If the film medium is not embarrassed by the elimination of referential forms, it is not because inherent in its photographic basis there is a reserve of features that withstand the elimination of reference, but rather because film possesses properties in addition to those that derive from its photographic basis.

The modernist movement in Canada produced almost no experimental cinema. The closest would be the works of Vincent Grenier, and even they were produced only after the filmmaker had lived in the United States for several years. His films typically employ forms that present the illusion of possessing processive and recessive areas. This illusory depth generally appears quite shallow and fragile. These visual forms appear for the most part to be non-representational, though in most of the films a few brief passages disturb this appearance by revealing that these apparently abstract images are in fact direct recordings of real (even if constructed) objects.⁴ Grenier's main concern is to illustrate how slight changes in a form's tonal relations affect our impression of the relations between the volumes in the form. Most intriguing, however, is his treatment of the theoretical issues inherent in the use of representation. On the whole, Grenier's works tend towards abstraction. He uses representational images as cadence points, points at which visual tensions are temporarily resolved, which seems to imply that it is

through recourse to abstraction that the tension necessary to a work of art is created. It could be said about such films as *X* (1976) and *While Revolved* (1976) that the aesthetic power of its imagery correlates directly with its degree of abstraction.

Use of abstraction was of course one of the most common features of modernist art. But Grenier's films do not use abstract images exclusively; in most of his films, representational images are used to counterbalance the aesthetizing effects of abstraction. In *World in Focus* (1976), however, he uses representation in a different and more theoretically interesting way.

It was a prevalent notion in modernist circles during the 1940s and 1950s that representational elements reduced a work of art from an object to an image; rather than being (or presenting) itself, it represented something else. In the early 1960s, however, artists found a way to make representational works whose ontological status, in relation to the original, was not a debased or diminished one. Jasper Johns, in his *Targets* series (1955-61) and *American Map* series (1960-63, 1965-66) pioneered the use of images that re-presented other representational images. Unlike most representational images, these images avoid the problem of opening up the ontological gulf between an image and that which it depicts, since an image of an image has much the same status and can serve many of the same functions as the original image itself. The images of maps in Grenier's *World in Focus* are such a case. An image of a map has most of the same features as the original map does; in fact, they are maps (even if viewing them simply as maps would be a very odd thing to do).

One of Michael Snow's favourite tactics accomplished exactly the opposite of what Grenier achieved in *World in Focus*. He demonstrates how an image from one medium is transformed when it is incorporated in another. In *One Second in Montreal* (1969), for example, a series of thirty-one still photographs are reproduced in a motion picture. Each is presented for a protracted duration; during the first half of the film each successive photograph appears for a slightly longer time than its predecessor and during the second half each appears for a slightly shorter time.

Viewers react to these lengthy, motionless film images differently than they would to the equally protracted display of slides or still photographs. They are acutely conscious of the length of time each is presented, in a way they would not be when looking at the original still photographs. The difference indicates that temporality is inscribed in a film image. Duration, Snow demonstrates, is one of the filmmaker's fundamental materials, even more fundamental than motion because without duration there can be no motion. The absence of represented movement highlights the experience of an almost pure time which is one of cinema's basic materials. In a similar vein, *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) shows that a photograph of a slide produces different effects than does the slide itself, and that a slide of a painting produces different effects than does the painting itself.

Issues associated with photographic representation also have a central place in the films of Andrew Lugg, who as well as making films has taught philosophy of science at the University of Ottawa. His films fall into two series: a series of performance pieces – including *Plough, Skid, Drag* (1973), *Gemini Fire Extension* (1972) and *Trace* (1972) – and a series of films using imagery derived from postcards – *Postcards* (1974), *Black Forest Trading Post* (1976) and *Front and Back* (1972). The performance pieces demonstrate how photographic imagery can be used to illustrate a concept; the postcard films deal with the effects of introducing movement into subjects we often find on postcards (into a certain type of vernacular photograph).

The performance piece *Plough, Skid, Drag* has a three-part structure. In each section a performer is pulled around the periphery of a field. Because the camera was not set exactly in the centre of the field, the distance of the actor and tractor from the camera varies, beginning at mid-distance, moving farther away and then close to the camera and finally returning to mid-distance. In each section the body of the performer has been positioned differently to provide an illustration (almost, but not quite, an ostensive definition) of one of the words of the title. In the first section, for example, the performer lies face down with his legs outstretched so that his feet act as a plough-blade; in the second he lies on his back with his arms and legs raised to form the shape of a skid.

In Lugg's performance-related films, the performance mediates between the word (and the concept it represents) and the photographic representation. The simple and overtly illustrational style Lugg uses makes evident the distance that separates photographic representation from illustration and images from words, for it constitutes a demonstration that concepts must be enacted in a performance in order to become amenable to being photographed. He also demonstrates that photographic representations contain many more features than characterize the general concept referred to by a common word, for they possess features either that are specific to the concrete instances which fall under some general term or that relate to the fact that general concepts must find embodiment in the flesh-and-blood world of spatio-temporal reality in order to be photographed. (Presumably, Lugg used the concept of performance to make this latter point.) The interest Lugg has shown here in the relation between words and image would have been very out of place in the context of modernist art, but it has become one of the important issues of postmodernist art and an issue in which Michael Snow has taken a great interest.

Lugg's postcard films confront even more directly the issues associated with representation in still photography. In *Postcards*, for example, he rephotographed buildings or scenes depicted in postcards, placing a motion picture camera in the location the still camera occupied when the original postcard photograph was taken. Some of the images in this film could be easily mistaken for reproductions of postcards because initially many seem to include

no movement. Eventually a movement is discovered – often near an edge of the screen – or the stasis which initially characterizes them is interrupted as a car or a person passes through the screen.

The central concern of the film is to explore the effect of introducing movement into a static image. Lugg points out that the effect is profound, for the introduction of movement destroys the autotelicity of the still photograph. Generally, still images present themselves as two-dimensional objects isolated from any context. The introduction of movement into the imagery makes the imagery appear three-dimensional and connects the space of the representation to the space beyond the edges of the frame. (The latter effect is particularly strong because the movement often occurs at the frame edge.) By adding features that run against the grain of postcard representations, Lugg exposes the conventions of that genre and uses the cinema's capacity to represent movement to disprove claims about the realism of the photographic imagery. At the same time he points out that the similarities between the imagery of still photography and the imagery of film imply a relation between film and still photography that extends his argument about the photograph's lack of realism to the film medium itself. Lugg's interest in disproving the photographic image's claim to veracity also explains his use of narration. The narration is written in the style commonly found in glosses on the backs of postcards: location and facts about the scene purportedly depicted. But these facts seem incongruous with what we see, for the images appear unreal, and besides, they exist only on the screen and not somewhere in the "real world."

Black Forest Trading Post, another of Lugg's postcard films, similarly exposes the lack of veracity in photographic (and cinematographic) images. The film consists of an image of a building – the Black Forest Trading Post – placed in a number of backgrounds, while the voice on the film's soundtrack supposedly identifies the site where each photograph is taken (and so where each Black Forest Trading Post is located) by naming first the building and then the background – for example, "Black Forest Trading Post, Jasper, Alberta." At first, each image and its verbal description seems to represent a single space. Eventually we realize that in every image there is a discontinuity, that the Black Forest Trading Post and the background are separate. Properly punctuated, a transcription of one section of the soundtrack, for example, would read not "Black Forest Trading Post, Jasper, Alberta," but rather "Black Forest Trading Post" / "Jasper, Alberta," enumerating each separate element in the mini-collage. In this work Lugg exposes how the presumed realism of a photographic – or cinematographic – image affects our apprehension of it, leading us to infer that images that are actually constructions are direct reflections of reality. This assumption even leads us to overlook slight perspectival or scalar anomalies between foreground and background. Still, because we recognize that individual elements in a photograph are real, most often when we do question the authenticity of a photograph we

do so by asking if it is not a collage (as we would examine an advertising or political photograph for evidence of seams that would reveal that it has been assembled from individual components). Lugg's collages simply extend this scepticism, arguing for a recognition of the fact that a photograph is always a construction.

Works like those by Michael Snow and Andrew Lugg raise an enormous theoretical challenge to the basis of modernism. Modernists had insisted on the idea that each art medium must retain its own identity when it assimilates impulses, forms or norms from others. Decades before, when confronted with a similar claim by Russian formalists, Czech aesthetician Jan Mukavrovsky noted that the threat of one art medium losing its distinctiveness when incorporating aspects of a second medium is not very great, since even when both use the same means they produce different effects. Snow and Lugg made a similar point in their works. Modernism had taken the purification of each medium as an urgent task and had attempted to find for each one a form that would have a set of attributes entirely different from the forms constructed for other media. Lugg and Snow proposed a more relaxed attitude, suggesting that the task of preserving a medium's purity is not quite as imposing as modernists took it to be. *One Second in Montreal*, for example, shows that when aspects of still photographs are incorporated in film – indeed, when still photographs are incorporated holus bolus in a film – they acquire the durational properties of a film image.

A film like Snow's *One Second in Montreal* provides a clue to the generally postmodernist character of Canadian avant-garde film. Much Canadian film, both experimental and non-experimental, rests on the assumption that film is a photographically based medium. In all its forms Canadian cinema has been preoccupied with an endeavour we find reflected in *One Second in Montreal*, the analysis of the nature of photography and, in particular, the attempt to comprehend its inherent paradoxes. It is the very intractability of the photographic image to conform to modernist reformulation that explains the dearth of modernist works in the corpus of Canadian avant-garde works.

The reasons for photography's affinity for postmodernism involve complex issues. For one thing, the change from modernist to postmodernist forms in the arts reflects a different understanding of the origin of creative order. Modernists generally held the view that the order that aesthetic objects possess is created in the mind of the artist; postmodernists generally believe that this order is discovered in the world of things. In other words, modernists viewed the universals of artwork as transcendental, while postmodernists view them as immanent,⁵ which is why collage, photo-realism, and *les objets trouvés* are favoured forms of postmodernist art.

There is another point of contact between photography and postmodernism. Both are concerned with issues arising from the use of representation and especially with the aesthetic and cognitive values of a representational image. Even the paradoxes to which postmodernist works return with such

regularity are paradoxes inherent in the concept of representation. Modernism was art seeking to be itself, but in the process of searching for the essence of artistic media, it became something else, namely, philosophy, for it became an inquiry into the defining characteristics proper to each of the various art media and into the mind's capacity to apprehend the truth about material order. In reaction to this paradoxical outcome, postmodernist artists have attempted to restore visual art to its original activity, the activity of representation (which explains the simplemindedness of much postmodernist art).

There are other paradoxical features of modernism and these can be best clarified by considering two examples: Jack Chambers' *401 Towards London No. 2* (1968-69) and an individual image from a photographic series by Snow entitled *Plus Tard* (1977). The former is a painting done from a snapshot, a casually produced photograph of an everyday event; the latter seems to be a casually produced photograph⁶ of Tom Thomson's *The Jack Pine* (1916-17), a painting well known to Canadians since it is a pioneering work of "documentary landscape painting," a type of painting which many critics believe to be the quintessential form of Canadian art.

Responses to these works run an interesting course. When looking at either of these works, we imagine the source-image that it represents (and, at least, according to naïve views, "re-presents"): the photograph Chambers used when painting *401 Towards London* or the painting which Snow photographed. Representations like these evoke a desire to see the original. Yet we can imagine that if the original were to be presented, we would then want to see the scene that it represented. And again we can imagine that if we were to be shown that scene, the curiosity and fascination that had been aroused by the original work of art would still not be satisfied.

If the presentation of its original model cannot sate the curiosity aroused by the original, it would seem that this curiosity must be directed not towards what the image represents but rather towards something intrinsic in the representing token itself, but found nowhere else (including the model). This was the conclusion drawn by modernist theorists. They expended much effort attempting to identify the properties intrinsic in a work of art that might elicit such interest and curiosity. Some argued that it was because artworks possessed "significant form" that they fascinated us. Others claimed that it was because the artwork bore evidence that a human personality had shaped it.

More recent artistic practices have tended to reject both these claims. Neither Snow's "casual" photograph nor Chambers' painting derived from a casual photograph that possesses what would be considered as a "significant form"; in fact, if either were considered in exclusively formal terms, it would be found lacking. Moreover, the meticulous objectivity of Chambers' reproduction of his source photograph is calculated precisely to exclude the formative – or, as he considers it, the deforming – role of the human personality.⁷

What underlies these effects, according to postmodernists, is not something intrinsic in the work of art itself; it relates, rather, to something intrinsic in the phenomenon of representation.⁸ Quite simply, postmodernists have argued that the special interest elicited by a representational image results from the fact that it presents the appearance of an object other than itself. Although this claim sounds almost tautologically trivial, it asserts a fundamental proposition. The word "appearance" has been chosen with great care, for it embodies an ambiguity essential to the phenomenon of representation in which postmodernists have taken great interest. The word "appearance" can refer either to someone or something actually present (as when we talk of a celebrity's appearance at some gathering) or to an illusory presence (as when we speak of a pool of water in a desert as being only an appearance).

The concept of representation is similarly double-sided. A representation is at once an actual object and an illusion, or at least something approaching an illusion, an image that, considered in a certain way, can seem to present an object that is not actually present.⁹ A representational image, then, is a fascinating matrix of presence and absence. In fact, only when the absence of the represented object is acknowledged can representation actually occur. For example, a person who believes in transubstantiation has, when taking communion, a religious experience that lacks any aesthetic dimension; on the other hand, a person who takes communion without believing in transubstantiation, who believes that the bread and wine only represent the body and blood of the Saviour, has an aesthetic experience which may or may not possess religious significance. This points out that the intimate relation that obtains between religious thinking and magical thinking does not obtain between aesthetic thinking and magical thinking. And this is of key importance for analysis of the concept of representation, since representations are held to be re-presentations – are effective as illusions – only for magical thinking.

It is the double-sided nature of the concept of representation – the fact that the presence of the original is suggested by an artistic representation even while its absence is demanded – that explains the peculiar course of desire a representational image (or, for that matter, any other form of representation) evokes. This desire projects itself towards "the other" the image represents. It is this that makes the desire impossible to sate, for nothing can retain its "otherness" when it is actually present; inherent in the very concept of otherness is the idea of absence.

Just as the relationship between pictorial space (or any other form of illusory depth a painting suggests) and the picture plane was the fundamental relationship in modernist painting, the relationship between presence and absence has been the determining factor in postmodernist art. This explains the particular interest which postmodernists have taken in photography. The relationship between presence and absence in a photograph is a particu-

larly intense one, since a photograph offers an unusually forceful “illusion” of the “other” which it represents. Indeed, it offers that “illusion” with such force that the “other’s” absence becomes something of a presence.

The Paradoxes of Photographic Representation

This paradox of photography has intrigued a number of theorists. Roland Barthes has written of “the real unreality” of the photograph and argued that in a photograph we discover a new category of space-time that involves “an illogical conjunction of the here-now and the there-then.”¹⁰ Stanley Cavell points out that the root of our fascination with photography lies in a paradox inherent in the photograph:

A photograph does not present us with “likenesses” of things; it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves. But wanting to say that may well make us ontologically restless. “Photographs present us with things themselves” sounds, and ought to sound, false or paradoxical. Obviously a photograph of an earthquake, or of Garbo, is not an earthquake happening (fortunately), or Garbo in the flesh (unfortunately). But this is not very informative. And, moreover, it is no less paradoxical or false to hold up a photograph of Garbo and say, “That is not Garbo,” if all you mean is that the object you are holding up is not a human creature. Such troubles in notating so obvious a fact suggest that we do not know what a photograph is; we do not know how to place it ontologically. We might say that we don’t know how to think of the *connection* between a photograph and what it is a photograph of. The image is not a likeness; it is not exactly a replica, or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition either, though all of these natural candidates share a striking feature with photographs – an aura or history of magic surrounding them.... We are not accustomed to seeing things that are invisible, or not present to us, not present with us; or we are not accustomed to acknowledging that we do (except for dreams). Yet this seems, ontologically, to be what is happening when we look at a photograph: we see things that are not present.¹¹

Particularly relevant is Cavell’s remarks about Baudelaire’s theorizing in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859-60): “Out of his despair of happiness, out of his disgust with its official made-up substitutes, and out of his knowledge of his isolation and estrangement from the present and the foreignness of the past (and, I believe, in his experiments with hashish), he found the wish for photography, in particular for motion pictures – the wish for that specific simultaneity of presence and absence which only the cinema will satisfy.”¹² The duality Cavell refers to, this co-mingling of presence and absence, is one of the most obvious – and paradoxical – features of representations. All representations are signs, “stand-ins” for objects whose “place” they take (and, of

course, in so doing – in “dis-placing” them – they render them absent). But while this is true of all representations, photography has so intensified the capacity of imagery to make that which it presents seem truly present – truly there, before us – that it has become a new and wholly different quality, specific to photography.

The central paradox of photographic representation can be expressed in another way, by considering the problems associated with attempting to state what we see when we look at a photograph (or a videograph or a film).¹³ One criterion we use in making decisions about the applicability of the term “to see” is that our experience be the result of a causal process: the concept of seeing something involves the notion that we are having visual experiences that are caused by the thing that is seen. But this is also true of photographs; when I look at a photograph of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I am aware that Laurier (along with other factors, the presence of a lens, a light-tight box containing a plate coated with materials that turn dark when light falls on them) caused the photograph which then caused the experience I had. That is the sense in which we can say, as Kendall L. Walton points out, that “objects cause their photographs and the visual experiences of their viewers mechanically; so we see objects through the photographs. By contrast, objects cause paintings not mechanically but in a more ‘human’ way, a way involving the artist; so we don’t see through painting.”¹⁴ It does not seem to be unnatural (or to be a violation of our normal use of the term “to see”) to say that I saw Leonard Cohen on television last night in a musical production (done on film and video), entitled *I am a Hotel*. After all, if we can say that we see tiny insects through a magnifying glass, and bacteria through a microscope, and atomic particles with an electron microscope, and solar flares through a telescope, is it not equally reasonable to say that security guards, sitting in an apartment lobby with a bank of monitors in front of them, see the rear entrance to the building on one of their screens? Or to say that I saw Leonard Cohen on television last night?

This assertion, however, produces a sense of uneasiness. But few explanations of why we feel this uneasiness have any merit. It is argued that photographs distort, and that what is presented in a photograph is a photographer’s vision of the world, not the world itself. It is also argued that photographic representations do not present the real world; rather, they present a world structured according to the photographer’s interests (or to the interests of those who pay for the photographs or those who control the cultural apparatus). The first point falls flat if we simply note that surveillance mirrors also distort, yet there would seem absolutely nothing odd about store owners claiming that they see (and watch carefully) customers in this (distorting) mirror. And the second point gets easily deflated when we look at what restaurant owners do. They use many techniques to make us see the food they serve in ways that suit their interests; they use lighting, china, and other things in ways that have proven capable of making what they serve look

appealing. But the fact that we are asked to see our food in a certain way is, after all, no refutation of the claim that we do actually see food.

Weakest of all of commonly offered rebuttals of the claim that, when we see a photograph of Aunt Millie, we are really seeing Aunt Millie is one that has become associated with Marxist-feminist theories of film and photography. This refutation altogether denies there can be distinctions among different forms of representations, claiming that representations in photographs and films have only the same status that, for example, representations of scenes in novels have. According to this argument, since novelists use techniques to make us see their characters in ways that serve the novelist's/the fiction's ideological interests, and since photographers use techniques that make us see their subjects in certain ways, then subjects in photographs are fictions in just the same way that characters in fiction are. (This argument has been used as the basis for defending the use of narrative forms in cinema, since it is taken as demonstrating that fiction is an inevitable condition of cinema.) We can readily rebut this rebuttal simply by looking at where it leads. It collapses into the single category of fiction all types of "misrepresentations," by which we can mean anything from a transformation of the natural world into a coded system to statements that assert an untruth ("untruth" implies that the misrepresenting assertion has existential import and that what it asserts about actual existents is false) to the constructions of fiction; as well, it fails to distinguish among the different ways of reading distortions (including those inevitable transformations that occur as the natural is transformed into the coded) which are appropriate to the different sorts of meaning representations have.

To see specifically where collapsing all types of misrepresentation into the single category of fiction leads, suppose we had an excellent digitizer connected to a device that read the wavelength of the light reflected from some very, very small portion of some object in front of us. As we move this colour-reading wand over the object, it reads the colour of some small part of the object, translates the colour into a number associated with that colour by the computer system, and stores that number in the memory location associated with the pixel representing the appropriate location. Suppose we changed the program used in the process so that colours were unnatural; when the colour-reading wand read blue, the number for yellow was stored in the memory location associated with that pixel and when it read magenta the number for green was stored in that location. In a sense, the image that appeared when a display was called out would be a misrepresentation – but only in a sense. Blue areas of the model would be yellow and our magenta areas would be green. As much accurate information about the scene would be included in the computer memory as if we had stored the number the program associates with blue in memory when the colour-reading wand had read blue, and had stored the number associated with magenta when the colour-reading wand had read magenta. (That the information is equivalent

is demonstrated by the fact that the original colours in the model must be recoverable, since even the information about the changes the colours undergo is included somewhere in the program.) The picture that is produced by our computer does not produce a fiction about the scene; it only demands a certain knowledge about how the image is to be read – in fact, exactly the same sort of knowledge that people who print photographic negatives acquire. With any system of representation, to understand the representations it presents, we must know the rules of reading. But that does not make the representations fictitious, in the sense of being about non-existent entities and non-existent actions and processes.

There is an important distinction for the rules of reading, which was first made by H.P. Grice, though its relevance to the theory of photography was first pointed out by Kendall L. Walton.¹⁵ Grice distinguishes between non-natural and natural meanings.¹⁶ Photographs, evidently, are bearers of natural meaning, even though they can be manipulated to embody non-natural, fictional meanings as well. A photograph of Margaret Atwood taken with a distorting lens that made her look like a gorgon might present her as a creature of her work; and that she is such, or can be thought of or seen in this way, would be the photograph's non-natural meaning. But even a photograph possessing such a non-natural meaning would still have natural meaning, an ontological assertion that behind the picture is Margaret Atwood. Moreover, the existence of a non-natural meaning does not make it impossible to see through the photograph and to see instead the natural meaning, the face of a serious and deep-thinking artist. In short, the presence of a non-natural meaning in a photograph does not make it impossible to discern its natural meaning (and much less does the discovery of the existence of a non-natural meaning to a photograph prove that no photographs possess natural meanings). All that is required is a knowledge of how to interpret the image, the kind of knowledge possessed by drivers who have lenses in the rear-window of their vans, which certainly distort their fields of view, yet nonetheless allow them to avoid obstacles while backing out of narrow lanes and to avoid turning into lanes in which there are approaching vehicles. There is enough truth (natural meaning) to the virtual image presented to our van driver that he routinely stakes his life on its information.

Still, as poorly conceived as these arguments are, the fact that commentators have offered them as often as they have indicates the degree of unease that is elicited by the assertion that, when we look at a photograph, we actually see the object it presents.¹⁷ The real reason for this unease is that, while the camera is a prosthetic for vision, it is different from magnifying lenses of microscopes or telescopes. When we view the product of a telescope (a magnified image) we are actually seeing solar flares, but when we view the product of a camera, we look at a picture; and pictures are ontologically distinct from what they picture. One difference is that, when we look through a microscope or a telescope, what we see there is contemporaneous with any

other objects that are in the vicinity of what we view (or as near as contemporaneous with the act of viewing as the time it takes for light to travel from the object allows, a condition that may, after all, simply specify a form of contemporaneousness), while when we look at a photograph we see something that, in itself, apart from its pictorial embodiment, belonged to a different time than other objects in the vicinity of the photograph.

Walton attempts to encapsulate the anomaly (he doesn't really consider it a paradox) of the photographic image by characterizing photographs as "transparent pictures." Like pictures, they are ontologically distinct from their objects, but they allow us to do something no other picture does (but magnifying glasses and telescopes do) – to see reality through them. Walton's notion of photographs as "transparent pictures" comes close to providing an account of the marvellous character of photographs (I choose a term associated with magic deliberately), but this account is still too incomplete to be satisfactory. Telescopes and microscopes and magnifying lenses do not make reality portable; it is impossible to look through them and to see parts of reality that are not right in front of us. In order to look at a *streptococcus bacillus* through my microscope, I have to have such a bacterium at hand. However, I do not have to be in Berlin to see Schloss Charlottenburg through a photograph (but of course – and this is a very important point to be made about photographs – the photographer did have to go to Berlin to make the picture on the poster in my office). Moreover, through a microscope, I can only see what is in front of me now, but through photographs I can see incidents from times past. My wife and I can look through the slides we have made over the years, and reminisce about the first time we saw Paris together, about screenings and festivals we have attended, and people we have met in London, Paris, Munich, Berlin and Amsterdam. And we can tell each other stories we recollect about what happened in travelling from one city to the next. The ability to see the past through photographs is one of its major appeals; people turn to photographs for just this form of pleasure.

Perhaps the paradox can better be captured by attempting to answer the question: What does a photographic image share with its model? The answer is a surprising one: Everything, almost, except its existence. There is a remarkable degree of resemblance between the appearance of a photographic image of something and the appearance of the thing itself, a high enough measure of resemblance to lend our assertion a certain amount of credibility. But it is equally remarkable to be able to say, as we can about what we see in a photograph, that what we see looks (almost) just like reality, but it does not really exist (now).

That photographic images truly are as paradoxical as this statement implies is a fact that can be verified by considering the temporal features of photographs. There is a sense of the term "see" which makes it quite legitimate to say of a particular photograph that in it I see my grandmother. But I see my grandmother, not as she is now, but as she was forty years ago. How do

we unpack this claim about seeing the past? The past of course, has no real existence any longer; it no longer *is*. And yet our statement that we see something implies that we have direct, perceptual contact with something that does no longer exist. How can we have direct contact with something that no longer is? This is surely as illogical – as magical – as any phenomenon might be. Stanley Cavell is correct in stating that “the mysteriousness of the photograph lies not in the machinery which produces it but in the unfathomable abyss between what it captures (its subject) and what is captured for us (this fixing of the subject), the metaphysical wait between exposure and exhibition, the absolute authority and finality of the fixed image.”¹⁸

The anomaly of photography is also evident when we consider the great difference between photographic representations and representations in other media. Representations generally invite us, to borrow a concept from Wittgenstein, to see their contents as something more than the particulars they are. Thus, for examples, Caravaggio's famous painting *Amor Victorious* (1602) invites us to see this model, so obviously a youth from the common people, as the mythological figure Amor, who (according to the painting) inspires the arts¹⁹; similarly van Dyck's *Bust-Length Figure of an Apostle with Folded Hands* (1620) invites us to see a particular human being as one of the Apostles, gazing upwards during the Miracle of the Pentecost; similarly, the many madonna paintings invite us to see a particular woman and infant as the Holy Mother and her Child. But photography is different in this respect; its ability to get us to see X as Y is vastly more restricted. When we see a woman and infant in a photograph, we do not see the couple as Madonna and Child; we see, simply, a particular woman and a particular child. Similarly, when we see a photograph of a human figure, we don't see it as a Nude; we see a particular undressed person. We see what is there, in the photograph, and we do not see it as something other than it is. In that sense, photography leans towards realism.

But what do we see in a photograph? Remarkably, something that does not exist (but rather that existed some time ago). We are not used to seeing things that do not exist, except in dreams, which explains why the contents of photographs seem phantasmal, dream-like, yet, at the same time, they seem so real, because we see the contents of the photograph as they really are (or were). It is this duality that makes photography and film the exemplary surrealist media. In photography, we see things that do not exist exactly as they are, and exactly for what they are in themselves.

Even this formulation of the paradox of photography makes it evident that the concepts that are knotted in the paradox central to the nature of photography are the concepts of presence and absence. There is another anomaly about photography that also relies on the so intimately intertwined concepts of presence and absence (that our minds seem so constantly – and with such dire consequences – to split apart). A screen (or a photograph) presents a world, but that world is always the world of another. I am at the apex of a

pyramid – which mirrors a nearly identical pyramid receding in the opposite direction from the screen, as though this fact made it clear that there is a “that world” on the other side of the screen which mirrors “this world,” on my side of it – where the camera was once placed (but no longer is). While the screen presents the world, it also screens me out from that world. That world is complete, for its coherence is not of my doing. When there are conversations in that world, I can only overhear them. I cannot participate in them, just as I cannot join the world into which I gaze. It is real, and yet I cannot walk into it.

The Romantics’ dream of creating an art form which could capture the world and so could allow its spectator to become one with the world was almost realized with the development of film and photography. All that was left out was the subject; we were made separate from the world, we lost our connection with the world, and presence became merely the endless presence of the self to itself. Romantic artists longed to re-establish our connection with the world. Photography and film did overcome the isolation of subjectivity, but only at the cost of all participation of the human agent in the task of reproduction. About this loss, Stanley Cavell offers some profound comments – comments that could serve as a gloss on Michael Snow’s film *Presents*.

A world complete without me which is present to me is the world of my immortality. This is an importance of film – and a danger. It takes my life as my haunting of the world, either because I left it unloved (The Flying Dutchman) or because I left unfinished business (Hamlet). So there is reason for me to want the camera to deny the coherence of the world, its coherence as past: to deny that the world is complete without me. But there is equal reason to want it affirmed that the world is coherent without me. That is essential to what I want of immortality: nature’s survival of me. It will mean that the present judgement upon me is not yet the last.²⁰

Postmodernism and Otherness

Modernists had forsworn any truck with an artwork’s “other,” insisting that a work of art must have a solid being, that it must be wholly itself, with no part constituted by something other than itself. This coincidence of a work with its own being was gauged in two distinct, though interrelated, ways. One gauge was the degree of referentiality of the work: illusionistic features were alleged to throw a work out of alignment with its being, since they forced the work to surrender aspects of its internal structure to that which it represented. Another gauge was the degree of its conformity to the medium in which it was realized: to be fully aligned with its being, a painting must be wholly a painting and must not possess features from some other medium of expression.

Modernism was a centripetal doctrine. It turned the artwork in upon itself, for it rejected the idea that a work of art ought to have any intercourse with a being other than itself. Postmodernism, on the other hand, is a centrifugal doctrine. Its techniques are techniques of decentering, of dispersal. Postmodernism has proposed, for example, the dissolution of notions of mediumistic purity and has advocated instead the construction of forms that use the attributes of one medium in works realized in a different medium (though these imported attributes must still be consistent with the basic characteristics of the medium into which they are imported).

Michael Snow's strategies and forms are based on the principle of non-exclusion. He demanded the right to use both representation and abstraction; his works employ both illusionistic devices and devices which emphasize the objecthood of a work of art. It is in the temporal structures of his films that we see this trait most clearly. Most of Snow's films have very simple shapes which extend over protracted durations. He pioneered the use of such forms; in fact, when he first used them, they provoked something of an outrage since they were so unusual.

In the early and mid-1960s, avant-garde cinema was dominated by forms developed by American filmmaker Stan Brakhage, whose films typically employ intense, expressionistic camera movements, frequent use of extremely close camera positions, rapid cutting between shots having contrasting attributes, and complex rhythmic structures created by the conjoint effect of the cutting and the camera movement and the movement of shots' object matter. The style forged from these devices tends to rivet the spectator's attention to the screen. Brakhage's works are so rapidly paced and have such intensity that viewers must give their entire attention to the task of grasping what occurs in the very instant of its happening. Hence, their mental energies are devoted wholly to the perception of what is immediately present; there is none left over for the apperceptive acts of recollection or anticipation. Spectators of a Brakhage film are fascinated spectators, absorbed completely in the given moment; they occupy a realm without any temporal extension, for in it everything exists in a timeless present.²¹

Snow's films have very different temporal qualities. The temporal characteristics of his films are related to features of photography. They do not follow directly from photography's own temporal characteristics; indeed, Brakhage's timeless present has more in common with the instantaneous character of a photograph than do Snow's extended durations. The influence of photography on the temporal structures of Snow's films is mediated by the concept of representation.

The temporal forms of Brakhage's films employ tactics calculated to consolidate the viewer's experience, to assure that only that is present to consciousness which is present in time. And since, according to the phenomenism his films are almost wholly given over to exploring, only that which is perceived exists, these temporal forms also assure that whatever is seen is

totally revealed, that there is no hidden other outside the manifold of perception. Snow's temporal structures, on the other hand, like the phenomenon of representation itself, employ a strategy of dispersal. By using a form that unfolds over an extended period in a nearly predictable manner, Snow encourages his viewers to recall the course the film has followed to reach a certain point in its development and to speculate on its future course. Snow's temporality, then, embraces the past and future; it is not confined to the present alone. It leads us out of the present into the past and the future – away from what is actually given, towards that which is furnished only by reflexive acts of consciousness, away from presence towards absence.

Snow's decision to use such temporal constructions reflects the fact that he is as interested in apperception as in perception. He has adopted an anti-phenomenalist position, for the structures of his films, unlike Brakhage's, imply the existence of a thing, an other, that lies outside of the manifold of perception – an other which, in fact, has a dual existence, for it is both a mental image, furnished by an act of reflection, and the material object that underlies a perception. Like representational images, then, they present something that is both real and unreal (in the sense of being non-material).

The temporal forms of Snow's films are related to features that are specific to the form of representation found in a photograph. A photographic representation, unlike the representations found in many other forms (painting, poetry, drawing, fictions), cannot depict objects or events which never actually existed. The distinction between those forms of representation that are constrained to represent actual existents and those which are not is an important one in mimetic theory. It was first introduced by Aristotle who noted that the former sort of imitation stands to the latter as history stands to poetry. Aristotle's comment is helpful in characterizing the contrasting temporal structures of Brakhage's films and Snow's, for Brakhage's films really are poetic and Snow's really are historical. The temporality of Brakhage's cinema figures in his endeavour to fashion his films into a form of poetry. The fascinated absorption in the timeless present he seeks to induce relates his poetic commitment to the ecstasies of imaginative creation. Snow's films, on the other hand, use continuous periods of time to allow viewers to scrutinize how experiences evolve. The study of how things evolve over time is one that might be termed historical; these historical concerns Aristotle would have considered appropriate to a medium which, being based on photography, can represent only that which actually exists.

If the extended durations of Snow's films make viewers aware of the passage of time, another of their temporal qualities acts as a counterbalance. Many of Snow's films have diagrammatic shapes; the conical shape of *Wave-length* (1967), based on the gradual narrowing of the zoom, is the prime example. Such shapes allow spectators to grasp the films' lines of development as wholes – to apprehend them in what are, in effect, spatial rather than

temporal terms. The use of such shapes acts to arrest the flow of time by transforming the films' lines of development into spatial forms, even while the use of extended duration makes spectators aware of the flow of time.²² Thus, while Brakhage had developed a cinema in which movement and repetition were used as they were in the writing of Gertrude Stein, to create the sense of a perpetually moving present, Snow has constructed structures which, while containing time, are themselves timeless and eternal. It seems obvious that the quasi-religious aspiration this reveals is one that is closely associated with photography. Unlike Brakhage's moving present, the timeless in Snow's work resists change, which is why he uses spatial forms to give it a figure. Even the tension between time and timelessness which Snow so often exploits is a tension that characterizes the photograph. A photograph, too, seems to depict the unfolding of an event in time even while it lifts those events outside time.

So strongly do these conflicting qualities assert themselves that each has provided the basis of a separate tradition of photography. One approach, as exemplified by the works of Robert Frank, exploits the photograph's ability to depict the speed of unfolding events; the other, represented by Weston, exploits the photograph's capacity to freeze a form and render it timeless. Snow's brilliant insight was to see how these competing qualities of photographic temporality could be reconciled in a temporally extended form with a diagrammatic shape.

Snow's work involves still another type of dispersal. He allows his works to cross the boundaries which separate different media, sometimes by reusing imagery created in one medium in works realized in a different medium, as in his film *One Second in Montreal*. But he also does this by incorporating features of one medium in forms constructed in another, for example, by incorporating characteristics of sculpture in a film. A fine instance of this is \longleftrightarrow (1968-69) which was produced by stationing a camera in front of a classroom wall, and first panning it back and forth, then tilting it up and down. Because the camera was positioned non-equidistantly from the two ends of the wall, the pan contains a slight asymmetry; while the camera moves back and forth, the wall seems to swing one distance towards the camera, then a different distance away. As a result, the space in front of the wall seems to expand and contract, while the wall itself undulates aperiodically towards and away from the image's picture plane. As the panning accelerates and decelerates, these spatial variations are reinforced; rapid panning streaks and blurs the image, flattening it further, while a more leisurely pace restores the illusion of deep space. Thus, a back and forth movement almost parallel to the picture plane results in an apparent movement towards and away from the picture surface.

Camera Movement and Highlighting Absence: The Case of Chris Gallagher

The camera movement in Chris Gallagher's *Atmosphere* (1979) resembles the one Michael Snow used in \longleftrightarrow . In *Atmosphere* the camera pans back and forth over a body of water at a varying tempo. The forward and return swings frequently travel different distances, and the camera occasionally comes to a standstill for varying lengths of time. Most people watching the film assume that a camera operator is in charge of the direction, the length and the pace of the pan and that the variations in tempo and distance are governed by some system. When the film ends with an image of a movie camera with a sail mounted behind it, spectators realize that these variations were determined by chances in the direction and velocity of wind currents.

This final image carries a great deal of significance. It opens up a gap between the film's appearance and its reality; what it appears to be – what it imitates – is not an object or scene from everyday life, but a film. *Atmosphere* is not just an imitation, but an imitation of an imitation, a metafilm that plays with viewers' expectations about cinematic form. And while showing that the film is an illusion (that it is not what it appears to be), the final image also reveals that there is no human agent behind its structure; thus it ties the concept of representation together with the notion of absence. It points up that only when an absence is acknowledged can representation occur. Only when the sail is shown – when we acknowledge the absence of a camera operator – do we recognize that the camera movements simply stand for, rather than actually are systematic, human-directed camera movements, i.e., that they are actually representations. Until we see the final image the relationship between the camera movements and the landscape – between the film's cinematic and photographic aspects – remains inscrutable; we cannot discern why the camera moves over certain parts of the landscape when it does and at the speed it does. The final image reveals that the camera movements were caused by wind, by something integral to the landscape the film depicts. But at the same time as it brings the film's photographic and cinematic aspects together, the final image also reaffirms their separateness. It demonstrates that while the photograph is limited to recording what is visible, film is not so restricted. The visible effects of wind are commonly used to suggest the unseen forces of nature. By using a structure that depends upon wind currents, Gallagher reveals how the cinema can reveal the unseen forces of nature that a photograph can never depict. The form of this film, in which the relationship between the structural and the descriptive elements imitates the relationship between observable and unobservable aspects of nature, resembles that matrix of presences and absences from which post-modernist art so frequently derives its structures.

Seeing in the Rain (1981), another extraordinary film by Chris Gallagher, is similar to *Atmosphere* both in the issues it deals with and in its form. The film was shot using a camera mounted inside a bus, looking out the right

front window. We do not see the edges of the window, but the raindrops collecting on it make us aware of the windshield and of the film image's picture plane. This foregrounding of the picture plane is reinforced by the camera being set very close to the window (or having a lens with a medium to long focal length). The concern with the relation of the haptic space of an image to the picture plane – with the relation of illusory three-dimensional forms to the two-dimensional surface on which they are depicted – is a characteristic feature of postmodernist art which derives from the nature of photographic representations (which are determined by the laws of geometric optics, including laws relating to the manner by which a virtual image of a three-dimensional world is formed on a plane). The scene through the window shows a street, viewed for the most part looking down it and slightly to one side. Thus the sides of the street delineate a linear recession typical of perspectival drawings and paintings. The bus also travels down the street – or appears to at first – into the deep space of the image, a movement that resembles the illusory camera movement Michael Snow employed in *Wavelength*.

As he did in *Atmosphere*, Gallagher uses a back-and-forth movement to provide the film's structure in *Seeing in the Rain*. The back-and-forth movement is furnished by a windshield wiper; each time the windshield wiper reaches the furthest point in its leftward swing there is a cut. At first the cuts are not much different from one another. We feel only slightly disturbed, as if a few frames had been cut out, and are left with the impression that the bus had popped forward down the street. Before very many cuts occur, however, we begin to feel really jolted when the cuts occur and we soon realize that later shots present us with a part of the bus trip that occurred before the parts presented in some earlier shots, producing the impression that the bus has leapt backward rather than forward.

This strategy establishes a tension between the film's drive forward towards completion (suggested by the forward movement of the bus and our anticipation of discovering where the bus ride will take us) and the thwarting of this drive, as the journey stammers forward and back, forward and back again. We have seen the same sort of tension exploited in Michael Snow's *Wavelength*. Furthermore the cutting Gallagher employed in *Seeing in the Rain* induces us – as does the form of *Wavelength* – to engage in the processes of anticipation and recollection. And the inducement for us to do so increases as the difference between successive shots increases – as the leaps forward and backward become larger – and we suspect that the film is presenting reorderings of groups of frames taken from a single shot.

The effect of the cutting strategy on the actual temporal organization of the film is as remarkable as its effect on our sense of time. As the film progresses, the leaps forward and backward generally become larger (though this tendency to increase is far from systematic and thoroughgoing); consequently, before the film progresses very far in this direction, the effect of this method of editing increasingly resembles the effect produced by completely

rearranging groups of frames. This in turn has the effect of transforming the linear narrative of the bus ride into a temporal construction that can reasonably be described as Cubist.

The opposition between the linear narrative that we know is the film's pretext and the Cubist form used to represent this narrative raises issues about the relation of *fabula* to *syuzhet* (see chapter five), and ultimately questions about representation and documentation which are at the very heart of the Canadian artistic tradition. Gallagher's decision to use realistic imagery, which is fashioned into a collage-form that so obviously has Cubist antecedents, was a brilliant move. Cubist art raises questions about the relation between abstract, primarily geometrical, forms and representational forms, and Gallagher's allusions to Cubism incorporate that inquiry into his own through intertextual means.

In his clever toying with the relationship between the film's *fabula* and *syuzhet*, Gallagher clearly shows himself to be working in a Canadian tradition. Our minds have a tendency to reorder shots in a collage so that they follow each other in a linear progression, to rearrange the film's *syuzhet* so that it corresponds to the *fabula*. More precisely, we tend to rearrange the events extracted from the order of their recital (from the order in which they occur in the account of these events) so that they occur in the same progression as they did in the order of actual events (the order in which the events occurred in reality). Thus there develops a tension between the order of the recital and the order of events that is analogous in certain respects to the contrast between ideal time and real time. Indeed, this tension hints at the notion of the ideality of the real because, watching Gallagher's film, we experience the real progression of events only mentally – we are never actually shown. This notion of the ideality of the real is one that Gallagher shares with many Canadian artists and intellectuals.

The most remarkable feature of the cutting strategy Gallagher developed for this film derives from its effect on the film's spatial construction. The cutting creates a push-pull effect whereby we seem to surge into the illusory depth defined by the street's linear recession, then draw back rapidly, then leap ahead again, then leap back once again. The kinetic play created by this oscillating spatial depth is one of the film's greatest sources of pleasure. But while the depth of the image is unstable, now increasing, now decreasing, the picture plane, which is foregrounded by the presence of water droplets on it and marked out by the movement of the windshield wiper across it, is absolutely unvarying. The greater stability of the picture plane contributes to our sense of its having greater strength. The fact that alterations in the image's apparent depth are correlated with changes occurring in the picture plane (the movement of the windshield wiper) reinforces this impression.

The relationship between a stable image surface and an unstable virtual depth suggests the unreality of haptic space. It also demonstrates the range of possible variations in the relationship between surface and apparent depth,

from a no-depth form that seems to lie right on the screen surface, to an image in a shallow space that almost coincides with the picture plane, to a deep space image behind the pictorial surface. Gallagher's demonstration of his ideas on this topic reaches its apogee in the section of film in which static shots (some of the few the film contains), which were taken after the bus had pulled in behind another bus and in which we see only the flat surface of the tail of the bus in front, alternate with shots taken while the bus was crossing a bridge, shots which possess considerable depth.

Generally, these concerns with the relationship of an image's illusory depth to the picture plane are concerns which modernists rejected when they rejected illusionism and all uses of haptic space. The more catholic attitude implied by Gallagher's use of a wide range of relationships between apparent depth and surface is typical of most postmodernist artists.

Gallagher also insists on the process used in making the film, and especially on its photographic attributes. There is an obvious resemblance between the movement of the bus in *Seeing in the Rain* and the illusory movement of the camera in *Wavelength*. The view through the window of the bus is reminiscent of what the cinematographer or filmmaker sees when looking through the viewfinder of a camera, and the relationship between the viewing screen in a camera viewfinder (on which the image formed by the lens is projected) and the illusory depth of the image one sees behind the viewing screen is very similar to that between the windshield of the bus and the street scene behind it – the bus is like a gigantic, moving camera.

In our discussion of the photographic basis of postmodernist art, we need to look closely once again at Michael Snow's *Wavelength*. Like \longleftrightarrow , *Wavelength* demonstrates that pictorial conditions generally understood to be complete opposites (in the case of *Wavelength*, the conditions of primary importance are the spatial conditions of hapticity and opticity) actually share a common nature, since both belong to a single continuum of pictorial form. And, as in \longleftrightarrow , Snow establishes this by using a monomorphic form that is based on a single operation to unite the two conditions. In the case of *Wavelength*, it is a simple reduction of the camera's field of view that transforms the one condition into the other; as the zoom is extended farther and farther, the image appears flatter and flatter.

Wavelength begins with a wide angle shot, taken by a camera set at one end of a loft, looking straight across it towards the interior surface of an outside wall of a building; in the wall there are four panels of windows which look out onto a street scene. During the film's forty-five minute running time, the zoom is adjusted intermittently, restricting, in uneven decrements, the camera's field of view. In the course of the film, four events involving people occur, as well as numerous changes in colour (some of which are very pronounced, others quite subtle), positive/negative reversals, transitions from day to night and from night back to day. As the film progresses, the camera's field of view narrows down, centring on a number of

images which are tacked on the central column of the wall on the opposite side of the room. The narrowing of the field of view continues until, at the conclusion of the film, the camera's field of view is contained within one of the photographs – a photograph of waves.

The conclusion of the film alludes to a paradox inherent in our conception of the frame. Generally, to frame a section of the world is to single it out for that special sort of attention that we give to an art object. The usual function of a frame is to convert a section of the world into an art object; in the concluding portion of *Wavelength*, Snow demonstrates that a frame can serve the opposite function. By rephotographing a portion of the photograph, he creates the impression that what we see on the screen actually is what in fact it only represents, it appears to convert an art object into the world.

The Frame and Absent Space: The Cases of Epp and Snow

Many Canadian filmmakers have made the investigation of issues related to framing central to their art. The frame has a crucial role in photography, probably more crucial – certainly more complex – than it has in painting. This additional complexity derives from the peculiar ontology of photography. Stanley Cavell offers some perceptive comments on the differences between the frame of a photograph and the boundary of a painting:

Let us notice the specific sense in which photographs are of the world, of reality as a whole. You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph – a building, say – what lies behind it, totally obscured by it. This only accidentally makes sense when asked of an object in a painting. You can always ask of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense asked of a painting. You can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality. The world of a painting is not continuous with the world of its frame; at its frame a world finds its limits. We might say: A painting is a world, a photograph is *of* the world. What happens in a photograph is it comes to an end.... The camera, being finite, crops a portion from an indefinitely larger field; continuous portions of that field could be included in the photograph in fact taken; in principle it could all be taken.... When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut *out*. The implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essentially in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents. A camera is an opening in a box; that is the best emblem of the fact that a camera holding on an object is holding the rest of the world away.²³

By introducing the idea that when some of the world is explicitly presented in a photograph, adjacent parts – and ultimately all the rest of the world – are implicitly presented, Cavell raises the notion that a photograph

involves a commingling of presence and absence and, more explicitly, that a photograph, in holding one section of the world up before us, withholds the rest. But he also might have pointed out that, in withholding the rest of the world from us, it must, in some sense at least, have taken hold of it. It is the mode of this taking hold that is particularly interesting – and difficult to explain. We can compare this idea of taking hold with the concept of participation, or with the concept of inclusion as it is used in set theory. The photographic image presents a section of the world that we know is part of a greater whole, just as a set whose generating algorithm is instantly known is, in the same flash, known to be part of another (or several other) sets. For example, when we are presented with the set {6 9 12 15} we instantly know it to be part of the set {3 6 9 12 15 ...}. The bracket here operates in much the same way as the frame in a still photograph, implying the next (possible) term in the series.

The boundary of a painting distinguishes between what is and what is not a painting. The frame of a photograph does not create the same ontological distinction. Nor does the edge of the frame seem to constitute the borders of a given shape; rather they are like the measure of what a container may have as content. This explains the fact that nothing like the shaped canvases of the 1960s seems possible in photography, because the actual surface of the photograph has comparably less power than the surface of a painting to influence the nature of the forms that fill it.

Cavell makes a further comment: "The camera has been praised for extending the senses; it may, as the world goes, deserve more praise for confining them, leaving room for thought."²⁴ This is a view Michael Snow would have no problem agreeing with. "The result of framing in photography," Snow has said, "is always a fragment, making the camera potentially analytical, an epistemological tool. That's to say (to repeat?) that out of the universal field, knowledge isolates, selects and points out unities or differences which were not previously evident. Identification, definition is a matter of limits, of recognition of limitations, bounds, boundaries."²⁵ Both Snow and Cavell thus suggest that the photographic frame has the function of transforming a physical space into a cognitive space.²⁶

And finally some remarks about framing by the great photographer, filmmaker and theorist Hollis Frampton:

The painter's frame marks the limits of a surface which is to be filled with the evidences of labor; the photographer's frame, sharing the accustomed rectangle with the standardized opportunities of painting and, also, with those of the printed page, resuscitates its own distant origins in post-and-lintel fenestration: it purports to be, not a barrier we look *at*, but an aperture we look *through*. Most bodies of work in still photography may readily be seen as picaresques whose denuded protagonist is none other than the abstract delimiter of the frame,

bounded in a nutshell but traveling through infinite spaces howsoever fate, or desire, or vicissitude may command....²⁷

Like Snow's films, Ellie Epp's *Trapline* (1976) takes framing as a central concern. *Trapline* is structured by a number of opposites: sound / image; on-screen space / off-screen space; action / reaction. All these oppositions devolve upon the fundamental opposition between presence and absence. Throughout the film, the frame is very nearly empty – or at least devoid of character and action; those attributes which ordinarily hold a viewer's attention within the boundaries of a film image are absent. Because the space within the frame contains little to hold our interest, our attention is drawn to the source of the sounds emanating from off-screen locations. By placing so much of the content of the film in the off-screen sound and by using shots of prolonged durations, Epp suggests the notion of absence that resides in photographic representation. She offers us the important insight that the frame, by its very nature, constructs a relation between presence and absence that corresponds to the relation between presence and absence in a photographic image. To quote Cavell again on framing: "When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut out. The implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of the photograph as what it actually presents."²⁸

Epp's strategy of emptying the frame of character and action raises a challenge to one of the most important conventions of the dominant cinema. Unless they aim to create suspense, Hollywood-type filmmakers present the most important event or element in the dramatic action in sufficient detail to focus the spectator's attention. (These filmmakers will use a close-up when some detail of an action is the most important element in the drama, or a two-shot when the interaction between two characters is the key to the ensuing dramatic action.) This form of construction is based on a theory of visual pleasure, which in turn rests on a theory of presence. Dating all the way back to V.I. Pudovkin's early work in film aesthetics – *Film Technique* (1929) and *Film Acting* (1933) – and called the ideal viewer theory, it states that the filmmaker should always present the element in the dramatic action that would be chosen by an ideal viewer, a viewer with an ideal understanding of the dramatic development, with ideally developed human sympathies, and with the ability to take any vantage point. As the first section of Snow's *Presents* implies, this prescription turned the aesthetics of narrative cinema, like those of painting, towards an aesthetics of appearance. Epp, on the other hand, by draining the image of any overtly presented narrative, reminds us that the photograph is based on absences – absences which the illusionistic cinema, in order to be illusionistic, must attempt to deny. If that absence were admitted to, the image's illusion of being the object that it actually merely portrays would be subverted.

Because the images in *Trapline* give no clue of important actions while the

soundtrack conveys the impression that significant actions actually occur off-screen, we sense the arbitrariness of the photographer's "cut in space." In doing so, Epp shows that presenting important actions masks the arbitrariness of the frame, by using the frame "to bring into presence" whatever it is the ideal viewer desires to see.

The paucity of action and characters and the "emptiness" of the space portrayed, together with the protracted intervals during which the shots are held on the screen, serve to achieve that effect which the Russian Formalists celebrated as a primary virtue of true works of art, that of increasing the length and complexity of our perception. More specifically, they make the viewer aware of space *per se*. Normally, when watching a movie, we observe incidents taking place in space but are not conscious of the space in which they happen. *Trapline*, on the other hand, does make us aware of space and, in doing so, increases the complexity and liveliness of our perceptions. The long, empty duration of shots also draws attention to the material substrate of the cinematic image. They draw our attention to the granularity of the image and to its luminescent quality. (This latter fact is emphasized by the "flowing light" patterns on the ripples of water.) Furthermore, the protracted durations of the shots prolong our perception of the object (the cinematic image) and so, in a manner analyzed and described by the Russian Formalists, engender a self-reflexive awareness of the process by which the image is apprehended.

Epp eliminates the distinction between the various types of spaces, according all the spaces within the bathing-house equal importance, by having the off-screen sound come from undetermined directions. This brings the whole of the off-screen space into play. In fact, the structure of *Trapline* draws a distinction between two types of off-screen space. The tight framing of the shots, their apparently nearly metonymic relations, their extended durations, and the use of off-screen sounds emanating from undetermined locations make us imagine an undefined off-screen space, which we expect to be revealed soon. We anticipate that the camera will pan or zoom or that a new shot will occur which will place the current, tightly framed shot within a spatial context. As the film progresses and no such camera movement or cut occurs, we realize that the surrounding space will not be depicted. We alter our expectation, anticipating that the space will be made concrete in another way – that shots will present serially an image of that total space. This space, which as a totality would still be an imagined, not a depicted, entity, would nonetheless be concrete and not indefinite, as the space imagined early in the film was.

The extended duration of the shots prolongs this period of waiting, of anticipating the conversion of the imagined, total space from an indefinite space to a concrete one. The very length of this period makes us aware of these two different forms of off-screen space, or at least makes us aware that we are awaiting the conversion of spatial form from one that evokes tension

into one that relaxes tension. In doing this, Epp demonstrates just how complex off-screen space is and shows how many forms it can assume. At the end of the film, we realize that the relationship between the various spatial fragments is inscrutable and that we remain unable to form in our imaginations a concrete image of the total space. Denying the power to form such an image underscores the important role such images (called "establishing shots" in Hollywood jargon) usually play; we are certainly made aware of how they relax the tension created by the fragmentation of space.

This refusal to accord different degrees of importance to different off-screen spaces also characterizes some of Michael Snow's films, especially *Presents* and *La région centrale* (1971). In both cases, Snow accomplishes this by using unorthodox camera movements. The lateral or vertical camera movements that are the norm in orthodox filmmaking tend to privilege that sector of the off-screen space towards which the camera is moving, the space adjacent to the side of the screen on which the objects appear to be entering the frame. Snow's circular camera movements in *La région centrale* and the frequently twisting and whirling camera movements in the montage section of *Presents* deny special privilege to any sector of off-screen space; they ensure that, for the entire duration of any camera movement, there is no one edge of the frame at which objects will enter or leave. Encouraging us to consider the entirety of off-screen space is part of Snow's purpose, for *La région centrale* uses the sphere as a model of unity and perfection.

By refusing to favour any one sector of off-screen space over another, Snow emphasizes, in a fashion quite consistent with the nature of the photograph, the arbitrariness of the frame. Indeed, the vision of unity that *La région centrale* proposes amounts essentially to the view that all points in space have an equal and common nature, even if that equality is the equality of opposites. This proposition entails the claim that what is off-screen is equivalent to what is on-screen, and hence the choice to depict any given segment of space at any given moment is quite arbitrary. The vision of total equivalence that lies at the heart of *La région centrale* and *Presents* is rooted in an understanding of the frame that recognizes the distinctive character of the photograph and the unique qualities of its frame.

The camera movements of *Presents* and *La région centrale* are entwined in the film's temporal structures. In *La région centrale*, for example, the sphere implied by the camera movements exists as a complete entity for all time; however, the film analyzes that sphere and presents its various parts in succession. As a result, the extended temporal duration of the film is emphasized and set in opposition to the all-at-once temporality of the imagined sphere. Furthermore, because the camera movements have uncertain vectorial attributes, the expected conversion of the indefinite, imagined off-screen space into a concrete, but still imagined, space never occurs. The tension created by our waiting for this conversion emphasizes the linear and successive temporal properties of film, and suggests that, if the conversion

were achieved in *La région centrale*, it would transform the film's temporal nature into one of completeness and simultaneity.

The whirling, dizzying camera movements of these films have other, more obvious implications. In the whole of *La région centrale* and in the final section of *Presents*, the camera is in constant movement, the boundary between what is inside the frame and what is outside is constantly changing. This highlights a difference between the film frame and the boundaries of a painting or of a proscenium arch and, most important for our purposes, between the film frame and the frame of a photograph. It is even more true of the film frame than it is of the photographic frame that its edges are not an ontological limit marking the boundaries of a form of reality; what is inside the frame and what is outside it do not have different reality values. And this is an argument for claiming that film is a more truly presentational medium than theatre, painting or even photography.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that photography and theatre, and even painting to a degree, create a far stronger impression of presence than film, simply because they call forth far more concentration. Furthermore, the moving camera seems to slide across the surfaces of reality and not to incorporate reality into its moving frame. It seems to slip over reality rather than grasp it; the effect of camera movement consequently is to highlight reality's distance from the camera and its ontological distinctiveness from the image. The moving camera suggests, therefore, that film is a medium of absence and not of presence.

The two implications drawn from this feature of the films are contradictory, for we have just shown that a) the moving camera suggests that film is a truly presentational medium and b) that it is a medium composed more of absences than of presences. Thus, Snow has devised a strategy in which concepts of presence and absence are paradoxically intertwined.

Representation and Presentation: The Case of David Rimmer

Canadian avant-garde filmmakers have used the photograph's bond with the past to counterbalance the forcefulness with which a film image presents itself as belonging to the here-and-now. David Rimmer's films frequently make use of this sort of tension, usually by exploiting the contradictions which arise from the dual nature of a film's existence. A film, Rimmer points out, is both a material object – an object with an autonomous existence – and a representation – something whose existence is relative to what it represents. In such films as *Seashore* (1971), *The Dance* (1970), *Surfacing on the Thames* (1970) and *Watching for the Queen* (1973), Rimmer uses footage whose dated content invites nostalgic associations. At the same time, he reworks this material, building from it structures that do not exploit these nostalgic associations but that depend on physical characteristics of the

image – on the grain or the dirt particles that adhere to its surface or on the motion that occurs between one frame and the next. Once again, we see the tension between the past and the present, between absence and presence, that is characteristic of a photographic image.

Rimmer also shares with many other Canadian experimental filmmakers an interest in the nature of the frame, as we see in his *Canadian Pacific I* (1974) and *Canadian Pacific II* (1975), a dual projection film of a railway yard and Vancouver harbour, shot from two slightly different points of view. Included in the foreground of the image is a portion of the room in which the film was shot, and taped around the window (in *Canadian Pacific II*, jutting out towards the top right corner) is a narrow black band which highlights the edges of the frame. By including a part of the room in the image and by fastening tape on the window's surface to make us take notice of its presence, Rimmer hints at the camera and its lens. By shooting from two rooms on different storeys in the same building – thus from slightly different vantage points – Rimmer demonstrates the interrelationship of framing and point of view. And by shooting in different weather conditions, on clear days and foggy days, Rimmer shows how the camera's rendering of depth is affected by changes in the aerial perspective – a spatial effect proper to photography. Rimmer thus relates several of a photograph's attributes to the nature of its frame. The two films were conceived as companion pieces and were intended to be shown simultaneously, in double-projection format, with *Canadian Pacific II* above *Canadian Pacific I*. Having the projection format allude to the process of shooting the film is something Rimmer shares with Michael Snow. Snow has used similar references, particularly in *Two Sides To Every Story* (1974) and the first part of *Presents*. Because they denigrate an artwork's autotelicity, these kinds of references were frequently frowned upon by high modernists.

The Single-Shot Film

The influence of photography shows up in another form of Canadian avant-garde film, a form I call "the single-shot film." By this I mean, not just those films which are made using a single camera set-up and are filmed continuously over a single (short) period of time, but all those films whose structure derives from features of the single shot. In this respect, the middle section of Jack Chambers' *Circle*, while not actually the product of a single camera-run, is a single-shot segment by virtue of the (nearly) fixed frame and the unvarying lens aperture. Snow's *Wavelength* similarly belongs to this category; although actually composed of many shots, using different stocks and photographed at different times of the day and night, the zoom appears to continue unbroken (but for its stammering movement) throughout the film.

There are an extraordinary number of such films in the Canadian avant-garde, films whose structures hinge on the nature of the photographic

medium. Other examples include David Rimmer's *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper*, *Canadian Pacific I* and *Canadian Pacific II*, *Surfacing on the Thames*, *Watching for the Queen* (1973), *Narrows Inlet* (1980), *The Dance* (1970) and, paradigmatically, *Landscape* (1969), a film that uses a single camera set-up and timelapse photography, so that we get the impression of a photograph that changes from a morning scene to a daytime scene to an evening scene. There are also Kee Dewdney's *Wildwood Flower* (1971); Chris Gallagher's *The Nine O'Clock Gun* (1980), *Terminal City* (1982), *Atmosphere*, and *Seeing in the Rain*; Rick Hancox's *Waterworx* (1982); Richard Kerr's early *Vesta Lunch (Cookin' at the Vesta)* (1978); and Joyce Wieland's *Sailboat* (1967) and *Dripping Water* (1969), a film she made with Michael Snow.

The Relation of Text and Image: Postmodernist Strategies

Another strategy of diversification has appeared in Canadian avant-garde films with considerable frequency. Many film artists have worked with visual forms that incorporate printed words in the imagery. This form of construction is found in several of Joyce Wieland's films, including *1933* (1967), *Reason Over Passion* (1967-69), *Solidarity* (1973) and *Pierre Vallières* (1972). It appears as well in Patricia Gruben's *The Central Character* (1977) and in some of my own films, including *1857: Fool's Gold* (1981), *Illuminated Texts* (1982) and *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World* (1985).

Perhaps this frequency can be explained by the fact that this form of construction is a loaded strategy. For the past 150 years, visual artists have shown a considerable antipathy to literary forms of construction, and one manifestation of this has been the denunciation of illustration. An image, purists maintained, must never illustrate a text or idea, must never merely depict in a visual form the incidents or ideas that are presented in a verbal text. To do so permits a form in one medium (visual) to be determined by considerations relevant to another medium (verbal). As though to oppose these claims, the image-text relations in Wieland's *Solidarity* and my *1857: Fool's Gold* are to some extent at least illustrational.

The tension created by the conflict between the activities of reading and viewing (one occurs across successive moments in time, the other in a single moment) is another obvious reason for the use of forms which incorporate texts in images. Still another – and perhaps a more important – reason is based on the conflict between images that are actually presented and images that are presented only by the imagination. This sort of conflict takes place when the text describes something (a person or a location) that is not seen in the image. In such cases, the film spectator (or, more accurately, the spectator/reader) is asked to imagine one scene while looking at another. The contrast between the image actually presented and the image produced by the imagination emphasizes the imaginariness of the latter. As we noted in the

discussion of framing, an image that is not actually presented but only evoked by some form is frequently used as a sign for what is absent. Accordingly, the use of text in film is frequently calculated to convey the notion that the relationship of a word to the image it evokes is the same as the relation of presence to absence in a photographic image. Sometimes, too, the image in such a construct will disprove or contradict what is asserted by the text it incorporates. This use of text is motivated as well by the attempt to deal with issues relating to the nature of photography, for it questions the often assumed veracity of the photographic image.

There is a final form of the image-text relationship, one that has a special theoretical interest. Many of the texts in the works mentioned have, in whole or in part, the form of descriptive noun phrases which function as the subject of a sentence. Expressions of this form possess a curious feature; while they always appear to make reference to something, in reality they might refer to nothing at all. For example, the expression "the present monarch of Bavaria" appears to refer to somebody; in fact, it does not. Such a description has a sense, but does not necessarily have a reference; it presents our consciousness with an entity whose existence stands in need of confirmation. This is, therefore, a form of representation that involves both a presence and an absence in much the same way a photograph does.

The Duality of Photography

A photograph typically both fascinates and disturbs. Its form of capturing the world seems to be a troubling yet exhilarating mixture of erotic magic and grasping acquisitiveness. It also seems to involve a moral equivocation, for it offers us precise knowledge of how the world appears – knowledge so precise that we assume it would constitute the ideal basis for a judgement about how things are and about how they fall short of our ideas of what they ought to be – but refuses to provide any judgement at all. It is even emotionally ambiguous, for it seems to offer the possibility of overcoming the sorrow of loss by making it possible to re-present the past; and yet it more often evokes nostalgia than it does delight. The duality that seems to permeate every feature of photography has made it attractive to artists and especially to Canadian artists.

There is a longstanding tradition in Canadian art of interest in realistic representation, which can be traced back to the alienation that European settlers felt when confronting the Canadian landscape and back to the value attributed to finding a means of overcoming the alienation of consciousness from nature. It is clear that the problem of finding a means for reconciling consciousness and nature, a key problem for Canadian artists and intellectuals, is really only an exaggerated form of a demand felt by moderns everywhere. The fact that it took on more exaggerated dimensions in Canada makes it hardly surprising that Canadian artists and intellectuals have been

in the forefront of those who have been building the postmodern paradigm. But it must be stressed here that, among the forms of realistic representation, photography has especially attractive features for those who have come to recognize the untenability of the modern paradigm's distinction between consciousness and nature, for a photograph is a product of the photographer's interaction with the world. Photography can even be considered as a means by which nature makes an "objective" image of itself that closely parallels the way that, in perception, it makes a "subjective" image of itself. (Of course, the very meanings of the terms "objective" and "subjective" are framed within the context of the modern paradigm and are relative to that paradigm; their meanings change when taken in the context of the postmodern paradigm.) There could hardly be better evidence for the immanence of consciousness in nature than this similarity in the means by which visual precepts and photographic images are generated. And the belief that consciousness is immanent in nature is a key feature of the postmodern paradigm – or at least of one version of it; a second, less adequate version, considers that the falsehood of a picture of consciousness as isolated and solipsistic can be demonstrated by showing that consciousness is created by language and society.

Canadian artists, as pioneers of the postmodern, could be expected to have evinced an interest in photography. Canadian writers who have made important references to photographs or to photography in their work include, among others, Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Robert Kroetsch, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Michael Ondaatje and Matt Cohen.²⁹ Canadian painters who seem to have been influenced by photography include Alex Colville, Ivan Eyre, Chris Pratt, Mary Pratt, Claude Breeze, Joanne Todd, and of course Jack Chambers and Michael Snow. These lists alone are reason enough to ask why the photographic image has seemed so important to Canadians.

CHAPTER 12

Michael Snow Presents *Presents*

... by an initial rite the writer must first transform the "real" into a painted object (a framed one); after which he can unhook this object, pull it out of his painting, in a word de-pict it.... All of this opens up a double problem. First of all, whence and when began this pre-eminence of pictorial code in literary mimesis? Why has it disappeared? Why did writers' dream of painting die?

ROLAND BARTHES, *S/Z*

Ut Pictura Poesis

From Henry James to James Joyce modernist writers took the quest for the essential image as the true goal of fiction, accepting (though in a revised and reversed form) the Horatian doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, the doctrine that poetry should reproduce the qualities of painting. The idea that poetry is painting – just as that knowledge is seeing (at least when ideas are organized, properly arranged within a mental frame) – had been around since at least the neo-classical period and was accepted by the likes of John Locke, David Hume and Joseph Addison.

The notion that literature has presentational (rather than merely representational) capacities that derive from the forcefulness of the visual images it constructs had been further developed and modified by Goethe. Though Goethe had maintained the neo-classical idea that all art involves making visible, he had construed the discovery of "the essential image" as an *Offenbarung*, a revelation; on this conception an image, even a verbal image, presents what would otherwise be ineffable. An image, according to Goethe, is not an alternative means of presenting what could also be presented in ordinary writing; it presents concepts that would otherwise go unrepresented. The image is creative, for it brings the ineffable out of the darkness and into the light of presence. (One is reminded of Plato's belief that *helios*, the sun, did not just bring things into visibility but also that it brought them into being.) In the particular representation, the unfathomable general is

The notes to Chapter 12 begin at page 431.

presented. This had been one motivation for precisionist, realist fiction.

As Goethe had written in his famous letter to Schiller, writing is a search for those moments of visual revelations, in which things in the world are seen as signs in a great book – perhaps illuminated manuscript would be better – that genius, being endowed with special reading abilities, can decipher. In later, modernist literature, this quest for the essential image as the goal of fiction became self-conscious. We see this in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927), for example; the book ends with the artist Lily Briscoe finishing the painting she had begun years ago. Woolf uses the painting as an image whose permanence rescues the world from the condition it had reached in its fall into time.

Postmodern thought has cast doubt on this belief in the primacy of the visual. Some thinkers, working in the wake of Ferdinand de Saussure, have demonstrated that language offers this illusion of presence only when it dissimulates and masks the manner in which it operates, for language is nothing more than a system of differences. Derrida and his followers have demonstrated that the present never presents itself as pure presence, that it is always inhabited by traces of the non-present. And, in a related vein, the Parisian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has shown that even that which seems absolutely and fully present to us, our self, is an illusion created in a hierarchy of lacks and identifications with (non-present) others.

It is here that I wish to pick up Michael Snow's contributions to postmodernism. But to really understand them, we must turn once again to consider aspects of modernist thought.

Modernism and the Metaphysics of Presence

The structure of the word "representation" suggests, among other things, an act or means of bringing something, or someone, that had been there before back into a person's range of perception; the process of making something that had disappeared manifest again; or of bringing something out of the past into the present. By convention, on the other hand, it refers to an image which is a simulacrum of – or better, a stand-in for – an absent object. Between these structural and conventional meanings, there exists something of a contradiction, for the structural meanings all imply that the very object that was once presented is now, at the moment of representation, once again presented; the conventional meaning implies the object that was once presented now is being "stood-in-for" by a representative – that is to say, the structural meanings all imply that the original object is once again made present, and the conventional meaning implies that the original is absent and stood-in-for (represented) by something else.

Plato objected to representation on the very reasonable grounds that the representing token, the stand-in, substitutes for an object of greater ontological value, consigning the originary presence into absence in the very act of

standing-in for it. Behind this claim, though, there exists an entire metaphysics, one that Jacques Derrida has termed "the metaphysics of presence." Wolfgang Walter Fuchs has capsulized the major tenets of this metaphysics:

- 1 Being as the most universal concept defies definition in terms of lower concepts. But this is also true of the concept of presence.... Presence is a mode of Being and, in the metaphysics of presence, the supreme metaphysical moment is when Being reveals itself, presents itself as Being-in-the-mode-of-presence.
- 2 The real nexus of the concepts of Being and presence is to be found in the temporality of the concept of "the present." Being is given in the absolute present moment because Being is eternal, transtemporal and therefore primarily present.... That which is in the present is what is, that is, manifests Being through its presence in the present.
- 3 Being is absolute. Being is that other than which nothing is.... Nonbeing and absence are derivative, mediated categories.
- 4 ... the notion of Being, in its primordial manifestation is the exclusion of absence.¹

These ideas dominated almost all of Western metaphysics up to the nineteenth century; they reached their height in the staggering metaphysical system of Hegel (in which the metaphysics of presence is already beginning to turn into its opposite, a metaphysics in which Being is identified with Nothingness). But as the nineteenth century drew towards an end, these notions were increasingly called into question, as is evident, first in the positivists' rejection of metaphysics, then in Schopenhauer's conception of the world as representation, in Nietzsche's nihilism, and, much later (perhaps this is the culminating moment of this questioning), in the theories of Martin Heidegger, in which we can find all the evidence we need that the metaphysics of presence has finally reached the point of crisis. The current theories of Jean Baudrillard reveal how prolonged that crisis has been.

Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art was called again to its usually conservative role – in this matter, of lodging a defence of the metaphysics of presence. Two strategies were deployed to advance that cause. The first is now well understood, for it has been worked through to its conclusion and, by now, been decisively rejected. That strategy was to give the work of art as many features of Being as possible, to make its being manifest Being. To this end, all aspects of the work of art were to be consolidated into a "totally presented present." Thus, representation was eliminated, inasmuch as the being of the representing token is involved with that of an absent other. Phenomenal forms of construction were employed to guarantee that there was no aspect of the work of art that eluded apprehension. This had the effect of putting the artwork's being on pretty much the same footing as that of the contents of consciousness, about both of which we may say, as a certain abstract expressionist painter is said to have remarked about his

work, "What you see is what you get." Finally, works were designed in such a way that the experience of them would occur wholly in the mode of presentational immediacy. The entire being of the work of art was to be grasped in the immediate present. This meant that no reference to any historical or mythological past was to be made. And, for arts like the cinema, whose very essence is temporal, this also meant that the very being of the artwork would be given in the moment – that it would be totally given in the instant. No part of the work would spill over from the living present into the past or future. Tactics used to accomplish this included the development of forms which wholly consumed the viewers' mental resources in perceptual acts so that no experiential past or future would be drawn into the experience of the work through the apperceptive acts of recollection or anticipation.

The means used in the attempt to achieve this sense of the living present and the reasons for that aspiration are well explained by Gertrude Stein. Stein once remarked that there have been only three originitive Jews, namely Christ, Spinoza, and Gertrude Stein. The remark has far greater importance than the mere expression of a healthy delusion of grandeur. In his article "Gertrude Stein and the Twentieth Century," Donald Sutherland takes very seriously Stein's reference to Spinoza, even while admitting that, when he asked Miss Toklas if Gertrude Stein really had so high an opinion of Spinoza, she replied, "Not so high as to read him." Spinoza, as Sutherland points out, believed that since God is infinite, all things, including matter and even evil, are in God.² This, as Paul Wienpahl shows, is simply Spinoza's way of saying that all things share in being, that is, in his view, participate equally in the act of being.³ This is the meaning of many of the devices in Stein's stylistic repertoire, and she is sometimes pretty explicit about it.

Any one being one is one. Anthing put down is something. Anything being put down is something and being that thing it is something [i.e., being manifests Being] and being something it is a thing and being a thing it is not anything [i.e., a thing is what it is and not something else; no existent exhausts Being] and not being anything it is everything and being that thing it is a thing [i.e., is a particular existent, and is not identical with Being] and being that thing it is that thing. Being that thing it is that thing and being that thing it is coming to be a thing having been that thing [i.e., all existence is co-eternal] and coming to be a thing having been that thing it is a thing being a thing it is a thing being that thing.⁴

Not only is this a forthright statement of the metaphysics of presence, but it also reveals how a series of tautological statements ("A rose is a rose is a rose") is the totality of what the metaphysics of presence allows us to say about the Being of beings.

The attempt to convert an artwork into a "wholly-presented present" was one strategy for preserving this endangered metaphysical species. In cinema,

that strategy is most prominently associated with the films of Stan Brakhage. But artists working in those arts based on photography for the most part used a different manoeuvre. That manoeuvre, which we are familiar with mostly from the writings of André Bazin, depended on the idea that in the photographic arts the image did not displace its originary model, consigning it to absence, but in fact, being nothing other than a trace of that model, actually acted to preserve its presence through time. As Bazin said: "No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model."⁵

Bazin petitioned to a theological notion of Presence to demonstrate that representations are, when they derive from photographs, actually representations. In doing so, he not only exorcised the ghost of Plato, which had so long been haunting the arts, but also showed how the arts could actually appropriate the metaphysics of presence which Plato helped to originate to defend what Plato himself attacked. That appropriation was to be accomplished by stressing the spatio-temporal fidelity to the reality of the individual shot (and shot-sequence), as though it were in the unity of his creation that God made his presence felt.

Though both these strategies were deployed to the same end, of maintaining what proved to be a dying metaphysics of presence, the roots of the two strategies were very different. The Stein/Brakhage strategy is rooted in a Jamesian sense of the present as an ultimate, undifferentiated moment in time. The Bazinian/Neo-Realist strategy is rooted in the idea that the Creative Presence rescues individual moments from perdition by binding them together in an insoluble unity which is an eternity outside time. But the two views do have something in common; both hold that the cinematic image manifests an originary source which is fully given when the image is presented and that it is this originary presence which imbues the image with its meaning.

Presents and the Challenge to the Metaphysics of Presence

Michael Snow's work both acknowledges and challenges the presentness of modernist art. Many of his works (such as *Scope*, *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film*) use devices that emphasize the frontal position we favour when viewing works of art, which underlines their presentational character. But part of Snow's genius, evident in *Presents* (1981) and *So Is This* (1982), is to have challenged the foundational assumptions of this metaphysics of a work of art.

Presents is divided into two major sections, the first of which can be variously subdivided into two or three subsections. The first subsection could consist of the manipulated video image, the second of the narrative with the

man and woman, the third of the scene of the camera's destruction of the set. On the other hand, the first two sections can be seen as a single section, with the video-processed footage used, not to mark off an independent subsection, but merely to achieve an effect impossible to achieve by photo-chemical/optical means. But the difference in texture and quality between the video section and narrative section alone argues for the three-part sectionalization, which their differing thematic concerns seem to confirm.

The first subsection begins with an image in the form of a single, vertical, whitish-blue stripe, accompanied on the soundtrack by a rich, thick, though slightly discordant group of electronically generated sounds. At first the pitch of sounds seems to fall in a descending glissando, but then it becomes more discordant – in fact, the various notes making up this cluster seem to become increasingly separate, distinct and inharmonious – as the stripe widens and is drawn into the shape of a small rectangle. When the image is stretched wide enough, it is revealed to be an image of a reclining nude in a somewhat indeterminate background. As the rectangular picture forms,⁶ the sounds merge into a single piercing drone,⁷ but become discordant again as the image continues to be drawn out horizontally into a thin stripe. This line then opens out vertically and fills the screen with a grainy and pale-toned, though now very recognizable image of a woman in a tacky, stage-set bedroom. The nude woman tosses and turns on the bed.

The narrow vertical line with which the film opens or the narrow horizontal slit which appears part way through the section are as much traces of the real world as are the images in screen-proportion rectangles, except these images are distorted in a way Bazin implies should not affect their ability to raise our belief (*emporter notre croyance*) in their reality.⁸ However, these portions of the film, or even the portions containing recognizable but highly distorted images, do not elicit our faith – in fact, they do not even seem to be indexical images. Their bond to reality seems to have been broken by the alteration of the image's spatial structure.

Bazin claimed that the process by which a photograph is produced guarantees that, "no matter how fuzzy, distorted or discoloured," a photograph is an indexical sign. Yet the information buried in the narrow horizontal or vertical band derives from reality and, in fact, has much the same visual information that a straight, unmanipulated photograph of the scene would contain (because the unmodified image can be produced from the modified image by a straightforward, perfectly mechanical mathematical transformation). It is not because the compressed image contains different information or has a different bond with reality than a straight photograph does that it fails to elicit our faith that it presents reality; its inability to demand our credence is the result only of the deformations it has undergone. Though Bazin may claim that the process by which a photograph is made assures its ontological bond with reality and so its ability to sustain our belief that it presents reality, Snow demonstrates in this passage that it is really our assumption that

the photograph involves an accurate, natural, point-to-point mapping of reality – a mapping that does not alter the spatial features of reality – that elicits our faith.

Snow's attack on the Bazinian theory of presence cuts even deeper. He has shown that distorting a photographic image can cause us to lose our faith that it is bound to reality by a primordial ontological bond and, consequently, that it actually presents reality. The images he uses to demonstrate this do not introduce completely new sorts of distortions – distortions that are not characteristic of photographic images; he only exaggerates distortions that occur when any photographic or cinematographic image is made, for all such images are moulded by the optics of the camera apparatus in ways similar to those in which these images are moulded and shaped. Thus Snow uses these videographic images to bring into question whether any photographic/cinematographic images are truly indexical.

Snow's works often demonstrate that features which are normally understood to be opposites are in fact joined together in a continuum, in order to establish that there exist similarities among features that most people consider to have only negative relations to one another. In \longleftrightarrow , for example, he shows that non-illusionistic forms of construction (constructions that make use of abstract patterns, that admit to the flatness of the surfaces on which they rest, that contain no recognizable images) can be produced from "illusionistic" forms (forms with which they are usually thought to have no similarities) merely by varying the rate at which the camera pans. Here he shows that photographic images, which are usually thought to be marked by the presence of what they represent, and hand-moulded representational images such as paintings or sculptures, which are generally thought to be marked by the non-presence of what they represent, are distinguished from one another only by the degree to which they have been manipulated or distorted. The differences between images of these two classes are thus shown to be not absolute differences of sort, but differences of degree. Above all, they are not ontological differences, that is, they are not differences that result from visual forms belonging to one class being invested with the nature of what they represent, and visual forms belonging to the other being invested with its absence.

These two types of visual forms could be represented by painting, especially abstract painting, on the one hand and photography on the other. Both sorts take material from the real world and mould it into a form. In both, reality is present but has been denatured or at least transformed in the process of being formed into a new entity. Although reality furnishes the raw materials of both sorts of visual forms, we seem to believe that, as this material is reshaped into a new form, its connection to reality is broken – that its original being disappears (or is rendered absent) and a new being emerges, one that, as a work of art, is less than real. Snow shows us the absurdity of this belief and of the belief that realistic images have a different ontological status

than highly formalized constructs do. Both are moulded objects made by reshaping the stuff of reality.

Snow's argument relies on the insight that all representations are an amalgam of matter and form. The matter from which all representations are constituted is physical stuff, which might be sound waves (as it is in the case of language), coloured pigments in an oil base (as it is in the case of painting) or tones or colours on a flat surface (as it is in the case of a photograph). This raw physical material is then moulded, shaped or formed into a representational construct. These statements, Snow points out, are as true of photographic images as they are of paintings or, for that matter, words. There is no reason to make claims for the unique ontology of the photographic image.

This first subsection ends as the video image of the previous section is replaced by a more fully resolved film image. The room in which the nude lies now resembles a cheap rendering of a wacky set-designer's fantasy of what a luscious woman's room might be; it is all done up in dirty pinks, reds and light blues. In the centre of the room is the bed with the nude woman on it, on the right is a dressing table on which sits a vase of red flowers, on the left, a bureau, on the floor, a pair of bright red shoes. It has, as a whole, the character of a proscenium-type set, so as to better present the woman.

Snow has for many years produced photographs of objects he has created rather than discovered. The set in *Presents* obviously bears strong similarities to the sets (or objects) he constructed for *Waiting Room* (whose title is ambiguous in much the same way as is *Presents*) and *Rendez-vous* (both 1979), *Door* (1979) and *Midnight Blue* (1973-74). The several flame photographs of the 1970s also represent subjects Snow "created," as do his "self-referential works," in which the artworks that Snow had done earlier are reused. This is true of the image of the loft used in *Wavelength* that was reused - re-presented - in *Untitled Slidelength* (1969-71); of the image of the drawing of a table in *Multiplication Table* (1977); of *Red⁵* (1974), based on a red field Snow created, of *Authorization* (1969) which re-presents successively images of the photographer making images of himself; of *8 X 10* (1969) based on a number of rectangles of roughly screen proportions; and of *Painting: Closing the Drum Book* (1978), based on solid-colour-field "paintings." Snow has employed this tactic of making photographs of objects he has created partly to articulate the manner in which many works of art are put together, in stages or in layers. It is also used to suggest the idea Chambers emphasized, that, in photography, invention and discovery are interchangeable. It is used as well to offer a comment on the conditions of illusionism. A representation invites us to compare it with the real that is represented in the representation. In showing us that what is depicted is not the real itself (the real in raw form) but is itself already within the system of representation, Snow is suggesting that we can never break out of the circle of signifiers to the transcendental signified, that whatever we can know is always already a signifier within a system of signification, and that we can never know the signified

itself, as outside any signifying system. He is suggesting as well that we can never break out of the circle of illusions to the real itself. Furthermore, works like *Rendez-vous* (1979) seem to hint at the fragile, tenuous nature of the seemingly real. All of this lends further support to the assertion that Snow is an artist whose fundamental convictions are of an idealist nature.

The second section begins with a loud knock, introducing the synchronous sound which continues for the rest of the section. The woman rises from the bed, calls out, "Just a minute," puts on a blue robe and red shoes and walks from the bedroom through the livingroom to answer the door. As she begins, an off-screen voice is heard, presumably the director's, calling out, "One," and the camera apparently begins to move, following the woman across the room. The woman's gait appears strange; her strides seem to be protracted in the way they would be if she were walking on a treadmill or travelling in the wrong direction on a moving sidewalk. When we notice that the walls and the furniture also shake when the camera appears to move, we realize that it is the set and not the camera that is moving.

The woman reaches the door and opens it. A man enters and hands her a bouquet of flowers, actually the same bouquet that we saw in the vase at the beginning of the section. Taking the flowers, she invites him in and they cross the room together. (Actually, at a new off-screen order, the set begins to move in the opposite direction while she walks on the spot, with the effect that the camera appears to be following them as they walk across the room.) She finds the vase we saw earlier, which is now empty, and places the flowers in it, then puts a recording of the *Bach Suite No. 1 for Unaccompanied Cello (in G major)* on the record player and returns to the livingroom – actually, the livingroom comes to her as she walks on the spot. A series of room/camera movements follow, each initiated by the off-screen voice calling out a number; the shaking and rattling of the moving set frequently causes the arm of the record-player to skip and slide. At one point the director calls out "Back to B," and the room moves (pans) in one direction; soon the director calls out "Back to A" and it moves in the opposite direction. The pair of movements are clearly an allusion to \longleftrightarrow . As these movements occur, the couple look for some lost object. Their search ends as they find what appears to be a photograph, though all we are shown is a flat, rectangular object with about the same proportions that a cinema screen or a photograph of standard dimensions has. The section ends as the set pivots about the point on its left-hand side nearest to the surface of the screen. This provides definitive proof that it is the set and not the camera that moves, for we are shown the mechanism on which the set rolls.

If the video section dealt with relations between film and other visual arts, inquiring into the presence of presence in both, this narrative section deals with the relation among film, theatre and the narrative. Specifically, it challenges a distinction commonly made between film and theatre – that theatre is a presentational art form and film is a representational form. This chal-

lence is mounted in a narrative that contains a series of incidents structured by the various meanings of the terms “presence” and “presents”⁹ – in the sense of gifts, in the sense of giving a show, in the sense of moments, in the sense of introducing someone into somebody’s presence, in the sense of occupying a space nearby the speaker (or some other marker), in the sense of charisma and in the sense of the opposite of absence. Snow’s tactic in this section is to show the interrelation of all these meanings – to show, for example, that in presenting a theatrical work, one relies on the presence of an actor to make the work of art real (to make it a real presence), to bring it alive in the present moment, and one does so using devices analogous to those employed when presenting a person, announcing that he or she occupies a space nearby the person to whom he or she is being presented. Snow also shows that presence and absence are not really opposites. But, most importantly, he shows that there exist important interrelationships between presentation and representation.

Presents in the Light of Language Theory

The process of interpreting this section from the beginning of the film to the end of the courtship scene consists in giving a reading of it, of identifying the literalisms¹⁰ the passage employs. The woman at first does not have clothes on and later she does. The section could be taken to mean that at first clothes are absent from her body (though present on the floor), but when she dons them they are present on her body (though, of course, absent from the floor). The nude woman, the woman whose clothes are absent, has a great deal of stage presence, but once she has her clothes on her stage presence is somewhat less present as she presents somewhat less of her presence to us and, in fact, less of her is present in the image. Still she is something of a present (a gift) and so, as she preens herself, she makes herself presentable so that she might present herself to her visitor. The overtones of courtship in the scene emphasizes that, in presenting herself to him, she might be making a present of herself. When she arrives at the door, the man gives her a gift (a present) of flowers, but the bouquet he gives her is the same bouquet we saw in her bedroom earlier, which makes his presentation only a re-presentation. She takes the flowers back to the vase in which they were present but from which they have become absent and replaces them – re-presents them, so to speak. When the man and woman search for the lost object, the object that was once present and now has become absent, they are endeavouring to make it present once again, to re-present it. When they do find it, though it is present in the image, its being (its presence) is never revealed to us, is never fully presented to us, but because the couple present themselves to us face-to-face, it is presented to them. It appears to be a photograph, and so contains a trace of the past. Thus, when the photograph is discovered, this past is re-presented, both in the sense of being depicted in an image and in the sense of

being brought into the present once again.

The film's narrative and the use of literalisms suggest the interrelation of presence, absence and representation, demonstrating that no two of the above terms really excludes the other. The orthodox view on presence in film, the view expounded by André Bazin, assumes a sharp distinction between verbal signifiers, which contain no trace of their referents, and photographic images, which are nothing other than the trace of their originary model. But here we have photographic images which are structured by verbal signifiers. A verbal signifier that has penetrated the structure of the photographic image means, for one thing, that the absence by which the verbal signifier is marked has become fused with the presence that marks a photographic image. The commingling of presence and absence in these very ordinary-looking images and this clichéd narrative¹¹ brings into question whether the verbal signifier is ever really marked only by absence or whether the photographic image is ever marked only by presence. All images and all words, it would seem, are characterized by a complex intercourse between presence and absence. It is this complex alliance that permits presence to turn into absence and back into presence again and so makes possible the phenomenon of re-presentation. It also makes clear that representation is never an act of re-presentation purely, that representation never makes the represented fully present, for representations, even in the cinema, involve absence as much as presence.

At the beginning of the third subsection, the camera lurches forward and runs into the table at which the man sits. The table is caught and held by something and so cracks under the pressure of the camera's forward movement, its top being torn off. The camera continues careening around the set, veering this way and that, demolishing the objects in its path. Finally, it runs up against the back wall of the set and appears to push through it and to fall into the real world. This section uses the process of violently dismantling a constructed set – itself, then, something of a work of art – to create another work of art, or, at least, a section of one. In it Snow continues to use devices to show that what seem to be opposites are really only complementary aspects of a single process, for here he demonstrates that destruction is an aspect of creation. But even these are complementaries that can be understood to involve the notions of presence and absence, for the destruction of something is usually thought of as a doing away with it, making it absent, while the creation of something is usually thought to involve making something new, that is, as a process which results in making something present which before was absent (at least, as that particular object which it is, though the potential to be that object must be latent in the stuff of which it is made). Snow demonstrates here that in the act of creation, then, both absencing and presenting are involved and are integrally related, just as they are in the phenomenon of signification, that the work of art, in coming into being, renders the unformed material absent. In his own way, Snow is pointing out the

relation between the production of art and the production of meaning.

At the end of the section, the camera appears to plunge into the real world. There follows a series of over a thousand hand-held shots. Taking shots with a hand-held camera has for various reasons (some conventional and some based in the nature of the process of hand-held shooting) been thought to guarantee that what the shots depict belongs to the actual world and has not been staged or contrived by the filmmaker. Such shots are believed to contain a trace of the real world and to present the real world to the viewer. But this idea is challenged by the nature of the relationship the shots in this final section have to one another.¹² As the shots proliferate, we realize that this section of the film offers no coherent, all-embracing narrative, even if certain sets of shots (such as those depicting the caribou hunt) do offer fragments of narratives, and that the narratives that are present are divided into fragments which are widely dispersed and intermingled with other shots possessing no narrative implications whatsoever. Nor are the shots held within a conceptual framework, as are the shots in the central section of Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1970) or in the montage sections of my *Illuminated Texts* (1982). Rather, the section offers us an ever-widening inventory of objects, people, landscapes, events, an inventory in which the most evident sort of shot-to-shot relation is the relation of opposition (as occurs when, for example, a long shot follows a close-up or a dark shot follows a light shot).

This oppositional relationship between shots has several implications. For one thing, such a relationship is itself constituted by the contraries of presence and absence, for an opposition is formed when there exists (=has being) a relationship based on a lack (=non-being) of a common feature – a presence of an absence, so to speak. Constructing such oppositions is, in a sense, a process of presenting absences. But the fact that successive shots in a series have no relationship to one another other than this relationship of opposition means that each shot becomes meaningful only within a system of differences, a system of terms not immediately given, of absent (not fully presented) terms. What we have, then, is a structure in which the presence that is inscribed within a hand-held shot – a presence which is emphasized by the self-contained nature of each individual shot (its self-contained quality is reinforced by the snare drum-beat which accompanies every cut) – is contained within a framework of differences, that is, against a background of absences. The relationship of this form of construction to the ideas of the French structuralist linguist should be evident, for Saussure pointed out that one's choices for what will constitute a speech-act are actualized against the background of a diacritical language system.

By pointing out the analogies between montage relations and the syntagmatic relations of language, Snow is destroying the myth that a series of hand-held shots does nothing more than manifest the real world, that the act of composing montage relations between such shots is nothing other than making presence manifest. Like a verbal utterance, according to Snow, a

montage passage is invested with both presence and absence; thus he demonstrates further similarities between words and images. As the section runs on, we come to realize that its inventory of events, places, people, landscapes and animals is based on certain classificatory concepts. We are, for example, shown images of animals moving on the ground and others moving through the air. The ability to move through the air can be considered as a feature which is present or absent in some animals, but when it is present its opposing characteristic is rendered absent. When we see the parachutist, however, what has become of this classificatory scheme? Here we have an instance of an animal (man) that moves on the ground and through the air. The principle of exclusion is refuted because the presence or absence of some attribute is shown not to be an absolute and essential distinction. Similarly, we are shown cities (buildings), which are artificial in the sense of having been produced by someone, and landscapes, which are natural. But what of the garden? Here attributes that are supposed to be opposites, to exclude one another – the natural and the artificial – are co-present. Thus, the use of classificatory concepts also provides a means of demonstrating the interpenetration of presence and absence.

This section of the film also deals with the present as a temporal concept. In his insightful article on the implications of the long take, Pier Paolo Pasolini points out that, because we believe that the long take presents a person's perception of reality, and because reality as it is seen and heard is always in the present tense, "the long take is thus in the present tense."¹³ However, the multiplication of "presents" in a montage passage abolishes the present, empties it out, for each present, he says, postulates the relativity of all others.

The temporal implications of montage are even more basic. The meaning of each shot in a montage is never really actualized until the shot is over. The meaning of a shot within a montage construction (and theoretically this includes all shots except those in single-shot films) is always experienced as one "not-yet-given-but-still-coming-to-be" or as "having-been." Its meaning never exists in the present but only in the future or in the past. Montage empties the present of meaning. In most passages using montage this fact is disguised, for generally there is a bridge creating some form of continuity between one shot and the next, which seems to carry the significance of the past into the present. The system of oppositions in this section of *Presents* makes us realize that in a montage nothing is presented as wholly in the present, unaffiliated with a future or a past. The meaning of the shot is not given fully in the present, but is always not there, not present. Meaning always overflows into temporal dimensions other than the present, dimensions that themselves are never fully given, never fully presented. Thus even the presentation of meaning involves absence. There could be no more radical challenge to the metaphysics of presence than this.

Between the section showing the destruction of the set and the montage section, the camera appears to push out the back wall of the set and plunge into the real world; this transitional device depicts the set as being enclosed within the real world. On one level, the borders of the artificial set can be seen as the edges of a frame which enclose an artifact which is surrounded by a real world. Thus, the relation of the set to the montage section is analogous to the relation of an image to the real world. On another level, the set can be considered as relating to presentational modes of art, the montage section as relating to representational modes. At yet another level, the montage system can be understood as a diacritical construct, like language. The relation between the set and the background world can thus be understood as the relation between presented meaning and the absent-and-never-wholly-to-be-presented diacritical language system. In depicting the one as the background to the other, Snow shows presence and absence to be co-primordial and demonstrates the non-absolute nature of the presence of meaning. The absent, he shows, is given along with the present, though it is not given in a direct temporal intuition. Rather, it is given as a ground of the present, just as is the case with time, in which the "now" is experienced as having dimension and as fading into the past. As Merleau-Ponty stated, "In time, being and passing are synonymous." And yes, *Presents* is really about time's passing.

Frequently the hand-held camera movements also suggest an attempt to capture the objects which the camera films. Many images in this third section allude to tracking or hunting: a woman is followed down a street, another up a flight of stairs; the camera moves so as to apprehend subjects that seem to be in flight; a pair of hunters are shown walking along the side of a road cut through the bush and several Inuit are presented, in some of the film's most astonishing shots, shooting and then carving up caribou (as a photographer/cinematographer does the world). In the course of the film, these hunting references become more frequent.

Snow is pointing out here that a camera is a tool for capturing a present moment that is in the process of fleeing from us. This idea is one of the staples of his work in photography. It is evident in the decisive moment character of the flame photographs Snow made in the late 1970s and in *Midnight Blue* (1973-1974) in the particular pattern of the illumination of the dark blue background, produced by a candle (whose image we see but whose reality is only a pool of wax on the ledge) at just one instant in time, and in the particular, time-bound pattern of illumination in *Door* (1979).

In a conversation with Pierre Théberge, Snow revealed how profoundly he feels these features of temporal process:

s: I think I'm stuck with certain contradictions about not being "at home" in the movement of time because the future and past are contents of the mind and you can't say the word "present" fast enough for

it to fit the present. One of the interesting things about the still photograph in the same way as certain paintings is the aspect of fixing a moment in time which, of course, is also an illusion, since like everything else it's slowly changing. Experiencing this stopping of time seems to be a refreshment that is demanded occasionally and I suppose it's in the same order of things as being interested in the infinite. In that sense it's slightly religious.

T: In that sense you are signalling the present as presence too, that you were or are there.

S: Yes, we think that the photograph proves that the photographer was there.

T: In *Midnight Blue* you have both the absence of the candle, physically, and yet its presence as a picture.

S: Its wax physical "remains" are there on the ledge in front of the photo which is its image "remains." The work involves death, corpse and memory of the now absent candle and discussing it we return to the definition of a photograph as a memory, a fixed memory, an externalized memory. But to return to the subject of fixing moments in time: doesn't everybody feel occasionally that time is going and they'd like it sometimes to stay still or slow down even? Maybe that's what gets satisfied by Vermeer's painting specifically. For once everything is stopped so that it can be examined. One knows that the stopping of time is the subject and it's refreshing. And there's another pole that has happened, or, will always happen, from Cézanne to the Cubists, the dynamism of accepting and participating in the fact that there really is no fixed point of view and that everything is constantly changing.¹⁴

Presents was made relatively close to the time this conversation took place. The film shares the same elegiac quality of the funerary, expressed in this conversation, with Snow's other great works of this period, *Midnight Blue* (1973-74), *Painting: Closing the Drum Book* (1978), *Door* (1979) and *Rendez-vous* (1979). Like them, *Presents* "mourns the passing of time" and, like them, responds to the passing of time by attempting to preserve time's fleeting instants in representations. But, as even the word's structure – representation – intimates, this aspiration cannot ever be fulfilled; once past, an instant (a once-only-present) can never be made present again (though it can be represented, it can never be re-presented). This is what the difference between the physical wax remains of the candle and the candle's and flame's phantasmal illusion presented in *Midnight Blue* points out. In making representations (as the destruction of the set in *Presents* suggests), the artist consigns the ordinary unrepresented moment to another realm, a realm of non-existence, of absence.

The idea of the irreversible disappearance of each successive (present) moment/shot is reinforced both by the single, sharp snare drumbeat which marks each cut in this passage (the sound of the snare drumbeat has much the same effect as a cut does in distancing filmgoers from the image) and by the increasing frequency of the use of the colour red (which alludes to the presence of death in the realm of the living). As a device the drumbeat is particularly interesting, for its use takes into account the way our experience of a shot changes over time. At first, when any new shot is presented, we feel somewhat distanced from its content because we do not immediately recognize it for what it is. After this comes a period of engagement during which we identify the shot's content. A more relaxed period of enjoyment of what is presented, and of its presence, follows, in which we experience what, in Lacanian terms, we might describe as Imaginary plenitude. Our identification with a unitary plenitude makes us unified and full beings. If the shot is held for some time after we begin to experience this sense of fullness or plenitude, we become distanced from its contents again. The takes in *Presents* rarely last long enough for this to happen; they are terminated abruptly, with the termination marked (and the experience of disappearance reinforced) by the snaredrum beat. The loss of that plenitude or presence is thus highlighted, as is the correlative becoming-absent of the self. The loss of this plenitude Snow seems to have related to the psychoanalytic conception of the lost object (according to which the primary loss we experience is the loss of our sense of unity, plenitude and oceanic presence).

The contrast of the implication of the temporal forms in Snow's films with those of Brakhage's reflect differences between the dominant American and Canadian ideologies. The temporal forms of Brakhage's films derive from Brakhage's deep interest in Gertrude Stein's writing. Stein's style was influenced by the ideas of William James, who was interested in the inner workings of the human mind, and this led to Stein's interest in a form of composition which, rather than revealing the processes by which external events unfold, conveyed inner responses to things. Similarly, Stein sought to reveal not the behaviour of characters but how she perceived her characters' mental processes.

William James maintained a dynamic notion of perception. For him, all knowledge, whether of things present or of things past, occurs within the experience of the present. All reality, he claimed, occurs in "the now," and this present undergoes continual change.

Accordingly, Stein concluded, for writing to be real it must be a description of what occurs in the present "now." The past is dispensed with as the content of writings. Remembrances, recollections, are done away with. The past tense is eliminated. Each statement is formed in the present, then the next, different statement is formed in the next moment. The discontinuous style that resulted has strong similarities with that of Brakhage who admits learning a great deal from Stein. Consider the following:

... Here it is. There are several subjects about which I can write. First Basket, then paragraphs, then tone, then three and I am through with three. And then me.

I have just changed my mind. I have just had that experience. Listen to me.

He looks like a young man grown old. That is a sentence that they could use.

I was overcome with remorse. It was my fault that my wife did not have a cow. This sentence they cannot use.

Now listen to me.

I have had a very curious experience.

If they had been one after the other it makes no difference, first I saw one well first I saw one. His name I will not mention. I was pleased, very flattered to be pleased. If it was not difficult it was not closed. I do not deny that I love to have them one at a time. But if they are not one at a time then I see them all the time. It finally came about that all three of them were of no particular use. I will not mention names because nobody will have to think at all that way. That is the end of that.¹⁵

William James had spoken of the everlasting "coming of concrete novelty into being," and this is certainly something that Stein's writing captures. And in the 1930s she conceived the idea of creating entities so vital "that there was something completely contained within itself and being contained within itself was moving, not moving in relation to itself but just moving."¹⁶

This conception of time has very deep roots in American intellectual life. In his journals, the Puritan philosopher-theologian Jonathan Edwards concluded a *Gedankenversuch*, imagining the world annihilated and then created anew, alike in every detail to the formerly existing world. He concluded that even though the newly created world might differ in no particular whatsoever from the world that preceded it, still it would be different. This *Gedankenversuch* led to Edwards' conclusion about time: "It is certain that with me the world exists anew every moment; that the existence of things every moment ceases and is every moment renewed." In consequence, Edwards mused, "we every moment see the same proof of a God as we should have seen if we had seen Him create the world at first." And this is a very extreme statement of belief in the continual coming-on of novelty.

Stein was explicit about the "Americanness" of her type of writing:

In the Twentieth Century you feel like movement. The Nineteenth Century didn't feel that way. The element of movement was not the predominating thing that they felt. You know that in your lives movement is the thing that occupies you most – you feel movement all the time. And the United States had the first instance of what I call Twentieth Century writing. You see it first in Walt Whitman. He was the

beginning of the movement. He didn't see it very clearly, but there was a sense of movement that the European was much influenced by, because the Twentieth Century has become the American Century.¹⁷

America lives with a sense only of the immediate demands of the will, not of that which continues, unchanged, through time. America is the empire of technology and, as has been recognized since at least the time of Henry Adams, the essence of technology is speed and immediacy. In the American mind, the present overwhelms all other times. The co-presence of various times is dismissed as a ridiculous impossibility; thus "only the present can be present" is held to be tautological. Americans have generally wanted to make the past a part of the present, to make all times contemporaneous with the present moment. This is partly due to the revolutionary origins of American political life, to the fact that the United States was founded in an act that involved cutting its ties to the "old country" and so to history. Even more, it has to do with the typological interpretation of history. In a paradoxical manner (almost as paradoxical as the American interest in history that denies the "pastness" of the past) the typological interpretation of history both affirmed and denied history. It affirmed history by proclaiming that the progression from type to antitype was a temporal progression, while it denied history by seeing every moment as a "replaying" of a previous moment. Furthermore, it was the typological interpretation of history that produced the myth of the American Adam, with its implication that, with the founding of America, everything that was old, traditional, European, degenerate, deadly¹⁸ had been dispensed with and that history (time) had been started again. Unlike Canada, the United States is primarily a culture of space, not of time,¹⁹ and Canadian artists and thinkers have often seen their task as one of promoting historical remembrance. (Surely the crushing difficulty of this onerous but necessary task is the main theme of Snow's *Plus Tard*.) This turning from the spatial to the temporal is hardly surprising given one of the primal experiences of Canadian culture – the fear of the alien landscape and especially of its empty spaces.

Films by Canadian artists have generally possessed different temporal qualities and their temporal structures have implied a different view of reality. Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) and *La région centrale* (1971), Jack Chambers' *Circle* (1969), Joyce Wieland's *Reason Over Passion* (1967-69), David Rimmer's *Surfacing on the Thames* (1970), *Seashore* (1971) and *Canadian Pacific I and II* (1974/1975), Chris Gallagher's *Atmosphere* (1979) and *The Nine O'Clock Gun* (1980) and Richard Kerr's *Canal* (1981) all develop slowly and continuously, without ruptures or breaks. The diagrammatic temporal form of Snow's films evokes a sense of the eternal and the timeless; similar feelings about this dimension of existence are evoked by a large number of Canadian experimental films.

The Architecture of *Presents*

The architectonics of the film as a whole has a tripartite structure (with one of its three units being divisible into two parts). This structure is based in part on Snow's conviction that there are three processes by which an object can be made: by moulding raw material; by dividing some other object into parts; and by joining separate elements together.²⁰ This idea is one Snow has worked with over many years. Some of his pieces, for example *Morning in Holland* (1969-1974), *Snow Storm February 7, 1967* (1967), *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) and *Sight* (1967), seem designed to highlight the subtractive process; others, like *Red*⁵ (1974), *Imposition* (1976), *Painting: Closing the Drum Book* (1978) and *Authorization* (1969), highlight the additive process; still others, like *Torso* (1963), some of the folded and crumpled *Walking Women Works*, and the opening section of *Presents*, feature moulding processes. Several other works play two of these processes off one another, bringing them into a perfect balance. *Of a Ladder* (1971), *A Wooden Look* (1969) and *Glare*s (1973) play additive and moulding processes off one another, while *Untitled Slidelength* (1969-71) plays subtractive and moulding processes off each other.

This tripartite structure is also based on concepts about the relation of self to other, on psychoanalytic ideas. *Presents* is based on a schema that bears some relation to notions central to psychoanalytic theory, particularly the theories of Melanie Klein. Melanie Klein was one of the leading figures in modern European psychoanalysis and, although her work has had very little impact in North America, it dominates the theory and practice of psychoanalysis in most South American countries. Most mainstream analysts have confined their work to adults or at most have included young adults. Even the more unorthodox among them, such as Anna Freud and her fellows who did work with children, used techniques that in most respects conformed to those used in adult psychoanalysis and so could be applied only to older children who could express themselves in speech. Melanie Klein originated a technique of analyzing children's play as free association and so extended the use of analytic methods to treat children as young as two years of age. There has always been tremendous controversy surrounding Melanie Klein's views, but some of the insights her methods have revealed about the earliest months of a child's life are of the most profound importance.

According to Klein, the earliest months of childhood are dominated by two physical processes – taking in and giving out. The child tries to take in only what are felt to be good objects (the prototype is the satisfying breast) and to keep bad objects out or get rid of them by projection. The emotional responses to external objects are really due only to the child's internal state – whatever causes pleasure the child feels is good and whatever causes pain, bad. Hence the belief in the goodness and badness of external objects results from the fact that in earliest infancy children do not make a distinction

between their internal worlds and the surrounding external world. Children may wish to destroy objects which they feel are threatening or evil, but the feeling that the hated object is threatening is the result of their having projected their own aggressive tendencies onto it. All of these Kleinian ideas are suggested by the form of *Presents*.

According to Klein, one of the key infantile feelings is resentment.²¹ Infants envy their mothers' capacity for creation, which causes them to form the fantasy of ripping open the mother's body and destroying its contents. Made to feel anxious and guilty by the fantasies they harbour and by the damages they imagine they have actually done to the mother, infants feel the need to make reparations.

The nature of the tripartite structure of *Presents* can be elucidated using these Kleinian, psychoanalytic ideas. The feminized space of the first section of the film reverberates with the presence of the woman's body. It can, in some sense at least, be taken as standing for the woman's body – or, rather, considering its obviously artificial character, a fantasy about a woman's body.²² The camera represents the eye/I, the self, the child. The portions of this section during which we believe that the camera (rather than the set) is moving alludes to the infantile feelings of omnipotence. The point at which our illusions about the nature of the action are dispelled, and we realize that it is actually the set that is moving, represents the onset of the infant's recognition that the mother possesses capacities she or he lacks.

The second part of the film represents the child's response to self-deflation. The destruction of the contents of the set, the feminized space, represents the fantasized destruction of the contents of the mother's body. The long montage section, the third section of the film, represents the child's reaction to this fantasy. Klein insisted that this reaction takes the form partly of the infant's turning away from his or her painful fantasies towards reality, partly of efforts at reparation, of the offering of presents. The former is suggested by the camera's pushing through the back wall of the fantasy set and plunging into the real world,²³ the latter by this passage's character as a series of "captured" images that are offered to us. It is because this passage is designed to represent the processes of destruction and reparation that the passage has an extremely disjointed character.

Even Snow's use of the frame in this section of the film alludes to the process of tearing reality (the other/the mother) apart. The understanding of the frame which underlies the construction of this section can reasonably be characterized as a photographic understanding. The orthodox conception of the frame derives from painting and holds that the frame is a formative device that, by defining the surface which a work has to fill, exerts a determining influence on all aspects of a painting.²⁴ The photographic understanding of the frame is different. For the photographer, the frame carves out a section of the world. This carving out of fragments of the world by the frame and their

subsequent recombining to create new objects – presents (in the sense of gifts) – is one of the primary concerns of this film.

Psychoanalytic theory and criticism that employs psychoanalytic concepts have made familiar and, indeed, acceptable the idea that a single structure in a work of art may have multiple meanings (and, in fact, contradictory meanings). And *Presents*' structure truly does suggest other somewhat different and indeed contradictory psychoanalytic ideas – ideas that are closely related to the central concept of psychoanalytic orthodoxy, namely, the concept of the Oedipal conflict. The scene given at the opening of *Presents* is a scene that has features of a fantasy, and it invites being interpreted as representing the image of woman or, more specifically, the Mother. The courtly visit of the male friend represents the intrusion of the Mother's other love object – other than the child, that is to say, who is represented by the camera that witnesses the scene of courtship. This other is, of course, the Father. The emphasis on the man's being allowed through the door to enter the woman's room (/womb) indicates the phallic and primal scene symbolism attached to this narrative event. On this reading, it is as a result of its having witnessed the developing relationship between the man and the woman that the camera attempts to destroy the room; and so this assault clearly suggests the child's envious attack on the parental coupling.

This attack pitches the camera/child out into the real world – a world composed of objects, many of whose forms give evidence of being shaped (influenced or even determined) by displaced sexual energies. (Thus there are, for example, images of actual naked women, but also images from art and media, guns, automobiles, tall buildings, etc.) In this world, the camera/the maturing child also finds evidence of the pervasive and abundant fecundity of nature, for the camera/maturing child observes an astonishing variety of plant and animal forms. Snow also suggests that there is a violence associated with photography (filming is compared with shooting and "trapping") that is phallic in origin. Indeed, the very idea that love is inevitably associated with hate, that creative love and destructive hate are inextricably linked with one another – even that loving feelings that lead to gift-giving are associated with negative feelings, just as the word "presents" contains the word "resents" – is an insight that relates to the psychoanalytic concept of the Oedipal conflict. It is worth noting that the violence embedded in this film (from the destructively careening camera of the film's beginning to the surgical incisions and the carving up of the caribou shown towards the end of the film) is rare in Snow's work. Snow seems to be singularly determined to rise above conflict, to rise above the negative in life and the expression of the negative in art, to a transcendental plane.

But the third section deals not only with processes of fragmentation and recombination; it is also concerned with the third process by which objects are created, the process of moulding raw materials into a new form. This is apparent in the use of camera-movement in this section. Sometimes the

camera films moving subjects, sometimes it moves over non-moving subjects. When it films non-moving subjects, its movement puts those subjects into movement; it takes stasis and moulds it into movement. Moreover, when the camera films moving subjects, it sometimes follows the movement of the subject and sometimes moves in the opposite direction. When it follows the movement, it extends it, because, when a moving subject is followed by the camera, it takes longer for the subject to traverse the screen. It transforms the movement – figuratively speaking, it remoulds it. A similar point could be made with respect to what occurs when the camera moves in the opposite direction of the subject it films. The fact that the camera shapes the movements it films, moreover, suggests a fusing of subject and object, a fusion longed for since it results in the illusion of union with the lost object.

***So Is This* in the Light of Language Theory**

Snow continues his meditation on presence and absence in *So Is This* (1982). The film consists entirely of individual words and punctuation marks, in white or lightly tinted letters on a black or darkly coloured background, which remain on the screen for varying lengths of time. The individual words are sometimes separated by varying durations of darkness and sometimes follow one another directly. For the most part, the words can be easily linked together into sentences, though on one occasion isolated words (some of them vulgar) are interposed between the consecutive words in the sentence and, on another, a number of vulgar terms are interposed between consecutive words in a sentence. The words are photographed to fill the screen from horizontal edge to horizontal edge; thus, the dimension of the letters change as the numbers of letters in the words vary.

The idea of making a film based on words is something that modernists would have found abhorrent. Snow even alludes to the idea that such a form is inconsistent with the nature of the medium: "one question which the author [of the film] expects [when talking to viewers after a screening] is: 'Why would anyone want to do such a thing as this?' followed by 'Wouldn't a book be better?'" Brakhage, in fact, had begun his statement of his aesthetic credo "Metaphors on Vision" with a condemnation of verbal language and an exhortation to his readers to "Imagine a world before 'the beginning was the word'." Brakhage celebrates vision precisely as a means by which Being reveals itself, fully and completely, as pure presence. Snow dismisses this claim, and with it, claims for privileges of vision. Not only does he reject the modernists' claim that respect for purity of the film medium entails a repudiation of language; he also rejects the assertion that images and language are ever completely disengaged from one another. Along with this, he rejects modernist claims that the visible is a pure manifestation of the presence of being. It is these rejections that ground *So Is This* as a study of the interpenetration of words and images.

The final words in the film are a quotation from Plato's *Phaedrus*: "You know Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painters' products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence."²⁵ The quotation gives only a part of Socrates' speech; in the speech as a whole, Socrates (Plato's mouthpiece here) condemns writing as a "corrupt" form of communication on the grounds that a written passage is incapable of answering a reader's question, that it can fall into the hands "of those who have no business with it" and, most importantly, that if it is ill-treated or unfairly abused, it lacks a "parent" to defend it. In sum, Plato suggests that writing separates a discourse from its moment and place of origin and from the person who issues it and so can easily fall prey to all sorts of mischief. Speech is very different, Plato says, as different as dead discourse is from living speech, for living speech "is written on the soul of the hearer," can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak and to whom say nothing.

Snow's film addresses all of the issues that Socrates' condemnation of written language raises. His frequent use of indexical terms (or shifters such as "this," "here," and "now" whose referent is relative to the moment and place of their enunciation) emphasizes the separation between the time the film was composed and the time it is viewed. The frequent use of the conceit that the film, and not its author, is the source of the text (the film includes such lines as "How do you know this isn't lying," where "this" ambiguously refers to the statement and constitutes the film's purported title) emphasizes the apparent self-enclosure of the text and the absence of "its parent." The frequent use of direct address and its explicit consideration of its audience raise the issue of its discourse being accessible to all sorts of people (at one point Snow/the film says, "This belongs to everybody," at another, "So what is important is not this but how this is used," and at another, particularly revealing moment, "You can see what a powerful tool this could be in the wrong hands"). The various untruths the film asserts suggests that written language can state falsehoods without being subject to cross-examination (though Snow/the film does state that the filmmaker will be present at some screenings to answer questions).

Snow seems to be saying that, as Plato had claimed, written language really is characterized by distance, misunderstanding and insincerity. Why would Snow make a film which relies exclusively on the use of written texts and indeed which emphasizes, through its word-after-word manner of presentation, the object-like character of the written word? The answer I would give is that the film is, in Derrida's term, "a deconstruction" of Plato's claims about written language – a deconstruction that, in fact, not only proceeds along lines typically followed by Derrida's own but even reaches conclusions paralleling those at which Derrida himself has arrived.

The serial presentation of the words and the sometimes prolonged durations that individual words remain on the screen seem to isolate the words

from one another, making them appear to be wholly self-contained, and so create a radical distinction between what has been and what is, and between what is not and what is. As well, the serial presentation of the words reveals that discourse (written or spoken) occurs in time and that the words of a discourse present themselves one after another, like moments in time. *So Is This* challenges these apparently obvious truths. Snow points out that in constructing meaningful sentences from the individual words, viewers must remember what has already been presented and anticipate what is yet to come, even the meaning of the individual words is inflected by the preceding words and the words that we anticipate will follow, as though they contained traces of the already past and the yet to come. And this raises a challenge to the idea that what is given in the present moment is fully present (present both in its mode of being and in time), while what is not in the present is completely absent. Against these ideas about time, Snow puts forward the notion that if the past is always retained in the present and the future rooted there, then past and future cannot ever be altogether absent, and, if past and future are retained in the present, then the present cannot ever be merely present. As Heidegger says, "Even the absent is present and as absenting itself from the present is present in disclosure," and "The presently occurring does not lie like a cut-off piece between the absent. When the presently occurring once stands in view, everything occurs together, one brings the other along with itself, one lets the other go its way."²⁶

Meaning itself is never fully given, for any text requires a reader to participate in the process of creating meaning. (Snow/the film explicitly mentions the spectator's role in creating meaning.) The isolation of single words in the film is used to reveal that words are not meaningful in isolation, but only in context – a context that includes the whole system constituting a language; the individual words themselves – the apparently "full" terms of the language – could not have significances but for the differences, the intervals – what Derrida terms the *espacements* or *différences* – which structure language. The intervals or *différences* must have their traces in the very terms which constitute a language if those terms are to be meaningful; hence, in language, as in time, nothing is ever simply present or simply absent.

But if each of these temporal modalities is marked by the other two, the essential future is the same as the past; in the famous expression of Heidegger, time is the coming on the past in the present. The view of time implied here is very similar to the view implied by the form of *Wavelength*; it is suggested that the whole of time exists together for, in its essence, time rests. While the present may appear as a moment, as a being, it is actually a relation, for past and future enter into its internal constitution. What it means for a moment – and for that matter, for a being – to be present is that it be situated in relation to the past and the future. Neither time nor beings, then, are pure Being; everything that is made present to us carries in its internal constitution the relation to non-being. The idea that meanings, like

moment times are "always-still-coming-to-be" or "already past" (which we noted is also implied by the montage form Snow employs in the final section of *Presents*) organizes the macromorphic structures of *So Is This*. Thus *So Is This* spends most of its time discussing what it is going to be (Snow/the film states that "this film will not discuss itself all the time" and "it's going to get into some real human stuff," and refers to most of the first half of the film as "an introduction" which he then repeats, in summarized form, for latecomers) and then proceeds to what Snow refers to as "a flashback." In sum, it consists almost entirely of an introduction to the work, a reprise (of the introduction) and a "conclusion" (in the form of a flashback), with hardly any "main body of text." The fact that the main body of the text is a text without a main body is a paradox analogous to the paradox akin to the non-being of meaning and presence, a paradox on which the entire film is built. To add to this the fact that the discussions of the future of the film and the conclusion occur wholly in the present, in the film's moment-after-moment, word-after-word, format of presentation is to balance these notions of non-being with notions of being.

The analysis of language and time conducted in *So Is This* reveals that there is a homology between the two – much as *Wavelength* revealed a homology among the structures of temporal passage, the horizon of expectation and the dramatic form – since the mode of being of both involves a comingling of presence and absence. But the serial presentation of individual words suggests another homology between time and language. In time, earlier events seem to have a priority, inasmuch as the events in a series can be said to be characterized by firstness, secondness and so on. However, as Derrida has shown in his analysis of "originary delay," it is a latter event – a second event – through which the first event is a first. Thus "secondariness" has a priority of a kind over "firstness," since it is the agent that constitutes the first's priority. Something's "firstness" then, is always a third term. (Thus Snow/the film discusses antecedent text films, says he would like to have been the first to make a text film because, quoting Blake, "priority is energy," remarks regretfully that "it's too late," and goes on to say "In some respects this is first. Obviously this is not the first time this has been used for the first time.") But like Being, meaning is subject to originary delay, for, while the originary moment of the sign is commonly believed to be its referent in thought (its meaning), there can be no thought without language; hence a sign has a priority of a sort over its referent.

Snow is actually responding to the view that Plato proposes in *Phaedrus* – that written language is characterized by distance, absence, misunderstanding and insincerity – by deconstructing it. That view accords a special, privileged status to spoken discourse,²⁷ inasmuch as it holds that in spoken discourse, sound and meaning present themselves as an indivisible whole; in spoken discourse, sounds seem united with their originary moment in the speaker's consciousness²⁸ and to have no existence as independent material

forms. Written words, on the other hand, present themselves as marks, as material forms which the reader interprets. (Snow's serial presentation of words emphasizes the process of reading through which "brute material" signs are transformed into signifiers.) Spoken language seems to be invested with – to be a plenitude of – meaning, while written discourse does not. But in fact the apparent plenitude of the spoken signifier only masks the absences – the *différences* or *espacements* – that structure any discourse, written or spoken. Written texts, as *So Is This* points out, more clearly reveal these "structuring absences," and so more truly disclose the nature of language.

Consistent with the thrust of its deconstructive strategy, *So Is This* involves considerable play with the concepts of presence and absence, identity and otherness, truth and falsity. At one point, for example, Snow writes, "This film (long title isn't it)" – the title being ambiguously the word "this" or all the words in the film, in which case the film is identical with its name, and so represents an instance in which the gap between objects and words, or between a thing and its name, is closed and a word, a name, really renders the thing present – "won't discuss itself all the time." (In this way, the notions of identity and self-enclosure are suggested.) "It's going to get into some real human stuff." (The notion of otherness is introduced.) "Also it's going to become confessional and very personal. The author is going to tell you as much as he can about himself." (Thus, truth and identity are to be guaranteed by the confessional quality of the work.) "He is going to be completely frank." (The last claim involves an interplay of identity and otherness, truth and falsity and reveals the possible falsehood of even apparently confessional pieces; it also plays on the idea of the name.)

So Is This obviously makes much of the peculiar nature of the word "this." One reason for Snow's interest in the term is that, as a shifter, it is a word that seems simultaneously full of meaning and empty of meaning, inasmuch as it seems to present that to which it refers at the same time as having no core of meaning in itself (since its reference is always relative to its context). In that sense, presence and absence seem to coincide in its meaning. But it must have had another appeal for Snow. The word "this" seems to point to – to present – a single, discrete identity that occupies a specific, localized space and time. But Snow proposes a relational theory of meaning (and time) in *So Is This*, according to which any meaning (or any instant) makes reference to an absence, which is the ground of the presented word's (instant's) meaning. In effect, Snow uses the term "this" to raise the notion of what A.N. Whitehead refers to as "simple location," which he characterizes as the doctrine of the "individual independent existence of real facts," pointing out that this doctrine implies the individual, independent existence of successive temporal occasions.²⁹ To illustrate what he means by this, Whitehead uses examples, such as Descartes' conception of the nature of time as being "such that its parts do not depend one upon the other" and Hume's conception of impressions as self-contained – a conception which prevented

him from finding any temporal relationship other than serial order.³⁰ Snow proceeds, as Whitehead had, to demonstrate that this doctrine of “simple location” involves a fallacy – the fallacy of simple location – by demonstrating that every meaning (and every event) is like a force field that has a focal centre, which is a combination of the aspects of other events, and a field of influence.

So Is This makes frequent statements – expressions such as “This film wouldn’t say shit if its mouth were full of it” and “There’ll be not one word about El Salvador, no mention of Trudeau” – that assert that certain concepts are absent precisely by making them present. This is yet another way of suggesting the commingling of presence and absence. Yet there is a way of reading the film that defuses the negative potentials of all these statements of falsehoods and about the film’s emptiness, and assimilates the work to the realm of pure being. When Snow states at the beginning of the film that “the rest of the film will look just like this,” he raises this possibility, that film just really is exactly what it seems to be, that it is “the purely visible.” In this way, too, he proposes a balancing of “illusion” and fact, being and non-being, self-reference and representation.

So Is This in many respects is like other films Michael Snow has made. Its word-after-word presentation determines the shape of the film as systematically as did the use of the zoom in *Wavelength*. As in all of Snow’s films from *Wavelength* through *Presents*, the number of qualities that are varied is radically limited; in *So Is This* the only variables are the size of letters, the length of time the words are held on the screen, and their tint, which is simply the result of the different film stocks employed (and so relates to intrinsic characteristics of the physical medium of film). Like Snow’s other films, its materials are space, time and light – the essential materials of the film medium. Furthermore, as in his earlier films, the system Snow employs does not completely determine the content of the imagery – in this case, the particular words; indeed, there is considerable variety in sentence structure and generally in the forms of relationships between the individual words in the text. Like his previous works, *So Is This* explores the uses of duration and creates a durative sense by encouraging the spectator/reader to engage in acts of recollection and anticipation. Like Snow’s artwork generally, it is concerned with creating a balance between “illusion” and fact, and between representation and material construction. And, like his other films, it uses wit to promote a rather analytic state of mind.

But the most important similarity between *So Is This* and Snow’s other films is its use of forms which involve an interplay between presence and absence. Just as Snow’s camera-derived works exploit the feeling that the other represented in a photograph appears in a mode of existence that involves both presence and absence, *So Is This* points out that the referent of written words has the same mode of existence. Again to quote Snow quoting Plato quoting Socrates, “You know, Phaedrus, that’s the strange thing about

writing that makes it truly analogous to painting...." It is in this context that the point of the lengthy discussion of censorship included in the film is best understood. This section was included partly to point out that the act of censoring creates a presence-in-absence, since a trace of what is censored always remains (as the readability of the sentence "He blanked her and she sucked his blank then he blanked it in her blank" demonstrates). But Snow also uses it to offer an argument against the censorship directed specifically at visual material. Singling out visual material for censorship would be justifiable only if there were essential differences between words and images. There is no such difference, as Snow proves; thus this singling out of visual material for censorship is absurd.

Presence, Time, Language and Knowledge

In *Useful Knowledge*, Gertrude Stein counted to 100 by ones, beginning "one and one and one and ..." continuing relentlessly until she could announce that we had reached 100 – or rather, 100 ones. Stein used this construction to make us feel 100 as an aggregate of individual things, as 100 separate and absolutely distinct ones. The idea of 100 as a collection that negates the individuality of that which it subsumes is shown to be an abstraction based on a vague idea of the actual reality which is one hundred individual units, one after the other after the other. It implies a view that the final reality is the immediate, individual entity, not some abstraction of the mind. In Stein's view, reality is not some undifferentiated, featureless absolute. The idea that every individual entity is a completely self-contained thing, becomes, when it is transferred into the domain of temporality (and Stein did carry these ideas into that realm), the idea that each moment in time is separate and distinct and does not prolong aspects of any previous moment. Each new or successive temporal unit arrives as something new; each present moment constitutes an independent event whose being is absolute and autonomous.

Stein's writing style, especially as it developed after 1911, relied on the parataxis of highly disparate elements. She used this kind of construction to create a mode of writing which refers exclusively to immediate experience, suppressing the generic element inherent in all description – to develop an extensive rather than intensive mode of writing.

In the *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel discussed the most primitive form of consciousness which he calls "certainty at the level of sense-experience" or simply "sense certainty." Though he conceived of sense certainty as a necessary stage in his theoretical construction of the ascent of consciousness, much of what he said takes the form of an attack, and much of what he says in his attack on sense certainty is germane to a consideration of assumptions embedded in Stein's metaphysics of presence. Sense certainty, Hegel noted, makes no attempt to classify the information derived from the senses; it is aware only of what is now immediately present to it, the certainty of the

"this," of the here and the now. Hegel argued that, while sense certainty appears to be a good candidate for certain knowledge, its claims to this status do not stand up under scrutiny, for sense certainty cannot articulate its knowledge. What do we mean by "this"? Its meaning can be broken down into a here and a now, Hegel acknowledged. But what knowledge can be founded on these notions? Suppose I write down "Now it is 9:55 p.m., Tuesday, May 24, 1988." As soon as I write this truth, it becomes false. What kind of knowledge is that? As Hegel pointed out, sense certainty cannot be expressed in language, for sense certainty is knowledge of pure particulars, while the copulative-predicative structure of language always involves general ideas. "This is a book," for example, subsumes this particular entity – this being – under the general category of book. The particularity of sense certainty renders that form of knowledge quite ineffable.

Hegel describes how the mind escapes the limitations of acquaintance with mere particulars, by acceding to the realm of self-consciousness. Similarly, *So Is This* shows how meaning is constituted by stepping out of the succession of particularized words and rising to a realm of timeless meaning.

So Is This demonstrates that words themselves really don't present meanings. Meaning is not something given; it is constructed by an intellectual act of synthesis – forged as much from the traces of the absent as from the present. As *So Is This* states, "the film will consist of single words presented one after another to construct sentences and hopefully (this is where you come in) to convey meanings." The film shows that meaning does not confront consciousness as an alien being. This is a Romantic view of meaning, which reflects that familiar, desire of Romantic Idealism to transform the estranged world into a world of our own.

This theory of meaning challenges a distinction phenomenologists devised to describe the relation of language to thought. Husserl drew a cardinal distinction between the "indicative" sign and the "expressive" sign. Indicative signs stand in for, or point to, objects; expressive signs carry an intentional, emotional freight. Indicative signs have referents; only expressive signs have what we might properly call meaning. Indicative signs acquire significance by standing in for the objects they point to and render what they signify absent;³¹ expressive signs acquire significance by presenting their intended meanings.

The word "this" seems to be the very paradigm of an indicative sign. As a shifter, it has no inherent meaning that it presents; it is used simply to point to a referent. Yet, it clearly has a presentational aspect, for it is used to indicate something which is really there, really present. It is characterized, therefore, by both presence and absence. But if this paradigm of an indicative sign is characterized by both presence and absence, all indicative signs must be. Likewise, while any expressive sign seems to present its ideational or emotional freight, its meaning depends upon its place within a language system and so is marked by an absence. In fact, expressive signs would not be

marked by absence only under the counter-factual condition – that language afforded us so complete an access to another's thoughts that we could establish through language that form of relationship that beings of pure reason such as angels are said to have with one another. Since this condition is never met, all utterances fall short of expressive self-presence and so are, in part, indicative. Husserl's knife-cut distinction between indicative and expressive terms does not hold up under scrutiny.

These are the implications of the formal structure of *So Is This*. And in showing that language is never exclusively and totally indicative in character, Snow's film challenges nominalist theories of language such as those found in the writings of the empiricists or in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Language, Snow realizes, has many functions other than that of stating that certain states of affairs exist. It may have exhortatory functions as in the sentence "Let's all raise our mental voices, mutely, mutually in song"; it may have exclamatory functions as the word "cunt"; it may have a phatic function as in the expression, "Hi, Mary"; and it may have a metalingual function as in "This film won't discuss itself all the time." By demonstrating that language serves a number of functions, Snow refutes the nominalist / referentialist view that language is exclusively indicative, as well as the view that language is exclusively expressive. And these, it seems, are the only two options available to those that subscribe to the metaphysics of presence.

Snow uses the successive presentation of words in *So Is This* to demonstrate that meaning is never fully given in the individual units of language. To construct meaning, we must be able to create a unity that brings together what is given and what is not. Canadian philosopher John Watson realized this many years ago; in 1912, he wrote:

Knowledge is never *a priori* in the sense that it is derivable from pure conceptions but neither is it ever *a posteriori*, in the sense of being based upon mere particulars. It is always, and in all its forms, the comprehension of particulars as embraced within a unity of space and time.³²

This interest in how particular events come to be enclosed within a unified and objectified framework seems to be a constant feature of Snow's filmmaking. It reveals an interest in how the mind rises above the flow of particular events and particular moments to a position from which events can be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. More precisely, it reveals an interest in the paradoxical qualities of time: time is motionless and yet it flows; in the flow of time, in the continuous sinking away of the moment into the past, there is constituted a non-flowing, absolutely fixed, changeless, objective time. This is what the diagrammatic forms of Snow's earlier films are all about. Words from John Watson again reveal the significance of this.

The simplest discrimination of the difference between "this" and "that" is possible only because consciousness is a universal capacity for distinction and unification. And in the moral life the implicit infinity of the human spirit reveals itself in the unceasing effort after perfection.³³

Reprise: *Ut Pictura Poesis*

Snow exhibited *Presents* for the first time early in 1982 at a small Toronto experimental film centre. He had not completed any films for the eight preceding years, with the exception of a fifteen-minute, rather slight piece, *Breakfast: Table Top Dolly*. Within months of exhibiting *Presents*, Snow began preparing the instructions for Anna Pafomow to follow when "filming" *So Is This*. The proximity in time of the making of these two films, and the years that separate them from Snow's other films, point towards their having shared conceptual interests. But the relation between these two films suggests the characteristic wittiness of this very clever filmmaker/artist: *Presents* demonstrates that imagery possesses many of the same features that a language does; *So Is This* demonstrates that language possesses many of the same features that imagery does.

A diagram mapping the relation between the two films (and, more generally, the relation between language and imagery the two films imply) gives us \longleftrightarrow , the title of one of Snow's earlier films. Titles are usually verbal, not visual, so Snow's choice to use a visual sign as title at least hints at his belief that visual signs can fulfil many of the same functions as verbal signs do. But the allusion to \longleftrightarrow articulated in the relation these two films have to one another has an even more profound significance. I pointed out in chapter 10 that Snow frequently uses forms, structures, and devices that imply that many pairs of features which modernists took as exclusionary opposites – features that oppose one another, so that if one feature belongs to the essence of some medium or object, the polar feature does not – are really complementary pairs. Language and imagery are media the modernists took to be opposites; they claimed that each has properties that make it utterly distinct from the other. This is the conception that lay behind the modernist argument that content could not possibly be transferred from one medium to another. The double-sided relation that *Presents* and *So Is This* bear to one another demonstrates that language and imagery have common features, that these opposites can be reconciled. Similar beliefs undergird the use of literalisms in many of Snow's works. *Venetian Blind* (1970), *Multiplication Table* (1977), *Light Blues* (1974), *Press* (1969), *Authorization* (1969), *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), *Crouch, Leap, Land* (1970), and *Imposition* (1976) are just a few of the better-known examples. Snow's revolutionary views on this matter are another expression of the catholicism of his beliefs.

But what prompts Snow to point out so insistently the similarities

between words and images? Partly it is Snow's interest in issues arising from the transition from modernism to postmodernism – issues that derive from the change to the more open, pluralistic conception of art that characterizes the postmodernist era. Partly it is his interest, which he shares with many Canadian artists, in the conditions of photographic representation. And partly it is Snow's desire to lay a claim for imagery as a medium for expressing concepts – to put the point somewhat hyperbolically, for the possibility of using imagery to convey philosophical concepts.³⁴

While many Renaissance theorists (Savonarola, for example) asserted that poetry appeals to our essential attribute, our faculty of reason, whereas painting makes a dangerous appeal to the senses, others – especially the Neoplatonic thinker Pico della Mirandola – asserted that a picture is an incarnation of the word, a complex, emblematic sign that reveals a mystery and lures the viewer into a state of contemplation that transcends sensory acts. The latter group noted that, though it is true that language presents ideas in symbols, whereas painting presents natural signs, both provoke activities (sensing, feeling, or thinking) that are alike, inasmuch as they were all referred to (in Latin) by the same verb (*sentire*).

A concept closely tied to the notion of *ut pictura poesis* is that of *ekphrasis*. *Ekphrasis* is the rhetorical device of using an object created in one medium as the subject matter of a work in another medium. It is one of Snow's favourite devices. *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* (1970) was created through an imbrication of *ekphrastic* conversions, as paintings are turned into slides and slides into a film; *One Second in Montreal* (1969) is surely one of the simplest, most straightforward examples of *ekphrasis* in the history of art. *Untitled Slidelength's* (1969-71) slide of hands holding a rumpled, recoloured photograph of the loft used in *Wavelength* is another instance of the imbrication of *ekphrastic* transformations. *A Wooden Look* (1969), *Glares* (1973), *Light Blues* (1974), *Multiplication Table* (1977), *Door* (1979), *Midnight Blue* (1973-74), *Plus Tard* (1977), *Of a Ladder* (1971), and *8 X 10* (1969) are all demonstrations of the transformative powers of *ekphrasis*. *Cover to Cover* (1975) makes photographs the subject matter of a book; *So Is This* (1982) makes a written text (which Snow insists was mostly composed well before the filming began) the subject matter of a film.

One of Snow's uses for *ekphrasis* is to indicate the differences among the various artistic media. *One Second in Montreal* demonstrates that, when photographs are transferred to film, their temporality is transformed into the durational temporality of the cinematic medium. Similarly, *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* shows that paintings are not reproduced exactly in all their details in slides and slides are not reproduced exactly in film (and even – this being one of the implications of the odd angle the slides are filmed from, which resembles the angle of view we get in a seat off to the side and close to the front in a movie theatre or lecture hall – that film imagery is not reproduced exactly in the consciousness of the spectator); this is the reason I

described the *ekphrastic* levels as being imbricated on one another in the film.

But Snow also uses *ekphrasis* for its traditional purpose, to demonstrate that the contents of a work of art have a meaning that transcends traditional boundaries between forms and media. Modernists advocated that the forms constructed in any medium are unique to it and should exploit that medium's essential characteristics, and that the essential characteristics of any one are shared with no other medium, which committed them to the belief that the forms appropriate to each medium must differ in respect to all its essentials from those appropriate to any other medium. Moreover, the reductivist strain in modernist thought advocated the reduction of the attributes of artistic forms to those directly related to the medium's essential feature; and this, along with the belief that forms appropriate to the different media must share no essential attributes, entailed the belief that artistic forms in different media share no attributes whatsoever. But modernists also believed that the meaning of any artistic object is wholly dependent on its form. Since they had concluded that the forms appropriate to the different artistic media are different in all respects, and since they believed that the meaning of any artistic object is entirely dependent on its form, they were committed to the belief that no two artistic media (successfully used) can articulate the same meaning. Meaning cannot be transferred from one medium to another.

Ekphrastic devices have been used to argue for another theory of meaning, one whose more relaxed character Snow doubtless found congenial. The landscapes of Wordsworth's and James Thomson's poems and of Constable's and Turner's paintings are more than pure poetic or painterly constructs. They are also landscapes of meaning – meanings that resist transformation as "the image" moves from one medium to another. Among more contemporary poems, a notable example of *ekphrasis* is William Carlos Williams' compelling poem series, "Pictures from Brueghel." There are many other, more traditional examples of recent poetic works in which the writers depicts themselves as being in a gallery of pictures and examining the works displayed for revelations of great truths. The image is represented as having this power because, it is argued, being static, it can embody eternal, unchanging insights. The image, then, is used as a tool within a process of philosophical speculation.

Snow's proclivities towards philosophical rumination are obvious. As *So Is This* demonstrates, his use of *ekphrasis* as a basis, as an instrument, for philosophic examination of problems of meaning, sense, and reference, is at once both highly traditional and highly innovative.

CHAPTER 13

Idealism, Photography and the Canadian Avant-garde Cinema

The Bazinian theory of cinema is in many respects built upon the structural framework of Hegel's philosophical system. Hegel argued that, while there is such a phenomenon as natural beauty, the beauty of artworks is of a higher order, for in artworks beauty involves the Spirit's manifesting itself to itself. Admittedly Bazin responded more to natural beauty and argued that benefits result from artists' – or, at least, photographers' and cinematographers' – self-effacement before reality. Still, Hegel's views on art could be modified to accommodate this difference; one could do so by incorporating into the Hegelian system views like those of Teilhard de Chardin that in the evolutionary process nature is developing towards self-consciousness (the noösphere).

For Bazin, as for Hegel, the aesthetic experience, including the cinematic, is a type of ontological experience. He argued that as long as the construction of the image or the linguistic operations of montage do not interfere with our appreciation of the image, the experience of film opens us to the Real within the real itself. Thus, in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," he wrote "Just as dramatic tension has no artistic value, the perfection of a reproduction is not to be identified with beauty. It constitutes rather the prime matter, so to speak, on which the artistic fact is recorded."¹

For Bazin, the greatest danger of the montage film is not that it encourages an analytic rather than an intuitive mode of apprehending reality, but that it sunders the integrity of reality whose harmony is the primary evidence of the meaning and truth of nature.² Thus he claimed, "It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the objective world, here a reflection on a damp sidewalk, there the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love."³

Bazin celebrated the photograph primarily for the method by which it is produced; the photograph, he points out, is the product of a natural process and so manifests the creativity of nature. In "The Ontology of the Photo-

The notes to Chapter 13 begin at page 434.

graphic Image," Bazin states, "By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist."⁴ And again, in discussing the power of photography to manifest the beauty of this creative power, he writes: "All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence. Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty."⁵ He even spoke of the photographic process as being capable of rescuing things from their fall into time:

Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model.⁶

The transfer of reality in the photographic process, Bazin regarded as a complex and mysterious spiritual process. He even drew a comparison between a photograph and the Holy Shroud of Turin to make the point that each preserves a spiritual essence for all time.⁷

Bazin is generally – and incorrectly – typecast as a positivist realist. A good positivist realist would not, as Bazin did, see the material world's most important role as the realm where the spiritual makes itself manifest. He makes his position on the nature of reality very clear in comments he made on surrealism, whose affinities to the photographic vision he was one of the first to recognize: "For him [the surrealist], the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear. Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact."⁸

The surrealists, as surrealist novelist and polemicist André Breton proclaimed, wanted "to make manifest something that was latent to reality," to reveal the marvellous, the mysterious, the wonderful of a sur-reality. Bazin shows that he shares some common ground with them in the penultimate sentence of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image": "the photograph allows us ... to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love...."

Bazin's aesthetic theories, however, are notoriously conservative. Not only did Bazin have little interest in avant-garde film, he had little concern for modern forms of painting and music and preferred traditional forms of

fiction. Most theorists of the avant-garde do not share Bazin's degree of faith in the revelatory powers of the photograph.

In the history of avant-garde film, up to the end of the 1960s at least, there were two major lines of thought on the nature of the photographic image and on the relationship between photography and film. Both originated in the earliest period of avant-garde film and are associated with specific schools of innovative filmmaking: one with graphic cinema, which began with the work of Viking Egging, Hans Richter and Walther Ruttmann and continues in the work of Peter Kubelka, the early Robert Breer, and with some qualifications, Paul Sharits; and the other with what may be called phenomenological cinema, which includes the earlier impressionist and surrealist cinema and continues in the work of Sidney Peterson, Stan Brakhage, and a host of Brakhage's disciples in the 1960s.⁹

Graphic Cinema

The graphic cinema movement was motivated by a desire to extend the spatial strategies developed by the Cubists and Futurists into the temporal realm. Along with other artists, graphic filmmakers battled against a pictorial system of linear perspective inherited from the painters of the Renaissance. Egging, Richter, Ruttmann, and in a more limited way, Fernand Léger repudiated what many conceived to be the real glory of the cinematic apparatus, its ability to present an illusory, haptic space and movements through it.

Such debilitatingly conventional forms of construction as the linear and volumetric ratio prescribed by the system of Renaissance perspective were believed to have their origins, at least in the case of cinema, in the technology that produces them. Filmmakers like Egging, Richter, and Ruttmann proposed to use the apparatus in ways it was not designed to be used, in contexts that allowed the artist to intervene in the shaping of the images and to counter the technological disposition of the machine.¹⁰ Animation was the mode of production these filmmakers chose.

Egging and Richter employed a three-fold strategy to overcome the natural disposition of the apparatus to furnish an illusory haptic space. First, they reduced the forms within the frame to geometric shapes that would coincide with the picture plane for the whole of their surfaces. Second, they incorporated these elementary plastic shapes into musical forms of construction, which made use of such figures of movement as repetition, inversion, variation, elaboration, alternation.¹¹ Finally, they applied rhythmic principles in the cinema.

This last tactic was used partly for the same reasons that forms of construction based on musical figures of movement were used to eliminate referentiality from the work. Rhythmic structures are structures whose relations are purely internal; they make no reference to the external world. In his

writings, Richter points out that avoiding referentiality eliminates from the experience of the work sentiments imported (through associations with the objects depicted) from the world outside the work of art.

This idea is a familiar one because it is the central idea in Edward Bullough's key paper in modernist aesthetics, "Psychical Distance in the Arts."¹² The next step in Richter's argument, however, is somewhat less familiar. Having remarked on the metronomic, clock-like nature of rhythm, Richter goes on to say that the elimination of imported sentiments produces a sense of pure time. As far back as Kant, a consecutive, continuous temporality was considered essential to the unproblematic perception of objects. It is hardly surprising, then, that the early modernists revealed unthought-of complications and contradictions in temporality as an important stratagem for effecting the dislocation of the aesthetic subject from what had previously been thought to be an immutable and unproblematic relation to aesthetic objects. In the works of Cubist and Futurist painters, and especially in that central work of our cultural era, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, the relation of the artistic construct to its subject matter has been made problematic by the use of a reformed temporality, one which has converted time from a linear-causal structure to a multiple, non-consecutive, non-progressive matrix of relations. Richter proposed to employ a similar stratagem in film construction.

The notion that the mission of cinema is to shape time eventually became a key idea in the history of the aesthetics of avant-garde film. Paradoxically, it not only motivated the development of the techniques of the graphic cinema but also foreshadowed the demise of the forms of construction based on musical and choreographic means of organizing film time. But before then Austrian filmmaker-theorist Peter Kubelka appeared and rigorously reworked the issues and ideas first announced by Egging, Richter, and Ruttman.

Although Kubelka's films are very well known and well regarded (Brahage has called him "the world's greatest filmmaker"), his ideas on film theory are not well known; he refuses to publish them, believing that the written word cannot describe the actual experience of a film and that gesture and intonation are integral to the expression of his ideas.¹³ Like Richter, Kubelka is convinced that the cinema is a means for organizing time:

I had studied music and knew about the rhythmic structures of music and I know about the fantastic enjoyment of *time* with which music grips. But in cinema there was nothing. When you regard the time in which films take place (a normal story-telling film, good or bad), it is a time which has no form; it's very amorphous. So I wished to create a thing which could establish for my eyes a harmonic time as music establishes a harmonic, rhythmic, a measured time for the ears.¹⁴

He is insistent that the material basis of the film medium establishes the basis for organizing that material in rhythmic patterns:

I saw the film strip, I looked at it and saw the slight changes between images, and then some series of images I liked. Then I realized what is now a very clear fact; that film in itself is already organized into a one beat rhythm. It is one image after the other image, it is already there when you make the film strip. The projector has a regular speed. Thus they are projected at a completely regular speed, which makes it fantastic, since it calls for a rhythmic treatment. Cinema is already rhythmic in its basic appearance. I decided I would introduce measure in time, which had been in music for hundreds and thousands of years.¹⁵

Many film theorists have tightly tied together this triangular relationship between the points of time, rhythm, and cinematic essence, but none more than Kubelka. Even in their radicalness, however, his theories are rooted in the terrain staked out by the early theorists and practitioners of the graphic cinema movement.

Peter Kubelka's Theory and Practice

One aspect of Kubelka's theories particularly unites him with the earlier graphic filmmakers-theorists, his views on the nature of the photograph and on the proper relationship between photography and film. At one point he told students at New York University: "This whole argument is directed against the belief in photography and the value of reporting the real world. What I say that you must do in cinema is not try to report or bring the real world – to use the qualities of the cinematographic camera to mirror the real world, but that you have to articulate as you do when you talk or draw."¹⁶

Kubelka had earlier defined "articulation" as the deliberate juxtaposition of individual elements. What he is protesting against here is the all-at-once quality of a photograph that captures preformed relations in a flash, rather than forming the relations it embodies through some constructive, artistic process or the exercise of what Coleridge referred to as the artist's "esemplastic powers." He goes on to modify this position a little by admitting that some modification of pre-existent relations, some articulation, does occur in the process of making a photograph. However, he still insists that relations inherent in reality play the major role in constituting a photograph: "The danger in filmmaking is in that people think that bringing nature to someone is useful.... When you draw it's evident that no two drawings are ever alike. But when you make photographs, and you stand where I stand ... then the photographs are practically alike. This factor is rather strong in photography because this machine has a strong articulation of its own, which is not desirable, which we have to remove."¹⁷

Nothing could be further removed from Bazin's view that photography's glory consists in its ability to capture the world without the photographer playing any role. But Bazin was more conservative in his aesthetic tastes, and he was most fond of artists who made representational images. Kubelka's models are those artists who were advancing the cause of abstraction. When

Kubelka speaks out against photography, claiming that a photograph can only capture pre-existent relationships, his comments resemble Roger Fry's argument that only when artists have complete control over all relations in a visual form are they truly free to exercise their form-making skills to the hilt and that any constraints on the formation of those relationships, such as are involved in representation, limit that freedom so essential to the artist. And when he criticizes the apparatus – the machine – for imposing its determinations on the pictorial form it produces, he is really advancing an expressionist argument which motivated one version of abstraction. But Kubelka develops this argument in a highly original way. The photograph, he tells us, is incapable of conveying what he calls "the real reality," the world as it exists objectively.

What, then, is the value of photography? To illustrate his answer, Kubelka compares a photograph of a tree taken by a student photographer with his own photograph of the same tree. "Now let's compare what's in this photograph with the real tree. Everyone will agree that the green is in no case the green of the tree. Where have these two photographs real value? They have value in that they distinguish a little bit of him [the student photographer] from me. So they say something not about the tree, but about him and me."¹⁸ Art is valuable as personal expression. But Kubelka's view is stronger than that. Art, even so-called abstract art, is representational, according to Kubelka, inasmuch as it represents the contents of the maker's inner world. He states: "When I want to make a film I think I want to document something about life, about reality, about what is going on. And I want, let's say, to make a picture of nature."¹⁹ But, he says, it is impossible to make a film about nature, about "the real reality." The world cannot be seen objectively, because perceiving and forming concepts are subjective processes. "Every artist tries to mirror the world, because what he thinks of as the world is his own world. You see I don't say, 'I want to mirror my world' – what is my world? I say, 'I want to mirror the world' and then it's my world anyway. There is no painting which is mirroring the world. Every painting talks."²⁰

Kubelka continues his argument by redefining the term "objective" in the way that all idealists finally must.²¹ He argues that because everything is ultimately subjective, if the term "objective" is to have any reference, it must apply to accurate renderings of subjective processes. Hence films that truly capture a subjective world are objective and merit being called documentaries. Describing his flicker film, *Arnulf Rainer*, he says: "Every painter tries to discover objective reality. But what is for me, objective, may not be for you. My *Arnulf Rainer* film is a documentary: it is an objective film; it is a world where there is lightning twenty-four times a second, let's say."²² Kubelka's films (at least his early films) tend towards abstraction, and some in fact make no use whatsoever of photographic imagery.

These ideas about the nature of a photograph provide the foundation for

Kubelka's theory of aesthetic value and specifically for his notion of the value of artistic representation: "You have to see everything as your reality. The world which you see, nobody else sees. So you can see my world doesn't exist for you, if I cannot build an image of my world. Then my world may become your world, or your world may change after seeing my world."²³

The ideas that any artistic construction – even a so-called abstract formal work – is representational, that all art is documentary, that the function of art is to overcome the solipsism implied in the Subjective Idealists' view that there is no common reality, and that we are all trapped within the circles of our individual consciousnesses, were all taken up by Stan Brakhage. Brakhage frequently speaks even of musical compositions as documentaries which capture events taking place in the consciousness of composers.

Kubelka evinces great ambivalence about the concept of representation. On the one hand, he condemns artists' aspirations to provide an accurate representation of nature as epistemologically naïve and aesthetically worthless. On the other, he does not believe pure abstraction to be valuable in itself. He considers art to be necessarily representational, but believes that its value results not from what it reveals about the world but from the expression of subjectivity.

Eisenstein's Theory

Soviet montage theorists shared a similar ambivalence about abstraction. Their views too were caught between opposing poles of realism and formalism. For instance, Eisenstein emphasizes time and again in his theoretical writings that montage qualitatively alters the content of the shot. He states, for example, that "the result [of montage] is qualitatively distinguishable from each component element viewed separately," and "the whole is different from the sum of its parts." The shot is equivalent to the substance of reality in Eisenstein's theory. "The minimum 'distortable' fragment of nature is the shot," he writes and later alludes to "the lawful necessity of combining *these fragments of reality*." Eisenstein insisted that the shot (the moving photograph) stubbornly resists efforts at aesthetic transformation. He speaks of "the shot's tendency toward complete factual immutability [that] is rooted in its very nature"; of the shot being "more resistant than granite."²⁴ He, in fact, stresses that it is this immutability, this resistance to aesthetic transformation, that is the feature that distinguishes the material of film from the material of other artistic media.²⁵ The greater degree of immutability of the shot, in comparison with music pitches, pigments, or even words, is a consequence of its being "less neutral in meaning."²⁶ Eisenstein means by this that meaning is inherent in the shot because of its factual character as a reproduction of nature.

One of the fundamental notions of Eisenstein's aesthetic theory, a notion that reveals the influence formalist ideas had on the development of his

thought, is that the only relations that can have aesthetic value are relations either among parts of the work or between a part of the work and the whole. An image's fidelity to reality, therefore, can never be aesthetically relevant, for only pattern – form – is of aesthetic importance.

Photography is only important as a mechanical system of generating the material of film, and it does this by capturing reality.²⁷ "Photography is a system of reproduction to fix real events and elements of actuality."²⁸ Though Eisenstein never really offers a critical analysis of the photograph, he talks as though photography involved a simple transfer of reality from nature to the film material, and so does not achieve the status of art. The cinema's means for transforming a non-artistic fragment of reality (a photograph) into art is montage. Montage allows the filmmaker to sever the relation of the shot (and the sequence) to reality by establishing a new formal ligature between shots and to emphasize relations that are internal to the sequence itself and that have no extrinsic reference.

In Eisenstein's view, the shot (the photograph) is the material of film, the stuff of which a film is made. As with all artistic media, the nature of this material determines the way it will be handled and the forms that will be constructed from it. In the case of film, it is the immutability of the individual shot, its near – but not quite – total resistance to aesthetic transformation that predicates the use of montage as a device of aesthetic reformation; because the film shot is so resolutely factual, the cinema demands a particularly powerful means for effecting aesthetic transformation: "The shot's tendency toward complete factual immutability is rooted in its nature. This resistance has largely determined the richness and variety of montage forms and styles – for montage becomes the mightiest means for a really important creative remoulding of nature."²⁹

Eisenstein admits (an admission essential to his argument that cinema should be viewed as high art) that montage processes are utilized in all of the arts. To explain the uniqueness of film's use of montage, he develops an argument based on Hegel's claim that when quantitative change reaches a certain threshold magnitude, it becomes qualitative change: "The frame is much less independently workable than the word or the sound. Therefore the mutual work of frame and montage is really an enlargement in scale of a process microscopically inherent in all arts. However, in the film this process is raised to such a degree that it seems to acquire a new quality."³⁰

The verisimilitude of the photograph, according to Eisenstein, is a negative feature that is transformed into a positive feature only when photographs enter into dialectical relations with one another through the process of montage. The photograph's bond to reality is itself devoid of aesthetic value; the peculiar strength of that bond renders the photograph especially resistant to attempts to transform the individual shot into an aesthetically valuable object. It was this very strength of the photograph's relation to

reality and its nearly complete resistance to aesthetic reformation – a resistance raised to such a degree in photography that it becomes a defining characteristic of the medium – that elevated to the highest degree of development that most powerful of aesthetic devices, montage. The non-aesthetic character of the photograph is transformed into a virtue through its dialectical relation to the aesthetically potent device of montage.

But montage can accomplish the work of aesthetic transformation only by dissolving the relation of the shot to reality and creating new, formal relations that substitute for that extrinsic relation. Eisenstein's view of the manner in which montage operates resembles the Cubist's view of the way in which the juxtaposition of multiple points of view on real objects could attenuate the depictive dimension of a work of art and convert it into a construction in which the most significant relations are internal relations. In fact, Eisenstein's entire account of the function of form resembles that offered by the Cubists, according to whom aesthetic pleasure results from witnessing what seemed too intractable, too raw, too uncontrollable being brought within the scope of aesthetic form. Thus arises the irony of Cubism. In attempting to depict perception as accurately as possible, in refusing to allow certain conventions of pictorial representation to delimit the aspects of a perception that could be depicted to those that could be depicted on a single flat surface, in insisting on accommodating the entire contents of our consciousness of an object or scene in their imagery, the Cubists had pushed naturalism to its limit and beyond and arrived at the antithesis of naturalism – two-dimensional, abstract art. Present in the art of the Cubists is Eisenstein's dialectical conversion through which the most resolutely non-aesthetic material – faithful renderings of the real itself, indeed in some instances in Cubist collage, actual fragments of the real – is pushed to its furthest extreme and turns into its opposite, an autonomous formal structure which possesses aesthetic significance. Eisenstein was likely aware of this fact, for neither his films nor his drawings are Constructivist in a pure thoroughgoing way; rather, they exhibit features of the hybrid style of Cubo-Constructivism. And certainly Eisenstein's view of the photograph seems to be that it is eminently amenable to his process of dialectical conversion.

In the 1950s, American avant-garde filmmaker Bruce Conner began developing a form of film often known as collage film, which seems to be based on related ideas about the function of montage. Like Eisenstein's "intellectual montage," Conner's form of film construction (at least, in those based on montage, for some exploit features of the single shot) seems based on a two-stage process. Individual shots are converted to emblems by abstracting them from their context. Thus a shot of a mushroom cloud becomes an emblem for destruction. These emblematic shots are then joined together in a complex montage in which the internal relations become at least as important as the external.

Germaine Dulac

The second line of thought in the avant-garde cinema concerning the nature of the photographic image and the relation between the film and photographic media emerged from what may be called phenomenological cinema, a cinema devoted to examining the operations of consciousness, particularly consciousness functioning in extreme states, as it does under the influence of mad love, drugs, psychosis, regression, imaginative inspiration, or under those states involved in dreaming or free associating. The phenomenological cinema relied on photographic illusionism to provide a likeness – or at least an analogue – of mental imagery. Montage was frequently relied on to furnish the antithetical moment; it was often used, as in *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), to render photographic illusionism problematic.

Though the place of the image was secured by the phenomenological filmmaker's aspiration towards the mimesis of consciousness, the fact that it was not material reality these films endeavoured to imitate but mental processes, did mean that the spatial field of the ordinary, representational image supplied by the camera was all but useless (for their purposes) and so had to be transformed. This was necessary in order to establish that the imagery used in the film represented subjective processes, not objective facts, and to distinguish the subjective processes represented in these films from those involved in ordinary perception, which are represented by conventional (undistorted) camera imagery.

Among those who championed the phenomenological cinema and helped formulate its theory was Germaine Dulac. According to the first principle of her theory of cinema, the object of cinematic mimesis belongs to the subjective, not the objective realm: "The character is not the centre of importance in a scene, but the relationship of images to one another, and as in every art it is not the external fact which is really interesting, it is the emanation from within, a certain movement of things and people, viewed through a state of the soul. Is that not the essence of the seventh art?"³¹

In "The Essence of Cinema: The Visual Idea," Dulac distinguishes between the static arts, such as sculpture and painting, which strive to reproduce an instant, and the dynamic arts, such as literature and music, which strive to give expression to the interior movement of thoughts and feelings. Holding the view that things that exist in space belong to a realm external to consciousness while things that exist in time belong to the internal world, she was led to conclude that the spatial arts provide an image of the external world while the arts of time provide impressions emanating from our inner life.³² Thus, the novel is "the revelation of ideas which succeed one another," poetry reflects "successive impressions" and is constructed by contrasting and linking together "sensations, states of the soul." Because films have a temporal dimension, she argued, they too deal with the interior realm. Hence, the cinema is a means of expression. It is not an art whose virtue is the

accuracy with which it records the external world; it is, rather, a rich new means of expression capable of as many levels of intricacy as harmonic music.

Her notion that cinema is an art of time and movement led her to question how important film's photographic basis really is. "Photography," she wrote, "is nothing but a means of expression for it [the cinema], its pen and ink, not its thought."³³ This claim argues against the idea the cinema's photographic basis determines its mission, demanding that it devote itself to the redemption of physical reality. She believed that the photograph is only the cinema's means, not its end. Filmmakers are as free to remould the spatial field the lens constructs as a writer is to forge new syntactical relations. She expressed doubt whether the material from which a film is made is the photograph or whether it is light, and once even stated that the cinema is constituted by moving, changing light. Behind Dulac's argument that the cinema's nature is not determined by the nature of the photograph lies her conviction that, if it were, interiority would be eliminated from the cinema, that the objective character of the photograph would condemn the cinema to merely providing representations of the external world. She may have found the idea that the material of film is light appealing because light is a metaphor for the power of consciousness to illuminate beings.

"The Essence of Cinema" was originally published in 1925. In an essay published seven years later, "The Avant-Garde Cinema," Dulac went further and discussed the reasons why filmmakers felt compelled to alter the character of the spatial field which the apparatus usually furnishes:

Before long [filmmakers] thought of photographing the unexpressed, the invisible, the imponderable, the human soul, the visual "suggestive" emerging from the precision of photography. Above the facts, a line of feelings was sketched out, harmonic, dominating people and things.

And from this the psychological film logically emerged. It seemed childish to put a character in a given situation without evoking the realm of his interior life, and so they add to his movement [his overt behaviour] the perception of his thoughts, his feelings, his sensations [his subjective world]. With the addition to the bare facts of the drama, the description of the multiple and contradictory impressions in the course of an action – the facts no longer existing in themselves, but becoming the consequence of a moral state – a duality imperceptibly entered, a duality which, to remain in equilibrium, adapted itself to the cadence of a rhythm, to the dynamism and pace of the images.³⁴

By the time she wrote this article, Dulac had come to believe that the precision of the photograph could provide an objective base upon which forms that depict the operation of consciousness could be constructed, or from which, as she put it, "a visual suggestive" could emerge. According to this

later conception, the cinema is basically an amalgam of objective and subjective features. But, she went on to argue, if the makers of phenomenological film are to overcome the resolute facticity of photography, they must be able to refashion the photograph's spatial field so that the photograph clearly represents impressions and subjective states and not objective reality. The makers of phenomenological films must take charge of the character of the representation, altering its apparently natural, scientific objectivity so that its subjective component could reveal itself.

Sidney Peterson's Views

Dulac ushered in a line of American filmmakers who, withough foregoing representational practices (inasmuch as they relied on representations to present a likeness of mental imagery), insisted that the space of a representation must be invented by the filmmakers, not determined by either convention or the characteristics of the apparatus. It was Sidney Peterson who was largely responsible for developing an American version of these ideas. Peterson's work and sensibility are those of a native American surrealist. Many of his films chronicle the picaresque adventures of a wacky protagonist and use disjunctive editing strategies to construct new time and space relations so as to induce a kind of *dépaysement*. But perhaps their best known feature is the use of distorted, funhouse mirror-images, which he created by shooting with an anamorphic lens. In *The Dark of the Screen* (1980), his book of lighthearted but profound reflections on cinema, Peterson remarks:

One historian of anamorphoses (Leeman) points to the etymological origin of the word – from the Greek for *again* plus *shape* – as indicating the role the spectator must play in reforming the picture for himself. It is the most subjective of all the branches of linear perspective.

Hence the possibility of its metaphorical use to emphasize the subjectivity of the viewing process....

... One small symptom of this revolt [against rationalism] is to be found in the widespread use of the word "like," as in the *Ursprache* of "Like ... you know ... real." There is no reality, only something like it. From the point of view of photography, the likeness has supplanted the subject.... Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, finds in the Freudian confrontation with the unconscious, as distinguished from the way "all the human sciences advance toward the unconscious only with their back to it," another symptom of this same revolt, and the Surrealists add a dimension to the struggle by not only confronting the unconscious but by attempting to colonize it. It is this attempt to colonize that relates pictures like *The Lead Shoes* to the dream and to an emergent and, so to say, open-ended *episteme*.³⁵

Peterson here proposes an epistemology based on irrationalism, whose mechanisms, he claims, were explored in his own film *The Lead Shoes* (1949). In his films, he investigates extreme states of consciousness, and the primary tool of his epistemology of irrationalism is the photographic image distorted and transformed to register the impact of those states. Peterson seems to believe that to carry this epistemological investigation to its proper end, the filmmaker's imagery with has to be extremely malleable, extremely plastic – as alterable as are the images that appear in consciousness. Artists must have complete control over the spatial field of the image.

Peterson has only recently returned to filmmaking. The first phase of his involvement in innovational filmmaking only lasted from 1947 to 1949, but he completed five works, nearly all acknowledged masterpieces. Not long after withdrawing from filmmaking, he handed his anamorphic lens to Stan Brakhage, the most significant heir of the Petersonian tradition. Though Brakhage eliminated many of the ironic features of that tradition, along with much of its surrealism, he accepted the idea that film is the mimesis of consciousness and that, in order to achieve an accurate representation of consciousness, the filmmaker must take complete charge of the image's spatial field. This belief about the mission of cinema is the source of his pronouncements on the creative struggle of the filmmaker, as is his recognition of the resistance of photographic apparatus to the efforts of the filmmaker to produce anything other than a single type of pictorial space (the type bequeathed by the Renaissance and by now utterly conventional).

For Brakhage, artmaking entails moral responsibility. He sees the present as dominated by inhuman forces of technology and as profoundly anti-individualistic. He suggests that art is the last refuge of the personal in an increasingly impersonal world. Even perception, he insists, is standardized by cultural experience. If art is to have any value, it must revitalize the personal and unique way of perceiving. Brakhage attempts to achieve this in his own art by using it to "re-member" his own personal and unique way of experiencing the world. And, he believes, to achieve this, the spatial system "built into" the camera apparatus, must be defeated, for that spatial system not only is highly conventional (representing the standardized way of seeing), but embodies the scientific world-view that prevailed during the Quattrocento. Brakhage's films amount to a catalogue of devices for "deforming" that spatial system and capturing the way he – a very myopic (in fact, half-blind) individual – sees.

Against the Petersonian View: Maya Deren

Maya Deren's beliefs about the proper relations between the photographic and film media oppose those of the advocates of phenomenological cinema. Like most of those who flourished in the period of early American modernism, Deren believed that each medium has its own unique properties which

artists must exploit. Deren claimed that the properties of film derived from the camera and that the impartiality and clarity of the lens – its precise fidelity to the aspect and texture of physical matter – is the first contribution of the camera.

Deren was consciously opposing the view of filmmakers like Egging and Richter, and later Kubelka, who advocated minimizing the role the photograph plays in the determination of film forms. She was willing to identify her adversaries; her major theoretical statement "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" (1960) opens by questioning the underlying ideas of "the graphic arts school of animated film."³⁶ The major thrust of her attack, however, was saved for "Petersonian filmmakers," those who use "distorting lenses, multiple superimpositions, etc. ... to simulate the creative action of the eye, the memory etc." Her basis for criticizing this type of film is her conviction that "such well-intentioned efforts to use the medium creatively, by forcibly inserting the creative act in the position it traditionally occupies in the visual arts, accomplish, instead, the destruction of the photographic image as reality." The photographic image, she proclaimed "is the building block for the creative use of the medium." She arrived at this position by considering what features film, among all the arts, uniquely possesses, not what features it has in common with music, painting, or fiction. She discovered that the photographic image has an ontological status that amongst images, it alone possesses. Other sorts of images – paintings, sketches, sculpture – have no necessary relation with the real world; what they imitate are ideas, not things: "A painting is not, fundamentally, a likeness or image of a horse; it is a likeness of a mental concept which may resemble a horse or which may, as in abstract painting, bear no visible relation to any real object."

Deren understood the activity of making works of art in the traditional, non-photographic media as a process with several distinguishable stages: first, the model for the image is observed, then a concept is formed, then this concept is embodied in a material medium. The emergent image undergoes change in each stage of the process and becomes increasingly different from its model. Deren described how reality is first filtered through the selectivity of individual interests and modified by "prejudicial perception." It becomes experience and is then combined with similar contrasting or modifying experiences, both forgotten and remembered, which become assimilated into a conceptual image. This in turn is subjected to the modification by "the art instrument." What finally emerges is a plastic image that is a reality in its own right.

Deren's discussion of the nature of art is similar to Kubelka's. Both believed that art imitates mental entities, not real things. Both affirmed that these mental entities are formed through complex processes and are highly individual, and that works of art help people share the perceptions, sensations, feelings, and thoughts of other individuals. Both believed that all art is documentary because it imitates actually existent entities, even though

these entities belong to the subjective, not the objective realm; and since no art really represents actual objects, there is no direct connection between an image and any object in the real world.

But unlike Kubelka, Deren did not accept the idea that these propositions are – or should be – true of film. Photographic images (which are the basis of cinema) are different, she claimed. Like Bazin, she spoke of photography as “a process by which an object creates its own image.”³⁷ Alluding to the ontological bond that relates a photographic image to its real-world model, she remarked, “If realism is the term for a graphic image which precisely simulates some real object, then a photograph must be differentiated from it as a *form of reality itself*.” And later, “As a reality, the photographic image confronts us with the innocent arrogance of an objective fact, one which exists as an independent presence, indifferent to our response.”³⁸

These were the grounds of her objections to the photographic and cinematic rhetoric that made use of distortions of the space of representation. “While the [photographic] process permits some intrusion by the artist as a modifier of that image,” she writes, “the limits of its tolerance can be defined as that point at which the original reality becomes unrecognizable or is irrelevant....”³⁹ Deren claimed that exponents of the phenomenological tradition have transgressed this line, a belief at the heart of her assertion that “such well-intentioned efforts to use the medium creatively ... accomplish, instead, the destruction of the photographic image as reality.”

Deren’s belief that “photography is a process by which an object creates its own image by the action of its light on light-sensitive materials” implies a kenotic view of the role of filmmakers-photographers. Sometimes she was willing to accept this view and so claimed with Bazin that filmmakers must efface themselves to allow the mysteries to manifest themselves through the filmmakers. This is implicit in her contention that though other visual images embody meanings, photographs provide a trace of the actual presence of objects. But she makes explicit her belief that this is the proper role for filmmakers when she states that photography “thus presents a closed circuit precisely at the point where, in the traditional art forms, the creative process takes place as reality passes through the artist. This exclusion of the artist at that point is responsible ... for the absolute fidelity of the photographic process....”⁴⁰

Deren, however, exhibited an uneasiness about adopting any position that implied that filmmakers-photographers exercise little or no influence on the final shape that their work assumes. Her well-known attacks on the surrealists were based on the belief that the use of automatic processes, which she believed to be the hallmark of the surrealist method, entailed a total abandonment of the artists’ aesthetic-moral responsibility to exercise their individual control over their creative production. This leads Deren to hedge a bit at times, as she did when she proposed the notion of “controlled accident,” the idea that photography involves a “delicate balance” between

features which artists control and features which arise "spontaneously" as a result of the "independent life of actuality."⁴¹

More often, however, she argued that filmmakers are constrained by the nature of their medium and thus cannot distort reality excessively. But, she asked herself, if artmaking depends upon artists being free to reshape materials drawn from reality how can film be art? What filmmaking has in common with other forms of artmaking, according to Deren, is that it involves a compositional process of joining parts with one another to make new wholes. This process does not deform the spatial field of the image; rather it creates new relations between points in time (by juxtaposing shots originating from different moments in time). In a statement that resembles an aspect of Michael Snow's view of the cinema, she announced: "The creative action in film, then, takes place in its time dimension; and for this reason the motion picture, though composed of spatial images, is primarily *a time form*."

Romanticism, Hegel and the Underpinnings of a Canadian Attitude Towards Photography

According to Nietzsche, the most characteristic quality of the modern individual is "the strange contrast between an inner life to which nothing outward corresponds and an outward existence unrelated to what is within."⁴³ Nietzsche's remark, a pithy summing up of the modern paradigm, contains a good measure of truth. For nearly two centuries, art has been torn between two desires. On the one hand, artists have attempted to bring art into an accord with the rationalistic spirit of the age. This desire motivated the development of such artistic movements as realism, naturalism, the psychological drama, *chosophie*, (Brechtian) anti-illusionism and such anti-Romantic movements as Futurism and Constructivism. On the other hand, there has been a tendency to divorce artworks from any relation whatsoever to the natural world and to separate the creative imagination from rational thought. Associated with this split is another – the split between truth and beauty. In the modern understanding, truth is unlovely and beauty is devoid of all truth. The tragic situation of modern art is that neither truth nor beauty is alone sufficient for a work of art and yet artists must choose one or the other, for they cannot have both.

The attempt to bring art in line with rationalism is driven by our culture's tendency to overvalue reason and scientific modes of thought. Nietzsche had the most trenchant comment: "One is indeed led to believe that our particular happiness does not spring from what really is but from our *understanding of reality*.... The artists of our century willy-nilly glorify scientific attitudes." The attempt to keep the creative imagination separate derives from a longing for a kind of aesthetic *gnosis* that would lead to an imaginative apocalypse in which the world would be seen for what it really is, as mere vanity and altogether without value.⁴⁴ This view sees art as the only thing of worth and even

art as worthy only insofar as the poetic imagination leads the ego beyond the perception of transitory particulars towards a vision of pure forms.

The artists of the Romantic era took as urgent the task of overcoming this split, which is why the Romantic movement not only exemplified the modern paradigm but also represented a turning point, deflecting the historical process towards the postmodern paradigm. Evidence of this can be found in Schiller's theory of a universal poetry. The foundations of this theory are quite similar to those of Hegel's aesthetic theory, for the ideal involved infusing all human activity with the poetic spirit in order to convert the products of all human endeavour, including science, psychology, and politics, into a form of poetry. Even the world itself would be poeticized; it would cease to be alien, and would become a reflection of human reality and perhaps even would come to embody human reality.

Hegel praised what he termed "classical art," which he viewed as the culminating moment in the history of art, as that phase in the development of artistic form when spirit and ordinary matter were brought together in as indissoluble a unity as is possible, that phase when form and content were as nearly identified with one another as they can ever be. Hegel's view of art was an incarnational view; it saw art as the product of Spirit's having entered into the body of the world and having become perfectly reconciled with it. But, Hegel believed, if art reconciles Spirit and the body of the world, aesthetic theory must overcome the hobbling dualisms of previous artistic theories – appearance and reality, the sensuous and the rational, truth and beauty, the particular and the universal, image and idea, content and form, meaning and structure, matter and spirit, outside and inside, subject and object. His aesthetic would accomplish this by demonstrating that art is the middle between these opposites, that it reconciles the differences, bringing them into harmony and balance.

Self and Other: the Undergirding of Romanticism

As D.W. Winnicott has pointed out, an important paradox emerges anew for each developing individual as an infant, during the process of separation of infants from their mothers and from their surrounding environment. In the early stages of child development, infants do not distinguish between the environment and themselves. In the process of maturation, they learn to separate the self from the not-self, from the environment. This change has a strong psychological impact which is potentially troubling. In order to minimize the possible adverse effects mothers offer many sorts of ministrations, among them presenting infants with objects in a way that does not violate their sense of omnipotent control. For example, mothers frequently make a game of presenting some especially favoured object when their babies indicate they want it. This game has one fundamental rule: older players must never cause children to wonder whether they created or discovered the special object. Here lies the paradox: infants take pleasure in believing that,

in favouring a certain object, they create it, even while they derive comfort from knowing that it exists before they create it.

Transitional objects, to use the term coined by Winnicott, exist at the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity. They both mediate (separate) and act as a bridge between these two zones. Thus they are able to counteract the potentially damaging effects resulting from the process by which infants separate from the external world.

In this intermediate zone, infants initially seem to experience living as opposed to mere existing, for it is here that for the first time they act creatively. Though they deal with physical objects, what they do with them is intensely personal, something fresh and never before experienced. Babies transcend the physical world, which becomes a construct of the imagination. In this intermediate zone, children learn about the powers of the imagination. These ideas are useful in alleviating some of the critical confusions surrounding the work of Jack Chambers.

Chambers' Art: The Amalgam of Subjectivity and Objectivity

One confusion focuses on Chambers' status as a realist painter, as a painter who strives to present an accurate description of the world. The other focuses on the notion that in 1968 Chambers' work underwent an abrupt change. Chambers' works divide into several periods, each of which is significantly different, but there is no single major turning point in his career. Rather, there is a series of developments, characterized by recurrent transformation and renewal. In 1962, Chambers abandoned the expressionist style in which he painted through the 1950s – examples from this period include *Self-Portrait No. 2* (1952), *Umbrella* (1954), and *Man and Landscape* (1960) – and began to produce works which incorporated imagery derived from photographs. These were subtly toned pictures and often depicted a figure standing isolated in a space it does not appear to fit. Two examples are *Sunday Morning, No. 1* (1963) and *Olga Visiting Graham* (1964). In 1966 he painted the daring silver paintings, in which he created a highly reflective, nearly monochrome surface that appears to reverse its tonal value (blacks becoming whites and vice versa) as the viewer moves in front of it. In 1967 he did a number of constructions in which one or several painted reproductions of tightly framed photographic images of people or objects were montaged with images laid under coloured plexiglass or with pure colour fields. In 1968 he turned to the expansive, finely detailed perceptual realist works on which his popular acclaim largely rests.

Most of the writers claim that Chambers' work changed around the time he sensed he had leukemia. (He was officially informed of the illness in July 1968, though he may have suspected he was ill some time previously.) Confronted with the impending destruction of his self, it is said, Chambers let go

of it, let it dissolve. The change in his worldview was presumed to have been incarnated in a series of paintings that are direct, impersonal, objective descriptions of material reality. Barry Lord, for example, discussing Chambers' perceptual realism, writes:

Chambers has said that the knowledge that he is suffering from this lingering but almost certainly fatal blood disease reversed his ideas about art and life. "My new paintings are reality," he said. "Reality is what you see out there."

Painted on a six-by-eight-foot rectangle, *401 Towards London* proclaims more clearly and triumphantly than ever that our land and people are suitable subjects for a major work of art. No formalistic considerations are allowed to obtrude or affect the panorama in any way.

401 Towards London is national, enhancing the dignity of Canada's places and people as the subject for major painting. It is scientific, realistically portraying the very guts of the economy of southwest Ontario. And it is democratic, extolling a common scene from the daily life of work and travel of the masses of the people.⁴⁵

This argument is a familiar one: realism progresses by accommodating more and more of material reality which, according to Lord's Stalinist views, can be identified with the structures and relations of commodity production. The importance of realism is that it allows art to deal with subject matter of a non-spiritual nature.

This view has some support; Chambers himself said that he considered obsolete and dated the "license on lyricism, subjective selectivity and emotional impurities that haphazardly deform and exaggerate objective reality."⁴⁶ There is, however, far more that is doubtful in Lord's hypothesis. There is a bit of a problem with the chronology; Chambers began making perceptual realist works in 1968, before his diagnosis. More importantly, a reference to manufacturing appears only in *401 Towards London*, which hardly indicates a growing commitment to materialism. Indeed, after *401 Towards London*, Chambers turned with ever-increasing frequency to the traditional subjects of paintings: still lifes, nudes, and landscapes. He certainly did not move to embrace some form of social realism as Lord suggests. Chambers' conception of realism is very far from that of Stalinists. He wrote: "To me [realism] means to structure light so that the painting corresponds with the ping you get when waking up." And further: "Painting realistically is creating space, not subject matter. Again, I don't mean it is done through perspective or descriptive shading, but space as colour frontiers, where each colour is a dimension. The presence of recognizable objects is incidental to realism."⁴⁷

There is, as well, little support for the notion that after his diagnosis Chambers suddenly embraced the idea of death. From the very beginning, his work was haunted by the presence of death. In *Olga Visiting Graham*, done in 1964, his wife Olga is seated in a graveyard communing with the spirit of a

departed friend. *Olga Visiting Mrs. V.*, also done in 1964, reworks the traditional idea that the newborn child resurrects the spirit of its forebears. And the film *Circle* (1968-69) uses an extraordinarily simple and elegant form to express the idea that the turning of the seasons through the cycle of the year involves a death and a resurrection. Death hardly makes its presence felt for the first time in 1969. Indeed, Chambers' contracting leukemia seems one of those unhappy instances in which an artist comes to live out a fate that is foreshadowed in his art.

The strongest support for the view that Chambers' work changed course lies in his use of space. Although most of his earlier works employed some form of montage or space-fracturing device, those dating after 1968 use a single, continuous space. Just how novel, however, in the context of Chambers' *oeuvre*, is this feature of perceptual realism?

In the first works he made upon returning to Canada – for example, *Slaughter of the Lamb* (1961), *Five Shepherds* (1961-62) – Chambers frequently resolved the canvas into separate molecules of colour of varying dimensions and incorporated into a single painting figures that have only subjective and associational relationships. In the work of the years 1962 to 1965, Chambers employed a wide variety of space-fracturing devices. Sometimes, as in *Olga Visiting Graham* (1964), he distributed a number of elements of equal weight throughout the pictorial space and eschewed using any compositional form that might integrate these various elements into a closed form. Thus the individual elements relate to one another in much the same way as do discrete components in a montage construction. Sometimes, as with *Daffs* (1964-65), he placed objects, or even parts of objects, against a monochrome background which served to isolate them, so that the canvas is unified not by an organic form of unity, but by one more typical of collage. Sometimes, as with *Olga and Mary Visiting* (1964-65), he fragmented the scene to indicate the different places objects had occupied at different times. In his work of 1968-69, he created constructions that integrated a number of separate images into montages of associationally related forms (*Grass Box No. 2*, 1968-70), narratively related forms (*Regatta No. 1*, 1968), or forms that depict a single person or thing at various points of a movement (*Moving Side and Forwards*, 1967; the images arranged on a vertical strip on the right hand side of *Regatta No. 1*). What all of the space-fracturing devices and montage forms of this period have in common is that they appear to have been used to depict the activity of memory. Memory operates by bringing discrete and imperfectly recollected details into a unified and clearly apprehended whole.

In his later works, Chambers abandoned the use of such devices in favour of creating images that had a single continuous space. Generally he seems, later in his career, to have favoured compositional devices that created the effect of a greater degree of pictorial integration. Still, the montage principle did not disappear from Chambers' work in one great step, taken in 1968. Rather, it progressively diminished in importance over a period of several

years, and as it did so, another device for depicting the operation of memory grew in significance.

One of Chambers' first, and likely his best-known, perceptual realist painting is *Sunday Morning No. 2* (1968-70). Its central structure consists in the contrast between the warmth of the interior space and the coldness of the exterior. But other oppositions appear: between the directions in which the two boys face; between the television (which itself incorporates a fragment of some distant space into these images of what, corrupting Goffman, we might call a "close personal space") and the teddy bear; and between the transcendental reality suggested by the presence of the star and the concrete personal reality of the domestic scene.

Chambers certainly produced other early perceptual realist paintings (*Diego Sleeping No. 2*, 1971 and *Diego Window*, 1972-73) that embody a wide range of elements that group into pairs of opposites. This form of construction serves many of the same functions as did the space-fragmenting devices and montage forms in the earlier work, that of ensuring that pictorial space contains highly diverse, even contrasting, elements. In spite of their realism, these paintings are still to some extent based on the montage principle.

In the later perceptual realist works, there are fewer elements and weaker contrasts between them, and an even greater degree of overall pictorial harmony. *Lake Huron No. 4* (1972-76), for example, consists simply of a large flat area of blue sky on the top, with the rolling forms of cumulus clouds repeated throughout and a smaller area of nearly golden sand and shrubbery on the bottom. Acting as a bridge between the two sections is a ladder on each of two sides and a tree in the middle.

Clearly this image, like *Sunday Morning No. 2*, *Diego Sleeping No. 2*, and *Diego Window*, is built upon a form that is based on oppositions – between earth and sky, between yellow-gold and blue, between matter and spirit, between the world of nature and the heavenly realm. Nonetheless, the effect of the oppositions has become strongly attenuated. So few are the pictorial elements (indeed, the image is characterized by an almost reductive lack of diversity) and so very simple is the composition that this painting creates a strong sense of integration. The repeated use of a single motif, found in both the clouds and the shrubbery, also has a unifying effect, for it reduces nearly all the pictorial elements to a set of variations on a single form. Furthermore, the arrangement of the cumulus clouds in a pattern echoes the form which dominates the composition, the centrally placed tree.

But the diminishing use in Chambers' later work of obvious diversity or very evident structures of opposition hardly indicates a decline in interest in the processes of consciousness, for in the later perceptual realist works other features are used to embody his ideas about consciousness and the self. The later work shows a more intense interest in light and colour than in his early works. Indeed, in some of his later works, light and colour come to predominate over form to such an extent that the objects appear to be nothing more

than modulations of light. *Nude No. 4* (1974-76), for example, is a pale-toned, light-suffused image of a nude in what appears to be the artist's studio. More remarkable are a series of still lifes – *African Violets No. 1* (1975-76), *Lilacs No. 2* (1976-77) – and the marvellous *Oranges* (1976-77), all of which are painted with a reduced palette of pale, closely related tones and which use very delicate and subtle shading and modelling to produce the effect of the objects seemingly about to dissolve into light. (Indeed, these objects seem to have their being in light.) The close tones of colours and the general softness of the image create a highly integrated pictorial space.

Thus the interest in light (which was always conspicuous among Chambers' artistic concerns) increased when Chambers began producing artworks using unitary structures rather than structures that reconcile opposition. Chambers' ideas seem to have to have been developing along the line of emanationist philosophers like Robert Grosseteste who in the thirteenth century argued that from the first form (*lux*), every subsequent form, accidental or substantial, is generated, and that, because all existing things have a common first form and first matter, all things are one. Chambers, like Grosseteste, believed that individual things are created when lower orders of material form are added to the first corporeal form (*lux*) and that light is the means by which the soul operates on the body and is the principle of intelligibility.

Most revealing, though, because of its contrast with the earlier *Sunday Morning No. 2* (1968-70), is *Sunday Morning No. 4*, done in the years 1975 and 1976. Like the earlier work, it depicts a view through a window from within a house. In the earlier painting, a contrast between inside and outside was created by the use of warmer and softer colours for the interior and colder and harder colours for the exterior. This juxtaposition is muted in the later work as both the inside and the outside are painted in the same pale, delicate and somewhat warmish tones. Furthermore, the space depicted has been greatly reduced and so much of the diversity of the earlier work has been eliminated. And finally, the image has been generally softened as the outlines of objects have become less distinct and the contrast between objects and their ground more muted.

The use of pale-toned colours in closely related hues and of large areas of unvaried colour in the background is familiar from works Chambers had done a full decade earlier (for example, *Daffs*, 1964-65). The function of handling colour in this way is also familiar. These pale-toned images with large areas of indistinctness resemble the fading images of memory. Thus, though the montage principle did decline in importance in Chambers' later work, he developed new – or rather, reworked old and temporarily abandoned – devices to serve the same function. Chambers' fundamental concerns were not changed, however; even in his later works, he was inspired by the ambition to create forms that revealed the processes of consciousness.

But this is only part of the story. Chambers' images are, in a sense,

realistic. The importance of realism in his work must not be underestimated. He was, for example, one of the first vanguard painters in Canada to embrace representation as a value. He began painting from photographs in 1962, about the same time that Michael Snow abandoned abstraction to paint *Lac Clair* (1960). From 1962 onwards, without exception, Chambers' imagery was derived from photographs.

The best model for the amalgam of subjectivity and objectivity in Chambers' painting is the transitional object. Like the transitional object, Chambers' works assimilate what is discovered to what is created, what is given to what is made, what is seen to what is imagined. How Chambers fashions this assimilation can only be called utterly paradoxical. Merleau-Ponty's comments on painting point towards the paradox that lies at the heart of Chambers' work. In "Eye and Mind" he writes:

Since things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow take place in them; their manifest visibility must be repeated in the body by a secret visibility. "Nature is on the inside" says Cézanne ... things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence....

[Images] are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feelings makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and imminent visibility which makes up the whole problem of the imagery.⁴⁸

Chambers' art in all its phases was committed to constructing works that held these features together in a paradoxical unity. From the early expressionistic stylizations of real objects, through the works that disassociate and reassemble photographed images and the silver paintings that transform photographed images into constructions in reflected light, to the perceptual realist works, the evolution of Chambers' career represents successive readjustments of the relationship between the objective and the subjective in the amalgam of a work of art. Throughout his career Chambers showed how seeing involves imagination, how daily living engages creativity. It is in the intermediate zone between objectivity and subjectivity that a person first comes alive. Through all the phases, Chambers' paintings recreate this space, affirming its continuing importance, demonstrating beautifully that life and art can be one.

These ideas are very close to Winnicott's and, at times, Chambers' theoretical reflections even seem on the verge of articulating some of Winnicott's notions: "To will creatively is to love the created world ... [i.e. loving, which is discovering what something truly is, *is* creation]."⁴⁹

But it is not just the amalgam of subjectivity and objectivity in Chambers' art that Winnicott's notion of the transitional object helps explain; it also helps explain the idea that Chambers so frequently reiterated that art and life are one. Winnicott points out that transitional objects, though they are real

things that belong to a real world, occupying "potential space" – the third area that is neither inside nor outside a person – are like internal objects, for they are invested with the significance that the child gives them in the imaginative act of playing. By the same token, though these significances are given to the object by the imaginative use the child makes of them, they are, though imagined, usually related to actual qualities of the object and, once projected into the object, they exist as though externally. These significances, produced by the subject but grounded in actual qualities of the object, help provide the child with a sense of continuing existence and so foster the child's confidence. Because they do so and also simply because they are invested with imaginative significance, the child delights in them. Even the most quotidian objects, Winnicott asserted, can become charged with such fascination.

Chambers' delight in the ordinary manifests itself in much of his art. Paintings such as *Diego Sleeping, No. 2* (1971), *Mums* (1968-71), *Lombardo Avenue* (1972-73), *Lilacs No. 2* (1976-77), *Oranges* (1976-77), the scrigraph *Figs* (1977), and the film *Circle* all deal with everyday objects and places and all convey the vivifying effects of imaginative perception. Chambers' assimilation of the act of perception to the act of imagination is a forceful testimony to the creative possibilities inherent in everyday living – possibilities residing in what Winnicott terms "potential space."

Winnicott's explanation of the importance of the actual external existence of the transitional object, of the fact that it really is "out there," in reality, also possesses the power to explain other features of Chambers' work. According to Winnicott, the first condition of something's being a transitional object is that it has the sort of existence that external objects do, for if a transitional object failed to have that sort of existence, it would likely be confused with an hallucination and would be felt to be subject to the same vicissitudes as any hallucination is. Chambers, in responding to a question from Avis Rosenberg about his use of other artists' images in his paintings, stated a related idea:

Sanchez Canton, for example, is so distinctive in his arrangements that it would be unrealistic to choose his works in spite of their appeal because his particular style of presenting objects would seem the reason for the choice. That would be contrary to the use of the foto as an object: we would be working aesthetically [expressing the subjectivity of the maker by deforming reality] and away from the real ... that is the real as *detached "enthrallment."* The anonymity of objects is maintained by a straightforward grouping without cleverness or sensationalism. This approach preserves something of the anonymous character (particularity) of things in nature ... you can appropriate the qualities of objects without getting the artist as well.⁵⁰

Here is a theory of art, called perceptualism, that denies the validity of representing subjective experience and argues for a form of art that maintains "the anonymity of objects" and yet does not advocate converting the work of art into an autonomous object but instead places its emphasis on realistic representation (on imagery over objecthood). Could there be any better proof of the need for a paradoxical critical mode – or for the relevance of Winnicott's notion of the transitional object to an analysis of aesthetic experience?

Chambers' ideal of a work of art – a work that would convey the experience of fusing with the world – was based in his conception of the nature of photography. He is another example of a Canadian filmmaker who was convinced that film is a photographically based medium, and whose use of the film medium was a part of his endeavour to comprehend the nature of the photographic image and to resolve – or at least comprehend – the paradoxes inherent in it.⁵¹ Why was Chambers was so interested in "the foto"?

A photograph, by its nature, reconciles the self and the world, much as Chambers aspired to do through painting. Photography, as Bazin noted, is a phenomenon of nature, the product of a technological system based on principles of optics and chemistry.⁵² Its very genesis determines that it has the status of a selfless impersonal work of art, which Chambers strove to achieve in painting.⁵³ Paradoxically, a photograph conveys, perhaps more powerfully than a work in any other medium, the presence of a consciousness; it always suggests a viewing subject. This paradox – that the more objective a description becomes, the more subjective it seems – is one of the notions that underlies Chambers' work in both painting and film. It is this idea that allows him to assimilate the act of creation to the act of discovery, and the act of imagining to the act of seeing. It allows Chambers to use photography to reveal and to inquire into the features of the transitional area of experience.

Chambers' interest in photography is also bound up with his postmodern version of Romanticism. Romanticism concerned itself with questions about the relation of consciousness to nature; Romantic thinkers aspired to show that both consciousness and nature were animated by the same forces, that the same creative urge produced new forms in nature and new ideas in human minds. A photograph is an emblem of this unity of consciousness and nature. Chambers states explicitly that a "foto" imitates what he calls a perception – a metaphysical insight – at the same time that it exists as a natural object whose character is wholly determined by those very laws scientists discover by studying nature. Thus a photograph reveals the manner in which nature inspires consciousness, and as an art object it reveals the creative dimension of those processes.

But a photograph does more than reveal the creative workings of nature. A photograph is produced by an emanation from its referent, for the trace the referent leaves on a photograph is created by light. Consequently, a photo-

graph belongs not just to the realm of physics, but also to the realm of metaphysics. For this reason, a photograph seems to promise to reveal the essence of what it represents. The peculiar nostalgia and sense of loss that a photograph so frequently provokes results from its failure to make good that apparent promise. What a photograph actually provides is not the essence of a situation, but only its accidental features, those superficial features that present themselves most conspicuously. The deepest truth about a situation cannot be gleaned from a photograph.

To reconcile the opposition between the potential for metaphysical revelation and metaphysical concealment and to arrive at the dialectical stage of synthesis, we must question the unity of consciousness and nature that photography presupposes. To be specific, we must ask what it is about reality that enables "objectivity" and "subjectivity" (to use the familiar terms of the modern paradigm's most basic – and most basically spurious – dichotomy) to coincide in the sensible properties of a photograph. The clue rests in Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* – the doctrine (/myth?) that all knowledge is reminiscence, that before birth we had been acquainted with universal forms and truths and that, though the trauma of birth has driven this knowledge from conscious awareness, we know the forms and consequently all truths, at least in a vague sort of way, and can, with the prompting of experience, be brought to recall them with considerable precision. Behind this doctrine (/myth?) is the conviction that all souls were originally one with the stuff of the universe.

This concept of *anamnesis* has startling relevance to Chambers' work. Neoplatonic echoes reverberate through his *oeuvre*, and the notion of *anamnesis* is indisputably central to the neoplatonic tradition. Chambers exploited the photograph's capacity to evoke reminiscences that unleash the capacity to transcend timebound existence. We might even say that he saw photography itself as Nature's own timeless reminiscence.

These were the ideas that attracted Chambers to photography. The paintings of all his periods evince an interest in light so strong and so deeply worked out that light can be said to have assumed a metaphysical dimension for him. Chambers' works convey Luminist convictions; for him, it is light that creates both the forms of nature and the ideas in human consciousness (this underlies the ontological identity of the forms of nature with the contents of consciousness). And a photograph, since it is made by light, stood for Chambers as an image of natural and indeed of supernatural creativity. As a product of this divine force, it is an image that manifests plenitude. But because a photograph is timebound or tied to a particular occasion which is always fading into the past, and because it fails to fulfil its emanationist promise to preserve and to represent the essence of what it depicts, a photograph conveys a sense of loss. Thus, a photograph was for Chambers an emblem of destruction as well as creation. It suggests the cycle of creation and destruction, birth and death.

The Rhythms of Life and Death: Chambers' Films

In Chambers' silver paintings, he concentrated on demonstrating the capacity of light to create forms. The striking resemblance these paintings bear to photographic images hints at his fascination with the photograph's ability to manifest the form-creating potential of light. But it was more typical of Chambers to use photographic images in contexts in which their capacity to suggest the cyclical relation between creation and destruction was required. Just a few of the most obvious examples are: *Olga Visiting Mrs. V.* (1964-65), *Daffs* (1964-65), *Olga and Mary Visiting* (1964-65), *Antonio and Miguel in the USA* (1965) and *Stuart Mixing Reds and Greens* (1965).

But it is his films that suggest the cycle of birth, death and rebirth with the greatest force. *Mosaic* (1967), his first film, consists in large part of icons of birth and death presented in a rhythmic alternation in order to suggest the balance between the processes of creation and destruction. To many viewers the film seems very disjointed and fragmentary at first, but as they become more familiar with its images, they discern the pattern of alternation that provides the film's coherence. Thus, they acquire an insight into the underlying order of things, in which birth and death act as balancing forces. In this way, the film equates artistic order, perceptual order and metaphysical order.

The central section of *Circle* (1968-69) presents a nearly fixed view of a backyard which undergoes changes with the passing of the seasons, from early autumn through winter and spring to summer. The film draws the familiar analogy between the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of death and rebirth. Significantly, the change from one day to the next is presented as a change in light.

Hart of London (1970), Chambers' last film, is a dense, feature-length, multi-image symphonic work whose scope is breathtaking. Without doubt it is a masterwork. In its quick cutting, its transitions from positive to negative imagery, its jittery, anxious camera movement, its vision of death as the slaughter of innocents, and above all its deep interest in the qualities of light, it resembles the work of American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage, whom Chambers much admired. Although Chambers' familiarity with and admiration for Brakhage's work may have expanded his formal vocabulary, the film remains unmistakably his own. *Hart of London* is composed largely of newsreel, photo-cinematographic images which are wedded to a particular place and time. For this reason they evoke a sense of loss. These images, like those of *Mosaic*, are often arranged in patterns which consist in the alternation of icons of birth with icons of death; the juxtaposition of footage depicting the birth of a child with that showing the slaughter of a lamb is one clear example.

Although in *Mosaic* and *Circle* Chambers used forms which brought the processes of creation and destruction into a balance, in *Hart of London* he offered a much harsher view of the relation between the two. Made shortly

after Chambers learned that he was suffering from leukemia, the film, rather than suggesting that death balances birth, implies that death sooner or later savages every living thing.

Though made with newsreel film, the work does not present merely straightforward, documentary-type footage. For much of the opening sequence, Chambers reworked his source footage, using special printing techniques to create intensely bright images. The purposes of this modification (like that of similar modifications of his source photographs in the paintings) were threefold. The bright light implies Luminist notions of revelation – prompted perhaps by Chambers' confrontation with his impending death. It also articulates the traditional analogy between light and thought, for the loss of detail in these high-exposure images resembles the loss of detail that occurs in our memory images. Finally, the very harshness of the light suggests that if light creates living things, it also destroys them.

Chambers' films, like all his artwork, are primarily concerned with a single area of experience, the transitional area. Chambers' career was not marked by any serious discontinuities, either between different periods or between his works in different media. In the paintings and films he made all through his career, Chambers sought to convey the vicissitudes of that experience which reveals the unity of the self with the world.

Nature, Idealism and the Photograph in Canadian Thought

The object the artist makes from his experience, as well as perception in itself, are both creation and both are analogous to the Life Force creating objects in the world. And it is this energy take-in and energy return, the pattern of Creation, that occurs in both instances: one, the painting, is an intentional objectivication of the other.⁵⁴

Canadian thought is often believed to have a deep-rooted Cartesian character. This belief lurks behind Frye's idea of the "garrison mentality" which he believes characterizes much Canadian writing and is also central to the thesis of Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972). According to the understanding of Cartesian philosophy which these authors adopt, René Descartes argued that all experience is essentially private; one human being does not share another's experiences but only infers them (and perhaps responds sympathetically). But most important, he is understood to have argued that there is no direct intercourse between mind and nature, since they are composed of different substances. Although this understanding of Descartes' philosophy gets the essentials of his thought quite wrong, this view of the relation of consciousness to consciousness and of consciousness to nature has found tremendous appeal in Canada in certain phases of our intellectual history (particularly those during which our intellectual life has been dominated by empirical ideas). The Common Sense school and the later versions of empiri-

cism and positivism which have at various times dominated the intellectual life of this country represent one reaction – and certainly the earliest reaction of outsiders – to the harshness of the Canadian landscape. Still, it must be stressed that there have been periods of our history when these dualist philosophies were repudiated. As Leslie Armour notes in *The Idea of Canada*,⁵⁵ many philosophers who came to appreciate Canada as a land and a country also arrived at the belief that nature is not something completely alien or other, but rather is a part of oneself, at least in the sense that it plays an important role in forging identity. They saw it as ontologically related to human beings, as something fragile and deserving of respect and care. Although the writings of such Canadian philosophers as William Lyall, John Clark Murray and John Watson express the idea that self and nature are intimately interrelated, it is in the works of Canada's most important native-born philosopher, George Blewett, and particularly in his *The Christian View of the World* (1912), that this idea finds its exemplary expression:

One of the unconscious vices that do us wrong today is our impiety toward the earth.... Today, after having been to man his foster-mother, genial or cruel, his sublime and dread teacher, sometimes his kindly companion, sometimes his terrific enemy, she has become to him something like his slave, the object of his cleverness, the object of his prodigality. Tomorrow, for our salvation, our devices outworn by the march of her ages, it may be she will hold once more, terrible in her inexorable arms, her proud and frail child.⁵⁶

Blewett was convinced that an idealism which, as he says, "is to be of constructive value to a theologian" must have "some deeper insight into nature than simply it is a system of ideas in our minds."⁵⁷ He undertook to develop such an idealism by attempting to show that ideas (which, he thought, include the values by which we live) are objective entities, since, even though we bring them to consciousness, they do have their own order. In bringing these entities to consciousness, we come to know ourselves: "Things are elements in a spiritual process which is at once cognitive, moral, religious, a process in which the experiencing subject comes gradually to know a world and to apprehend the principles of its natural and social order; and by ideals and impulses which constitute his very nature, is called to a unity of thought and affection and character with that order and with its creative source."⁵⁸ And later he speaks of "that practical intercourse with nature – the labour and wrestle, the steadily growing mastery crossed by occasional and terrible defeat – which has an even greater place than knowledge in the total process in which we at once *receive and achieve* our spiritual being."⁵⁹

According to Blewett, we achieve our identity, our selfhood in the course of our transactions with the world. He referred to the process by which this "personality," as he calls it, is formed as a "self-distinguishing" one, a

process by which we come to distinguish ourselves from events and objects and events and objects from ourself. Underlying these distinctions is a primal unity of self and world.

Blewett also claimed in this passage that we find out about ourselves by doing things, not by introspection, and similarly that we learn about nature by examining the processes we use to think about nature. What we discover through these processes is that both nature and human consciousness are rational in form. This rational form is not something preordained by God, for such preordination would limit freedom and freedom is a necessary condition of an action's having the ability to produce real knowledge (because knowledge arises only when action is animated from within the person rather than being determined by external forces.) Rather, Blewett regarded knowledge as a creative process and claimed that what it grasps is nature itself as creative activity. The creative activities of both mind and nature result in the formation of interrelations between elements that manifest, in the unity of their relations, a rational order.

Each thing that exists manifests a subjective, rational principle that is uniquely its own. At the same time, each thing is what it is because of its relations to all the other elements in the entire system of existents. This table on which I am now writing achieves its identity by not being this chair, not being that wall, this room, this building, the campus of this technical training college. Similarly, my identity is defined by my not being you or him or her or that group of people. Thus, even though everything manifests its own, unique subjective principle, it is intelligible only in relation to the total system of existents. Blewett terms this total system, following Hegel, Spirit or the Absolute. For Blewett, as for Hegel, Reason or Spirit are in the very structure of things, since rational order characterizes the system of nature. As this order becomes consciousness, it manifests itself as intelligibility.

This metaphysical view has important ethical implications. If we realize ourselves in a community and in the larger unity that is the system of nature, then the problem, so central in American philosophy, of how we co-ordinate so many individual, self-serving wills is dissolved. As Blewett's predecessor John Watson put it, though our duty is "to the realization of the complete nature of the self,"⁶⁰ because we are formed in society, the true good of the individual is inseparable from the consciousness of the social good. Both Blewett and Watson argue that every form of social organization rests upon a tacit recognition of a higher order good that is realized in the union of ourselves with others, and that by entering into a community whose end is to advance the social good we realize our own potential as an individual.

These notions of the nature of community are absolutely central in Canadian social thought. They are reflected in most of our most noble social theories right down to the most recent times, as in George Grant's monograph *English-Speaking Justice*. In this book, Grant brilliantly criticizes the individualistic bias of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. According to Rawls,

"Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override." Similar views of the nature of community are frequently expressed in our literature, in such works as John Richardson's *Wacousta*, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, Sarah Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*, Frederick Philip Grove's *The Fruits of the Earth*, W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes* and *Return of the Sphinx* and Margaret Laurence's *Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*.

Jack Chambers' views on nature, self, art, perception and photography exemplified similar ideas. In his journal entitled *Red and Green*⁶¹ Chambers wrote: "The perception of the natural world ... is a source of truth about oneself, because not only what one projects but also what he receives is himself." Here Chambers stated his belief in the fundamental identity of subject and object. Later, he articulated what might, *prima facie*, seem to be an emanationist idealist view of reality.

Perception is the intelligible brilliance within us, when our soul and the soul of things become present to one another. It is the intuitive unfolding of both the *self* and the *other* in one embrace. The rupture, fading or shadow of this brilliance becomes, at the instant of its fading, the experience of a *what* that lives. The come-down to categories and numbers, to the time of day, returns us and things to the objective world. We are a spiritual centre, surely, but also an object among objects. It is in the immeasurable interval between *oneness* and the emerging, conscious *observer* that the world is glimpsed as unknowable.

In this passage, Chambers proposed that the real is ultimately light (brilliance). This reality eludes the grasp of concepts for it is non-particular, and inasmuch as it includes both subject and object it is known immediately – it can only be known through direct intuition, not through concepts. We know this reality through insight not through reason and no names apply to it. At another point, Chambers resorted to a kind of colour mysticism to express a related idea: "A bright yellow mass in the peripheral vision excites and delights before we name it.... But a forsythia bush, two in fact, one a little bit bigger than its mate, and fuller too, is something else. The excitement of yellow diminishes to the extent that the mind informs itself of particulars." This sounds very much like Roger Fry's domain of pure forms which can be apprehended only by an innocent vision (a higher vision unsullied by reason), except that Chambers' mysticism is one of light and colour rather than pure form. The similarity between his views and Fry's are even more pronounced in the following passage: "The peripheral 'abstract' provokes a purer 'feeling' of colour which our in-focus mind dilutes with information. The peripheral image hears more than the foveal one; it also smells, tastes, touches more than focus does ... colour does not need the indicative mind in order to be.

Through the 'mindlessness' of sight alone the senses enjoy colour." Chambers suggests that in the moment of heightened awareness, our sensory modalities fuse into a synaesthetic intuition. And what is grasped in this intuition? One comment implies that Chambers believed that what is grasped is being ("colour does not need the indicative mind in order to *be*").

What Chambers called perception is a heightened form of awareness. This form of consciousness is synaesthetic in nature. Its object is not some particular or another, but a universal form, or being. However, Chambers' views may seem more neoplatonic than Hegelian, but Chambers' work demands to be understood against the background of the Hegelianism that dominated Canadian philosophy in its grand period, 1880-1940.

There certainly are some obvious affinities between Chambers' work and Hegel's thought. The notion that experience is neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but involves a fusion of subjectivity and objectivity, is a notion that is central to the thought of both. Both attribute crucial importance to the apprehension of Being. Chambers' other similarities to Hegel are implied in the forms of his paintings and in the ideas explicit in his writings.

Chambers' meticulous attention to material reality in his painting belies the notion that the highest sort of knowledge is acquired during moments when the apprehension of the forms of particular things is annihilated and replaced by an apprehension of the universal. Chambers, in fact, is quite definite about his belief that revealing the inner truth of objects, which he aspired to in his painting, must not lead the artist to denigrate the value of physical existence itself. In a remark that could have been made by John Watson had he developed an aesthetic theory, Chambers stated: "With the object's physical appearance purposefully in hand, the artist today can concentrate on the primary principle of the object – its metaphysics – *without diminishing its appearance.*"⁶² And further:

Perceptualism transmits Reality within reality through an energy concentration in the painting it shapes. To do this as Creation does it, it uses the conventional appearance of things.... Perceptualism's faithfulness to the appearance of things is in accordance with its faithfulness to the process of creation. Without the experience of wonder, the real becomes unreal and the viewer looks into himself for a meaning and away from perception.⁶³

Or again: "We feel a deep and abiding affection for the physical. What stays with us from day to day more or less consciously is this sense of gentle astonishment at the world as it is."⁶⁴ The similarity these statements have to Mircea Eliade's descriptions of hierophany is obvious. Eliade defined an hierophany as: "The manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our profane world."⁶⁵ And he commented: "By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain itself."

These are foundational ideas within the Hegelian system itself, as evidenced by the following passage from *The Phenomenology of Mind*:

The object is, then, partly immediate existence, a *thing* in general corresponding to immediate consciousness; partly an alteration of itself, its relatedness (or existence-for-another and existence-for-self), *determinateness* – corresponding to perception; partly essential being or in the form of a *universal* – corresponding to understanding. The object as a whole is the mediated result [the syllogism] or the passing of universality into individuality through specification, as also the reverse process from individual to universal through cancelled individuality or specific determination.⁶⁶

Even the root of the Hegelian system, the notion of dialectical synthesis, involves the conception of the universal's surpassing the particular at the same time as it is *preserving this particular's being* in the processes of passing over into the more general.

If Chambers was some sort of Idealist, he was not one of those interested only in "the Surpassing Transcendent" or "the One Beyond Things." Rather he belongs to that brand of Idealists, like Hegel, who are interested in the interplay between the one and the many, between the Universal and particulars, between Spirit and Matter. In his journal he wrote:

The *perceptual* in-swing travels via the simple senses to the mind ... or arrives in such a manner for *perception* to occur. Then the out-swing as emotion exits via the brain to the simple senses again which structure the exterior world. As an intentional out-going art, that is, as an inner light structuring outer matter, *perceptual* experience is crafted by means of a discriminating dialogue with what was seen: the *description*.⁶⁷

Chambers' expression "an inner light structuring outer matter" may be only quasi-Hegelian, but his idea that there is a dialectical interplay between the Universal and the particular, between intuition and sensation and his claim that an object is a fusion of subjective and objective dimensions are consistent with Hegel's system. But most especially, it resembles the Objective Idealism of John Watson, who argued for the reconcilability of apparently diverse, even opposing, elements.

Unlike F.H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet, Watson did not deny the reality of the here and now or of the world of change. Rather, applying his principle of reconciliation, he attempted to show that it is possible to maintain the reality (at least in some sense of reality) both of the one and of the many, of that which endures and of that which changes. In a similar vein, Watson argued for the reality of space and time and of the realm of change, which philosophers such as Bradley and Bosanquet had denigrated as merely phenomenal:

I am unable to see that space and time can from any point of view be eliminated, unless we are prepared to say we have no knowledge whatsoever. For, with the elimination of space and time, as we must remember, there also vanish permanence, motion and change; and as without these all our sciences, whether physical or mental, disappear, nothing is left but the fiction of a reality that we can only define as that which is indefinable.⁶⁸

A fundamental tenet of Watson's philosophical system is that reason arises in and through particulars; he believed that if ordinary matter were merely a set of appearances then we would be stymied in our efforts to grasp the real. Thus Watson even affirmed that in the religious phase of existence "nature is seen to have no independent being; it is *in every part* the manifestation of spirit. There is nothing common or unclean, because God is present in all things. The self does not stand opposed to nature, because nature is recognized to be a mode in which reason, as the essence of self, is expressed."⁶⁹

This is clearly very close to the view expressed in Chambers' work, in which quotidian reality (the importance of which is testified to by the meticulous realism with which Chambers renders its every detail) is charged with another meaning.

Chambers' assertion that the concept of intuition can be assimilated to the concept of expression is also consistent with neo-Idealist (neo-Hegelian) systems of aesthetics, such as that of Croce. Chambers understood the function of painting in an Hegelian fashion, as the overcoming of the alienation of nature: "Painting can only be a shadow of the original *perception*.... But it is a model of affirmation, of the way Nature lives in us and of our oneness with it. It is the intention of the artist that this *oneness* be glimpsed as the content and subject-matter of his work. That is its reality."⁷⁰

The idea that there is a single spirit that permeates reality and consciousness alike, that animates the movement of both and shapes the forms they assume, is an Hegelian idea that is fundamental to all of Chambers' thinking about art. In "Perceptual Realism," a distillation of his early thoughts on the subject of perceptualism, Chambers stated:⁷¹

Man as artist can communicate with nature and communicate that in nature to other men because men and nature share the same instinct. The organic process of nature which man shares is the way mankind as a fruit is shaped on his tree and by all in which the tree is rooted. This process containing each man and animating him from within and from without is also the process he spontaneously emits to the outside world again.

About the relation of body and mind or matter and spirit, he wrote: "Perceptual realism incorporates two systems of technology (historical and industrial) and two systems of visibility (body and mind) to structure a reflector

object of experience." And on the reciprocity between knowledge of self and knowledge of other the conception that all knowledge is finally self-knowledge: "The perception of the natural world and its objects, creatures and people is the source of truth about oneself because not only what we project but also what we receive is ourselves."

But perhaps the most cogent evidence of the Hegelian character of Chambers' thought is a statement about his belief that the universal spirit is present in every particular:

everything and anything that one *sees* is in its actual presence also more than we can in any one way understand it to be. The more we become familiar with the experiences that perception brings, the more we become aware on the inherent gentleness in the intercommunion of oneself with things. So gentleness of reception is also a communication that influences the outside world. Finally, perception itself becomes a "forgotten" awareness that just *is* with all the common naturalness of those common things seen out the window or inside the house or any place.

In another article, Chambers wrote:⁷²

The outward look of things which the will creates embodies the energy discharge of what is perceived beyond the seen. The more real a thing is the more mysterious it is. If I change what I see for art by subjugating it to an inward-looking fancy, I'm denying the mystery beyond the appearance of things as they are by turning inward to memory, invention and the mind.... 'Everything begins and everything happens through contact with matter'.

Ultimately, Chambers' view of reality is a hierophanic one, in the same sense that Hegel's is. He argued that although things are real, their mode of being is not that merely of a material object, for they also manifest a higher order of reality. Since their physical being manifests ultimate reality, it is not to be denied and merely transcended in the ascent to higher orders of awareness. Even Chambers' account of the manner in which things manifest ultimate reality seems extraordinarily Hegelian. At one point in describing his painting methods, Chambers commented, "My painting gets put together just like an experience – in particles." He claimed that a painting comes into being through an act of synthesis and that the form constructed in this synthetic process is the painting's mode of being. However, experience too, Chambers noted, has a similarly synthetic mode of existence, for its being is constituted in a similar process. In fact, Chambers claimed, it is the highest sort of experience – the sort of experience he terms "perception" – that has this mode of existence, for it is that sort of experience which is incarnated painting. But Chambers also believed that a perception is constituted by the same forces and in the same manner that reality is. Thus, the structure and

determinants of art, perception (insight) and reality exist in a three-termed relation of isomorphism, since all three sorts of events/objects have a similar synthetic form and the mode of being of all of them involves the same principle of unity which animates them and gives them meaning. The statement that these ideas resemble some central ideas of Hegelian metaphysics would certainly be an instance of meiosis.

Even the name Chambers gave to his artistic theory, perceptual realism, seems to hint of the Hegelian nature of his thought. Chambers does not think that perception is the mere registering of external states of affairs on consciousness, but something much more:

Perception is the instant before consciousness; it precedes the conscious identification of objects. It is the instant of vision.... I think that perception occurs when the senses constellate in response to matter and the impact generated on the mind neutralizes consciousness; for an instant there is no mental directive to see something, hear something etc. The mind is alerted into a state of receptive passivity that somehow releases a higher or "composite" sense into play. The consciousness thus neutralized is then able to perceive the Invisible Body 'behind' the world. The Invisible Body is energy and is a more vital reality than the material attenuation of it ... our sensory world.⁷³

And, at another point, he stated:

Perception is the intelligible brilliance within us, when our soul and the soul of things become present to one another. It is the intuitive unfolding of both the *self* and the *other* in one embrace.⁷⁴

And finally:

The moment of "white light" is the moment of *perception* ... It is the seminal brilliance of *perception* – that blind vision of unconscious intelligibility, never seen nor known except as unknowable, which makes a work of art real.⁷⁵

In sum, Chambers seems to have believed that perception is a species of metaphysical intuition and to have used the term "realism" to ground this metaphysical insight in concrete, material reality. Taken as a whole, then, Chambers' artistic theory is like that of Hegel inasmuch as it holds that the work of art integrates spirit and matter, the sacred and the profane, the transcendent and the actual.

If Chambers' metaphysical theories resemble those of Hegel, his artistic theories also resemble those of Mikel Dufrenne.⁷⁶ Dufrenne proposed the concept of a "sensuous realism." According to him, a work of art is a concrete thing, real, and, therefore, to be encountered on the level of the "sensuous." The term "sensuous," as Dufrenne used it, implies more than just a mode of apprehension; it is intended to stress that there is "bodily reception" of a

work of art. Dufrenne explained that this is because, in experiencing a work of art, one encounters the Real that underlies the real. This encounter with depth rather than with the surface of things occurs only when one's attitude towards the object is not one of detached analysis but a more intimate one that involves feeling, since feelings involve the actual modification of one's physical being:

Feeling is that in me which relates to a certain quality of the object through which the object manifests its intimacy.... Feeling reveals being not only as reality but also as depth ... feeling distinguishes itself from presence [i.e., feeling as a way of "being with" an object rather than "present to" an object] in implying a new attitude on the part of the subject. I must make myself conform to what feeling reveals to me and thus match its depth with my own. For it is not a question of furthering my possessing [*étendre mon avoir*] but rather of listening to a message [*entendre un message*]. That is why, through feeling, I myself am put into question.... to feel is in a sense to transcend.⁷⁷

How extraordinarily similar to Chambers' writings this passage is. Chambers too was interested in the body's involvement in the apprehension of reality, and seemed to believe that the act of perception brought about a conforming of the incarnated (the embodied) self to reality. In Chambers' thought, as in Dufrenne's, perception was believed to involve the response of the total person to the depths of reality. But there is another striking similarity between their artistic theories. Unlike most twentieth-century aesthetic theories, those of Chambers and Dufrenne are both anti-subjectivist. According to Dufrenne, the subject conforms herself or himself to the other when she or he responds to it with intimacy; in fact, identity is lost in becoming a modification of the Other. About our most profound mode of response to reality, Chambers wrote:

Intuition is known to all of us by experience; to the intellect it is a mystery. Intuitive flashes are in the brain, or it may be that there are extra-sensitive cells within a sensory centre, which specifically tune into emanations detected in objects rather than cling to their appearance. In any case, it is like a bell in a bell-tower, *only in this instance the bell-tower vibrations excite activity in the bell.*⁷⁸

Both Dufrenne and Chambers argued that reality can "take the initiative" in being apprehended by a subject. Dufrenne stated that the Real "seems to solicit disclosure," and "expects its meaning to be spoken."⁷⁹ In a similar vein, Chambers stated: "Inspiration has taken over the mind. Then where does the painting come from? ... In my case, I am convinced that the inspiration always belonged to the object...."⁸⁰

Both as well claimed that art-making is a selfless activity, since the subjectivity embodied in a work of art belongs more to the object than to the

subject. These views resemble those of André Bazin, who also identified a kind of artwork which derives an advantage from the absence of a human maker; because of that absence, such works affect us like phenomena of nature. The beauty of such works, Bazin insists, depends not on their expressiveness but rather on the truthfulness with which they convey reality, or more precisely, a reality whose structural depth not only possesses a logical order but also embodies the values to which people should conform their lives. Such an art is one which unites the traditional categories of beauty, truth and goodness. That art, Bazin claimed, is photography.

Hegel had argued that being and becoming are closely interrelated (through the notion of "naught," which mediates between being and becoming).⁸¹ Being, Hegel says, undergoes change – in fact, creative change – insofar as in the realm of the spirit change is not a repetitive recycling through old patterns but the actual production of novel forms that truly represent an advance on previous forms. On this view, the function of a work of art is to transmit the creative energy through which such novelty appears. One means of doing this is to use an art medium whose forms are created by the same creative energy as produces the objects of nature. Bazin claimed that this medium is photography:

The aesthetic world of the painter is of a different kind from that of the world about him. Its boundaries enclose a substantially and essentially different microcosm. The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a finger print. Wherefore photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it.⁸²

Although Chambers differed with Bazin in his belief that photography does substitute a system of signs for real objects of nature, the notions that a photograph is produced by the same energy that produces both the objects of nature and the contents of consciousness, that it therefore mediates between nature and consciousness, that the photograph as a natural object embodies the values which, as an image, it makes manifest, and that, as a product of natural creativity, it surpasses aesthetically motivated productions or productions which are calculated to express our (limited) selves are all notions that Bazin and Chambers shared.

But we know how resistant Bazin's thought was to the influences from the vanguard tradition. In Chambers' writings and art, ideas about photography, though very similar to those which provided the foundational notions of Bazin's aesthetics, were pressed into the service of the vanguard tradition. But what more cogent demonstration could there be of the point that Canadian avant-garde film represents a departure from the limits of modernism than that such anti-modernist ideas are at its very core?

Our analyses of a variety of English-Canadian films (documentaries, fiction features and avant-garde) have revealed that the nature of the

photographic image has had a considerable influence on our cinema. Some filmmakers, whose work belongs to the cinema of presentation or to the cinema of illustration, have exploited its features for didactic or affective ends. Others, whose work belongs to the cinema of construction, have not restricted themselves to using the photographic image to attain ends of these sorts but have also inquired into the nature of that image. A comparison of the European and American traditions in avant-garde filmmaking with the Canadian tradition has revealed that this interest in the nature of the photographic image is far more prevalent among Canadian artist/filmmakers than among their counterparts in Europe and the United States. Canadian thinkers have shown a proclivity for hierophanic conceptions of reality. According to the hierophanic view of reality, there is a paradoxical character to nature inasmuch as the ultimate meaning of nature is said to be present in its very absence, graspable only in its ungraspability, apparent in its invisibility. So is it with the meaning of a photograph.

CHAPTER 14

Forms of Cinema: Models of Self

The various periods of avant-garde cinema reflect changes in the conceptions of the nature of the self. The beginning of each major phase was marked by a different view of how the self was formed and how it operated. The first phase of avant-garde cinema – the so-called surrealist avant-garde (Man Ray, Germaine Dulac and the early Buñuel), the so-called dadaists (the early René Clair) and (the most problem-ridden of the three terms) the so-called impressionistic filmmakers (Jean Vigo) – flourished in Europe in the 1920s and – with the exception of the graphic cinema pioneered by Victor Eggling and Hans Richter – made extensive use of montage constructions that were patterned on the chain of free associations, of symbolism, and of open texts, texts which demand to be reinterpreted by each individual viewer to incorporate his or her personal experiences. Through these means, as well as through their thematic concerns which frequently dealt with the vicissitudes of instinctual expression, the films produced by this school embodied a conception of the self that is akin to that offered by early schools of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The equation of the erotic quest for instinctual satisfaction, the aesthetic quest for beauty, and the psychological quest for the self which is characteristic of the early American psychodrama, suggests a substantially revised, but still Freudian, conception of the self. To be precise, the drama in many of these films concerns the tragedy of the loss of the sense of identity or, more technically, of ego autonomy, revealing a shift from the conception of the self that is tied to earlier Freudian instinctual theory to one related to later psychoanalytic ego psychology – broadly, the ideas of Hartmann (involving the notions of ego strength and conflict-free ego functioning), Erikson (identity) and Rapaport (ego autonomy). Indeed, the tale told by many of these films is often told by Erikson, for it concerns the tragic loss of ego identity.

Although that particular conception can be found in any of the major works of this period, it is nowhere more evident than in Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), a film which many consider to be the seminal work of this period.¹ Its structure was designed to demonstrate how the mind

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takes a commonplace, everyday occurrence and embellishes it in the course of rethinking and reworking it. The embellishments follow a clear pattern: they trace the regression from a depressive ("depressive" in this instance referring to the capacity to experience sadness, loss and mourning) to the paranoid / schizoid position.² The mechanisms involved in this regression include the processes of separating off those internal forces which are experienced as negative, aggressive and threatening, projecting them onto another person, and then identifying with that aggressor. A film based on these mechanisms was well ahead of its time; it was not until almost a decade after the production of this film that psychoanalytic theorists in America began to consider these concepts.

The films of Brakhage and his followers which dominated the avant-garde of the 1960s embodied a very different conception of the nature of the self, one much more consistent with the understanding of the self proposed by phenomenologists and, specifically, by adherents of existential phenomenology (exemplified by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Brakhage and the generation of the 1960s emphasized embodied or incarnated being, by stressing that seeing is an act of the whole body. Too, the work of Brakhage and his followers, like the existential phenomenologists, seems to imply that the self is known reflexively, that we learn about ourselves in the process of learning about things other than ourselves. Brakhage's stylistics refuse to accord a place to any immutable transcendental self that persists unchanged through a course of the experiences it undergoes. This explains why the acts of seeing that his films depict have the fascinated, almost hallucinatory, quality that they do, for the self in his work is given over almost totally to the visionary experience and, in the most literal sense of that expression, is almost completely absorbed by it. But this too explains the anxious intensity so evident in his work, for a self that is not thought to possess some part that is stable, some part that persists through change is one that is felt to be in constant jeopardy of dissolving into fragments in the flux of experience. On a view like Brakhage's, then, to undergo a change in perception is quite literally to experience a death and a rebirth.³

The warmth with which Michael Snow's films were greeted was in no small measure due to his re-establishing of a stable self and, consequently, a stable place for the spectator. This reformulated notion of the self's nature is of key importance in *La région centrale* (1971). *La région centrale* is a film of constant motion,⁴ yet its motion, like that in Snow's other films, is quite restricted in its range of variations. The camera moves constantly around a fixed centre; the movement is always circular, though its speed does vary. The circles, too, can be tilted even while they are being described, thus creating the figure of a circle in rotation. The camera can also be twirled on its axis, forming a circle within a rotating circle. The apparatus which performs these movements was designed and engineered so that the camera always points outwards, its axis aligned with a radius to that point on the circle

where, at any moment, the camera is to be found. While the camera is at the centre of the landscape the film depicts, it constantly looks outward; it photographs every point in that space except that at which the apparatus itself (the camera-mount) is located.

Snow has made quite explicit the implications of this form of construction. In a conversation with Charlotte Townsend, he commented:

If you become completely involved in the reality of these circular movements, it's *you* who is spinning, surrounded by everything, or, conversely, you are a stationary centre and it's all revolving around you.⁵ But on the screen it's the centre which is never seen, which is mysterious. One of the titles which I considered using was *!!432101234!!* by which I meant that as you move down in dimensions you approach zero and in this film, *La région centrale*, that zero point is the absolute centre, Nirvanic zero, being the ecstatic centre of a complete sphere.⁶

Brakhage, like Snow, created films whose organizing principles derived from the use of a moving camera; in fact, the characteristics of Brakhage's camera movements gave his films profoundly musical qualities. Specifically, his camera movements, along with his rapid cutting, imbued his films with polyrhythmic qualities, for the rhythms created by the cutting were layered on rhythms created by the camera movement which were layered on rhythms inherent in the recorded movements of the object matter. Snow recognized the importance of the role rhythmical forms play in the overall construction of Brakhage's films and, in a fashion Snow's work has now made familiar, he simplified Brakhage's complex rhythmic forms and radicalized their function. The pendulum-like camera movements of \longleftrightarrow possess features of a metronome's operation, and the film consists of a series of back-and-forth movements at different tempos which, by way of emphasizing their rhythmic nature, are marked by periodic metronome-like clicks on the soundtrack. (These clicks actually mark the extreme points of the camera's back-and-forth swings.)

So radical was Brakhage's manner of handling the camera that the initial outrage provoked by the appearance of Brakhage's early films focused mainly on the intensity and irregularity of his camera movements, which many found jerky and uncontrolled; he was regularly condemned as the key figure in the "shaky camera school" of filmmaking. Furthermore, Brakhage's films, like those of Snow, constantly imply the centre out of which their camera movements are generated. In Brakhage's films, this is because his hand-held camera movements, like the traces of paint left by an abstract expressionist painter, are to be considered records of gesture, behaviour motivated by and expressive of the subjective state of the artist at the moment in which she or he engaged in it.⁷ In viewing a Brakhage film, we learn – or, at least, are supposed to learn – from the way in which external objects are photographed the

conditions of the filmmaker's internal world. Thus, like *La région centrale*, Brakhage's films derive their structure from the relation of a centre (which is constantly implied but never depicted) to a periphery.

There are, however, important implications to the differences in the attributes of the camera movements the two artists characteristically employ. By means of an extraordinary equation between expression and vision (an equation based on the idea that the bodily changes, which at least register – if they are not identical to – the variations in our emotional state, are inevitably reflected in changes in our visual consciousness), Brakhage's camera movements take on the qualities of the operations of the eye. In fact, with Brakhage, the camera becomes a metaphor for the eye; movements traced by the camera have mimetic significance, presenting the shifts in attention and the constant alterations in ways of seeing that characterize vision. Snow's camera movements have a more mechanical quality because the qualities of vision to which he aspires belong to a superhuman vision, a vision unattached to any body in space; that is why, unlike Brakhage, he never attempts to transform camera-derived representations to make them resemble eyesight.⁸ His is a more idealized vision, for it is set free from any particular location in space and seems, for this reason, to take on aspects of the "eye of God."

Brakhage's belief that corporal variations are necessarily reflected in variations in our visual percepts includes the notion that the native differences among individuals, evident in the clear differences among bodies, involve differences in our visual consciousness. Each person is gifted with a unique way of seeing. Accordingly, he has devoted his art to attempting to document his own unique vision. Snow, on the other hand, has given us what is truly an art of the camera.

Still, Snow's films, like those of Brakhage, are basically concerned with the nature of consciousness – with the subject. But the subject of Snow's films, a subject which persists unchanged through all the experiences it undergoes, is a somewhat paradoxical entity, for its self-identity is grounded in the fact that it is nothingness (a "nirvanic zero") inasmuch as it defines itself in terms of being other than what it experiences. It persists unchanged through experiences only because its existence is that of an empty concept; it is only because it is not what it experiences (that its existence is other than the ever-changing contents of experience) that its nature is never altered.

Like the conception of self that informs Brakhage's films, Snow's conception is also a phenomenological one, though Snow's is more closely related to the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl than to the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Brakhage, like Merleau-Ponty, insists upon the primacy of perception as a mode of access to the real. Snow, like Husserl, is as much concerned with the apperceptive acts of the self (consciousness) as with its perceptual acts.

The religious dimension of Snow's work is rooted in his conception of self,

which can be glimpsed in the equation he draws between consciousness and ultimate reality. It would not be going too far to suggest that this reality, which undergoes change without itself being changed, has the attributes which the Christian followers of Husserl ascribe to the soul.

A new phase in the history of avant-garde cinema emerged with the waning of structural film. Exemplified by the work of Yvonne Rainer – and unfortunately less celebrated in its appearance than structural film was – this development also involved a revised conception of the nature of the self. Snow's conception of the self as a nothingness led in the next phase of avant-garde cinema to a conception of the subject which, possessing no natural or God-given core, is empty and therefore ever-changing and fluid.⁹ The subject, according to this school of thought, is nothing at all; it is merely a set of mutations plotted by the conditions in which the subject finds himself or herself and by whose agency he or she is constantly reformulated. This conception of the self puts an emphasis on process rather than on identity.

These more recent conceptions of self derive from Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language. By way of an attack on nominalist theories of language, Saussure argued that language is a system not of fixed and unalterable essences but rather of labile forms. Saussure understood language as a system of relationships between constituent units which themselves are constituted only by the differences which mark them off from other units paradigmatically related to them. Thus, only the place a term occupies in a network of relations with other associated terms determines its value and meaning; no term has meaning outside a system of relationships.

This, the most recent conception of the subject in avant-garde cinema, pictures the subject as constituted in a manner similar to that in which meaning is constructed in language, that is, by its place within a network of differences. Like the signified, the subject cannot be thought of as something with an absolute meaning which persists through the experiences it undergoes. It has no absolute being inasmuch as it is never present as pure presence, the subject being defined precisely as something which is differential. A signifier bears no meaning within itself; isolated from the total language system of which it is a part, it is meaningless. Thus, in order to learn the meaning of any word (like anxiety) we must take into account its relationship (its similarities and differences) with other words in the system, both words (like anguish, worry and agony) that are closely related to it and others that are not. In the end, it is only the entire system of language that gives any sign its specific meaning, different from that of any other sign. Thus Saussure wrote:

the final law of language is that nothing can reside in one term precisely because linguistic symbols are not related to the things they designate. "A" cannot designate anything without the help of "B", which is powerless without "A". They have value only because of their reciprocal

difference. Things do not signify because of concrete nature, but by virtue of the formal features which distinguish them from other things of the same class. To consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept is grossly misleading.¹⁰

No linguistic mark is meaningful in itself, it is only an operator in a structure the whole of which is responsible for constituting meaning. Thus "e" and "a" are not themselves meaningful terms, but the difference between them makes possible the differing significance of "very" and "vary." A popular and much bandied about slogan expressing this idea is that language is constituted solely by differences that make a difference.

Lacanianians argue that the entry of a child into society involves the child's accession to language. Like many remarks Lacanianians offer, this remark is plurisemic. The remark may mean – and at different times in the writings of Lacan and his followers does mean – any or all of the following: a) that society is structured like a language and that each individual is assigned a place and meaning within the system of oppositions between male and female, married and unmarried, parent and child, etc. The place individuals have within this system of oppositions bestows their identity upon them; b) that consciousness of self is possible only in the context of its contrast with the recognition of a "thou" which actualizes the concept of a non-me. Thus, it is the mutual opposition within the I-thou dialectic that founds subjectivity. Language institutes the relations between persons and by doing so allows the self to reflect upon itself as a distinct personality. According to this view, then, the self is constituted as a relatum within an interpersonal relationship; c) that all mental acts, including even perception and recognition, require language, or that language is necessary for all kinds of thinking and, hence, for subjectivity in general. According to this view, childrens' perceptions and concepts are not complete and well-formed before they acquire language. Language does not simply add names to already existing, individual objects, it plays a role in their formation. A favourite analogy of Saussure's for illustrating the relationship of signifier and signified was that of a sheet of paper: "Again language is comparable to a sheet of paper; thought [the signified] is the front and sound [the signifier] is the back. You cannot cut up the front without at the same time cutting up the back; similarly, in language you cannot isolate sound from thought nor thought from sound; you could do this only by a process of action that would result in the creation of pure phonology or pure psychology."

One point these interpretations have in common is that the subject is not a distinct entity, rather it has only a differential identity, it is constituted as a subject only in an oppositional relationship to others. Just as any signifier refers to a particular signified only through the mediation of the rest of the signifying system (language), so the subject is constituted as a subject only through its involvement in a diacritical system. Just as meaning arises not

through any particular signifier but through the relation of terms in a system, so the subject's identity does not arise through his or her unique person, but through the subject's relation to a network of others from whom he or she is distinguished.

Lacanianians also argue that the acquisition of language effects splits in the "I," for, while the Symbolic Order (the order of language) provides the subject with an identity, it also inaugurates the dialectic of alienation of the ego (the illusory idea of unity the subject possesses) and the subject (the one who engages in mental acts). This split results from the impossibility of coincidence between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance. Subjects become set in the social roles they play (but with which they are really not identical) and these roles are built up into an ego.

Furthermore, the very nature of language involves an arbitrary and changeable relation between the signifier and the signified and it is this feature of language that makes metaphor possible. The process by which metaphor operates, the substitution of one signifier for another which it occultates, Lacanianians take as the model for the process of repression, which establishes a split between the conscious and the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis has shown that the subject's psychical apparatus is made up of various agencies, each of which has its own properties and purposes and which interacts and conflicts with each other. To this discovery, Lacanianians add that the ego furnishes the subject with only an illusion of permanence, stability and integration. In reality, the subject can be grasped only as a series of agencies in conflict.

This shift in emphasis from a transcendental subject to a labile and divided self – a self divided between subject and ego, between unconscious and conscious – is central to the works of Yvonne Rainer.¹¹ Her work involves a number of oppositions – oppositions between image and sound, between written text and spoken text, between depiction and account, between past and present, between here and some other place – which make incompatible demands upon the spectators and ultimately make spectators aware that they are engaged in competing processes, that they are split between watching and listening, hearing and reading, imagining and perceiving. The notion of the individual being self-contained and wholly harmonious in all her or his parts is displaced and replaced with the notion of the person as divided and as possessing parts which do not coincide with one another, whose divisions are not completely harmonious with one another. The conception of the self as transcendent (which dominated previous phases in the avant-garde cinema) has been repudiated and replaced by a conception of the subject as being formed in experience, inasmuch as the subject is the condition of meaning. (This conception of the genesis and nature of the self shares features with the postmodern paradigm.) The static conception of the self of the previous phases has been replaced with a conception of the subject as labile and as "self-conflicted."

The strong impulse to examine the nature of the self did not begin with avant-garde cinema but originated in the seventeenth century and culminated in the modern paradigm. It paralleled the withering away of those highly ordered world views which had accorded value to human beings depending on where they stood within a cosmological system. According to the pre-modern view, value was bestowed upon human beings in a measure that depended upon their lofty place with the hierarchy of beings (that is, within the order of creation). With the collapse of hierarchic world views (a collapse that was finally conceptualized in existentialism, in death of God theologies and, especially, in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche) human beings, as Nietzsche so insistently pointed out, were thrown back upon themselves as the producers of values. Experience of the loss of given, pre-established values forced on people recognition of the need to produce a new set of values from within human nature itself. This prompted much self-examination and led to the celebration of the inwardness of the modern paradigm. At about the same time, Darwinian and Freudian philosophies displaced the individual – whose being had traditionally been linked (in a manner which Freudianism challenged) with self-consciousness – from the centre of the world stage, as Copernican thought had before displaced the individual from the centre of the cosmos. This induced a sort of narcissistic wound, and human beings reacted by scurrying to find a rather primary sense of the self at the centre – at least the psychic centre – of things.

Image and Identity

In an important footnote to his legendary description of his grandson's "fort/da" game, Freud remarks:

One day the child's mother had been away for several hours and on her return was met with the words "Baby o-o-o-o" which was at first incomprehensible. [Freud had earlier explained that both he and the baby's mother took "o-o-o-o" to mean "gone" – *fort* – in German.] It soon turned out, however, that during this long period of solitude the child had found a way of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image "gone."¹²

A lesser student of human behaviour than Freud might have concluded that the child's behaviour represented an instance of the psychological process of turning some action against the self, or was evidence of the pleasure afforded by mastering the unpleasant, or considering the relation between the child's play with his reflection and his play with the wooden reel, as evidence of the delight a child takes in revenge against the mother for her behaviour (expressing the idea "it's not you who are going away; it is I"). But

Freud's insight was deeper; he recognized that the child's game concerned those very fundamental concepts, being and non-being. At stake in Freud's analysis of the child's game with the mirror is a person's exteriority to himself or herself. What the incident taught Freud was that a person's identity is based on imagery, that humans live in the external images of themselves.

The question of how the imagery on which our sense of identity is based comes to be attached to the subject represented by the shifter "I" is an interesting one, and demands consideration of the nature of the basic identificatory processes, of the manner in which image-presentations occur in the very young child and of the nature of the relation of language to thought, including mental imagery. It has been well established that the infant's earliest experiences are synaesthetic and hallucinatory in quality. The stream of ever-varying, synaesthetic sensations which constitutes the infant's experience must seem to the infant to be reality and it must seem to her, that she is totally absorbed in that reality: she is it, and it *is*. But, probably as a way of organizing this flow of sensations, an "I" forms. Winnicott's thoughts on the relation between mother and child provide a clue about how this happens. The baby at the breast or held in his or her mother's arms gazes into the mother's face. Winnicott asks, "What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face?" And he answers: "I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there.*"¹³

The correlation between mother's states and baby's states means that for the baby, the "not-I" and the "I" are still merged, when, that is, the mothering is good enough to encourage this belief. But, in the normal course of things, the baby does eventually come to perceive the mother's face and to know it as hers; when this happens, the mother becomes a feature of the environment, of the "not-I."

All of this talk of the fusion of child and the breast, of the merging of the "me" and the "not-me," depends on a satisfied baby at a good breast. But there is also the bad breast and the bad baby. All babies sometimes experience the bad breast, since all babies are sometimes upset and try to project their pain into the mother, and sometimes feel rage. In this state babies can try to disavow the pain they continue to feel when the breast (the bad breast) fails to succour them or they can express the rage they feel by forming a negative hallucination, an hallucination which does away with the breast, the mother, or whatever is the source of the frustration and the upset they experience. In fact, the negative hallucination often does away with everything else as it does away with what is believed (usually as a result of projection) to be the source of discomfort.

Most often the mother will take in this anger and this frustration, process it and return to the baby a succouring sense of being. But what happens to the internal world of babies in cases of failure, when, for whatever reasons, the

mother's ministrations do not soothe the baby? When babies have hallucinated away the source of their pain, they are left with a gap in consciousness, an emptiness, a primary blankness. Since children's sense of being depends upon the existence of conscious imagery, this emptiness is experienced as an engulfing, annihilating void. Their being is threatened with non-being. If babies are able to develop stable representations, this annihilating nothingness will only rarely present itself. If they are able to form a representation of their mother (an image of the mother) then, even when she is physically absent, she will not necessarily be absent from consciousness. Since the sense of identity of young children depends upon the presence of imagery and upon the mother, the ability to form the feeling/idea that the mother is not really gone carries with it the belief that their own continued existence is unthreatened.

In the first few months of life the mental representations of very tiny children are constantly changing; these synaesthetic sensations/perceptions/apperceptions are rather like continuously altering hallucinations. They later become somewhat more specific and less synaesthetic, and increasingly they are sorted into representations of the internal world and representations of the external world. Even so, in the early stage of this process, these representations (at this stage, mental imagery) are quite unstable and somewhat unfocused. Perhaps the most accurate way of characterizing these images is, to appropriate J.M. Davie's term, as "wobbly images." These wobbly, unstable images are correlated with, literally, a shaky sense of the self.

One of the effects of the acquisition of language is to stabilize this wobbly image. Children acquire language, and use it, not just to categorize the contents of their experience, but to actually create forms of experience unavailable to those without language. After children acquire language, not only do their mental representations become increasingly verbal but all their experience, even visual perception, comes to be informed by language. Thus, children who learn the term "motor" come to connect their perception of single motor with the names of things that move – locomotives, motion pictures – and with the abstract concept of motion; they incorporate it into a system of concepts and, by tracing the relations between these concepts, they can produce new knowledge for themselves. Similarly, when they encounter a new word such as "automobile," if they are old enough and knowledgeable enough, they can identify one of its important features, that it is "automobile."

An effect of the acquisition of language on consciousness is that language comes to mediate between the raw materials of sensation and the resulting percept, for a number of complex operations are performed on the raw material of sensations. Language is used to analyze incoming sensations, to synthesize incoming information, to abstract certain features of sensation and render them prominent and to filter out other aspects, to encode the resulting impressions into systems and to formulate complex relations among

these entities it helps to generate. Involved in the formation of every perception is a process which results in the raw material of sensation being assigned to a familiar category, a process that is intimately involved with the abstractive and generalizing functions of language. Hence all computer simulations of perception involve a decision-making algorithm which is used to assign a perception to a certain category. While the human eye can distinguish between two or three million hues, most people know at most only thirty to forty colour names. A person perceiving a certain hue has the task of isolating its primary feature and then assigning this feature to some colour category. It is language that makes this possible. When a language has only one name for blue and green, these colours themselves are often confused. Thus language influences perception.

Language filters the mass of data presented by the senses, abstracting relevant features and incorporating these features into a categorical framework. Language also allows us to deal with absent objects – so to speak, to reproduce the world in consciousness. This permits us to maintain a system of meanings regardless of whether we are actually experiencing the objects to which the words we use refer. This productive capacity of language allows us to reorder as well as to reproduce relations between objects and so provides the basis of both imaginative and conjectural (“what-if”) thinking; in short, it makes possible a form of negativity which does not threaten the essential structures of being. In permeating the structures of imagery, in isolating certain features for awareness, in assimilating these perceptual abstracts into a categorical system, language stabilizes the originally wobbly image and provides a nucleus around which it crystallizes or, to use another metaphor, comes into clear focus.

Still, the wobbly image sometimes reappears in consciousness even after the acquisition of language, and with it comes a sense of the uncertainty of reality, a sense that the being of both the self and the external world is in jeopardy.¹⁴ This happens in psychosis, but it also occurs at times in the psychic life of perfectly normal individuals (whoever they are). And, as J.M. Davie has pointed out, sometimes even these wobbly images vanish, and that annihilating emptiness presents itself again.

These ideas are present in the work of Jack Chambers, which possesses a religious/cosmological dimension. The language of religious mystics often includes terms like “nothingness,” “the original absence,” “non-being” (and even “the being of non-being”), “the void” and the “*via negativa*,” terms which refer to this annihilating nothingness, this gap in consciousness produced by the negative hallucination. Correlations between this gap in consciousness and the mystic nothingness are clear. The mystics’ encounter with nothingness occurs when the nadir of human existence has been reached and, we are told, it annihilates the sense of the self. From psychology we know that this blankness also often occurs in states of depression and is felt to demolish the structure of our being. The mystics often speak of the

destruction and emptying out of selfhood as a prerequisite for establishing a new form of relation with the Other. The psychoanalyst Marion Milner asks:

Is it not possible that blankness, that lack of mindfulness, can also be the beginning of something, as the recognition of depression can be? Is it not possible that the blankness is a necessary prelude to a new integration? May not those moments be an essential recurring phase if there is to be a new psychic creation? May there not be moments in which there is a plunge into no-differentiation, which results (if all goes well) in a re-emerging into a new division of the me-not-me, one in which there is more of the "me" in the "not-me" and more of the "not-me" in the "me".¹⁵

When we experience such a gap in consciousness, we feel that our continuing existence is threatened, a feeling that is at the root of fears of death. It is from this triangular relation between the negative hallucination, the intimation of death, and the mystical void that Chambers forged the structures of his work. Among his works, it is *Hart of London* that makes this most evident.

Hart of London

Hart of London (1970) begins with a nearly pure field of white light accompanied by white noise (a sort of hissing) on the soundtrack. The image has several connotations: death, desolation, and above all, non-existence in which consciousness has its beginnings. It suggests, as does much of Chambers' work, that the beginning and end of our existence coincide, that our end is a return to our beginning.

The field of pure white light changes to an image of a white snow-covered field. A hart runs and leaps in the middle of the field, as though startled by something. This image too is richly laden with connotations. The hart is an animal of the forest and so evokes associations of unspoiled nature, of nature before civilization encroached upon it and corrupted it.

But this is a startled hart; it is fleeing, not playing. The ominousness of the images of the hart are reinforced by the alternation of normally exposed images with over-exposed images and fields of pure white light, since shots of these latter two types have qualities in common with annihilating nothingness. But as yet we do not know what has startled the hart and why it is fleeing. We soon learn, for next we see a gun being loaded. The gun is shown a number of times, first in over-exposed images, then in multiple-exposed images; thus, the line of regression from normal perception to the wobbly image to the negative hallucination is drawn.¹⁶ The movement from normal to regressive and back to normal perception is repeated several times as the image of the gun alternates between normal and negative imagery which, on the whole, is very light-toned. By means of this alternation, the gun is associated with the negative hallucination.

The deer is shown leaping over a fence in a newsreel image, an image that appears in Chambers' painting, *The Hart of London* (1968), and, as in the painting, this image is juxtaposed with one of a policeman carrying ropes, that is, with an image of the regulatory forces that ensnare and destroy playful innocence.

The film again changes to a field of white light which once again suggests the negative hallucination and the idea of death. From this field of white emerge undefined, barely visible images of men on a city street carrying an ensnared deer. The focusing ring on the lens is then racked over and we see a tree. This pull-focus is a device for making a transition from the idea of civilization to the idea of nature. But what is implied in this transition? We might be tempted to interpret it as expressing the familiar notion that our civilization is destroying nature, but other features of this passage and of the film as a whole contradict this interpretation. For one thing, the film does not present nature as something that is wholly kind, gentle and innocent; by this point in the film, Chambers has already associated nature with the annihilating emptiness. His vision of the relation between civilization and nature is far more complex and far more disturbing than this interpretation would make it out to be. In *Hart of London*, Chambers shows that civilization and nature have their innocent and gentle sides, but both also have a violent and aggressive side that drives each to destroy the other.

Chambers here seems to be developing a tragic vision of the relationship between civilization and nature which is akin to another postmodern's vision. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Martin Heidegger speaks of two fields of being, World and Earth.¹⁷ World comprises all conscious beings and all those beings manipulated by consciousness for its own purpose. Its will is to master and to control the Earth. It seeks to assimilate the earth by making the Earth knowable to consciousness. That which it cannot understand, it seeks to destroy. Earth, on the other hand is (or, more precisely, is understood by World to be) the ensemble of material beings. It is driven by unconscious instinct. Like World, it too is self-aggrandizing and wants to return the World to the state of Earth. Finally, it is inscrutable to World.

Not the least troubling aspect of this description of the relation of these two fields of being is that the distinction between World and Earth is not as sharp as the distinction between nature and civilization is generally understood to be; it does not neatly categorize every object that exists as belonging exclusively to one or the other of these two domains. In fact, everything that exists can be understood as belonging simultaneously to both domains, for everything that exists is made of material that comes from the Earth and operates according to the laws of nature (that is, Earthly laws) and at the same time has fallen under the control of the World's impulses. (This is Heidegger's way of formulating the postmodern notion of the unity of consciousness and nature.) Though everything belongs simultaneously to both domains, the two domains are inevitably at odds with one another. The

conflict between them can be understood in two ways. One is that each is self-aggrandizing: World seeks to assimilate Earth and Earth seeks to assimilate World; the other is that Earth is inscrutable to World and World attacks in order to destroy what it cannot understand.

Like Heidegger, Chambers seems to have believed that World incorporates aspects of Earth and that Earth incorporates aspects of World that civilization and nature are locked in a closed cycle of struggle. And like Heidegger, Chambers seems, at least at the time he made *Hart of London*, to have believed that that makes existence essentially tragic, since this essential tension unleashes destructive forces.

As consciousness starts from the void of nothingness, so World evolves from Earth and civilization (and consciousness) evolves from nature. Thus Chambers' film begins with snowy fields, then shows animals in the snowy fields, then animals on city streets, and finally developed cities. Though civilization is shown as developing from nature, and consciousness is shown to have its origins in the blankness of unknowing, World (civilization and reason), when far enough developed, tries to overcome Earth (to eliminate nature and unreason) and claim everything for itself. And so it is with life and death: the life force drives all beings towards immortality and the death force strives to destroy all life. This is quite a different conception of the relation between life and death than the one Chambers held when he made *Circle*. Then he saw life and death as holding each other in balance. At the time he made *Hart of London*, his vision of the relation of the two was a much more disturbing one, for he came to believe that each is locked in a tragic struggle with the other.

The images of World (of civilization and consciousness) that follow are a montage of faces, buildings, and cityscapes arranged in what the film semiotician Christian Metz would call a bracket syntagma, which means achronological groupings of loosely associated images which follow one another in the same manner a parenthetical interpolation follows a main text. As the passage proceeds, the city appears more and more industrial. But also included in the passage are a large number of old school photographs, of groups of people wearing clothes that identify the photographs as dating from a few decades ago and pictures of people standing in formal poses before the turn-of-the-century buildings. Thus, the passage takes on the features of a souvenir album. As the sequence proceeds and the montage becomes more rapid and an increasing proportion of the images are in negative, the resemblance of the film images to actual memory images becomes more striking. Even the rapidity with which one image replaces another and the indistinctness or the indefiniteness of these images which results from their being in negative seems calculated to convey the instability and uncertainty that so often characterizes memories and to evoke that sense of loss which is so deeply involved in the process of remembering. The fact that some of these images (such as the images of the entrance to the Kellogg building, the

Carling brewery truck and the McCormick biscuits factory) seem to belong to some indeterminately remote past stresses the achronology of the passage and so emphasizes its interior quality, and at the same time gives the imagery a very local character. In this way, Chambers provides a figure for the relation between consciousness and place. The alternation of negative and positive imagery, the recurrence of some images, the presence of flipped images, and the use of rapid montage give this passage characteristics which resemble those of the process by which consciousness endeavours to form a stable image fixed in – or at least associated with – a time and space other than that of internal time and space consciousness. It therefore suggests the struggle of consciousness for a sense of place.

We realize by this point too that the film imagery is becoming more distinct and definite and that its apparent depth is increasing. Throughout the rest of its length, the film follows along on this course of development; the imagery changes from black and white to colour, becomes more stable, more conventionally realistic, and takes on greater depth. The general development is from less stable, early internal imagery to conventional imagery representing the world external to consciousness. It represents a move from within to without, depicting the way in which the self finds a place in the real world. It shows how imagery that is the ground of our being and that at first seems to be purely internal achieves a locus in the real world, thus bringing self and other into a fundamental ontological relationship (even if a conflicted one).

Chambers' decision to have the opening passage begin with that primal blankness from which imagery emerges seems to indicate his interest in the origins of consciousness and the foundations of identity. But the structure of the opening passage has other significances. It is largely composed from still and moving picture images of local history of London, Ontario. Chambers uses this imagery to convey the idea that our sense of identity is forged in a community and that our sense of self is inextricably bound up in that community. (In fact, it suggests the postmodern notion of the unity of self and other.) This explains the extended family album quality of the passage, for a family album also interrelates personal and family identities. The instability of this imagery – imagery which represents the contents of consciousness – is used to demonstrate that only when internal imagery comes to be associated with a fixed time and space, only when it achieves "place-ment," does it become stable. Finally, inasmuch as the wobbly image is a product of instinctual drives, the structure of the opening passage indicates that the sense of personal identity which is forged on the site of the stable image regulates the derivatives of the instinctual drives. Thus Chambers associates the notions of community and a regulatory order.¹⁸ *Hart of London* is in part about the vicissitudes of the instincts within a regulatory order.

The film continues with a passage that conveys a sense of the difficulty of fixing these conscious images, of making them stable. Several devices are

used to convey this difficulty. Close-up images of what appear to be branches create a flat, rather Pollock-like construction. Because these images lack space (depth), they also seem not to have a fixed place in the real world. Positive-to-negative and negative-to-positive reversals (of factory buildings and street scenes, for example) are used to create a literal lack of stability. Negative images (of buildings, cars, etc.) are used to produce flattened spatial fields. Images are flipped left to right so that the direction of the movement in the image alternates between movement from left to right and movement from right to left. Superimpositions are used to create multiple vanishing points within a single frame, a strategy familiar from Cubist art, which has the effect not only of reducing depth by multiplying vanishing points until none is especially effective but also of suggesting, as the Cubists themselves realized, the synthetic nature of perception. Grid-like structures such as occur in bridges, girders and buildings with square windows are used with a similar purpose: they flatten the image by reducing it to simple geometric forms that lie flat on the picture surface. Moreover, most of the movements in most of these images occur in directions that parallel the surface of the picture plane, a feature which also helps eliminate any impression of depth. But what most closely resembles the wobbly image of anxious drive perception and most clearly reveals the purpose of all these devices is the use of bas-relief, as in the image of the horse and buggy, created by combining positive and negative versions of the same image slightly out of phase with each other, with the result that the product of the combination is an image composed of silver-white forms in shallow relief with jittering edges.

One set of images, which appears several times in this passage and is of special importance, shows men dragging corpses of wolves across snow fields. Some of these are images of a single man with a wolf, others are images of several men with wolves. They suggest the interlocking violence of human beings and nature; the wolf represents nature's violence and its being slaughtered represents the violent reaction of human beings to the violence of nature.

Near the end of this section, there appears an image of a man in the middle of a snowy field holding a hose as though flooding a skating rink. The whiteness of the field and the freezing cold are obvious allusions to death. This shot anticipates other images of water that occur at the very end of the passage, images of flowing water that obviously signify dissolution and death (analogues to the impulses motivating the negative hallucination) for it is followed by a short passage which contains no distinct imagery whatsoever. Following it is a shot, in clear focus, of maple keys.

The water image is a transitional device that carries us into a new section of the film. This sectionalization is marked by a change in the soundtrack from intermittent bursts of white noise (which, here, are a kind of aural equivalent of the negative hallucination) to the sound of flowing water. This latter sound, though somewhat more representational and less aggressive

than white noise, still carries connotations of dissolution and death. And although we might be inclined to conjecture that the main shift of implication in this aural transition is a shift of the destructive drive – or at least, of the represented locus of the destructive drive – from the internal realm to the external, this cannot really be so, since Chambers seems to have believed, at least at the time he was making this film, that the violence of human beings interlocks with the violence of nature and that each holds the other in a circle of mutual struggle (and much of the film's imagery embodies this postmodern belief). This aural transition can be interpreted only as a shift in attention, from the internal to the external, from one part of the circle of violence to the other.

In this new section, shots or passages that signify life, birth and the process of generation alternate with shots or passages that signify death. For example, images of maple keys are juxtaposed with images of a snowy field, as though to emphasize the deathly significance of these later images. Similarly, another passage begins out of focus with what, to all appearances, seems to be another field of pure light that, we have learned by now, signifies the negative hallucination; this field of pure light forms (through a pull-focus) into an image of a snow-covered field, in the middle of which is a mother holding her two sons. (It is, then, somewhat reminiscent of Chambers' early painting, *Olga at the South Pole*, 1963.) This shot itself, then, comprises symbols of both birth and death. Shortly thereafter, we are shown a mother carrying a baby out into the snow, in a shot that again relates the ideas of birth and death. This image is soon followed by a passage constituted by what seems to be overlaid images of branches; the images slide overtop one another, and the flat space that results suggests the wobbly image.

The appearance of wobbly perception at this point is especially interesting. Because snow-covered fields are most frequently used in these passages to convey the idea of death and destruction, it might seem that Chambers believed that the forces of destruction belong to the world external to consciousness, and that the image of the mother and child standing in the middle of the snowy field was meant as an image of modern dualism, as an image which portrays the individual as a weak and vulnerable being in the middle of a hostile nature – were it not, that is, for the presence of these wobbly images. Wobbly percepts are percepts affected by the drives, and the anxiety they register is signal anxiety about the drives themselves or, more precisely, about the drives felt as attacks on the structures of the ego. Given the context in which these wobbly percepts occur, we can safely infer that the drives whose effects are here registered by the destabilizing of perception are the aggressive drives. Hence the wobbly image juxtaposed against the field of snow conveys the idea that the human being answers external forces of aggression with his or her own aggressive drives. Here, again, in an utterly postmodern fashion, Chambers implies that human beings and nature are locked in mutual combat.

The section continues alternating images that signify birth and growth with images that signify death and decay. Images of water are cut together with images of farmers ploughing the field, creating a conjunction that conveys the idea that water has fertilizing, life-sustaining powers. These images, that signify the life-sustaining forces, are followed by overexposed, intensely bright images which signify violence, aggression, destruction, and, generally, the negative drives that produce negative hallucination. In keeping with these connotations, the next images are of flooded areas and ruined houses. Taken as a whole, the passage conveys the idea that water can be life-destroying as well as life-sustaining and, on a broader level, that there is an intimate relation between creation and destruction. In the next passages, leaves and maple keys are superimposed over the face of a person who appears to be lying quite still, as though dead. Here, once again, images of birth and death are associated with one another. Following these are several extreme close-up images of shoots on a hedge being cut down by a man wielding a pair of enormous shears.¹⁹

With the next image, a new section begins which, although marked off from the previous section by different visual qualities, is nevertheless thematically nearly identical with it. This passage begins with a close-up of one eye, then moves to a close-up of a hand searching out a medicine bottle. The deathly significance of these images is emphasized by the next shot of a dripping tap, which condenses the idea of the corrosive effects of passing time and the idea of the dissolution of structure by water. This construction, inasmuch as it articulates a comment on the man's condition, is a kind of intellectual montage. The next shots continue the pattern of the alternating syntagma which has provided the structure for this passage. They are shots of various parts of the body of a baby boy: we see first his hands in close-up, then extreme close-up shots of his entire body which, because they were taken with a moving camera seem to represent the baby's own perception of parts of his body, for they are not in clear focus. These shots emphasize first his eyes and later his teeth; the later images are used to suggest that even a seemingly innocent baby possesses aggressive instincts and, thus, that innocence and aggression can be associated with one another. When, still later in the passage, images of the baby playing with his penis are linked with images of his teeth, the pattern of alternation of images of behaviour motivated by creative drives with images of behaviour motivated by destructive drives is continued.

A new section of the film begins when the image changes from black and white to colour. Like the previous one, this section is structured by the alternation of images of birth and images of death. However, the images in this passage are more literal than those in previous passages, for they are images of the birth of a child and of the slaughter of a lamb. The lamb has obvious religious connotations and the table on which it is slaughtered strongly resembles an altar. The scene is a version of the crucifixion, with the lamb

representing Christ, *Agnus Dei*, the lamb of God that "taketh away the sins of the world." The blood, whose redness, we surmise, the switch to colour was calculated to emphasize, is thus the blood of Christ which washes away our sins. This image is a complex one, for it brings together notions of sin, death, redemption, salvation and rebirth. As a version of the crucifixion, it relates ideas of death and birth. There are also, at the end of the passage, shots of the newborn baby (representing the Christ child and so the Love of the World) juxtaposed with shots of a lamb embryo (presumably from the womb of the lamb we just saw slaughtered) that likewise relate the ideas of birth and death, and articulate the notion that there is a destructive force in things, a force that, effectively, slaughters innocents.

The next passage consists of red-tinted images of a bonfire in which Christmas trees are burned. The Christmas tree is a symbol of Christ's birth, the red bonfire, of death. The following passage consists of images which deal with such notions as separation and merger, individuality and its loss, and with death, here depicted as loss of individuality. We see pictures of a mother teaching her son to swim (here water stands for the universal solvent which dissolves the structures that individuate things, leaving only a common "soup"), a lamb embryo (the whole) being divided into parts, a human embryo (the individual – a part) enveloped in the surrounding tissue (the whole). In all these cases, it is the newly born or the not-yet-born whose individuality and integrity are threatened. Once again, then, birth and death are linked with each other. The pixillation effects used in this passage further emphasize the dialectic of unity and division.

The passage continues with a soft focus shot of light reflecting from water, that is, of short-lived dots of lights dancing on an ever-changing, indeterminate ground. This is yet another variation on the theme of the dialectical unity of particularity and universality, death and life. This scene is followed by pixillation of toys and driftwood on a beach: a red plastic shovel, an inner tube, and plastic moulds stuck into the sand, one an ambiguous purple shape resembling a hand grenade and the other a prominent yellow smiling-faced sun, then by images of people near an ocean which, like the image of the children swimming, conveys the threat of the impending dissolution of individuality and particularity.

The fear of the loss of individuality with which these sections of film are concerned relates closely to the idea of identity with which the earlier sections of the film dealt. For one thing, the images of water are rather like the negative hallucination. Although Chambers seems to have believed that our sense of identity is constructed upon specific, concrete, definite images, the images in this passage are used to suggest universality and therefore are all, to a degree, non-specific, abstract and indefinite. Thus, even in their formal characteristics, they represent the antithesis of a sense of identity. But the matter is not quite as simple as this. Chambers believed that our sense of

identity develops in a community and in a place – a specific place within society and within nature. The use Chambers makes of images of universality in the last passages implies that the universal has aspects other than its nurturing ones, for they reveal that, at the same time the universal helps forge the individual, it threatens that person with loss of individuality. Thus the very agency that creates human beings also threatens them with destruction. The intimacy of the relation between self and other which Chambers draws is of an altogether postmodern character.

The next section of the film presents additional examples of the duality within nature of nurturing and destructive forces. We see a man going for a brief swim in icy cold waters of a stream; here, an activity that would normally be delightful and restorative has turned into a potentially lethal one. We then see men emerging from a hole, as though from a mine shaft which has collapsed. The implication that they narrowly missed being destroyed is quite obvious, but the image also contains another less obvious implication. The way the men emerge from the underground cavern resembles the way a baby emerges from the birth canal. This passage, too, has a double connotation of birth and death. Following this image, we are presented with several shots of sailboats on a lake, some of which resemble scenes that appear in Chambers' well-known painting *Regatta No. 1* (1968), a painting which alludes to the story of a boy dying at a boating event. Hence, this passage at least adumbrates the notion that an activity which is normally life-enhancing can also result in the destruction of a life.

The passage constituted by images of sailboats is followed by one in which images showing individual units being formed into unified wholes and images showing unified wholes being divided into individual units alternate with one another. We see people crossing a bridge, their individual footsteps joining to create a journey, then railway water-towers being toppled over and destroyed. We see a train, composed of a series of individual cars (in fact, this image suggests both integration and disintegration), then a group of parachuters breaking up as the individuals plunge from a plane one after another.

This section is followed by one that deals primarily with decay. We are shown fruit dying on a vine, then scenes from some sort of recreational event, apparently at a nursing home or an asylum (some attendants are dressed as orderlies). Rather sorry-looking old men stand in barrels and box one another until one tips over. With this scene, the theme of balance – the balance of life and death (for in all these games the loser is knocked to the ground) – is made explicit. This theme is articulated again in the next passage which shows a wheel-barrow game in which participants end up getting dumped to the ground. The destructive potential inherent in that which ordinarily supports and nurtures life is again suggested in a scene of huge flowers in the shade of large umbrellas; while looking at these shots, we realize that though the sun once nourished these flowers, it now threatens to destroy

them. In the next scene, some young children enter a room and kiss an old couple who sit in rocking chairs. Even though vital and loving children are depicted in this scene, the overriding impression is produced by the immobility of the old people. Accordingly, the scene suggests more the sad fate of youth than the continuity of the generations (even if the latter is also implied). Next we see old people looking at old photographs, perhaps searching for lost friends. Chambers seems to be suggesting that the loss these people obviously feel is not counteracted by the ability of photographs, or memories, to preserve moments against time; a photograph can never secure a moment against loss precisely because a representation can never really make what was past present again.

The use of photographs in this sequence reveals something quite important both about the use of dated newsreel footage in this particular film and, more generally, about Chambers' interest in creating images that derive from photographs (as nearly all his paintings after 1962 did). Part of Chambers' interest in the photograph is obviously that it acts as a sort of memory. A photograph is like a memory in two respects. In the first place, it is a representation, in the sense that it renews the past. The photograph has the power to affect us with bygone things; it can disturb us in a way that the thought of and the affects surrounding the lost object can disturb us. Chambers' paintings have consistently exploited the capacity of the photograph to inflict us with nostalgia. *Olga Visiting Graham* (1964), one of Chambers' earlier realist paintings, depicts his wife visiting a departed friend. The family scenes, in *Sunday Morning No. 2* (1970) and *Diego Sleeping No. 2* (1971), for example, are simple scenes of passing childhood, depicting moments that are known to all parents, retrospectively, to be both perfect and very short-lived. Even the later still life and nude paintings present objects and people whose beauty is bitterly transient. The dated quality of the found footage in *Hart of London* evokes feelings of sadness similar to those we feel when we think of objects that we cherished or people we loved. The faded, undetailed quality of much of the found footage highlights the pastness, the "bygone-ness," of these lost objects, in just the same way as the indistinctness of memories – and the fundamental unrecoverability of their missing details – provides an index of the loss of events and objects which are their source. Secondly, like some memories, a photograph can present us with an illusion which so closely resembles our experience of actual objects that it very nearly overwhelms our recognition that it is an illusion and convinces us, rather, that it has actually rendered eternal the object it depicts. There are two consequences to this. One is that memory and consequently love can very nearly render enduring events and persons we cherish and save them from destruction. This is the conviction behind Chambers' repeated insistence that perception, which begins in love, ends in a photograph. The second is a more bitter consequence; the eternity which a photograph seems to achieve for its object is achieved only by turning the object into an illusion – into something

unreal. A dialectic between eternity and unreality lies at the heart of the photograph, and this dialectic is the reason why the photograph breaks so many promises. To render something permanent, a photograph must first render it unreal.

Chambers appears to have been haunted by this dilemma, for it seems to have been the source of the realization that life-sustaining and life-denying forces, creative forces and destructive forces, are intimately interrelated, even in artmaking. Like Snow in *Presents*, he seems to have come to the sad conclusion that a photograph is marked by both the presence and the absence of its model. When making *Hart of London*, Chambers was probably convinced that the illusory nature of the photograph is its primary attribute, that a photograph – like a memory – triumphs over time only by rendering its model unreal. We surround ourselves with images to hang on to what we love, but in doing so we accumulate only the ghostly traces of a bygone world.

The theme of the destruction of natural beauty that occurs when things of beauty are turned into art objects is reworked in the scenes of women picking flowers to wear as boutonnières. The following scenes, of birds trapped in their cages like the spirit in the flesh, like the real in the illusory, like the transient objects of nature in the eternal time of the photograph, offer additional articulations of the same concept. The fundamental destructiveness of human beings, nature and the process of making art (and perhaps even of the process of forming memories) is suggested by the following images of corpses lying in rows.

In the final passage, Chambers' two sons, John and Diego, approach some deer in what appears to be a zoo, wanting to pet them or to feed them. The soundtrack presents Mrs. Chambers' voice, lowered to a chilling whisper, giving the boys instructions and repeating, over and over again, "You've got to be very careful." In certain important respects, this scene is a reversal of the opening scenes in the film, for there the hart was the victim and here it threatens to be the destroyer of innocent victims. The scene also clarifies the role of the hart in the film. This role, it turns out, depends upon the traditional symbolic value of the image of the hart. Like the eagle and the lion, the hart has traditionally been understood as an enemy of the serpent and so associated with light and goodness. The slaughter of the hart depicted at the beginning of the film, therefore, represents the slaughter of innocence while the menacing quality of the hart at the end of the film implies that even goodness has turned threatening and destructive. Moreover, the hart, because its antlers are renewed, is also a traditional image of regeneration. The image of the slaughter of the hart is an image of destruction of the regenerative forces, of the ultimate victory of destruction over regeneration, while the image of the hart menacing the children at the end of the film is another depiction of the potential lethality of the creative force and exemplifies the manner in which the creative drive threatens to destroy innocence. Finally, because of

the resemblance of its antlers to branches, the hart is linked with the Tree of Life, and the killing of the hart is a symbol of the destruction of life, while the menacing hart is a symbol of life-sustaining forces turned aggressive and destructive.

There is, however, a central ambiguity to this passage. Mrs. Chambers may be not cautioning her children about the hart's threats, but exhorting them to take care for the hart. "You've got to be very careful" may also be taken as a moral statement, encouraging her children not to frighten the deer unnecessarily. References to the violence of human beings and the violence of nature are thus condensed in this ambiguous exhortation.

Hart of London is a film concerned with the activity of creation and with the process by which identity is constituted. It establishes that the means by which a person's identity is forged has its roots in imagery, in images of self, of nature and of community, or, more precisely, of self-and-community-and-nature, for it shows that self, community and nature are indissolubly linked. But it is, in addition, a film based on a profound understanding of various types of mental imagery and their natures. The film's interest in memory arises from Chambers' concern with the stable image upon which a stable sense of identity is grounded. These images, because of their stable, object-like characteristics, belong to – or at least have some of the features of the contents of – what the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott refers to as the third space, a space which is neither external to consciousness nor internal to consciousness. It is this that makes such images valuable in the process of forging an identity which relates self to world within a stable matrix. In some mental states, however, as these images grow fainter and less distinct, the fact that they are internal to consciousness becomes increasingly evident, as does the fact that they are subject to the same vicissitudes as all internal objects. Above all, it becomes clear, as *Hart of London* intimates, that they are as much prey to being eliminated in aggressive rage, to being done away with by the negative hallucination, as are other internal objects. The negative hallucination does away with the ground of our identity and is therefore felt to pose a threat to the foundations of our being. Because we normally deal with our destructive impulses by projection, the destructive forces involved in the negative hallucination – internal forces that are felt to threaten our being – are attributed to the community and nature which surround and support us. This explains Chambers' notion that the violence of self, nature and community interlock and why, in Chambers' work generally, but especially in *Hart of London*, images of community and nature have the dual characteristic of supporting and at the same time threatening our sense of identity.

La région centrale

Michael Snow proposes a somewhat more stable sense of identity than Chambers does. The rapid exchange of one image for another in Chambers'

Hart of London suggests the wavering sense of identity that is associated with constantly shifting identifications. The more limited range of images found in any of Snow's films (with the exception of the final section of *Presentations*) implies a more constant and enduring sense of identity. Although this sense of the self is involved in all of Snow's films, it is clearest in *La région centrale*.

To say that it is in *La région centrale* that Snow's notions about the self become clearest might seem extravagant, inasmuch as *La région centrale* is certainly one of the first – perhaps the very first film – in which camera movement is completely de-anthropomorphized. In most films, regardless of whether or not it moves, the camera functions as a substitute for the human eye, seeing much as a person would if situated exactly where the camera is. Generally, when the camera is moved, it records pretty much what people would see if they moved about some environment. There clearly are differences between the camera's perception and human perception: a person's attention is selective but a camera records everything in the field in front of it, in either soft or sharp focus; human perception is normally sharp throughout its range of vision – or, at least, possesses a rapid enough follow-focus mechanism to simulate the effect of a field that is sharp in all planes of its depth, while a lens' depth of field is usually quite limited; and human peripheral vision has no equivalent in photographic vision. There are also differences between the way a camera scans across an environment and the way the mind's eye scans across an environment (a camera moves continuously across or through an environment while the mind's eye slips and darts from place to place to place without registering the places in between). These differences, however, can usually be ignored. Indeed, we are usually encouraged to ignore them. But Snow's photographs and films have consistently been dedicated to making us aware of those features that distinguish the camera's perception from human perception. Thus he has used gels (pieces of coloured plastic inserted in front of lights or lenses to colour an image with an overall tint) to reveal among other things that, whereas the human eye adjusts to changes in colour temperature of the ambient light that enables us to see objects, the photograph registers every minute detail of those changes in the colour of light to which it is exposed. Too, many of his photographs reveal the process by which they are made and so reveal their status as an object, and not as a ghostly, mental image.

The camera movements of his earlier films, too, are chosen for being unlike eye movements. There is, for example, nothing in human vision that resembles the zoom used in *Wavelength*. Even the repeated and often hyperaccelerated panning in \longleftrightarrow eventually insists upon the difference between the mechanical motion of panning and the far less continuous changes involved in shifts in visual attention. But it is *La région centrale* that carries this feature of Snow's work to its apogee, for throughout that film's three-hour duration, the camera consistently moves in a fashion utterly

unlike the movement involved in changing place or visual attention.

However paradoxical it might seem, it is the very purity of the camera movements – their de-anthropomorphized character – in *La région centrale* that allows them to serve as a metaphor for consciousness. Snow filmed *La région centrale* on a remote mountaintop, north of Sept-Îles, Quebec. Nowhere in the film do any people or animals appear, nor is there evidence of any towns or villages just beyond range of the camera. Nor, for that matter, is there any indication that human beings live nearby; there are no hydro-electric power lines, no television transmitters. Hence, the camera moves over and through an uninhabited landscape, over and through an unpopulated space, an empty space, or at least, something rather close to it. As a result, we are able to see camera movements for what they are in themselves. We do not regard them – or, perhaps more accurately, we do not disregard them, as we do most camera movements in most fiction movies – as a means of moving from one important object or character or incident to another or as a way of following characters as they move. The emptiness of the landscape encourages us to recognize the camera movements for what they are in themselves.

Snow made some characteristically perceptive comments on the relationship between the camera movements in *La région centrale* and previous films. In a proposal submitted to the Canadian Film Development Corporation (now Telefilm Canada), Snow stated:

I would like to make a 3 hour film "orchestrating" all the possibilities of camera movement and the various relations between it and what is being photographed. The movement can be an imperceptible part of the activity, can accept it, can counterpoint it or contradict it and can be independent from it. Since I'm sure nothing has been done in this area perhaps I should clarify the sense in which I can say that camera movement is an unexplored potentially rich part of cinema: camera movement has generally been allied to the dictates of the story and the characters being presented and follows what has been assumed to further these things, e.g. someone leaves the room, the camera follows the action. I give the camera an equal role in the film to what is being photographed.

The camera is an instrument which has expressive possibilities in itself.²⁰

The principle underlying the camera movements of *La région centrale* is a transformation of the principle underlying the camera movements of Brakhage's films. The specific characteristics of Brakhage's camera movements (their being slow and lyrical or rapid and agitated) reveal the subjective state of the filmmaker when he performed these movements; at the same time, they represent movements of the eye – shifts of attention and other variations in vision. In Brakhage's work, the representation of vision and the

expression of feeling are related to one another in a most extraordinary manner. This extraordinariness has much to do with the conception of the self in Brakhage's work. His films are based upon – and are dedicated to the attempt to evoke in their viewers – a fascinated condition which involves a thoroughgoing identification of the viewing subject with the act and content of vision.²¹ In Brakhage's vision, the "I" is nothing but an "eye" – or, at least, an expanded eye that is capable of seeing internal as well as external events. So complete is the identification that for Brakhage any change in vision represents a transformation of the self. One register of this transformation is a change in our somatic state, a change that is reflected in our behaviour, indeed in the very way in which we move, including how we move when holding a camera. Similarly, when we move, our *soma* is affected and these changes are registered as changes in the way we feel and see – or better "feel/see," since for Brakhage all emotional experiences involve modification of our bodily condition and the way we see, and these alterations cannot be separated one from the other. Since Brakhage identifies the "I" with the "eye," he considers all transformations of vision to be transformations of the self. Fascinated spectators of Brakhage's films are so absorbed in the act of seeing that any change in what they see ruptures the continuity of the self. Every shift of attention involves a death of one self and the birth of another. This is what the perpetually regenerating forms of Brakhage's work are all about.

Snow proposed to go Brakhage one better:

I decided to extend the machine aspect of film so there might be a more objective feeling, you wouldn't be thinking of someone's expressive handling of the thing but perhaps how and why the whole thing got set in motion, what's behind it. The camera itself is a machine so attaching it to another, personally designed machine seemed a way of augmenting its possibilities. In this case I was composing for a very special instrument. I only looked in the camera once. The film was made by the planning and the machinery itself.

And in a note on the film, he added:

In my films I've tried to make something happen that couldn't happen in any other way so that there is something special about the experience that comes from the possibilities of the medium. If it seems worthwhile to make art works at all which is sometimes questionable you'd better do something that adds to the world, not in a material sense but that as an experience has some distinction to it. At the same time the films are not coercive, they're objective. The film is there and you are here. You're equal. It's neither fascism nor entertainment.²²

Snow's camera movements do not encourage us, as Brakhage's do, to believe that they embody the mechanics of seeing nor do they encourage the

strongly involved, fascinated response that Brakhage's do. One reason for this is that his camera movements do not resemble the movements involved in shifting our visual attention from one point to another. Rather, they are camera movements that are as much as possible unlike the natural movement of our eyes and so can never be taken as representing those movements. Secondly, Snow bases entire films on simple camera movements extended over considerable lengths of time. This is important partly because such movements are unnatural. While we might, through concentrated attention, turn our head slowly in a way that allows us to see something like the way the camera at the beginning of \longleftrightarrow sees, we never turn our head back and forth at varying rates for forty-five minutes. This makes it inconceivable to say that the camera movement in this film mimics some feature of perception. Finally, a soft-focus, rapidly scanning shot that is held on the screen for only a very short period of time, which Brakhage uses with great regularity (indeed he has often composed entire films exclusively from such scenes), demand that viewers concentrate all their mental energies on the act of perception – on identifying what they are seeing – so that no mental energy is left over to allow viewers to engage in the apperceptive acts of anticipation and recollection. The unitary forms of Snow's work, which frequently involve the slow development of variations, encourage viewers to engage in such apperceptive acts, including the act of self-reflection. The temporality of Brakhage's films (their elimination of all sense of past and present) embodies a conception of the self as perpetually being renewed and so, as lacking a history – a conception of the self as constituted by nothing other than the imaginative act in which it is momentarily engaged. The temporal continuum of Snow's films (which he highlights by using forms involving gradual and systematic variations which occur over extended durations and by using representational imagery which, as he insistently points out, involves a commingling of various temporal modalities) embodies a different conception of the self – one which, as Snow's stress on the apperceptive acts of recollection and anticipation indicates, sees the self as enduring through time. Snow's self is stable, for it is not perpetually transformed with its changing identifications, as is the self of Brakhage's films. The fact that there exists a still centre behind the camera movement in *La région centrale* implies that the self of Snow's film is unaffected by the experiences it undergoes. As the self-reflexive forms of Snow's works²³ suggest, this self is the transcendental self that lies outside of experience and reflects upon it. This is why Snow, in comments on *La région centrale*, has stated that he wanted to make a film that acknowledges that, when we view a film, "the film is there and you are here."

The Transcendental Self, *La région centrale*, and Idealist Thought

The extremely flexible camera mount Snow and his associate Pierre Abelos designed for *La région centrale* permitted camera moves that seem, by the end of the film, to detach the eye from the body, to allow the eye to float free in space, to become "the eye of God."²⁴ Jean-Louis Baudry's comments on the cinematic apparatus seem framed as a description of *La région centrale* and of the implications of the camera movements it employs:

To seize movement is to become movement, to follow a trajectory is to become trajectory, to choose a direction is to have the possibility of choosing one, to determine a meaning is to give oneself a meaning. In this way the eye-subject, the invisible base of artificial perspective (which in fact only represents a larger effort to produce an ordering, regulated transcendence) becomes absorbed in, "elevated" to a vaster function, proportional to the movement which it can perform.

And if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement – conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of film – the world will not only be constituted by this eye but for it. The movability of the camera seems to fulfill the most favourable conditions for the manifestation of the "transcendental subject." There is both fantasmaticization of an objective reality (images, sounds, colours) and of an objective reality which, limiting its powers of constraint, seems equally to augment the possibilities or the power of the subject.²⁵

In Snow's *La région centrale*, spectators identify with the camera, with what allows them to see what they see. The camera is the stand-in for the transcendental subject which constitutes and rules the objects in the world which we perceive, for it is through the transcendental self that the discontinuous fragments of lived experience are integrated in a unifying meaning. As Husserl states in *Cartesian Meditations*: "A second type of polarization now presents itself to us, another type of synthesis which embraces the particular multiplicities of cogitations, which embraces them all and in a special manner, namely as cogitations of an identical self which, active or passive, lives in all the lived states of consciousness and which, through them, relates to all objects."²⁶

Continuity, then, is an attribute – and product – of the subject. Brakhage's films evoke such a radical sense of discontinuity that continuity of the transcendental subject itself seems in doubt. The spectators' identification with a changing visual field is so complete that, despite the subjectivity of Brakhage's camera movements, the identification with the camera as the agency of vision is weakened. Indeed, Brakhage's attempt to affirm the subject behind his camera appears to be a last-ditch attempt to save the self from

collapse into the ever-changing (we could say ever-dying-and-being-reborn) field of the other, the spectral scene. The sure sense of the continuity of the transcendental self which Snow's films convey is one mark of Snow's access to a conflict-free realm of experience.

Even Snow's interest in framing relates to the idea of the transcendental subject. To quote Baudry again:

The world is no longer only an "open and unbounded horizon." Limited by the framing, lined up, put at a proper distance, the world offers up an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the "subject" which sights it. At the same time that the world's transfer as image seems to accomplish this phenomenological reduction, this putting into parentheses of its real existence (a suspension necessary ... to the formation of the impression of reality) provides a basis for the apodicticity of the ego.²⁷

For Snow, consciousness is consciousness of consciousness. That is why for Snow consciousness, though stable and enduring, is nonetheless a nullity, an emptiness, something that can be defined only as self-consciousness, as the awareness of awareness, as something that has no nature of its own but is wholly determined by its object.

In drawing an analogy between the camera and consciousness and in pointing out that the camera imposes structures on that which it produces (and so transforms the real in the process of making a representation of it), Snow is advancing the familiar Kantian claim that consciousness imposes forms and structures on its contents and that all we can know is the phenomenal realm that is subjected to such formative principles, not the noumenal realm underlying it. And when Snow collapses the distinction between the subject and object and stresses, by using the comprehensive circular movements of which the film is composed, the idea that these representations form a complete self-contained world, Snow develops this argument along the same line that Hegel took Kant's (and retraces that dialectical progression from the modern toward the postmodern paradigm). Given Hegel's dismissal of Kant's claims for the existence of a noumenal realm (claims which Hegel thought contradicted Kant's own demonstrations that the world of the senses could be entirely constructed from phenomenal material, without using materials, rules or procedures that derive from anything outside the phenomenal) and his demonstration that the phenomenal world is all that reason can know, and his belief that the noumenon is an empty notion, his attack on Kant is a criticism of the Subjective Idealism in the name of Absolute Idealism. The central tradition of Canadian philosophy and art has consistently embodied a tension between empiricism and subjectivism on the one hand and Absolute Idealism on the other. Here, in the evidence of Snow's affinities for the Hegelian tradition of Absolute Idealism, we have a testament to the continuing strength of that heritage.

In a way *La région centrale* throws all these claims into doubt. Some sections of the film make use of devices which seem designed to provoke a confusion, inasmuch as they invite us to (mis)take movement of the camera for movement of the objects that are filmed, or of movement of the viewing subject for movement of the camera. In fact, the film as a whole seems finely balanced, with one confusion being weighed and balanced against the other. For example, the ninth section presents night images; the moon appears to move through the screen tracing arcs from one corner of the screen to another. Of course, we know that it is actually the camera that is moving, but, try as we might to see it this way, we still seem to stubbornly take the movement as the movement of the moon through the sky. The final section of the film is a climactic section for it contains movements of incredible velocity as the camera sweeps from ground to sky and back again at an ever accelerating pace. When these speeds reach a certain pace (about the point at which the camera takes about 1.5 seconds to complete one full cycle beginning from ground, moving to the sky, then back to the ground again), we begin to feel a sensation that is extraordinary, indeed unique in all of cinema. It is a feeling of weightlessness, as though we were whirling through space observing the earth beneath us. These sections are designed to bring into question the relation of the subject of the viewing experience and the object of that experience. The very nature of the climax suggests the exhilaration of being released from a fixed position and identifying with a dynamic process.

But does this not refute the claim that the self always stands outside of experience, unaffected by it? Is not this a form of fusion? Probably not. The experience of this section of the film is enormously subtle; the strongest feeling it elicits is that the self has been dissolved and that the cosmic process is going on without it (in both senses of the word "without"). In a sense, then, it is one more variation on the theme of the self's distance from the other.

The experience of *La région centrale* is one of losing the self in a process. Snow's films, like those made by the majority of Canadian avant-garde filmmakers, demand to be considered within the framework of Absolute Idealism. Are these two propositions not contradictory? Is it not absurd to speak of an idealism without a subject? This does not appear to be the case. Indeed with this film, Snow's thought takes a step toward Hegel's most profound insight. Jean Hyppolite has demonstrated that Hegel's conception of history is not an anthropological one. Here is Louis Althusser reworking Hyppolite's argument, extending it with his own (rather polemical) remarks:

History is the Spirit, it is the last moment of the alienation of a process which "begins" with Logic, continues with Nature and ends with the Spirit, the Spirit, i.e. what can be presented in the form of "History." For Hegel, quite to the contrary of the erroneous view of Kojève and the young Lukács, and of others since them, who are almost ashamed of the Dialectics of Nature, the dialectic is by no means peculiar to

History, which means that History does not contain anywhere in itself, in any subject, its own origin. The Marxist tradition was quite correct to return to the thesis of the Dialectics of Nature, which has the polemical meaning that history is a *process without a subject*, that the dialectic at work in history is not the work of any Subject whatsoever, whether Absolute (God) or merely human, but that the origin of history is always already thrust back before history, and therefore that there is neither a philosophical origin nor a philosophical subject to History. Now what matters to us here is that Nature itself is not, in Hegel's eyes, its own origin; it is itself the result of a process of alienation which does not begin with it: i.e. of a process whose origin is elsewhere – in Logic.²⁸

Althusser further developed his claim that Hegel's notion of the Absolute is that of a process without a subject by further scrutinizing the implications of Hegel's basic view of the nature of the Absolute:

when we examine more closely the 'nature' of this Subject which is supposed to be Absolute ... we find that it is *the origin negated as an origin*. This can be seen at two points in particular.

Firstly, at the beginning of the *Logic*, which negates what it begins with from the very beginning, by immediately negating being in nothingness; which can only mean one thing: the origin must simultaneously be affirmed and negated, hence the subject must be negated *from the moment* that it is posited.

Secondly, in Hegel's famous thesis that the Absolute Idea is simply the absolute method, the method which, as it is nothing but the very movement of the process, is merely the idea of the process as the only Absolute.²⁹

On this Althusserian reading of Hegel, Hegel suppresses every origin and every subject in the effort to establish the truth of his fundamental conviction, that the Absolute is a process without a subject. In the end, then, we may assert what Hegel established at the outset of the development of his metaphysical system, that being = nothingness, that all that is is process. This recalls the Heraclitean aspects of Snow's thinking.

The notion of the transcendental subject that informs Snow's earlier film threatened to lead to a rupture between mind and things, and this could only lead to a thoroughgoing subjectivism of the sort that virtually defined the modern paradigm. In the ultimate experience evoked by *La région centrale*, consciousness merges with the totality of matter. Mind and matter, the ideal and the real, as Hegel foretold, are reunited. In this section of *La région centrale*, Snow proposes an enlarged view of consciousness, expanding it from one that sees consciousness as representing beings to one that sees consciousness as forming – and formed in – Being. This makes it the culminating moment of Canadian cinema.

Snow's work is based on a strategy of balancing complementaries that *prima facie* appear to be opposites. In a way, Snow wants to demonstrate that there is a basic harmony of things, to move beyond duality towards non-duality. Yet there is a chilling aspect to this. This harmony, this non-duality, does not include the self. The self, perhaps, is seen as a fiction which we adopt at the standpoint of the finite. When the finite standpoint is transcended we are left, simply, with the pure evidence of things. Thus, among the apparent dualities which Snow attempts to reconcile are the dualities of sadness and serenity. Certainly, the forms of many of his films, including *Wavelength*, suggest the passing of time and so of loss. Yet his films also seem to be imbued with the sense that the feeling of loss sometimes yields to serenity inasmuch as the act of memory guards against utter loss of the past. But, reciprocally, Snow's feeling of serenity seems to be imbued with sadness, for memory itself somehow seems essentially nostalgic. Sadness and serenity co-exist in a tension until, as the diagrammatic form of *Wavelength* invites us to do, we see this time from a vantage point of eternity. But where are we in eternity? Wherever there is wholeness, there is loss. This, it seems, is the ultimate lesson that photography teaches.

Snow's work is just at the cusp of the change from the modern to the post-modern paradigm. The shifting and unstable qualities that result are in no way aesthetically deleterious. Snow's films induce what we might call a mental oscillation – a swing back and forth from one paradigm to the other – and thus provokes a tension that lends his work an aesthetic power. Snow longs to overcome the isolation of the modern subject, but he also believes (as the forms of his work demonstrate) that this can be done only by converting reality and the subject into phantasms. Transcendence is loss, according to Snow.

The emotional power of such a conception is undeniable. However, the tension that sustains such conceptions only exists at periods of historical transition like our own. As the postmodern paradigm comes to dominate thought, the possibility of further work like Snow's will become ever more remote.

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Notes

Notes to Introduction, Part I

- 1 Anthony Wilden, "Culture and Identity: The Canadian Question, Why?" in *Ciné-Tracts*, vol. 2, number 2, Spring 1979; and *The Imaginary Canadian* (Vancouver, Pulp Press, 1978). See especially p. 148.
- 2 Wilden, *The Imaginary Canadian*, p. 63.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 4 Here I differ with Wilden.
- 5 The importance of this topic was established by the work of Gregory Bateson (see, for example, *Steps To an Ecology of Mind* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1972]), and especially "Double Bind, 1969" and "Towards a Theory of Alcoholism: The Cybernetics of 'Self,'" (first published in *Psychiatry* 34, pp. 1-18 and collected in *Steps To an Ecology of Mind*). Anthony Wilden and Tim Wilson have also dealt with this topic. See Wilden and Wilson, "The Double Bind: Logic, Magic and Emotions" in Carlos E. Sluzki and Donald C. Ransom, eds., *Double Bind: The Foundation of the Communicational Approach to the Family* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1976), pp. 263-286.

Notes to Chapter 1

- 1 This is why the denunciations of The Regina Five (painters Kenneth Lochhead, Arthur McKay, Douglas Morton, Ted Godwin and Ronald Bloore) as mere importers of American-type modernism of the sort expounded by Clement Greenberg really miss their mark. Several of these painters (especially Lochhead) capture the quality of this empty space.
Examples of works that employ strategies for concealing the vast, empty spaces that characterize our landscape can be found in Gaile MacGregor's *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). The book is at once original in conception and exhaustive in its working out of its themes.
- 2 *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* was first published by Longmans, Green, Longmans and Roberts in 1851. A new edition was brought out by Hurtig Publishers in 1968.
- 3 Heather Dawkins, "Paul Kane and the Eye of Power: Racism in Canadian Art History," *Vanguard*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Sept 1986), pp. 24-27.
- 4 This notion is central to the exegesis of an experimental film that was produced in Canada but is very American in its typological structure (as in so many features). See Bart Testa, "The Epic of Concatenation: On *Amerika* and *United States*," *C Magazine*, 10 (Summer 1986), pp. 46-55.
- 5 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 80-81.

- 6 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays in the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 141-142.
- 7 Marcia Kline, *Beyond the Land Itself: Views of Nature in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 47.
- 8 Wyndham Lewis, "Canadian Nature and its Partners," *The Listener* (August 29, 1946) in *Wyndham Lewis on Art, Collected Writings 1913-1956* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), pp. 428-429.
- 9 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p. 200.
- 10 From Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 63.
- 11 In Seth Feldman, ed., *Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), p. 52.

Notes to Chapter 2

- 1 Grant often collapses the latter into simple Calvinism, but I believe he is wrong to do so.
- 2 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, pp. 5-6.
- 3 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, pp. 17-18.
- 4 John Dunn, *Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [Past Masters Series], 1984), p. 47.
- 5 Thus Sir Ernest Barker's introduction to *Social Contract: Locke, Hume and Rousseau* (New York: Oxford University Press [A Galaxy Book], 1962) makes no distinction between Locke's and Hobbes' views on the origin of duty in the state of nature (see for example, p. xix).
- 6 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, pp. 35, 34.
- 7 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, pp. 36-37.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 9 Though one important difference between Grant and Calvinists is that the Calvinists would never, as Grant well knew, claim that it is in the practice of philosophy that we discover "what man is fitted for" (to use Grant's own phrase). On this contrast, see George Grant, "American Morality" in *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1959, rev. 1966).
- 10 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, pp. 44-45.
- 11 One Canadian who did is Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The basis of his political philosophy was the belief in the importance of keeping nation and state distinct from one another. A nation is a group of people united by a common culture which include various components of race, language, religion, social ideals, art, education and a common stock of experience. The state, on the other hand, is an administrative institution, concerned with regulating behaviour, enforcing laws by (among other things) punishing crimes, and distributing goods. On the question of what measure of equality the state had the responsibility for ensuring, Trudeau offered no absolutes, but certainly in his view it would include operating social programs and facilitating certain activities by providing transportation or building industries or hospitals or schools. Basically his position was that the social conditions the state ought to pursue "in a very general way consist in so organizing the political community that all its members have the essential before a few are allowed to enjoy the superfluous." Two formative influences on Trudeau's thought were the rise of Nazism and the ensuing global conflict and the agrarian, "francophone nationalism" espoused by many of the followers of Abbé Lionel Groulx and the *Action française* movement (some of whom – including Camillien Houde, mayor of Montreal during much of Trudeau's childhood and youth – embraced the ideology of Mussolini's Italy and Vichy France). Both movements made the state an

instrument of national expression and both led to reactionary excesses. Trudeau reasoned that the forces that led to these reactionary developments were immanent in the identification of a state with a nation. Whenever this identification is made, those who are citizens of a state or residents of the geographic area administered by a state, but who are not members of the national group whose will the state expresses, are relegated to the position of at best second-class citizens and at worst non-citizens whose human rights are not recognized (as the German National Socialists refused to acknowledge the human rights of non-Aryans generally and Jews in particular). A universalist conception of humanity and community (which Trudeau may have acquired during his Jesuit education) demands that the state must not be the voice of any particular nation. Members of any national group ought to be able to participate fully in the affairs of state. This is the logic behind Trudeau's advocacy of multiculturalism, a position that has found almost universal and unquestioning acceptance in Canada.

There is an intimate relationship between Trudeau's belief that freedom belongs to the essence of humanity and his belief that reason must furnish the basis of political obligation. He seems to believe that political orders that solicit emotions from their citizens or that ask for a loyalty which is founded on something other than the rational calculations of a self-interested individual have a tendency to degenerate into systems that bind the individual rather than making him or her free. Such political orders include those which are founded on what Trudeau regards as irrational nationalistic (or patriotic) or religious sentiments. Trudeau attempted to use the ideal of reason as an instrument to cut apart the ligatures that bound together nationalism, agrarianism (as a counterforce to modernizing and secularizing tendencies) and Catholicism – an alliance which was, at the time Trudeau and the other editors of *Cité Libre* took up cudgels against it, a three-part unity that Ultramontanism had bequeathed to Quebec and that dominated that province from at least the turn of the century until the Quiet Revolution in the early to mid-1960s.

Trudeau's political philosophy is the product of a strong and generous moral vision. But among its implications is a radical restriction of the functions of state. It eliminates from the domain of activities in which the state ought to engage those activities whose end is the building and maintaining of a "national culture." Most societies have held these to be endeavours proper for a state to carry out. One reason for this widespread conviction is that national cultures serve to give citizens ideals which they can identify with and which distinguish one state from other states. Another reason is that human beings can develop their potentials fully only in a strong culture; they become fully human only when a culture fosters and develops their highest potentials.

Undergirding my arguments is a positive conception of freedom, a view that sees freedom as the facilitating or even the guiding force that enables something (or some person) to become what it has the potential for being (or even, in Grant's words, is "fitted for"), in contradistinction to the negative conception of freedom (that is, of freedom as the removal of restraints on an individual) which is the liberal view of freedom. Those who maintain the conception of positive freedom generally advocate a strong national culture, since they view the existence of a strong culture as a condition of positive freedom, while those who maintain the conception of negative freedom argue that the state should have a minimal role in developing a national culture, since they consider the presence of a strong national culture to be inconsistent with the pluralism that is so closely associated with the negative concept of freedom. The majority of Canadian intellectuals have maintained notions of positive freedom. Trudeau

did not, likely because of his universalist Catholic ideals.

A consequence of the conviction that the state should play no role in fostering a national culture is the belief that the state's activities ought to be restricted to the administrative responsibilities of ensuring a measure of distributive justice (perhaps this includes such activities as operating social welfare programs, a health care delivery system, a free educational system), reconciling property disputes, protecting residents from crime and punishing those guilty of infractions of the laws that protect its residents. Trudeau accepted this reasoning and so conceived of the state as primarily an administrative mechanism (rather than seeing its institutions as the embodiment of the historical wisdom and cultural values of a people). Though these conclusions may (or may not) have had widespread beneficial effects, it was certainly this line of reasoning that led to Trudeau's famous statement of 1968 that the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation. Many thinkers have maintained that the state has a proper place in the regulation of sexual conduct, since sexual conduct involves human values too significant to be ignored; the health and continuing well-being of a community (as the Roman church realizes) depends upon the healthy sexual activity of its adult residents. Liberals, on the other hand, see sexual conduct as Trudeau did, as a matter of private rather than public concern. And similarly, many societies and many thinkers have argued that the state ought to play a positive role in the production of a national culture. While he did admit that the state should intervene in the nurturing of culture, Trudeau argued – in a way that was wholly consistent with his negative conception of freedom – that the state should intervene in culture only to stop cultural “bully-boys” and the forces of crass materialism from getting their own ways.

This conception of the negative role of the state in culture is a far cry from the positive conception that states with strong, central cultures have traditionally held. And indeed Trudeau qualified his stand: intervention by the state in culture supposes “that the state knows better than the citizen what is ‘good’ for him culturally, and ... more than any other, this kind of value is international and common to all men; in the long run, then, the state should ideally promote an open culture. There is also a danger that cultural protection, like its economic counterpart, would tend eventually to produce a weak, ‘hot-house’ culture.” [Try making that argument to the Germans or the French.]

- 12 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed., John Yolton (London: Dent [An Everyman book], 1961).
- 13 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London and Glasgow: Fontana Library Edition, 1964), p. 452.
- 14 Cited in Frederick Copleston S.J., *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5 Modern Philosophy: The British Philosophers, Part II Berkeley to Hume*, p. 168.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 16 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 170.
- 17 From Reid's 1785 Collection, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay VI, Chapter 4.
- 18 Cited in Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, part II, p. 171.
- 19 Both cited *loc. cit.*
- 20 In this regard at least, the views of the Scottish Common Sense school resemble more recent, non-phenomenalist versions of empiricism (advanced by Otto Neurath, W.V.O. Quine and R.W. Sellars, for examples). For a good introduction to some contemporary empiricists and their critics, see Harold Morick, *Challenges to Empiricism* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1972). One of the main sources of the contemporary critique of

Humean phenomenalism is Wittgenstein's comments on the impossibility of a private language (see L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophic Investigations* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1953], pp. 88-104). Wittgenstein's remarks on these pages are extremely cryptic, even for Wittgenstein. For analyses of the Wittgensteinian argument against private languages and sense data that make Wittgenstein's reasoning somewhat more accessible see H. Morick, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967).

- 21 S.A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 3.
- 22 For a discussion of the nature and extent of the influence of Common Sense views on Canadian thought, see A.B. McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), especially the second chapter. The remarks on curricula that follow are drawn from this source.
- 23 John Passmore's history of recent philosophy notes that after John Stuart Mill's fierce attack on Sir William Hamilton's philosophy, "The 'Scottish School' never really recovered from the blow, although it lingered on for some time in Scotland and the United States, where it became a sort of official philosophy in the less adventurous colleges" (John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* 2nd ed. [Harmondsworth (Middlesex): Penguin Books, 1968], p. 13). It lasted quite a bit longer in Canada and penetrated the more adventurous universities.
- 24 There is a common misconception that the dualistic worldviews which have been a persistent feature of Canadian intellectual life are of a Cartesian character. But in fact they are not rationalistic at all; they are empiricistic. Our quasi-official rationalistic philosophy is Absolute Idealism – and it holds that in the final analysis subject and object are identical.
- 25 From W. Lyall, *Intellect, The Emotions and Man's Moral Nature*, quoted in A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, p. 50.
- 26 Thus, in his 1855 address that opened the 1855 session at Queen's College, James George spoke on "The Relation Between Piety and Intellectual Labour," reminding students that "in their blind enthusiasm for learning", they risked "overlooking the relation which God established betwixt body and mind" (quoted in A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, p. 41).
- 27 Quoted in A.B. McKillop, p. 55.
- 28 T. Martin, in *The Instructed Vision* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1961) demonstrates just how widely accepted the Common Sense school was and how great an influence it had in the United States. (I hope the reader will recall that I argued at the outset that the search for absolute differences between Canadian and American thought leads one into a paranoid quest.)
- 29 A very fine survey of McCosh's thought and of his influence on higher education in the United States is J. David Hoeveler, Jr.'s *James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981). It should be noted that the book says nothing about McCosh's influence on Canadian thought.
- 30 Puritanism is a development much influenced by the Calvinist tradition. Moreover, while American Puritanism admittedly may have issued in a secular and debased system of thought, it was certainly anything but secular in origins. Even Jonathan Edwards' theology proposed itself as a *summa* of Calvinist theology and the pervasive theme of his writing is the most familiar of Calvinist themes, the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and humanity's utter dependence on God for salvation (i.e. human beings' inability to attain salvation through good works). Too, Edwards' argument, in *Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue* (1754), that it is in the emotions rather than in the intellect

that virtue resides, has more than a little resemblance to very common Calvinist arguments, while his denial of the essential freedom of the will and his refutation of Arminianism (which claimed for the human will the power of self-determination) is wholly consistent to Calvinist teachings of predestination. Perhaps the most cogent philosophical and biblical case ever made for Calvinism, in fact, is Edwards' *Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will* (1754). To a point even Edwards' qualified endorsement of the Great Awakening (a movement of religious revivalism and evangelical pietism and millennialism which began in New England in the early 1700s and spread through the maritime provinces of Canada in the late 1700s and was one of the first expressions of American religious nationalism), in his report, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) has roots in the Calvinist stress on the individual's direct relation to God, unmediated by ecclesiastical authority.

Despite this important relation between American Puritanism and Calvinism, the two should not be identified. George Grant seems to attribute some features that I believe are distinctive to true Calvinism to the Puritans. Nevertheless, I also believe that when the differences between the Puritans and the more thoroughgoing Calvinists are recognized, the argument that Puritanism is one of the foundations for American technologism can be seen as potentially stronger than the version which Grant himself provides. Furthermore, I believe that through identifying the differences between American Puritanism and the more thoroughgoing Calvinism that took root in Canada we gain insight into the differences between the political foundations of the two nations.

John Milton was trained as an Anglican, and though he became a Puritan, he rejected Calvinism and its doctrine of predestination. Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* is not at all a bad guide to the differences between Puritanism and the stringent versions of Calvinism.

Milton believed that the Bible is Divine revelation and that it is capable of providing all that is necessary for salvation. This itself is at odds with the more stringent versions of Calvinism which emphasize human beings' dependence on God for salvation but is consistent with Puritanism. But Milton associates this Biblicism with an emphasis on internal states, just as other Puritans did. Milton stated that while scripture is the only external guide to which, in matters of religion, human beings must conform, conscience is the only internal guide. But it is how Milton developed the notion of conscience that represents one of the distinctively Puritan features of his thought. He combined his resolute Biblicism with a strong emphasis on "right reason." Conscience, Milton claimed, operates rationally, and even when illuminated by the Spirit, it relies on "right reason," not mystical capacities, as a guide to scripture. This idea is based on a view which supports Grant's comments about the anti-contemplative character of Puritanism. Authorizing Milton's view of the role of reason in interpreting scripture is the doctrine that in the scripture God's will has accommodated itself to the limited understanding human beings possess. In the Bible, God has presented as full and complete a revelation as humans are capable of comprehending. A consequence of the view, as Grant implies, is that speculations on the Transcendental are seen as at best useless and probably corrupting.

Furthermore, Milton, like many Puritans, rejects the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, holding that every person possesses a free will and the power to choose good rather than evil. This power Milton and many other Puritans see as an aspect of God's gift of grace. Like the anti-Calvinist Arminians, Milton believed that human beings are free and possess the powers that enable them to

pursue or to refuse salvation. Milton held that regeneration (to use that Arminian term) is a matter neither of faith nor of works but of the works of faith. (This conviction too lends support to Grant's view that Puritanism results in a devotional commitment to activism.) According to Milton, to every person God gives sufficient grace that salvation is within his grasp. The Miltonian view – a view held by many other Puritans – that salvation is within the grasp of every person is at odds with the Calvinist view that humans are so depraved that they are utterly dependent upon God for salvation and that it is God's will alone which determines who the elect, who are chosen for salvation, are. By emphasizing the powers possessed by every person, it lays stress on the individual, and by emphasizing the importance of the works of faith, it lays stress on activism. These features of Puritanism are consistent with Grant's understanding of the relation between Puritanism and technologism.

Milton's conception of human nature – and the conception of many Puritans – was also different from the gloomy Calvinist view of human nature as depraved. While Milton did believe that a certain hardness of heart resulted from the Fall, he believed that grace, which in his theology amounted to conformity with "right reason," could illuminate the virtue that is natural to human nature. The spiritual regeneration that results from such illumination leads to a revitalization of natural powers and a reawakening of the understanding to natural powers. Moreover, through the confrontation with evil and its rejection, human beings acquire "true liberty." In this process, as well, they achieve true character.

In this way, Milton's Puritanism – and other Puritans thought much the same as he did – has certain resemblances to humanism. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the United States it could associate itself with certain forms of humanism (such as the thought of Thomas Jefferson) and that each of those doctrines could reinforce the other. Of course, Calvinism, with its much more gloomy view of humanity, could not associate itself with humanism, and as a result of the grip on the Canadian mind of a very stringent Calvinism, humanism never had the same impact on the Canadian ethos. Furthermore, Puritan emphasis on "right reason" allowed it to establish links with Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin. The Calvinist emphasis on piety and "enthusiasm" precluded such associations. Thus Canadian thought has quite often questioned "the primacy of reason."

The Calvinism that took root in Canada was altogether more radical than American Puritanism. The Calvinists here were the Dissenters (who broke from the established Church of England). The Puritans felt that the Dissenters were too extreme, too irresponsible and would bring discredit on the reform movement in general. Our Calvinism was usually one of the Congregationalist varieties. The founder of Congregationalism, Robert Browne, argued that the true church is a body of believers in Christ, bound to him and to each other by a voluntary covenant. Congregationalist churches are self-governing and consider their real head to be Christ. They choose their own ministers and other church officers but consider that every member is responsible for all others. There is no ecclesiastic hierarchy.

Puritans were alarmed at the radicalism of Congregationalism specifically and Separatism generally, believing it would lead to spiritual and political anarchy and turmoil. They were also appalled at claims that a true understanding of the Bible could be attained simply and directly by Divine revelation; the implication that the unlettered were on a par with the educated was too much for them to bear.

31 The Enlightenment repudiated the Calvinist conception that the earth is a vale

of tears and suffering; rather than picturing humans as the lowly plaything of an inscrutable God, it portrayed them as the captain of their fate and the hope of the universe. Rather than stressing the depravity of humanity, the Enlightenment stressed its perfectability. Instead of the dark doctrine of Original Sin (that theme of so many Calvinist sermons), the Enlightenment embraced the idea that human beings were infinitely perfectible, a creature whose good or evil traits resulted more from social experiences than from Adam and Eve's sins.

Though Benjamin Franklin retained his faith in most of the Calvinist Virtues (Franklin's famous Thirteen Virtues were the same as those espoused by Calvinists), his thought exemplified features of Enlightenment thinking. He rejected completely the Calvinist attitudes that the earth is a vale of suffering, a trial constituted to prepare people's spirits for the Day of Wrath. He believed that our lives should be devoted to the pursuit of happiness, achieved by "getting on" with our fellows. The traditional Puritan virtues he recommended, not for their value in "justifying God's ways to man," but for their practical utility – for their value in helping us "get on." For Franklin moral virtue was no mystical quantity; it was practical, for through the exercise of virtue, people would succeed in their endeavours. Virtue should be pursued not out of fear of God's wrath, but for the eudaemonistic and hedonistic rewards that it affords. Franklin also taught that wealth was not evidence of God's favour; it was simply something gained through effort and frugality – a notion that contradicts the Calvinist teaching that people are utterly dependent on God.

- 32 Moreover, Calvin did not believe this separation ought to be as complete as he is often alleged to have believed. Calvin did believe that different needs for fellowship should be fulfilled by different institutions. The concern of the church should be with spiritual salvation, the concern of the state with external conduct and a just ordering of society. But, while he believed these two institutions should be structurally independent, he also believed they should promote each other's welfare.
- 33 McCosh's ethics were formulated in the midst of a dispute between a moderate and an evangelical group within Scottish (and Irish) Presbyterianism. The moderate groups were an alliance of nobility and gentry with the Reformist ministry that was formed after the Patronage Act was passed in 1712; all were influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment. They wished to put an end to the theology of damnation and to liberate the church from the prejudices of the masses. Moderates insisted that the church should expound the Christian's practical duty in a fashion befitting the age of progress. They emphasized the benevolence of human beings rather than their depravity. Seldom did the sermons of the moderate clergy mention such Calvinist doctrine as original sin, divine election, reprobation and arbitrary grace, and they avoided any signs of enthusiasm. For them the theology of damnation was a taboo.

As J. David Hoeveler Jr. points out, evangelicalism was a thoroughly Victorian movement. Prominent among the features of the Victorian age are moral earnestness, anti-intellectualism, reliance on authority, enthusiasm and hero worship. Evangelicalism attracted zealous partisans the world over, but in the English-speaking nations (and among these, especially Scotland, Ulster, Canada and the United States), this zealotry took on distinctive traits. In these countries Evangelicalism joined with other romantic and anti-intellectual movements to reject the idea that truth was the decision of the court of reason. Its gospel-based fervour was dogmatic in the extreme and favoured a new form of authority – the truth of the gospel, discovered in a moment of enthusiasm.

Evangelicalism was partly a product of the pauperization and the social

disenfranchisement of the working classes following the Industrial Revolution. It was also a way of combatting the rise of the scientific attitude. Consequently, evangelicals spoke out against rationalism and scientism. For those who were experiencing the plight of Glasgow's industrial workers or who knew firsthand the miseries of those living in the declining rural areas, the Moderate movement, with its attitudes of refinement, learning and high culture had little to offer. But the Evangelicals did take up their cause; in fact, evangelicalism was a movement that developed partly in response to the demands to reform the Christian religion to meet the needs of these new industrial classes. The Scottish Evangelicals returned to the sterner aspects of the Calvinist teachings for the moral resources to combat the social decay of the age. They returned to emphasizing the scriptural foundations for faith, the sinfulness of human beings and the omnipotence of a wrathful God.

34 George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974), pp. 61-62.

35 The typological interpretation of history leans towards doing exactly what Voegelin has spoken so forcefully against, immanentizing the *eschaton* in the manner of the gnostics. To some extent, the Puritans did identify the world-to-come with the here-and-now of real world existence, bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. This eventuated in the secularization of Puritan morality. The Puritan emphasis on labour and will, when secularized, put the Americans in an advantageous relation with technology.

36 George Grant, "A Platitude" in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 137.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

39 This discourse is prominent in our films. Sandy Wilson's charming feature *My American Cousin* (1985) associates the opposition in character between the Canadian girl and her American cousin with the opposition between nature and technology. Butch, the American cousin, arrives in a Cadillac automobile, has a transistor radio (and brags that rock-and-roll is available on American stations twenty-four hours a day), is impatient that some country roads in the Okanagan Valley are not paved and are barred by animal gates that are not automatic, and is interested in who is going to get to the moon first – the Russians or "us", as he says (Americans often forget that we Canadians are not "them"). The Canadian girl is associated with picturesque nature (which at her age, she can only find boring – the film opens with the girl writing "Nothing ever happens" in her diary). In a still more clever turn, director/scriptwriter Sandy Wilson associates Americanism with unbridled will (Butch listens to a radio announcer saying "You can get anything you want"), amorality (his parents come to collect their runaway son and state, "It's all right Butch, you can return home: she's not pregnant") and lack of respect for nature. (The American parents express their interest in buying a scenic section of the Okanagan Valley – an action which also suggests the acquisitiveness of the American character – and turning it into a resort. To do so, the American father notes, some changes would have to be made.)

40 Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984).

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

42 Like most moralists, the majority of Common Sense philosophers argued that the external moral principles are apprehended not by a separate faculty known as intuition, but by conscience.

43 James George, "What is Civilization – A Lecture delivered in the City Hall (Kingston), with the view of aiding to raise the bursary fund" (1859). Quoted in

A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, p. 38.

- 44 *Elements of Natural Theology* consists for the most part of the traditional Paleyite arguments that the fact of God's existence and the nature of his attributes could be discerned in the evidence of design which nature presents. But there is one feature of Beaven's work that differentiates it from Paley's. Beaven had absorbed the ideas of moral government that were prevalent in British North America in his time. Thus he argued that the order and regularity of the cosmos depends on God who is its moral governor. The natural/moral order establishes duties and obligations which humans must fulfill. Thus Beaven is another Canadian thinker who adopted a conservative position in morals and politics. In Beaven's case, this conservatism verges on advocating the belief that the universe is morally tyrannous. On Beaven's work, see A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, Chapter 3, and Armour and Trott, *The Faces of Reason*, Chapter 2.
- 45 Jacob Gould Schurman, *Kantian Ethics and the Ethics of Evolution* (London: Williams & Norgate for the Hibbert Trustees, 1881). Schurman published another book, *The Ethical Import of Darwinism* which principally consists of a refutation of Social Darwinism. Schurman taught at Dalhousie University until 1892, then went on to Cornell to set up the Sage School of Philosophy and to found the "official organ of American Idealism," the *Philosophical Review*. He drew a former pupil from Dalhousie, James Edward Creighton to Cornell and together they helped train a generation of American Idealists.
- The handiest and best introduction to Schurman's thought is chapter 6 of Armour and Trott's *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1981). There are also some basic, but still useful, comments on Schurman's ideas in Armour's more popular book, *The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1981), pp. 95-105.
- 46 For a good demonstration of the efforts Canadian thinkers made to combat the enthusiasm for empirical methods in the social sciences, see S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for An Ideal: Six Canadian intellectuals and their convictions in an age of transition 1890-1930*.
- 47 While accepting (like the subjective idealists) the fact that the nature of the mental (or of the ideational, or of the contents of Reason) is also the nature of reality, Absolute Idealists, unlike Berkeleyan Idealists, maintained a monistic doctrine, arguing that all that exists belongs to or is a form of one mind (the Absolute Mind). Schelling had referred to the philosophy of Fichte as "subjective idealism," since Fichte (the founder of German Idealism) describes the world as creation of the subject, which he viewed as primarily a moral world. According to Fichte, the Ego affirms itself as a moral will and consciousness by constructing the objective world (the Non-Ego) out of appearances; in positing the sensible, objective world of the Non-Ego, it brings into being something that will put obstacles in our paths, the overcoming of which increases our virtue. Schelling called his own philosophy "Objective Idealism," holding that nature is simply "visible intelligence." Accepting Schelling's categories, Hegel argued that neither Subjective nor Objective Idealism is complete in itself, that Subjective and Objective Idealism represent thesis and antithesis, respectively, and call for a synthesis, which he undertook to provide. The completed synthesis, represented in his own philosophical system he called "Absolute Idealism."
- 48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans., with an introduction, by Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1953), p. 27. (Hegel's *Lectures on The Philosophy of History* was originally published in 1837.)

- 49 Students of film theory will recognize how very Hegelian Bazin's article "The Myth of Total Cinema" really is. In that article, Bazin argues that the cinema exists only as an idea in the Platonic heavens, and that it is still coming to be. We will discover the essence of cinema only at the end of the process of constructing a total cinema. (Thus the article can be seen as one side in a dispute between an Hegelian thinker, André Bazin, and a Marxist thinker, Georges Sadoul.)
- 50 This influence was indirect. Canadian philosophers who espoused Absolute Idealism were primarily influenced by Hegel's British disciples and particularly by Thomas Hill Green.

Here we must consider some additional features of his work in order to establish the reasons for the pervasiveness of Green's influence among Canadian Idealists; to characterize that influence with greater exactness; and to contrast Green's work with the work of his Canadian disciples, which should reveal the principles behind the transformation of Green's thought in Canada. This should give us some insight into the Canadian mind (to be precise, it should provide confirmation of some of the hypotheses about the Canadian mind this chapter has offered).

In an early article, "Popular Philosophy in its Relation to Life" (in R.L. Nettleship, ed., *The Works of Thomas Hill Green*, 3 vols. 1885-1888), Green examines the ethical theories of Butler, Hume and Rousseau as well as Locke's "way of ideas." Green criticized these philosophies for the inadequacies of their conception of the human mind. Green argued that this "popular philosophy" considers the human mind to be like a reckoning machine, for, he explained, it holds its most important function to be calculating how to achieve pleasure for itself and how to avoid pain. It lacks any conception of the relatedness of one moral agent to another – of the fact that the interests of one agent are bound up with the welfare of others.

Among the correctives Green offered to the popular philosophy were the insights of evangelical religion. In the *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883), Green attacked Hume on two points: his attempt to ground "philosophical" relations on "natural relations," and his theory of the self. Hume had argued that the self does not present itself in experience. If we look into ourselves, we experience only a succession of impressions, ideas, emotions, memories and anticipations; we do not experience any identity that endures through time. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume stated an empiricist criterion: "when we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire from what impression it derived. And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion." Hume used this principle as "a wrecking-ball" to demolish as baseless the notion of a self that continues through experience. "Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations, succeed each other and never all exist at the same time. It cannot be, therefore, from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of the self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea." Hume saw the self as nothing more than a "bundle of perceptions" or, better, a flux of perceptions very much like that presented in the astonishing films of the legendary American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage. What accounts for our belief in our continuing personal identity?, Hume asked. And he answered that all that accounts for this belief is our memory and the fact that a succession of related perceptions feels like an identical (uninterrupted and unvaried) perception. We mistake a series of related but (numerically) distinct perceptions which constitute the mind for a single and unvarying perception.

Green objected to Hume's ideas on the self, on the grounds that Hume had noted that the "bundle of perceptions" he believed constituted the self involves an impression of their relatedness. But this relatedness demands an unchanging subject that relates all the various ideas and impressions (this argument depends upon Green's view that relations are the product of minds). The very existence of nature (as a domain of related elements) depends upon a continuing, self-identical subject.

Green also argued against all attempts to reduce ethical phenomena to natural phenomena. To attempt to base morality on feelings, on the hedonistic quest, as Green alleged Hume had done, is a mistake. So too is the endeavour, which Green found in Hobbes and Spinoza, to create rights out of nothing but a state of nature. Against these efforts, Green argued that human actions arise from motives, "an idea of an end, which a self-conscious subject presents to itself, and which it strives and tends to realize" (*Prolegomena to Ethics*, sect. 87). In choosing these goals, the subject will take into account "the common good."

Green's ethical principles led to a sort of moral earnestness. He condemned the moral philosophies of the Enlightenment for lacking a deep sense of sin. Like the Evangelicals, Green believed that it was only by recognizing that sin is truly abominable that the soul can begin on its ascent towards human perfection. These ideas are very much in keeping with the Calvinist cast of the Canadian mind. But there was one aspect of T.H. Green's philosophy to which Canadian thinkers could not reconcile themselves, and that was the liberalism of his political philosophy.

Green's was not a liberalism of the common sort. His communitarianism (which was based on his concept of "the common good") was antithetical to the atomistic individualism on which liberal political thought usually rests. His belief that ethical principles could not be derived from natural phenomena led him to dismiss the social contract theory, another cornerstone of the classic version of liberal political theory. But unlike most Canadian Idealists, Green was not disposed to grant that the state was endowed with any positive moral authority. For Green the purpose of political action was to put citizens in a position to lead "a good life." Accordingly, Green's conception of freedom was (to use Berlin's term) one of "negative freedom." The liberalism he favoured was one that would leave individuals with the maximum freedom consistent with "the common good," for this would afford them the greatest opportunity to exercise moral choices. While he recognized that at times the state would have to curtail some freedoms of some individuals, he advised that, whenever it did not lead to harm to others, that individuals should be left free to do as they choose. This liberalism Canadian thinkers could never accept.

51 John Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, pp. 55-56.

52 Grant's main treatment of this question is "Tyranny and Wisdom," in *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969). I believe that for Canadians this is one of the most important articles on political theory ever written.

In this article, Grant sides with the Platonist Leo Strauss against the Hegelian, Alexandre Kojève. This fact must be stressed since Grant's anti-Hegelianism entails that his position (and especially the anti-historicism he had adopted at this time) are at odds with those held by John Watson.

53 From Larry Schmidt, ed., *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: Anansi, 1978), p. 21 (from a "conversation" on the topic of Canadian politics).

Grant continued his comments by taking Trudeau to task for his liberal cosmopolitanism: "How to express a proper love of one's own within a Christian

life? That is very hard – a very difficult question. And yet I know that most people who are cosmopolitan lack something essential. That is one reason I dislike Trudeau so greatly. He is such a cosmopolitan. You feel in him a real dislike of ordinary French-Canadian life, and even a dislike of the deeper roots which made French-Canada distinct. Whatever Lévesque's mistakes, one does not feel that superior cosmopolitanism in him. One feels a love of his own in all its rough particularity." I believe Grant's accusations against Trudeau are accurate. Trudeau argued that the state must not be too closely tied to any national group. A deracinated, cosmopolitan conception of the state is an obvious consequence of this argument.

Some people have accused Grant of "endeavouring to homogenize Canada ... failing to understand the regional nature of our country." Grant's concept of "love of one's own" throws such claims into doubt, as does his speaking on behalf of French-Canadian nationalism (at least on behalf of their cultural nationalism). But if one needs any further evidence about Grant's views on this matter, there is his statement, "Canada is a nation put together of regions. I think that is what this nation is all about" ("Interview," *Dalhousie Alumni Magazine* 1:1 [Fall 1984], p. 11.)

- 54 Like Grant, Watson recognizes the bad consequences that follow the failure to recognize the claim of excellence, for in *The State in Peace and War* (p. 1), he quotes approvingly from Pericles' funeral oration. "It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized."
- 55 John Watson, *An Outline of Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1908), pp. 186-187.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 57 George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, p. 52. Grant's rejection of the belief that the spirit can be actualized in the world highlights Grant's difference with Watson, however. Watson, a Hegelian, believed that *eschaton* involved a rational principle and would be realized in time, through progress. Grant seems to believe that morality depends upon revelation and that its principles are irrational, and he rejects all claims for an immanent *eschaton*.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 59 George Blewett, *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), p. 354. Blewett's view also leads to an immanentizing of the *eschaton*. This is one of the features that make his theory a version of Absolute Idealism. But it is this something against which Grant argues with great vigour. This tells us quite a lot about the logic of the evolution of Canadian philosophy.
- 60 Richard Allen has done a good job of explaining the origins and the course of this movement. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).
- 61 John Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, p. 232.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- 64 John Watson, *Outline of Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1908), pp. 232-233.

Notes to Chapter 3

- 1 The notion that consciousness is generated by and can be equated with intricate forms of order is not far from the ideas about consciousness advanced by a group of people working in the field of artificial intelligence. These views have been popularized by Marvin Minsky in *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and

- Schuster, 1986) and *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) and by Douglas Hofstadter in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
- 2 Quoted in Charles Karelis, "Hegel's Concept of Art: An Interpretative Essay" in *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox with an Interpretative Essay by Charles Karelis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. xxxiii.
 - 3 An important inference can be drawn from this statement. We know that for Hegel the form of a work of art is its content made visible. We are told that content is the Idea, its form "the configuration of the plastic image." If the form is the content made visible, then this configuration must be identical with the Idea of the work. This supports the claim I advanced earlier that "The Universal" (or the Idea of anything) is nothing other than the form of unity (or the rational principles of the unity) of any individual thing.
 - 4 Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, p. 100.
 - 5 *Introduction to Hegel's "Philosophy of Fine Art,"* trans. by Bernard Bosanquet (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886), pp. 16, 56.
 - 6 Hegel praised Plato's work as a foundation and a guide.
 - 7 Actually this view is advanced only in *The Republic*. *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus* offer altogether different accounts of the value of art.
 - 8 Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, pp. 71-74.
 - 9 In fact, Hegel states that though artists may create such *simulacra* of the real, this is not what they generally do; nor does the aesthetic value of the work depend upon the verisimilitude of such *simulacra* (i 45/i 53).
 - 10 ii 805/11 182; ii 1191, ii 544.
 - 11 Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art I*, p. 272.
 - 12 Robert Duncan, "Towards an Open Universe" in Howard Nemerov, ed., *Poets on Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 189.
 - 13 Charles Olson, *Selected Writings*, Robert Creeley, ed. (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 82-84.
 - 14 Denise Levertov, "The Origins of a Poem," *Michigan Quarterly Review* #7 (1968), p. 238.
 - 15 The image also appears in James Thomson's "The Castle of Indolence" (lines 352-369) and reappears in Coleridge's "Perfection: An Ode" (1802), Stanzas I and VII, and "Ode to the Departing Year" (1796). For some years, it was one of Coleridge's favourite images.

Notes to Chapter 4

- 1 Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1966), pp. 146-147.
- 2 Grierson's collectivist notions, his idea of the community being founded on shared interests and a common will, have Idealist antecedents. Even his claim that new ways of formulating and disseminating information result in new types of community, that the progress of ideas results in new dimensions of the Spirit which manifest themselves in new modes of social organization, has a basis in Hegelian thought. They also have deep roots in the intellectual history of Canada.
- 3 John Grierson, "The Course of Realism" from Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 199.
- 4 "Education and the New Order," in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 200.
- 5 Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 27.
- 6 "Education and the New Order" (1941) in John Grierson, *Grierson on*

- Documentary*, p. 261.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 261.
- 8 "Propaganda and Education" (1943) in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 287. Emphasis in original.
- 9 In "Education and the New Order" (1941) in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 271.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- 11 From "Education and Total Effort" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 273-4.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 272.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- 14 "Report from America" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 331.
- 15 From "Education and Total Effort" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 279.
- 16 From "Propaganda and Education" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 283.
- 17 *Loc. cit.* Grierson presented this as the European view, but it is clear that he agrees with it.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 287, 290.
- 19 From "The Challenge of Peace" (1945) in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 390.
- 20 From "Propaganda and Education" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 289.
- 21 See "The Malaise of Disillusionment" (1951) in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 358-64.
- 22 From "Education and Total Effort" in John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 279.
- 23 Christian Metz, *Christian Metz Film Language: A Semiotics of The Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 98.
- 24 See Mamber's *Cinéma-Vérité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).
- 25 Perhaps explaining this idea in another manner would help to clarify it. By basing the films on a contest-type situation, one is guaranteed that there will be a central question posed by the film which can be expressed in the form "Will A win over B?" and that this question will be answered by following the course of development of the event. This entails that the course of the unfolding of the physical event is homologous with the form of the drama and thus that a document of the unfolding of the event will possess at least a degree of dramatic intrigue.
- 26 This influence has been attested to by the Candid-Eye filmmakers themselves, including, for example, Terence Macartney-Filgate in an interview with Sarah Jennings (in Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson, eds., *Canadian Film Reader* [Toronto: Peter Martin Associates/Take One, 1977]).
- 27 This approach places the work of Cartier-Bresson within those modernist practices which eschewed the use of dramatic forms because they tended to privilege certain moments over others.
- 28 See V. Louis Marcorelles, *Living Cinema* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 67.
- 29 From "The Decisive Moment" in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 44, 45, 46, 49, 50.
- 30 W. Eugene Smith's "Photographic Journalism" (1958) in Nathan Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

- 31 Eugene Smith, "Photography Exhibition Catalogue" (University of Minnesota, 1958) in *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 32 Leacock, on the other hand, in his own films produced after leaving Drew Associates, dealt with less public events, for example with a family after the birth of quintuplets, a meeting of police chiefs, etc.
- 33 Mamber, p. 116.
- 34 The idea that photography developed when a series of technical innovations made it possible is simply historically false; all the technical components necessary for the development of photography were in existence at least two hundred years prior to its invention.
- 35 A cogent presentation of the conflict between these two modes of photography is Walker Evans' article in *Hound and Horn*, no. 37.
- 36 The term "modern" refers here not to those tendencies described by Clement Greenberg as constituting modernist painting, but to that stream of art flowing from impressionism which devoted itself to presenting the quotidian and the transient.
- 37 Hence the resemblance between the subject matter of much of literalist photography and that of much of impressionist painting. (This explains why the affinities of photography Kracauer sets forth in *Theory of Film* are the subjects so often found in impressionist painting.)
- 38 Susan Sontag, "Shooting America" (*The New York Review of Books*, April 18, 1974); this article appears, in a slightly revised form in Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 51-82.
- 39 Robert Frank's *The Americans* (published in France as *Les Américains*, 1958, American edition published 1959) first rejected this approach. Frank refused to select those climactic moments which constituted the object matter of Cartier-Bresson's photographs and instead selected those moments before or after "the decisive moment," when reality revealed its imperfections.
- 40 The thread that links the development of photography and the development of *chosisme* is the notion that progressive art must find a place for the real. In Romantic painting and in early photography, mythological subjects were replaced by landscapes and portraits, in impressionist art (and the photography contemporaneous with it), street scenes and scenes from quotidian life were depicted and, in *chosisme* actual matter, drawn from the real, was used as an art medium. Modernists, instead of incorporating objects from the real in artistic imagery or using matter from the real world as its medium, attempted to convert the work of art itself into an object.
- 41 But photography is particularly hampered when it attempts to affirm its material character, as its material tends to dissolve into the illusion it presents. (For further discussion of this, see chapter 11.) Accordingly, Frank and the photo-modernists that followed in his wake, imitated the abstract painters' approach to painting rather than their method of ontological reduction.
- 42 Janet Malcolm, *Diana and Nikon: Essays on the Aesthetic of Photography* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, Inc., 1980), p. 78.
- 43 So extreme is Cartier-Bresson's stance on this matter that he photographs only with a 50mm lens – that lens with an angle of acceptance which most nearly approximates the angle of acceptance of human vision – and he refuses to crop or otherwise to manipulate the print in printing.
- 44 This practice is allied very closely with that principle of non-interference in the pro-filmic event held by all practitioners of "direct cinema" in North America. No doubt this accounts in part for the affinity which the Candid-Eye filmmakers felt for his work.
- 45 *Loc. cit.*, pp. 43, 47, 51. Cartier-Bresson's thoughts on technique, too, are based

upon his ideas about the role of intuition in photographic creation and not, as the Candid-Eye and Cinema-Direct filmmakers seem to think, on some desire to establish a comfortable relationship between man and technology.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

48 For a history of this process see S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for an Idea: Six Canadian intellectuals and their convictions in an age of transition 1890-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

49 First used in cinema in the works of Robert Flaherty. But whereas Flaherty felt compelled to resolve such a structure with a dramatic finale, the Candid-Eye filmmakers felt no such compulsion.

50 "On National Culture," *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 222.

Notes to Chapter 5

- 1 These descriptions derive from attempts to explain the composition of plots. A plot is an ordered rather than a random sequence of actions, and every theory about the nature of plots is constrained to define for itself the units of plot and to explain the rules that govern the arrangements of these narrative units (sometimes referred to as "narremes") into what semioticians call syntagma, that is, sequences of typed elements – elements that have specific functions within possible chains of units. Many literary theorists have argued that the rules that regulate the formation of narratives are similar to those that regulate the formation of sentences, that the structure of plots is roughly homologous to the structure of sentences, and more specifically that narrative syntagma are analogous to relations of noun and verb parts in canonical sentences.

Of the many narrative theories that have been advanced, the most popular among formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist critics has involved the construction of narrative grammars. Such grammars depend upon an insight that Aristotle offered in the *Poetics* (though formalists and structuralists often maintain this view for reasons other than Aristotle's), that characters are necessary only as agents or performers of actions. To avoid conceiving characters in terms of psychological essences, formalists and structuralists have attempted to define characters as participants, as doers rather than as beings. A character acquires a set of characteristics only through actions. Indeed, narrative grammars, which are frequently based upon verb-centred grammars of natural languages, reduce characters to action. Thus formalists and structuralists have argued that characters do not exist except as they are part of the events that carry them along and that any attempt to discuss characters as though they are real human beings with lives outside the narrative to which they belong is sentimental misunderstanding.

The literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov, taking the sentence as his model of narrative structure, states in *Grammaire du Décaméron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965, p. 28): "The grammatical subject is always without internal properties; these can come only from its momentary conjunction with a predicate." Accordingly, he treats characters as proper names to which characteristics (predicates) are attached during the narrative. Characters, in Todorov's view, are not heroes or opponents, they are simply the subjects to which readers attach predicates as they work their way through a narrative.

A.J. Greimas goes even further than Todorov. He points out that agents of narrative can include human beings (characters), inanimate things (Siegfried's sword) and abstract concepts (fate). He also distinguishes between "acteurs" and "actants." *Acteurs* are agents invested with particular qualities in specific

narratives, while *actants* are general categories that underlie all narratives. Greimas reduces the number of *actants* to six: sender, object, receiver, helper, subject, opponents. Actions, expressed in the verbal part in the sentence, invest these *actants* with qualities (predicates).

- 2 The reader should recall the relationship Bazin draws between ontology of the photographic image and the need for preserving the spatio-temporal integrity of reality in photographic and cinematographic representations. There is a theological basis for Bazin's theory. He believes that causal powers of nature involved in creating the photograph embody the creative powers of the Divine Himself. This conception of causality is rooted in the metaphysics of presence. The theories of "action only in proximity" state (and formalize) our everyday belief that a causal effect occurs only when the cause is present to the proximate effect.
- 3 For a description of the approach the American *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers took, see Stephen Mamber, *Cinéma-vérité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).
- 4 In this formulation of my ideas, I have drawn upon the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In a seminal essay, "Le stade de miroir comme formateur de la fonction de Je [the mirror stage as constitutive of the ego function]," Lacan noted that in the first few months after birth, infants do not possess sensory motor co-ordination, are dependent upon external care, and are full of anxiety and discord. But around the age of six to eight months, infants' perceptual apparatus develop to the point at which they become aware of themselves as bodily totalities or integral Gestalts catching sight of reflections of themselves either in a mirror or elsewhere. Prior to this time, the infant had an erotic relationship to his or her fragmented body. (Lacan uses the term *corps morcelé* to point to what we all actually experience, at some time – the body as being in pieces. He suggests that the prevalence of imagery of bodily disintegration in dreams and fairy tales, of hallucinations and fantasies of one's double, of mutilation and castration and of being devoured constitutes a demonstration that this experience is widespread.) At this age, as a consequence of perceptual development and of seeing his or her mirror reflection, the infant takes the image of the whole body as his or her love-object.

However, this representation of the total body, Lacan points out, is only virtual (in the sense in which that word is used in the science of optics); it is an ideal unity that the child cannot possibly assume. In that sense, the image of the total body is alienating, for it situates the agent of the child's sense of identity outside herself, and causes her to take something outside herself as herself. But this mirror image is constitutive of the ego and, as a result, the ego that is formed by the process initiated at this moment in the child's life has the same inverted structure as the mirror image (that is, it represents the child from the outside, as though seen by another) and is external to the subject.

The process which begins here also inaugurates a development by which the subject comes to identify with other images of human forms, that is, with other human beings. Thus, the mirror stage also initiates the dialectical process involved in transitivity:

During this period [the mirror stage] one will record the emotional reactions and the articulated evidence of normal transitivity. The child who strikes another says that he has been hit; the child who sees another fall, cries (Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1977, p. 19).

What we have here is another instance of an imaginary relationship which

involves the merging of self and other. This transitivity is thus the core of the process by which secondary identifications, identification with human beings other than oneself (or one's mother-and-self taken as oneself). Thus the mirror stage also inaugurates the process of identification with other human beings which is based upon the human form one shares with them, and with the world one has in common with them.

Despite the virtual character of the object with which one identifies in imaginary relationships, and despite the alienating effect those relationships have, what all imaginary relationships (whether of the earlier sort in which the infant identifies with his or her reflection in the mirror or of the sort that develops subsequently in which a person identifies with another human being) do is provide a sense of security for the subject, a feeling of being an integrated individual. These imaginary relationships provide one with a sense of the wholeness and plenitude of his or her being. And these imaginary relationships are scopical in character.

- 5 See Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (*Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 [Fall, 1975]).
- 6 Alan Rosenthal, *The New Documentary in Action: A Casebook in Filmmaking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 31-32.
- 7 Directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate, Stanley Jackson and Wolf Koenig: camera, Michel Brault and Georges Dufaux; editing and production, Roman Kroiter and Wolf Koenig, 1962.
- 8 Directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate; camera, Wolf Koenig; editing, William Geaves; production, Roman Kroiter and Wolf Koenig, 1958.
- 9 One cannot clearly identify all instances of "modified interviews" since it is sometimes difficult to determine the degree to which one's manner of speaking resembles what it would be in an interview.
- 10 The only candidate scenes would be scenes of the anglophone and francophone choir masters directing their choirs and the scene of the young man telephoning his mother in Scotland.
- 11 In an evaluation of Hegel's dialectics Engel says:

Dialectics on the other hand, comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending....

This new German philosophy culminated in the Hegelian system. In this system – and herein is its great merit – for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual is represented as a process ... i.e. in constant motion, change, transformation and development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection between what makes a continuous whole of this movement and development.... It was now the task of the intellect to follow the gradual march of this process through all its devious ways, and to trace out the inner law running through all its apparently accidental phenomena (from Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970], excerpt Volume 3, pp. 126-133).

As Georg Lukacs has shown, Marx took over from Hegel the concept of history as a self-activating totality in which elements that, from a positivistic standpoint, seem to be independent of one another are shown actually to be organically linked. This concept of totality which Marx derived from Hegel is central to all his theoretical speculations.

- 12 Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," in *Meaning and*

Necessity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 205-221, originally published *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4 (1950) pp. 20-40.

- 13 A syntagma is an autonomous segment having more than one minimum unit, that is, in film, more than one shot. The bracket syntagma is a type of syntagma first identified by Christian Metz. Here is Metz' definition:

a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of the same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other in order to emphasize their presumed kinship within a category of facts the filmmaker wants to describe in visual terms. None of these little scenes is treated with the full syntagmatic breadth it might have commanded; it is taken as an element in a system of allusions, and therefore it is the series, rather than the individual, that the film takes into account. Thus the series is equivalent to a more ordinary sequence, and so it constitutes an autonomous segment (this is a kind of filmic equivalence to conceptualization). Example: the first erotic images of *Une Femme Mariée* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964), sketched a global picture of "modern love" through variations and partial repetition. [In "Problems of Denotations in the Fiction Film" in C. Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor [London: Oxford University Press, 1974], p. 126.]

A compound bracket syntagma is composed of a number of series of shots, in which each individual series presents facts that are closely related to each other categorically, and the various series taken collectively present facts that belong to a category of a higher order.

The relation of this definition to my comments on illustrational structures should be clear. Note, in this regard, Metz' remark that a bracket syntagma is "a kind of filmic equivalence to conceptualization."

Notes to Chapter 6

- 1 This oppressiveness of Maritimers' life is revealed by the desolate images with which the film opens: abandoned shacks, a fishing boat rotting on the shore, and the tired and worn faces of old people.
- 2 Admittedly, both can be seen simply as coping differently with the same problem. As Maritimers in Toronto, Pete and Joey find themselves outcasts. Each of them, in his own fashion, attempts to cope with the sense of irrelevance and impotence this creates. Joey attempts to adapt to this situation by finding satisfaction in constructing such a "home for himself" as his circumstances permit; Pete, in contrast, refuses any such accommodation to reality and tilts against such social institutions as (alienated) labour and marriage in an effort to shape circumstances into a form that will satisfy him.
- 3 In Feldman and Nelson, eds. *Canadian Film Reader* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates/Take One, 1977): pp. 208, 211, 212, 215.
- 4 The necessity to support Betts results in his abandoning his dream of finding a fulfilling job that will allow him to leave his mark on the world, and also involves collaborating with that which thwarts his desire for male comradeship.
- 5 The crisis scene in any dramatic work presents a "make or break" situation. Here Pete's efforts to keep Joey for himself reaches exactly this state. What prevents Pete from realizing his wishes is Joey's desire for family life.
- 6 I believe this is true of the greater portion of films of any integrity, and not just of *schlock* commercial vehicles like *Parasite Murders* or *Outrageous* which are constructed on the model of the American B-Movie.

- 7 The term "text" here is being used to refer to that which is constituted by a number of systems regulating the appearance of mutually opposed elements. No claim is being made that many film images are literalisms in Paul Willemen's sense of the term – see Willemen, *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1974/5) and *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1981).

Notes to Chapter 7

- 1 Loose, because the elements are not "thoroughly-ordered," i.e. many features can share the same level in the hierarchy, and perhaps because some features can be arbitrarily placed either higher or lower on the hierarchy.
- 2 By 1962, this form of cinema began to change drastically in order to incorporate a challenge to certain assumptions which underlay the form as we are discussing it.

I should make quite definite my conviction that, whereas many of the features of Unit B documentary, such as those discussed below, are typical of the presentational mode, the Candid-Eye films are illustrational (but still empirical, though empirical in a different way than are films of the presentational mode).

- 3 More exactly, the structure of the passage depends upon the potential of the body of thought to provide structures which can elicit and resolve tension.
- 4 A recurrent topic of debate around documentary film has concerned the "objectivity" of film. I would contend the whole question is based on the false notion that objectivity, honesty and truthfulness are mutual conditions of one another.

I contend that *cinéma-direct* did not in the least aspire to objectivity. What was at stake was not the invention of a form of cinema which effaced the filmmaker's personality and subjectivity, but rather a form of cinema which guaranteed that the event depicted was allowed to run its natural course with a minimum of interference on the part of the filmmaker. This refusal to interfere in the event is what is implied by my use of the term "authentic." I should perhaps remark that I consider it a part of the honesty of *cinéma-direct* that the personality of the filmmaker is revealed rather than masked.

- 5 This proclivity for "the revealing moment" might account in part for the admiration many Canadian Candid-Eye filmmakers felt for the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson.
- 6 It should be remembered that Kracauer's arguments for a Cinema of Presentation were grounded in his analysis of the photographic image. Readers may note that the descriptions of post-classical art I offer are congruent with Kracauer's descriptions of the affinities of the photographic image (*Theory of Film: the Redemptions of Physical Reality* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1960]). The reason is simple: the framework for Kracauer's opposition between formative and realistic tendencies in photography and film is drawn from the contrast, standard in art-historical writing, between classical and post-classical (particularly Impressionist) art.

In light of this, it is enormously troubling that Kracauer so closely ties the differences between formative and realistic tendencies to differences between the media of painting and photography. That the basis for his distinction between these two tendencies – and indeed even the precise description of their features – was formulated in histories of painting to describe general differences between impressionist art and the art preceding it quite discredits Kracauer's claim that realism is a bias specific to photography.

- 7 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 102. It should be noted that Sontag claims that, though this belief is widespread, it is erroneous.

- 8 I should probably stress that all of the films discussed in this section "have a point to make" and therefore are, to a degree, illustrational.
- 9 This refusal to consolidate the narrating voice in a single person and to privilege any particular viewpoint gives the text an openness which is typical of much recent filmmaking.
- 10 Often, this feature of the individual photograph is used to evoke a sense of an undepicted narrative. Atget's photographs of empty streets are a case in point. It is interesting to note that both Atget's photographs and the Presentational form of cinema are evidential in character.
- 11 A sort of self-reflexivity inherent in all these modes of organization reaches its apogee here. Films in all of these modes comment on the limitations of that empiricism which provides their form. In this case, that form of self-reference is paired with the reflexive reference to the film's assumptions about the nature of photographic iconography.
- 12 There is another dimension to this work's narrative character; the work is part of a cycle of films entitled *Hapax Legomena* (1971-72) which is best understood as being autobiographical. Through the total cycle of the work, Frampton's evolution as a filmmaker is charted and is shown to retrace the course of evolution of cinematic art. Thus, the form of this autobiography highlights Frampton's effort to find a place for himself within the history of cinema.
- 13 As well as the Romantic idea of the difficulties inherent in the attempt to reconcile analytic and imaginative processes.
- 14 This explains why many exponents of the cinema of construction prize those works in which strategies are used to foreground hitherto unrecognized material properties of the medium.
- 15 Colin Low's *Universe* (1960) is another example of this mode.
- 16 Peter Harcourt, "The Innocent Eye" in Feldman and Nelson, eds., *Canadian Film Reader* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates/Take One), p. 72.
- 17 This seems especially true when we take into account the conditions of filmmaking at the time when Flaherty worked. Although some of his shots are evidently set up, we excuse it on the grounds that his camera was bulky and film stocks were slow.
The fact that Flaherty's works *did* involve manipulation or that all of Flaherty's films end up revealing his own point of view does not really refute this claim since here we are concerned with what the structures themselves suggest, with the meaning that is conveyed by that which is immanent in the work.
- 18 S. Toulmin and J. Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983 [1965]), p. 125.
- 19 John Berger, *Permanent Red: Essays in Seeing*, 2nd ed. (London: Readers and Writers Publishing Cooperative, 1979), p. 68. *Permanent Red* was first published by Methuen and Co. Ltd. in 1960.
- 20 *Loc. cit.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
- 22 This change in ruling paradigm had important consequences for the theory of representation. When material reality is thought to be grounded in Being, it is regarded as a pure presence. When reality is thought merely to be self-sustaining during the period it exists, but to have a non-necessary mode of existence, it is regarded as being marked by both presence and absence. Theories of representation themselves can be sorted into types on the basis of whether they may conceive the signifier to be a pure presence, a pure absence, or a commingling of presence and absence.
- 23 Such a process, of course, led not to that sort of total insight into a fictional

character's motivation which the classical author possessed, but rather, to a rather incomplete and partial understanding. This confirms our analysis of the difference in the epistemological stances assumed by these types of art.

- 24 The fact that there existed a parallel between events of the time at which Eisenstein made the film (the Soviets were preparing for war with the Nazis) and the subject matter of the film does not really rebut this claim. The decision to use historicizing and mythologizing devices to allegorize the subject matter rather than to directly represent the events of the day is sufficient to establish the fact that the film's formal characteristics differentiate the film from reality.
- 25 It should be noted that a formative tendency operates here, inasmuch as a narrative can be considered to be a quasi-abstract form structured by certain formal narrative relations such as separation, opposition and synthesis.
- 26 Both *mise-en-scène* and narrative then achieve complexity through their use of multiplicity, for both depend on the arrangement of a small number of basic elements. But the elements can be freely arranged in all possible combinations only when the classical principle of subordination of elements under a single, dominant element is eschewed in favour of the principle of equivalency of the various elements. This explains why so many devices of post-classical art are essentially strategies for creating an equivalence among the elements composing a work of art. The tonal system of western music and the perspectival system of western painting work to privilege some elements over others by according priority to the tonic or to axial compositional lines. The relations between elements are pre-determined in a pre-established hierarchy. The strategies of post-classical (and especially of modernist) art served a de-hierarchizing function. De-hierarchized relations among the elements also reflect the "modern" belief that there is only one type of reality – material reality – and that there is no hierarchy among beings (and no hierarchic relation between beings and Being).
- 27 On this matter, it might be recalled that some of Eisenstein's earliest theoretical ideas on montage developed from his analysis of the difference between rhythmic and metric montage. What was at stake in Eisenstein's early theory was the identity of the unit which might be perceived as being regularly repeated.
- 28 While I believe that the "realist" tendency within the modern art movement was, philosophically, its least interesting movement, I have chosen to concentrate on it (a) because this tendency is most relevant to Canadian art and (b) I am interested in tracing the postmodern destiny of the modern art movement, and it is in the "realist" tendency within that movement that this destiny can be most clearly discerned.
- 29 Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema" in Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
- 30 John Watson, *An Outline of Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1908), p. 438.

Notes to Chapter 8

- 1 Speculation about "illusionism" can be seen as the inevitable consequence of the attempt to insert subjectivist and expressionistic ideas into an aesthetic tradition which had been founded upon the concept of mimesis.
- 2 This view has been most powerfully argued by Stan Brakhage.
- 3 *Film Culture*, no. 46 (Autumn 1967).
- 4 This intensification of interest in the plasticity of the film's images resulting from the devaluation of the narrative is a prevalent, though seldom noted, feature of the modern cinema; it largely accounts for the strength of the effect of

- the imagery in the films of Antonioni and more especially Bresson.
- 5 As might be expected in the case of a photographer/painter turned filmmaker, this matter has been a recurrent concern in Snow's films. *One Second In Montreal*, for example, demonstrates that by transposing photographs into a film, one alters the nature of the viewer's response to them.
 - 6 That this film deals with the structural homology of drama and experience was first pointed out by Annette Michelson in her characteristically brilliant article "Towards Snow," (*artforum*, No. 9 [June 1971], pp. 46-47) to which I am greatly indebted.
 - 7 That the dramatic film image exists in a field charged between the poles of the present and the future is a fact Snow brilliantly demonstrates in *One Second In Montreal*.
 - 8 A note on the soundtrack. *Wavelength's* soundtrack consists of an extended *glissando* interrupted by real, synchronous sound only during the human events. The soundtrack parallels the visuals, for like the visuals it is (for the most part) generated by a single, extended operation. Moreover, like the forward progression of the zoom, the increase in the frequency of the sound on the track parallels the increase in tension during the course of a drama. The substitution of pure tone which is never heard in the natural world for the traffic sounds we hear at the beginning of the film charts the poles between which the film moves and provides an aural equivalent to the transcendence of "ordinary reality."
 - 9 Typified surprisingly enough by another film of this remarkable filmmaker, *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964).
 - 10 This idea was extended and developed in *La région centrale*.
 - 11 *Take One* (vol. 3, no. 3).
 - 13 I am here speaking somewhat loosely. There is, of course, a play of spaces in the film – between the "illusory three-dimensional space" of the loft and the real two-dimensional surface of the screen, between the space inside the loft and the space outside the loft, and between the surface of the screen and the space of the viewing room in front of it.
 - 14 Maya Deren's important contrast between vertical and horizontal structures is one of the most cogent theoretical formulations of the problematic defined by this desire. See Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* (New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), pp. 173 ff.
 - 15 A song which, appropriately enough, deals with the notion of illusion and reality.
 - 16 An important compositional feature which merits comment is the incorporation in the work of incidental devices that suggest to the viewer that for which the over-all structures of the film stand as a grand metaphor.
 - 17 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Note-Books of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. E. MacCurdy (New York: George Braziller, 1955), p. 922.
 - 18 Leon Battista Alberti, "On Painting," quoted in Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 87.
 - 19 Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision* (New York: *Film Culture*, no. 30 [Autumn 1963]), n.p.
 - 20 Stan Brakhage, "The Seen: Remarks Following a Screening of The Text of Light at San Francisco Art Institute, November 18, 1974," in Robert Haller, ed., *Brakhage Scrapbook* (New Palk, New York: Documentext, 1982), pp. 205-206.
 - 21 Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and The Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 149.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
 - 23 The tension conditioned by an expectation of a conclusion about which one is

certain has also been recognized and exploited by Robert Nelson. In *Bleu Shut*, he develops a strategy to evoke that, in its purity, is reminiscent of *Wavelength*. The similarity of this film to *Wavelength* is even more marked: like *Wavelength*, it demonstrates that the temporality is the basis for structures employed by the film which elicit and modulate expectation.

- 24 When the viewer becomes conscious that the camera movement will end on one of these objects, s/he feels the same sort of tension as that brought on by the anticipation of the range of possible outcomes of a drama. This points up the fact that this film, though for the most part lacking in the kind of action traditional in the drama, possesses nonetheless the structural tensions of that form.
- 25 The character and influence of these events were first pointed out by Sidney ("Structural Film," *Film Culture*, no. 47 [Summer 1969], p. 4).
- 26 There is a further randomness associated with these events occurring in the space outside the loft. As a result of the changes in film stock, filters and printing processes, the windows of the loft sometimes are blocked up with light or darkness, and at other times transparent; this renders the outside sometimes observable, sometimes not. There seems to be no discernible pattern to these changes.
- 27 The restriction of the action to a single space, the play between the space inside the loft and that outside the loft and the movement of the zoom towards that space outside the loft have yet another significance: they define the problem of establishing that consciousness has access to things outside the circle of ideas and they suggest the drama of the quest for transcendence. (Snow himself has directed attention to this aspect of his work by saying, in his statement prepared for the Knokke-le-Zoute Festival, that the work is a "summation of my nervous system, religious inklings". He has also related the work to his first experiment with lysergic acid.) The film concludes with an image which appears to be that of a space beyond that of the loft, but in fact is enclosed within the loft, and this of course reiterates the idealist position. This aspect of the work separates Snow from the analytic and objectifying tradition with which Snow is often identified. The aspirations of those belonging to this tradition have been consistently and thoroughly secular and materialist in character. Snow's work, on the contrary, clearly belongs to the tradition of Romantic Idealism which, for decades, has sustained experiment in the cinema.
- 28 Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'art cinématographique," first published in the 1931 brochure Lycée of Le Havre, *Distribution solennelle des prix*; reprinted in Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Ecrits de Sartre: chronologie, bibliographie, commentée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 546-552.
- 29 He is Hollis Frampton, a friend of Michael Snow and the maker of (*nostalgia*), a film I commented upon in chapter 7. An interesting aspect of these episodes is the treatment of the man lying on the floor. As the man tumbles onto the floor, he falls almost out of view of the camera. A slight progression of the zoom then totally removes the man from view and gives the impression of the camera passing over him. The effect is to render the man almost insignificant in comparison with the general flow of events. Thus, this treatment of the man stands, I believe, as an analogy to the way in which events and objects within the context of a dramatic film tend to be "carried away" by the momentum of the unfolding story – to cease to be events which stand as entities in themselves and to become "relational units", units whose nature and importance are determined by their relationship to past events and events to come, and which are entirely subsumed into the dramatic structure. It also alludes to the indifference to human beings of the passing of time. Time is an order of events "above" (in some sense) the human order. Snow has said of *Wavelength* that it

deals with the beauty and sadness of transcendence. Time, like the camera, marches on, above particular individuals, who are removed from "the scene of action" by the passing of time – alas.

- 30 The feeling of temporal separation is enhanced by the apparent change from day to night between the two events. Thus, in conjoining these passages, Snow sets in motion a play between real time and film time.

We have already noted that the film deals with various kinds of connections between things. Here another kind of connection is demonstrated – the connection of events in a dramatic sequence. In addition the relationship between the four "human events" requires comment. Each successively occurring "human event" in the film marks an increase in mobility and in dramatic intensity, culminating, in fact, in the fourth episode, with a moment of real drama. In this regard, the relationship of the four "human events" is structurally similar to the relationship of the events in a drama, each of which increases the dramatic tension.

- 31 One suspects that this separation of events serves other functions as well. Inasmuch as this film is, in part, a study of the modes of "cinematic illusionism," one can perhaps see the separation as making a reference to the separateness of the frames upon which all "cinematic illusionism" is ultimately based. And inasmuch as this film is, in part, a study of dramatic structures in film, this separateness can perhaps be seen as making a reference to the fragmentation of scenes upon which the articulation of the drama in film has, since the days of Griffith, been based. In addition, the interpolation of the passage of superimpositions into this passage, by breaking up the dynamics of the unfolding story, demonstrates the way in which voiding a film of a story encourages the viewer to contemplate the graphic character of the images, and to consider the objects represented not relationally but for what they are in themselves. Thus the contrast between the two filmic styles in this portion of the film demonstrates the different modes of cinematic experience.
- 32 This recreates in the over-all structure of the film, the play between images creating the "illusion" of deep space and images which appear flat. This same opposition was used earlier in the film in the contrast between, on the one hand, naturalistic images and, on the other, the images in photographic negative or the pure colour fields.
- 33 Roger Scruton argues this point convincingly. Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), esp. pp. 188-212 and R. Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* (London: Methuen, 1983) especially the essay "Photography and Representation."
- 34 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 10-14.
- 35 These are other respects in which *Wavelength's* materials can be said to be pure. For one, the sound we hear on the sound track is very pure; being a sine tone, its waveform is the only waveform that consists of a single pitch, without admixture of overtones. Moreover, the light effects employed in this film are so strong they sometimes overwhelm the image, making the film a construction in pure light. Finally, Snow's interest in structuring light and time suggests his interest in the pure materials of film.
- 36 In the profundity of his sense of time as the bearer of possibilities, Snow resembles Heidegger.
- 37 This movement toward reification is also exemplified in the attempt to create a work which for the most part lacks the human action typical of the drama but

which possesses the structural tensions inherent in that form.

- 38 The strategies which Snow uses to void these movements are remarkable. Throughout his film *oeuvre*, Snow has chosen movements which have no counterpart in human vision. Snow has so reduced and protracted the camera movements that a single operation generates the structure for an entire work. The resultant monomorphic structure is in marked contrast to the polymorphic structure which had become traditional in innovational filmmaking.

Notes to Chapter 9

- 1 A few of the key texts of the critical school to which I am here referring are Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, Ltd., 1914); Roger Fry, "Some Questions in Aesthetics" in *Transformations* (London: Chatto & Windus, Ltd., 1926) and "Retrospect" in *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, Ltd., 1920) and Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle" in *British Journal of Psychology*, V (1912), pp. 87-98.
- 2 There are two separate lines of development which involve the use of simple or reduced forms. One, stemming from Matisse and Miro, represents the quest for pure organic forms. These artists' methods of production have been primarily intuitive and their ends metaphysical. Another line of development stems from Constructivism and analytical Cubism. Artists belonging to this tradition have viewed the production of artwork as the incarnation of an intellectual act; their styles have been objective rather than organic, and their arena of discourse more epistemological and scientific than metaphysical and speculative. It is clearly with this second line of development that we are concerned here.
- 3 Ross Woodman, *Chambers* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1967), pp. 11, 9.
- 4 The idea that perception is a synthesizing process was one important to the work of Cézanne and the Cubists. Chambers' work is very Cézannesque; like Cézanne, his views of the synthetic nature of perception led him to the dismemberment of the spatial system characteristic of realist and impressionist art.
- 5 Woodman, *Chambers*, pp. 15-17.
- 6 Jack Chambers, "Perceptual Realism," *artscanada*, Vol. xxvi, No. 5, No. 136/137 (October, 1969), pp. 7-13.
- 7 Elsewhere he writes: "Our consciousness of the material world is not ultimate reality, but rather attenuated features of Reality as it persists through into matter." See "Perceptualism, painting and cinema," *Art and Artists*, No. 7 (December, 1972), pp. 32-3. Chambers drew a crucial conclusion from these feelings about nature: that the self finds its true being in a particular place in which it is grounded. Chambers explained his return from Spain (where he mastered the craft of painting) to Canada: "The Castillian [sic] landscape was always something impenetrable for me. It was something I desired to become by entering it but never could or never did.... There was an organism within an organism that appeared as landscape. But I knew I was not inside" (Ross Woodman, *Chambers* [Toronto: Coach House Press, 1967], p. 7).
- 8 Charles Olson, *Human Universe and Other Essays*, edited by Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1967), pp. 59-60.
- 9 In Bradly, Beatty and Long, eds., *The American Tradition in Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1967), p. 575. The essay was first published, anonymously, in monograph form in 1836 and was reprinted, under the author's name, in 1849, in *Nature, Addresses and Lectures*.
- 10 Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in Bazin, *What is Cinema*, Vol. 1, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967), p. 12.

- 11 Cited in José L. Barrio-Garay, "Jack Chambers' Paintings – The Last Decade" in Paddy O'Brien, ed., *Jack Chambers: The Last Decade* (London Regional Art Gallery, 1980), p. 9.

Notes to Chapter 10

- 1 *De Anima* 429 b 25. Snow's argument may be thought to be based on a form of the "logically black is white" slide, the fallacy of arguing that because the difference between two extremes is a difference of degree, therefore those extremes are really the same. I think this is to misunderstand Snow's argument which I take to be making three points: a) that there are features which all imagery has in common; b) that oppositions of the sort we have described depend upon abstracting certain features of images (or other media), hypostatizing them, and setting these hypostatized attributes in opposition to one another, even though substantively the objects these attributes characterize are not in opposition; c) that these mind-constructed abstractions misrepresent reality by simplifying it. While these simplified, hypostatized abstractions may be opposites of one another, the real substantives they characterize share some features but not others.
- 2 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, Vol. 10, No. 21 (Summer 1967), and reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968).
- 3 A brilliant if somewhat polemical statement of the relations between the modernist aspiration and American ideals is to be found in Clement Greenberg's article, "American-Type Painting" in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).
- 4 Annette Michelson, "About Snow," *October*, No. 8 (Spring 1979), p. 123, and "Toward Snow" in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film. A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 181.
- 5 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 106.
- 6 Some readers may wonder whether the real innovator here was not Michael Snow but Andy Warhol, or, at least, whether the temporal forms of Warhol's films did not anticipate those Snow employed in his structural films. It is certainly true that both artists have used extended duration, elongated actions, repetition and/or stasis and (apparently) continuous time to make film's *durée* sensible. Nevertheless, there are important differences between their uses of time – differences that make Warhol's use of time something of an ironic sidebar to the main line of development of *avant-garde* cinema. Warhol protracted the events he depicted (regularly projecting footage that had been recorded at sound speed, i.e. 24 frames per second, at slower, silent speed, i.e. 16-18 frames per second) essentially to create irony. It is the ironic tone of his films that makes the spectacles they present seem so alienated and the act of viewing them at once so voyeuristic and so mechanical. (This automated fascination is the postmodern citizen's characteristic response to celebrity. This explains why so much of Warhol's effort has been devoted to producing images of the rich and glamorous.) Snow, on the other hand, uses duration for more formalist purposes, to stress the objecthood of the temporal object.
- 7 John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: The Gifford Lectures, Delivered in the University of Glasgow in the Years 1910-1912, Part First; Historical* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1912), p. 2.
- 8 Frank Davey, "Atwood's Gorgon Touch" in Jack David, ed., *Brave New Wave* (Montreal: Black Moss Press, 1978), pp. 363-364.
- 9 Preface to English edition of *Ideas*, (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 11.

- 10 In proposing that Snow has reinstated the transcendental subject in film, I am putting forth a different view than that advanced by Ms Michelson in her article "About Snow" (*loc. cit.*). Ms Michelson suggests that a reflection of the transcendental subject, whether the "hallucinated" viewer of Brakhage's films or the "reflective" viewer of Snow's, was common to independent filmmaking of both periods. I would contend that the notion that the "hallucinated" viewer has the status of a transcendental subject is based on a quite mistaken reading of the nature of the transcendental subject as it was described in phenomenological philosophy. I return to consider this idea in chapter 14.
- 11 Rimmer has, at times, veered towards abstraction, as in *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper*, or towards collage, as in *Square Inch Field* (1968) and *Migration* (1969).
- 12 *Wavelength* might be taken as having such a structure, for it "progresses" from a three-dimensional image to a two-dimensional one. Careful consideration of the film proves this reading untenable, for the film's form is actually that of a circle, or, perhaps, more accurately, a spiral. The film ends with an image of waves which suggests a similar illusory depth as that of the film's opening images. At the end, however, our sense of this depth is altered by the recognition that, since we are looking at a photograph on a wall, the image's deep space is really a virtual space: we are conscious both of the image's essential flatness and of its virtual depth.
- 13 The use generally made of the term "illusion" in contemporary film theory, I find quite objectionable. I believe that no part of our response to a work of art involves being "prey to illusions," for we always recognize the ontological difference between an image and a "real object." To put it otherwise, our experience of an image (as a work of art) involves the recognition of its ontological condition.
- 14 It should be noted that Wieland has also used printed texts in such a way that the meaning of the text, and of its relation to the image, is ambiguous.
- 15 A significant exception is the use of the written text in Landow's work. Landow [a.k.a. Owen Land] uses written text to explore semiotic dimensions of film.
- 16 I.e., its potential to make us consider the pictures as objects rather than as images.

Notes to Chapter 11

- 1 Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International*, 6 (October, 1962), p. 30.
- 2 It was the great American avant-garde filmmaker, Hollis Frampton, who, citing how central Flaubert's project was to the modernist ambition, first indicated the incompatibility between Flaubert's project and the nature of photography (Frampton, "Impromptus on Edward Weston," in *October*, Vol. 5 [Summer, 1978], p. 53).
- 3 ... though the banal idea of exhibiting the light from the beam of an operating projector for a specified period of time and calling this a film was many times expressed in many countries and was often actually carried out. In Canada, this triviality was worked out by Kirwin Cox, in the form of a specification for a film performance entitled *Lightfilm* published in the catalogue of the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre (1972), p. 40.
- 4 The images in Grenier's films, while they seem to consist of purely abstract patterns, are actually direct recordings of actual constructs. These constructs themselves, however, are purely aesthetic and non-functional, which further complicates the theoretical issues in the relationship between representation and abstraction in Grenier's films.

- 5 On this matter see Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry in The Sixties* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979).
- 6 The appearance of being casually produced is created by its slightly soft focus and the blurring of the image, caused by moving the camera, that is, by features of the sort which typically appear inadvertently (or, more exactly, by features rather similar to those which typically appear inadvertently) when one makes a rapid snapshot of a work of art hanging in a gallery. The appearance is deceptive; Snow uses these apparently accidental features in a highly calculated fashion.
- 7 See Jack Chambers, "Perceptual Realism," *artscanada*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (October, 1969), p. 8.
- 8 Or, more technically, the special effects of representation depend upon relational rather than absolute properties. The error that the modernists made was to assume that the special properties of representation must be absolute properties. It was this assumption that underlay their notions about the autonomy of the work of art.
- 9 The magical thinking characteristic of pre-artistic representation equated both forms of presence (i.e. the illusion represented was taken as having the same reality as the representing sign). Artistic representation, as I argue immediately below, depends upon separating out these two forms of presence. Or, more technically, artistic representation occurs only when a consciousness of the nature of symbolism replaces the effects of magical thinking in one's psychology.
- 10 Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in Roland Barthes' *Image-Music-Text*, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 44.
- 11 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), pp. 17-18.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 42. Baudelaire's plight, as described by Stanley Cavell, is remarkably similar to Michael Snow's. Snow has also described his work (particularly his music and his film *Wavelength*) as being influenced by his experiments with psychotropic chemicals.
- 13 Cf. Kendall L. Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On The Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Dec., 1984), pp. 246-277.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 15 See H.P. Grice, "Meaning," *Philosophical Review* 66 (July, 1957), pp. 377-388. The relevance of Grice's article to the theory of photography is established by Kendall L. Walton, "Transparent Pictures," *loc. cit.*
- 16 This distinction is obviously related to Peirce's distinction between indices and symbols.
- 17 The best attempt at developing the first two counter-arguments presented is to be found in Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision and Representation" in *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Autumn 1975), pp. 143-169.
- 18 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed; Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 185.
- 19 Actually this interpretation of Amor's relation to the arts is disputed: some believe his playful pose and ambiguous smile give us reason to believe that Caravaggio has represented him as mocking those "higher" human endeavours – music, art and learning.
- 20 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 1st ed., p. 160.
- 21 As a result, the forms of Brakhage's films are related to collage. Like James Joyce, Brakhage is interested in depicting conscious processes, in which all noematic objects are equally present. The form both men developed for their endeavour was that of collage, or at least, a form based upon parataxis.

- 22 The former is a reflective, apperceptive form, the latter a perceptual form. This conflict between perceptual and apperceptive processes is one of the watermarks of Snow's work.
- 23 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 1st ed., pp. 23-24.
- 24 *Loc. cit.*
- 25 "Bruce Elder and Michael Snow in Conversation," *Cine-Tracts*, No. 17, Vol. 5 (Summer, Fall, 1982), p. 14.
- 26 A related idea is expressed in Gerald Mast, "On Framing" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Sept. 1984), pp. 82-109.
- 27 Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion* (Rochester, N.Y.: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), p. 145.
- 28 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 1st ed., p. 24.
- 29 Michael Ondaatje is an especially interesting case. Ondaatje, besides being one of Canada's most interesting poets, is also a prose writer and filmmaker. His films are: *The Sons of Captain Poetry, A film on bp nichol*, 1970; *Carry on Crime and Punishment*, 1972; and *The Clinton Special*, 1974. Ondaatje has commented on the forces that prompted him to make his first film. He evidently saw filmmaking as a means of escaping from the self-enclosure and representationalism of literary language, in other words, from "the modern." See Sam Solecki, "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje," *Rune*, No. 2 (Spring 1975), p. 40.

Notes to Chapter 12

- 1 Wolfgang Walter Fuchs, *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence: An Essay in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 6-7.
- 2 Donald Sutherland, "Gertrude Stein and the Twentieth Century" in Robert Bartlett Hass, ed., *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), pp. 139-156.
- 3 Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 54-71.
- 4 From Gertrude Stein, "A Long, Gay Book," in *Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein with two shorter stories* (Barton, Berlin, Millerton: Something Else Press, Inc., 1972), p. 48.
- 5 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in Hugh Gray, trans. and ed., *What is Cinema*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 14.
- 6 In this passage a black border, of ever varying proportions and dimensions, constantly surrounds the image. It serves to emphasize that what Snow is presenting in this passage is an image, not reality.
- 7 At the point when the image assumes the same proportions as the cinema screen, the various notes in the cluster stand in a certain harmonious relationship to one another. Quite likely, the various tones are at octaval intervals from one another or at intervals of the natural harmonic series, for this would explain why they merge into a single piercing tone. One would conjecture that as the image is stretched in one direction, the different notes increase in frequency at different rates, that they are, literally, pulled apart, and as it is stretched in the opposite direction, the various notes decrease in frequency differently. Thus when the image is of a normal aspect ratio, the tones are at harmonic intervals while if the image is compressed or stretched, the notes are at unharmonic intervals.
- 8 This point was first made by Stuart Liebman, to whose article "The Presents of Michael Snow" (in *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 12) I am considerably indebted.

- 9 This point, too, was made by Stuart Liebman in "The Presents of Michael Snow."
- 10 I here use the term in the sense in which it is used by Paul Willemen, as referring to "clear-cut instances of words marking specific figurations in films." (Really he should refer not exclusively to film but to images generally.) See P. Willemen, "Reflections on Eikhenbaum's concept of Internal Speech in the Cinema," *Screen* vol. 15, no. 4 (Winter 1974-75), pp. 59-70; and P. Willemen "Cinematic Discourse – The Problem of Inner Speech," *Screen* vol. 22, no. 3 (Summer 1981), pp. 63-93.
- 11 Snow uses a narrative structured by literalisms to point out the crucial relationship of language and narrative.
- 12 To be more precise, we would point out that the challenge occurs in two ways: first, by the diacritical relationship the shots in this section have to one another and secondly, by the character of some of the camera movements Snow uses in this section. Some of the camera movements actually do seem to grasp hold of reality, to "capture" it (in the visual metaphor Snow uses in the section) while others seem to career about widely, as though striving to capture reality but unable to do so. Hence there is a gradation in sorts of camera movements spanning the poles of movements which appear to present reality and those which seem unable to do so.
- 13 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Observations on the Long Take" (1967) trans. by Norman MacAfee and Craig Owens, *October*, no. 13 (Summer 1980), pp. 3-6.
- 14 From Pierre Théberge, "A Conversation with Michael Snow" in *Michael Snow* (a catalogue), (Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzerne, 1979), p. 20.
- 15 From "Genuine Creative Ability" in Robert Bartlett Hass, ed., *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971) pp. 104-105.
- 16 From "Lectures in America" quoted *ibid.*, p. 107.
- 17 From "How Writing is Written" in Robert Bartlett Haas, ed., *How Writing is Written: Volume II of the Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), pp. 153-154.
- 18 This view of Europe is still common in America. In avant-garde cinema, its most forceful expression is in Stan Brakhage's *The Dead* (1960). Brakhage's description of the film, for the catalogue of the New York Filmmakers' Co-operative says it all, "Europe, weighted down so much with that past, was The Dead. I was always Tourist there; I couldn't live in it. The graveyard could stand for all my view of Europe, for all the concerns with past art, for involvement with symbol." When I was in London with Brakhage for a festival of avant-garde films, he told me that he found Westminster Abbey (in which, though he did not say this, one walks over the graves of the long dead) "an evil building", and was compelled to make a film record of its evil. I, on the other hand, felt visiting it to be a revelation of my heritage. This sums up, I feel, the differing typical response of Americans and Canadians towards the concept of history.
- On the concept of "the American Adam" in American literature, see R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).
- 19 This was first pointed out by the political economist and cultural theorist Harold Innis (1894-1952), one of the pioneers of communication studies. In the 1920s, Innis became dissatisfied with American and British scholars who dominated Canadian universities and who were applying inappropriate models to their investigations of the Canadian economy. Innis wanted to establish Canada's separateness as a North American entity. To aid in doing so, he drew a cardinal distinction between "the monopolies of time" and "monopolies of

space" (in *Empire and Communications*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950). Innis claimed that the media of communication created "a bias in civilization favourable to an over-emphasis on the time concept or on the space concept." See *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), p. 63; for a full account of Innis' time/space theory, readers should consult "A Plea For Time," pp. 61-91 and "The Problem of Space," pp. 92-131. "Industrialism and Cultural Values" (which also appears in *The Bias of Communications*) contains interesting remarks on the topic, as well.

Innis' insight was that in "Western civilization a stable society is dependent on an appreciation of the proper balance between the concepts of space (territory) and time (duration)" (*The Bias of Communication*, p. 62) and that the tension at the heart of communications media – between territory, politics and centralization on the one hand and duration, religion and decentralization on the other – was responsible for the major cultural disturbances, both historical and contemporary. He held that the dominant contemporary media (of his time: radio and newspapers) were biased toward "present-mindedness." Temporal discrimination and the apprehension of duration is discouraged because these media emphasize spatial-mindedness (as generally do those media which address the eye rather than the ear). Innis attempted, through what might be considered an act of remembrance, to recover the sense of time and history. (Through *Image and Identity* this, I have insisted, is exactly what Snow's films attempt to accomplish; indeed Innis' distinction neatly sums up the differences between Brakhage and Snow.) Innis described Canada as a culture biased toward "the time concept" while the United States, he believed, was more biased toward "the space concept." Still, in an astonishingly prophetic insight, Innis realized that the "migration of technique" from the United States was leading to an ideological and commercial hegemony of the United States which resulted in "conditions which seem fatal to our cultural interests" (*The Strategies of Culture* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952], p. 19).

- 20 In fact, Snow emphasizes the additive process above any others. Though he sees other possible ways of making art (subtracting or moulding), he seems to agree with Chambers that artmaking is primarily a matter of things getting put together in pieces.
- 21 The child resents the mother's creative powers. The word "resents" forms part of the word "presents," a fact which Snow pointed out when introducing *Presents* at Buffalo's Albright-Knox Gallery in October 1982.
- 22 Actually, the character of the set is a little more ambiguous than this comment suggests. The set is obviously a construction and, as a construction, represents the product of masculine activity. A male has constructed an emblem of the female, for a female. Thus, even the character of the set involves a reconciliation of opposites, of (considering the gender of the filmmaker) self and other. Its artificiality, moreover, reconciles the opposites of fantasy and reality.

Masculine activity is represented as the assembling of parts, but also, in the next section, as the dismantling of things into parts. (That a male is the agent of the destruction is revealed in the several ghost images of Snow that appear in the third subsection.) The male, Snow implies, relates to part objects, the woman to the whole. But totality is a category of presence; therefore the male world is a world which involves absences – and the overcoming of absences through the construction of wholes – while the female world is wholly the world of presence.

To give some idea of the intricacy of the relations between the various sections of this film, it should be pointed out that these themes of construction also appear in the montage section, in the shots of the hammer and of the

- building under construction, while shots of male and female bodies suggest the difference between the world of the male and the world of the female.
- 23 Actually, this expression is a bit imprecise. The last section of the film, despite its use of hand-held shots, we come to realize, is as much a construction, an imaginative recasting of the real world as are the other sections of the film – which, after all, also use real world materials such as lumber, cloth and paper to construct a representation of fantasy.
 - 24 The shaped canvas works of the sixties were often devoted to the exploration of this influence.
 - 25 Snow humorously introduces the quotation as a flashback, though the spectator /reader accepts it as being as much a part of the present text as any other part of the film. The significance of this interplay of past and present will be discussed shortly.
 - 26 Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), pp. 320, 322.
 - 27 One of the more recent versions of the traditional conceptions of the priority of the spoken was Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, whose communitarian ideas Snow seems to attack in a very witty passage: "Sharing: When was the last time you and your neighbour read together? This is communal reading, it's Group Lit!"
 - 28 Hence, speech seems to involve a unity of body and soul. Consider that Snow's conceit that the text itself (the "this" of the film) is the *source* of the discourse – that the human enunciator is absent – would have been unworkable if the film consisted of a spoken text.
 - 29 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 207-208.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
 - 31 This is the theory of meaning Wittgenstein advances in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. This theory, which was also Pound's, leads to the idea that linguistic constructions (or, in Wittgenstein's case, elementary linguistic constructions) consist in concatenated names. Hence this theory leads to interest in paratactical forms of construction (of the sort we find in Pound's poetry or Stein's verse) which have so frequently been a concomitant interest to direct perception. Undergirding all these theories is a metaphysics of presence.
 - 32 John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience, Part Second, Constructive* (The Gifford Lectures, delivered to the University of Glasgow in the years 1910-1912. Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons, 1912), p. 216.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
 - 34 Snow's claim is significant for the way it reverses a general (though not by any means thoroughgoing) tendency of philosophical thought. Philosophers, especially since the time of Descartes, have generally been very suspect about the capacity of mental imagery to deliver a true picture of the outside world. Many philosophers pointed out that our mental imagery tells us more about the way our bodies are affected than it does about the external world in itself. This, after all, is the basis for many of the so-called "arguments from illusion."

Notes to Chapter 13

- 1 Bazin, *What is Cinema?* trans. and ed. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 15, footnote.
- 2 Though this is certainly one of Bazin's objections to this form of construction.
- 3 Bazin, *What is Cinema?* p. 15.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 7 *Ibid.*, footnote, p. 14.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16. Bazin's claim here is remarkably similar to that made by another thinker who has reflected deeply on the nature of photography and its relation to film. That thinker is artist/filmmaker Hollis Frampton (1936-1984). In an exuberantly insightful essay "Meditations around Paul Strand" [in Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion* [Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983], p. 130] Frampton wrote:
- ... photography seems to begin and end with its every photograph. The image and its pretext (the "portrait" and the "face" which bear to one another the relationship called "likeness") are ontologically manacled together. Every discrete phenomenon has its corresponding photograph, every photograph its peculiar subject: and after little more than a century the whole visible cosmos seems about to transform itself into a gigantic whirling rebus within which things cast off scores of approximate apparitions, turn again to devour and, finally, replace them.
- 9 There is a third movement in the international avant-garde, a Baudelairean cinema which includes amongst other things, Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'amour* (1950), some of the work of Jack Smith (*Flaming Creatures*, 1963) and Ken Jacobs (*Blonde Cobra*, 1959-1963, *Little Stabs at Happiness*, 1959-1963) and most of the work of Kenneth Anger (*Fireworks*, 1947, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, 1954, revised, 1966), Barbara Rubin (*Christmas on Earth*, 1964, *Love Supreme for the Free Spirits*, 1967) and Ron Rice (*The Flower Thief*, 1960, *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, 1963, *Chumlum*, 1964). This movement (which has been revived by the punk/new wave and by the "bad" filmmakers like Nick Zedd), which celebrates transgression, is largely a literary form. In this cinema, the image is conceived of as an arbitrary construct which can be elaborated with decorative stylistics. Such a cinema, then, is hardly concerned with taking into account the specific features of the photographic image. The best treatment of this movement is Carel Rowe's *The Baudelairean Cinema* (Minnesota: UMI Press, 1981).
- 10 The idea that the camera and especially the lens is a product of Western technology and incorporates in its very structure the principle of geometric optics was to prove enduring. It appears, for example, in the writings of Stan Brakhage. See *Metaphors on Vision* (New York: *Film Culture*, 1964).
- 11 See Hans Richter, "The Badly Trained Sensibility" in P. Adams Sitney, ed. *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 22-23.
- 12 Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, V (1912-1913), pp. 87-98.
- 13 For his views, we must rely on the transcriptions of his lectures made by his students at New York University and published as Peter Kubelka "The Theory of Metrical Film" in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 139-159.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 17 *Loc. cit.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 143. The opposition between the terms "mirroring" and "talking" reflects Kubelka's distinction between modes of artistic production which

merely capture preformed relations and those which "articulate" (to use Kubelka's own term) relations.

- 21 Kubelka's version of idealism ultimately entails solipsism. This is a quite different form of Idealism than Canadian avant-garde filmmakers have generally adopted, for theirs involves communitarian notions of the self.
 - 22 Kubelka, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
 - 24 Sergei Eisenstein, "Through Theatre to Cinema" (1934) in *Film Form*, trans. by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1969), pp. 4, 5, 8.
 - 25 This claim is aesthetically problematic. "Resistance to aesthetic transformation" is not a positive quality, nor is it a material quality. Eisenstein should have specified what material attributes render the shot (a photograph) "as resistant as granite" to being moulded in the hands of the filmmaker. Of course, he attempts to convince us that it is a positive quality by arguing that the "quantity" of this resistance is so great that it has become an actual quality, but this just won't do.
 - 26 Eisenstein, *op. cit.* p. 4.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 3. In another passage, Eisenstein stated that "A piece of reality is sliced off with the camera lens." ("Outside the Frame," 1929, and "The Collected Writings of Sergei Eisenstein" [in Russian], p. 294, cited in Jacques Aumont, "Montage Eisenstein I: Eisensteinian Concepts," *Discourse* No. 5 [Spring 1983], pp. 41-99.)
- There are cogent reasons for scepticism about the accuracy of Eisenstein's account of his early theory are, but I am not convinced by them. I cannot reconcile the claim that Eisenstein's later thought evolved towards realism with his well-known interest in prelogical thought and Vygotsky's notion of inner speech.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 - 31 Germaine Dulac, "The Essence of Cinema: The Visual Idea," trans. by Robert Lamberton, in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 41-42.
 - 32 Godard's attack on Bazinian realism in "Montage, mon bon souci" (*Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* [Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1968], pp. 52-55), takes the same idea as its starting point. In this early theoretical work, Godard stated ideas which link him with the avant-garde cinema. This helps to explain why, after 1968, his filmmaking was to establish practical links with that tradition.
 - 33 Germaine Dulac, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
 - 34 Germaine Dulac, "The Avant-Garde Cinema," trans. by Robert Lamberton, in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film*, p. 45.
 - 35 Sidney Peterson, *The Dark of the Screen* (New York: Anthology Film Archives and New York University Press, 1980), pp. 20-21.
 - 36 Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality," in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Avant-Garde Film*, pp. 60-73.
 - 37 *Loc. cit.* This remark about "the object creating its own image," along with the assertion that "the photographic image confronts one with innocent arrogance of an objective fact" (given below) relates Deren's views to those immanentist views of consciousness that are such a prevalent feature of postmodern theory. (The same point could be made in respect of the theories of André Bazin.) Such views contest the representationist view of consciousness characteristic of, among others, the empiricist tradition. These representationalist views hold

that consciousness possesses an image that represents, or is a simulacrum of, reality and that the truth of what is in consciousness depends upon the correspondence of the image to the object or event of which it is an image. An excellent critique of such representationalism can be found in Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979); Rorty's book may be one of the most penetrating criticisms of "the modern paradigm" in intellectual history and one of the most powerful pieces of advocacy for "the postmodern paradigm". Immanentist views like those of Heidegger (for example), against the representationalist view of consciousness, propose no transcendental subject outside of experience, no separate experiencing subject who comes to know by coming into possession of (or forming) a mentalistic image distinct from its object. Such a view takes meanings to be something other than purely subjective phenomena; it holds meaning to be the result of a process and considers the meaning of signifiers to be what they are by virtue of their coming-to-be what they are relative to a nexus of meaning. That is to say, they take meaning into the internal constitution of being. [For an excellent discussion of such views, see Joseph P. Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1979].] Experience, according to such views, involves an internal relation between the two *relata* (subject and object) which are forged in the relationship. Such immanentist views are crucial to "the postmodern paradigm;" they are held by Charles Olson and Jack Chambers, for examples, and are a fundamental topic of interest of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 65.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 64.

41 The forms of Snow's early cinema involve a similar balance between control and chance for they employ highly determined structures which act as containers for chance effects. In this way, their forms reflect features of the photograph.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

43 F. Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke* (München: Musarion-Ausgabe, 1926-1929), xvii, p. 340. Nietzsche even remarked that the Greeks, whose life was characterized by no such split, would be horrified at the lack of human usefulness of present-day, so-called, "Humanist" knowledge, and quipped that anything that the humanists believed valuable could be printed within a leathery binding on the outside of which would be printed "Manual of Internal Cultivation for External Barbarians" (*ibid.*, vi, p. 258, ft. nt.).

44 *Ibid.*, xi, p. 180.

45 Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People's Art* (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), pp. 234-235.

46 Quoted in Jose Barrio-Garay, "Jack Chambers' Paintings: The Last Decade," in O'Brien, ed., *Jack Chambers: The Last Decade*, p. 8.

47 Conversation with Dennis Young, 29 April 1970, printed in the catalogue for Chambers' retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1970; and in Ross Woodman, *Chambers* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1967), p. 11. These quotations also suggest that Chambers held emanationist views: "Our encounter with reality is at an appropriate and substantial point along the attenuation of that energy into material form" (Jack Chambers, "Perceptual painting and cinema," *Art and Artists*, Dec. 1972, p. 30) and "Perception is a process, like watching a movie. Suddenly the spectacle freezes and loses focus. The sound dissolves. The defocusing spreads, brightens in a flash and becomes light in the mind. All in an instant.... The moment of 'white light' is the moment of *perception*" (*Red and Green: A Journal*, p. 157).

- This hardly sounds like Marxist realism to me.
- 48 In James Edie, ed. and trans., *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 164.
- 49 In Avis Lang Rosenberg, "A Correspondence with Jack Chambers," in *Vanguard* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery) vol. 11, no. 4 (May 1982), p. 18.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 16. My emphasis.
- 51 Many Canadian films, both experimental and other, take these issues as their problematics. In fact, the assumption that film is a photographically based medium seems fundamental to the Canadian film tradition. Most likely, this is because our art in general has had the character of the documentary. Certainly, the assumption that film is a photographically based medium is not universal. In the British, American, French, and German avant-gardes there exists a very considerable body of work which demonstrates that film can survive the elimination of all that which, in the ordinary cinema, derives from photography and hence, that the photographic elements of ordinary cinema are accidental, not essential properties of the medium. Examples would include Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1925), Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* (1960), Tony Conrad's *Flicker* (1966), Malcolm Le Grice's *Horror Film I* (1970) (actually a performance piece involving projected material), Paul Sharit's *Axiomatic Granularity* (1973) and *Color Sound Frames* (1974), Hollis Frampton's *Hapax Legomena VII* (*Special Effects*) (1972) and Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963) and his *Arabic* (1980-1981) and *Roman Numeral* (1979-1980) series. In fact, everywhere but in Canada, the imageless film is an important genre of experimental filmmaking. A more complete development of this idea is presented in the previous chapter.
- 52 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in Hugh Grey, ed., *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 13.
- 53 Jack Chambers, "Perceptual Realism," *artscanada*, No. 22/23 (1969), pp. 7-13.
- 54 In Avis Lang Rosenberg, "A Correspondence with Jack Chambers," in *Vanguard*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (May 1982), p. 18.
- 55 Leslie Armour, *The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Press, 1981), p. 23.
- 56 George Blewett, *The Christian View of the World* (New York: Yale University Press, 1912), pp. 197-198.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 60 John Watson, *An Outline of Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1908), p. 229.
- 61 In *Jack Chambers* / (*Jack Chambers, Artist and Writer*) (London, Ont.: Nancy Poole Gallery, 1972), pp. 163ff.
- 62 In Jack Chambers, *Red and Green: A Journal*, p. 161. My emphasis.
- 63 From Jack Chambers, "Perceptualism, painting and cinema," *Art and Artists*, No. 7 (Dec. 1972), p. 32.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 65 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 1. The relevance of Eliade's notion of hierophany to certain twentieth century versions of realism, and its special importance to Bazin's realist theory of cinema was first pointed out by Michael Bird in his article "Film as Hierophany" (in John R. May and Michael Bird, eds., *Religion and Film* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982]). This essay presents the most profound interpretation of Bazin's theory of cinema I have ever read. To the comments Bird offers in that essay, I would add that the notion of hierophany, in proposing that the Real (which has always been understood to have features of consciousness, if not to

actually be Mind] inhabits the real, describes that same integration of the subjective and the objective that is the key feature of "the postmodern paradigm". Accordingly, I would explain the number of thinkers who seem to have developed ideas rather similar to Eliade's notion of hierophany as evidence of the growing domination of recent and contemporary intellectual culture by "the postmodern paradigm."

- 66 G.F.W. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J.B. Baillie (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931), p. 790.
- 67 In Jack Chambers, *Red and Green: A Journal*, pp. 157-159.
- 68 John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience: The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in the years 1910-1912. Part Second: Constructive* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1912), p. 216.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 128. Italics mine.
- 70 In Jack Chambers, *Red and Green: A Journal*, p. 161.
- 71 Jack Chambers, "Perceptual Realism," *artscanada*, Vol. XXVI, No. 5, No. 136/137 (Oct. 1969), pp. 7, 13.
- 72 Jack Chambers, "Perceptualism, painting and cinema," *Art and Artists*, No. 7 (December, 1972), p. 31.
- 73 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.
- 74 Chambers, *Red and Green: A Journal*, p. 165.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 76 Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo, Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 77 *Ibid.*, pp. 376-377 (trans. altered by R.B.E. by comparison with the original).
- 78 Jack Chambers, *Red and Green: A Journal*, p. 163 (italics mine).
- 79 Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, pp. 534, 549.
- 80 Jack Chambers, *Jack Chambers/(Jack Chambers, Artist and Writer)* (London, Ont.: Nancy Poole Gallery, 1972), p. 122.
- 81 "Being is the simple empty immediateness which has its opposite in *pure Naught*, and whose union therefore is with Becoming: as transition from Naught to Being, it is Beginning; the converse is Ceasing." Hegel, *Outlines of Hegel's Logic*, trans. by Wm. T. Harris, Part First, A9, in J. Loewenberg, ed., *Hegel Selections* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, 1957), p. 104.
- 82 Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in Hugh Gray, trans. and ed., *What is Cinema*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 13, 15.

Notes to Chapter 14

- 1 A view with which I cannot wholeheartedly concur. It seems to me that Joseph Cornell's (1903-1972) films and especially *Rose Hobart* (1936), are the truly seminal works. In their wacky ellipses, their shifting, unstable spaces, their scrambled, allusive, and ultimately undefinable, narratives, their perpetual regeneration and consequent immediate destruction of new organizing formal principles, these works are a virtual catalogue of the devices which would inform and the aspirations which would animate the "New American Cinema" for the next thirty years.

The best discussion of Cornell's enormously important but little known film work is P. Adams Sitney's essay "The Cinematic Gaze of Joseph Cornell" in Kynaston McShine, ed., *Joseph Cornell* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980).

- 2 We are here using Melanie Klein's famous schema, of which even Lacanian analysts of cinema have made so much. These ideas are expounded in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works* 1946-63 (London: Hogarth Press, 1975).

- 3 Brakhage makes much of this by using what I refer to as “perpetually regenerating” forms. Brakhage’s films proceed by the constant displacement of one incipient form by another – by the constant rejection of one form and the adoption of another. In fact, Brakhage so radicalizes this form of construction that the point at which one form breaks down and is replaced by another is frequently the end of each and every individual shot. In such cases (which are quite common in Brakhage’s *oeuvre*) a shot with one set of attributes (a “conventional” representation, say) can be followed by a shot with a completely different set of attributes (a piece of leader, say, or an homogeneous field of light, or one using anamorphosis or painting on film).
- 4 Because the camera is in constant motion, the vantage point from which the landscape is represented is constantly changing. In *La région centrale* Snow repudiates the fixed viewpoint of traditional painting. It should be noted that it was in traditional landscape painting that this fixed vantage point found its most important role. This might well explain why Snow moved from the urban environments of his earlier films to a natural setting in *La région centrale*. *La région centrale* thus belongs to a central line of development of twentieth century art, one devoted to the attempt to overcome the restrictions involved in the use of a fixed vantage point and to explore the possibilities inherent in the use of a shifting vantage point. Indeed, the passage at the end of the film, in which the camera eye becomes positively disincorporate and unattached to any location in space – in which the camera seems to have overcome gravity and to be whirling through outer space – might well be the culminating work in that tradition.
- 5 Snow proposes, then, that there are two modes of experiencing the film, one of which involves the viewer’s identifying with the camera apparatus, the other of which has him outside this identificatory process. As I try to suggest in my “conversation” with Snow (*Cine-tracts* no. 17), most of his films – and his artwork in general – invite just such a dual experience. But this, it should be pointed out, is characteristic of the cinema generally. Jean Mitry remarked, “In the cinema, I am simultaneously in this action and *outside* of it, in this space and out of this space. Having the power of ubiquity, I am everywhere and nowhere.” Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et Psychologie du cinéma* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), p. 179. Here is evidence that Snow’s films deal with experiences that relate to the very nature of the cinema itself.
- 6 Charlotte Townsend, “Converging on *La région centrale*: Michael Snow in conversation with Charlotte Townsend,” *artscanada*, Vol. xxviii, No. 1, No. 152 / 153 (Feb/Mar 1971), pp. 46-47.
- 7 Brakhage’s films, then, have a performative dimension, as one cannot consider only their internal relations but must also consider the *acts* by which the qualities the films possess are produced. But Snow’s *La région centrale* also involves a quasi-performative dimension, as it is concerned with the implications of the methods one employs in representing a landscape. He said about the making of *La région centrale*:

I wanted to make a film in which *what the camera-eye did* in the space would be completely appropriate to *what it saw*, but at the same time, equal to it. Certain landscape paintings have a unity of method and subject. Cézanne for instance produced an, to say the least, incredibly balanced relationship between what he did and what he (apparently) saw (from Charlotte Townsend, *loc. cit.*).

And further: “I was speculating on how you could make a real landscape film” (ibid.). I believe this statement is to be taken literally and that it asserts that *La*

région centrale is partly about how to make a landscape film.

- 8 Much of Brakhage's visual rhetoric (the use of anamorphosis, of stock unbalanced for the light by which it is exposed, of soft-focus shooting, of painting on film, of under-and-over-cranking of the camera, of colour gels, of extreme close-up shooting – a cinematic "myopia," so to speak – as well as the darting and even shaking camera movements, imitating the movement of the eye right down to its saccadic movements) was designed to assimilate the camera's "vision" to that of eye/mind. Snow's does just the opposite; he foregrounds the features specific to camera-derived representations. This surely is one of the reasons for his acute interest in the photographic frame, for there is no comparably sharp boundary to the eye's field of vision. His camera movements, too, have no precise correlatives in the domain of vision; there are, for example, no correlates in vision to the smooth pans used in *Wavelength*, or to the enlargement of a portion of the visual field, unaccompanied by perspectival change, found in that same film.
- By tying our vision to the body, Brakhage is able to claim that sight is a product of natural forces. Brakhage seems to relate language to society and the body to the individual. Hence he argues that in acquiring language, one's visual consciousness becomes restricted to presenting general images that embody properties abstracted from the sets of objects referred to by common nouns (which, according to this view, constitute the key feature of language).
- 9 The self of transcendental phenomenology – the self involved in the films of Michael Snow – is the nothingness which it is, it is a pure form of subjectivity which is always other than the experiences which it has. According to this later school of thought the subject is not a pure form of being – is not something "given" but something that is constituted in experience and so is continually in process.
- 10 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1960).
- 11 It should be admitted that Rainer's work takes the issue of identification as a crucial one for the cinema. It seems obvious that the question of how one can use demotic subject matter, representational forms and narrative construction without provoking identification seems to be central to her film work. But I believe that the reason Yvonne Rainer considers the evocation of identificatory processes to be problem-laden is that it creates a mistaken impression of coherence of the subject. Thus, the particular way by which she solves the problem is to utilize devices which make the divisions in the spectator (or rather the spectator/auditor/reader) sensible.
- 12 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by James Strachey, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1959), pp. 33, 34 fn.
- 13 D.W. Winnicott, "Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development", *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 131.
- 14 It is widely known that Brakhage, as a man and an artist, possesses (or more accurately, is possessed by) an obsession with death. Too, Brakhage's films are the best studies I know of "the wobbly image" anywhere in film. I think these two facts are not unrelated.
- 15 Joanna Field (pseud. of Marion Milner), *On Not Being Able to Paint* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1957), pp. 154-155.
- 16 I use the term "wobbly image" to refer to mental representations that have not yet been stabilized by language or have been destabilized by the impact of the drives, and the term "negative hallucination" to refer to that gap in consciousness which occurs in moments of rage as the aggressive drives do away with the image/object of their rage.

- 17 Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
My reading of this essay has been deeply influenced by Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977). *Savage Fields* can be read as a piece of advocacy for "the postmodern paradigm" and a staking of claims for the priority of Canadians in the development of this paradigm.
- 18 The contrast between the conceptions of self and of personal identity which Chambers proposes in this passage and those of Stan Brakhage (to whose films *Hart of London* bears a strong resemblance) highlights the differences between American and Canadian conceptions of the self and of personal identity quite strikingly. Chambers, we have seen, believed that one's sense of the self depends upon a sense of the community to which one belongs. Brakhage, on the other hand, believes that all social influence on consciousness represents a corruption of the basic, primal self (the pristine self that Brakhage seems to believe is outside of "sociality") and that one discovers his own identity by stripping away all the effects of the social and recovering one's unique vision. (How very like the difference between the work of Unit B and the work of the Drew group this contrast is!)
- 19 These images are obviously metaphoric; indeed, the obviousness of the fact that they are metaphors makes us aware that, unlike *Circle*, *Hart of London* is a poetic film in much the same sense that Brakhage's films are poetic films: that they are films whose imagery is highly condensed, highly metaphoric and highly charged.
- 20 Reprinted in "Michael Snow: A Filmography," *Afterimage* no. 11, guest editor Michael O'Pray (Winter 1982/83), p. 14.
Snow's comment on the camera being an equal to what is photographed relates to his praise of Cézanne in his comments on *Wavelength*: "The complicated involvement of his perception of exterior reality, his creation of a work which both *represents* and *is* something, thus his balancing of mind and matter, his respect for a lot of levels are exemplary for me" (*ibid.*, p. 8).
- 21 ... for Brakhage's Romantic Idealism identifies the act and the content of seeing. (This explains his stress on Imagination.) According to Brakhage, Imagination creates the universe to which one belongs. Consequently, in this universe, there is no distinction between the subject of an experience, the act of experiencing and the content of experience. It is the fact that, as *Dog Star Man* (1961-64) shows, he considers the act of experiencing and the content of experience as identical that allows Brakhage, like many of the Romantics, to conceive of the universe as essentially creative – to put the stress on *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.
- 22 "Michael Snow on *La région centrale*," in *Film Culture* 52 (Spring 1971), p. 60.
- 23 Like many works central to the modernist canon, Snow frequently uses self-reflexive forms of construction. While, as in modernist practice this is partly to guarantee the autonomy of the work (see my "Conversation with Michael Snow" in *Cine-tracts* no. 17 (Summer Fall '82) and *Afterimage* no. 11 [Winter 82/83]), it has another function, that of acting as metaphor for consciousness, and, more specifically, for self-consciousness. This, I think, is obviously true in works like *Authorization*. However, the use of the "non-anthropomorphic" camera style in *La région centrale* provokes a detachment from the image that, too, evokes a self-conscious form of awareness.
- 24 The disincorporate vision Snow presents here is very different from the extremely corporeal and "incarnated" vision of Brakhage's films. They seem to transcend the area of experience that is affected by conflicts among drives and to rise to a

conflict-free zone of experience.

- 25 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," originally published in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. XXVIII, no. 2, 1974, anthologized in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, ed., *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings* (New York: Tanam Press, 1980), p. 30.
- 26 Cited *ibid.*, p. 31.
- 27 Baudry, *op. cit.*
- 28 Louis Althusser, "Lenin before Hegel," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 122.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

Filmographies

Most of these entries have been taken from Peter Morris' invaluable volume, *The Film Companion* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Inc., 1984).

Candid-Eye Film Series (1958-1959)

The Days Before Christmas (Pilot Film. Episodes directed by Roman Kroitor, Wolf Koenig, Stanley Jackson, Terence Macartney-Filgate, John Feeney, and Michel Brault)

Country Threshing (1958, directed by Wolf Koenig)

Blood and Fire (1958, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

A Foreign Language (1958, directed by Stanley Jackson)

Pilgrimage (1958, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

Police (1958, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

I Was a 90-Pound Weakling (1959, directed by Wolf Koenig, Georges Dufaux)

End of the Line (1959, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

The Back-Breaking Leaf (1959, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

One Third Down, Twenty-Four Months to Pay/The Cars in Your Life (1959, directed by Terence Macartney-Filgate)

Glenn Gould – On the Record (1959, directed by Wolf Koenig, Roman Kroitor)

Glenn Gould – Off the Record (1959, directed by Wolf Koenig, Roman Kroitor)

Jack Chambers

Mosaic (1966)

Hybrid (1967)

Little Red Riding Hood (1967)

R34 (1967)

Circle (1968-69)

Hart of London (1970)

C.C.C.I. (1971)

Jack Darcus

Great Coups of History (1969)

Proxyhawks (1971)

Wolfpen Principle (1974)

Deserters (1983)

Overnight (a.k.a. *The Universal Statement*)

Chris Gallagher

Plastic Surgery (1975)

Santa (1979)

Atmosphere (1979)

The Nine O'Clock Gun (1980)
Seeing in the Rain (1981)
Terminal City (1982)
Mirage (1983)
Undivided Attention (1986)

Dorothy Todd Hénaut

VTR St-Jacques (1969, with Bonnie Klein)
The New Alchemists (1974)
Do Your Thing (1974, in collaboration)
Sun, Wind, Wood (1978)
Horse Drawn Magic (1979)
Not a Love Story (1985, with Bonnie Sherr Klein)

Claude Jutra

Le dément du lac Jean-Jeunes (1947)
Mouvement perpétuel (1949)
Pierrot des bois (1956)
Les jeunesses musicales (1956)
A Chairy Tale (1957, with Norman McLaren)
Les mains nettes (1958)
Fred Barry, comédien (1958)
Félix Leclerc, troubadour (1958)
Anna la bonne (France, 1959)
Le Niger: jeune république (1961)
La lutte (1961, with Michel Brault, Claude Fournier, Marciel Carrière)
Québec USA ou l'invasion pacifique (1962, with Michel Brault)
Les enfants du silence (1963, with Michel Brault)
Petits discours de la méthode (1963, with Pierre Patry)
À tout prendre (1963)
Ciné-Boum (1964, with Robert Russell)
Comment savoir ... (1966)

Rouli-roulant (1966)
Wow (1969)
Au coeur de la ville (1969)
Marie-Christine (1970)
Mon oncle Antoine (1971)
Kamouraska (1973)
Québec fête juin '75 (1975)
Pour le meilleur et pour le pire (1975)
Dreamspeaker (1977)
Ada (1977)
The Patriarch (1977)
Arts Cuba (1977)
Seer Was Here (1977)
The Wordsmith (1978)
Surfacing (1980)
By Design (1981)

Richard Kerr

Hawkesville to Wallenstein (1977)
Vesta Lunch (Cookin' at the Vesta) (1978)
Dogs Have Tales (1979)
Canal (1981)
Luck is the Residue of Desire (1982)
On Land Over Water (Six Stories) (1984)
The Last Days of Contrition (1988)

Allan King

Skid Row (1956)
The Yukoners (1956)
Portrait of a Harbour (1957)
Gyppo Loggers (1957)
The Pemberton Valley (1957)
Morocco (1958)
Where Will They Go? (1958)
Bull Fight (1959)
Saigon (1959)
Rickshaw (1960)
India - 14 Years After (1960)
Josef Drenters (1960)
A Matter of Pride (1961)
Dreams (1961)

Three Yugoslavian Portraits (1961)
The Pursuit of Happiness (1962)
Joshua, A Nigerian Portrait (1962)
The Peacemakers (1963)
The Field Day (1963)
Lynn Seymour (1964)
Bjorn's Inferno (1964)
Running Away Backwards (1964)
The Mostly Unlikely Millionaire
 (1965)
Warrendale (1966)
Children In Conflict (series, 1967)
Who is ... James Jones (1967)
The New Woman (1968)
I Was Born Greek (1968, with Bill
 Brayne)
A Married Couple (1969)
Mortimer Griffen, Shalinsky and
How They Settled the Jewish
Question (1971)
Delilah (1972)
Can I Count You In? (1972)
Come On Children (1972)
A Bird in the House (1973)
Pity the Poor Piper (1974)
Baptizing (1975)
Six War Years (1975)
Red Emma (1976)
Who Has Seen the Wind (1977)
Maria (1977)
Silence of the North (1981)
Home Fires (series, some episodes,
 1983)
Ready For Slaughter (1983)
Who's In Charge? (1983)

Bonnie Sherr Klein

Pow Wow at Duck Lake (1967)
Encounter at Kwacha House (1967)
Encounter with Saul Alinsky (1967)
Little Burgundy (1968, English
 adaptations of *La p'tite*
Bourgogne, directed by Maurice
 Bulbulian)

Organizing for Power: The Alinsky
Approach (1968, 5 films)
VTR St-Jacques (1969, with Dorothy
 Todd Hénaut)
Citizen's Medicine (1970)
A Working Chance (1976)
Harmonie (1977)
Patricia's Moving Picture (1978)
The Right Candidate for Rosedale
 (1979)
Not a Love Story (1981, with
 Dorothy Todd Hénaut)
Speaking our Peace (1985, with
 Terry Nash)

Wolf Koenig

The Structure of Unions (1955)
City of Gold (1957, with Colin Low)
It's a Crime (1957)
The Days Before Christmas (1958,
 with Terence Macartney-Filgate,
 Stanley Jackson)
Country Threshing (1958)
Glenn Gould – Off the Record (1959,
 with Roman Kroitor)
Glenn Gould – On the Record (1959,
 with Roman Kroitor)
I Was a Ninety-Pound Weakling
 (1959, with Georges Dufaux)
Festival in Puerto Rico (1961, with
 Roman Kroitor)
The Living Machine (1961, with
 Roman Kroitor)
Lonely Boy (1962, with Roman
 Kroitor)
Canadian Businessmen (1964, with
 Roman Kroitor)
Stravinsky (1965, with Roman
 Kroitor)
Steeltown (1967, with Rex Tasker)
Coming Back Alive (1980, with
 Paul Cowan, Bill Mason,
 Rosemarie Shapley)
John Cat (1984)

Roman Kroitor

Rescue Party (1952)
Paul Tomkowicz: Street Railway Switchman (1952)
Farm Calendar (1955)
The Great Plains (1956)
Glenn Gould – Off the Record (1959, with Wolf Koenig)
Glenn Gould – On the Record (1959, with Wolf Koenig)
Universe (1960, with Colin Low)
The Living Machine (1961, with Wolf Koenig)
Festival in Puerto Rico (1961, with Wolf Koenig)
Lonely Boy (1962, with Wolf Koenig)
Above the Horizon (1964, with Hugh O'Connor)
Canadian Businessmen (1964, with Wolf Koenig)
Stravinsky (1965, with Wolf Koenig)
Labyrinthe (1967, with Colin Low)
IBM Close-up (1968, with Graeme Ferguson)
Exercise Running Jump II (1972)
Code Name Running Jump (1972)
Circus World (1974)

Colin Low

Cadet Rousselle (1947)
Time and Terrain (1947)
Age of the Beaver (1951)
The Romance of Transportation in Canada (1952)
Corral (1954)
The Jolifou Inn (1955)
Gold (1955)
City of Gold (1957, with Wolf Koenig)
Circle of the Sun (1960)
The Days of Whiskey Gap (1961)
The Hutterites (1963)
Labyrinthe (1967, with Roman Kroitor)

Fogo Island (1968, series of twenty-eight films)
The Winds of Fogo (1969)
When I Go ... That's It! (1972, in collaboration)
Do Your Thing (1973, in collaboration)
A Pinto for the Prince (1979, with John Spotton)
Atmos (1980)
Pete Standing Alone (1982)
Something's Happening Here (1986)

Andrew Lugg

Front and Back (1972, with Lynne Cohen)
Trace (1972)
Gemini Fire Extension (1972)
Plow, Skid, Drag (1973, with John Orentlicher)
Postcards (1974)
Dusk (1975)
Exceptional Moment A (1975-76)
L'Invasion printanière/Spring Push (1976)
Black Forest Trading Post (1976)

Terence Macartney-Filgate

Emergency Rescue (1956)
The Canadian Infantryman (1956)
The Days Before Christmas (1958, with Wolf Koenig, Stanley Jackson)
Blood and Fire (1958)
Police (1958)
Pilgrimage (1958)
The Back-Breaking Leaf (1959)
One Third Down and 24 Months to Pay/The Cars in Your Life (1959, with Fergus McDonnell)
End of the Line (1959)
Emergency in Morocco (1960)
Pilot X-15 (USA, 1960)

Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel
(USA, 1962)
Arts in Cuba (USA, 1962)
South African Essays (USA, 1964)
The Hundredth Summer (1964)
Composers USA: The Avant Garde
(USA, 1966)
Marshall McLuhan (1967)
Christopher Plummer (1967)
Up Against the System (1969)
A Young Social Worker Speaks Her
Mind (1969)
A. Y. Jackson: A Portrait (1970)
Henry David Thoreau: The Beat of
A Different Drummer (1972)
The Time Machine (1972)
Lucy Maude Montgomery: The
Road to Green Gables (1975)
Grenfell of Labrador (1976)
Labrador: Land out of Time (1977)
Fields of Endless Day (1978)
Dieppe 1942 (1979)

David Rimmer

Knowplace (1967, with Sylvia
Spring, Bob Herbison)
Square Inch Field (1968)
Migration (1969)
Landscape (1969)
Blue Movie (1970)
Treefall (1970)
Variations on a Cellophane
Wrapper (1970)
Surfacing on the Thames (1970)
The Dance (1970)
Real Italian Pizza (1971)
Seashore (1971)
Fracture (1973)
Watching for the Queen (1973)
Canadian Pacific I (1974)
Canadian Pacific II (1975)
Al Neil/A Portrait (1979)
Narrows Inlet (1967-1980)
Shades of Red (1982)

Bricolage (1984)
Along the Road to Altamira (1986)
As Seen on T.V. (1986)

Donald E. Shebib

The Duel (1962)
Joey (1962)
Revival (1963)
Surfin' (1964)
Satan's Choice (1965)
A Search for Learning (1966)
Allan (1966)
David Secter (1966)
June Marks (1966)
Christelot Hanson (1966)
Basketball (1967)
Everdale Place (1967)
Satan's Choice (1967)
San Francisco Summer 1967 (1968)
Unknown Soldier (1968)
Stanfield (1968)
Graduation Day (1968)
Good Times Bad Times (1969)
Goin' Down the Road (1970)
Rip-Off (1971)
Born Hustler (1972)
Between Friends (1973)
Winning is the Only Thing! (1974)
Mrs. Gray (1974)
We've Come a Long Way Together
(1974)
Once Upon a Time in Genarro
(1974)
Deedee (1974)
The Canary (1975)
Second Wind (1976)
Old Man Reeve (1977)
The Fighting Men (1977)
Holiday for Homicide (1978)
Fish Hawk (1979)
Heartaches (1981)
By Reason of Insanity (1982)
Running Brave (1983)
Slim Obsession (1984)

Michael Snow

A-Z (1956)
New York Eye and Ear Control
 (1964)
Short Shave (1965)
Wavelength (1967)
Standard Time (1967)
 ↔ (1969)
One Second in Montreal (1969)
Dripping Water (1969, with Joyce
 Wieland)
Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound
Film (1970)
La région centrale (1971)
Rameau's Nephew by Diderot
(Thanx to Dennis Young) by
Wilma Schoen (1974)
Breakfast/Table Top Dolly (1972-
 1976)
Presents (1981)
So Is This (1982)
Seated Figures (1988)

Joyce Wieland

Tea in the Garden (1958)
Larry's Recent Behaviour (1963)
Peggy's Blue Skylight (1964/1986)
Patriotism, Part One (1964)
Patriotism, Part Two (1964)
Water Sark (1964-1965)
Bill's Hat (1967)
Barbara's Blindness (1967)
Sailboat (1967)
 1933 (1967)
Handtinting (1967)
Catfood (1967)
Rat Life and Diet in North America
 (1968)
Dripping Water (1969, with Michael
 Snow)
La raison avant la passion (1969)
Pierre Vallières (1972)
Solidarity (1973)
The Far Shore (1975)
A & B in Ontario (1984)
Birds at Sunrise (1972/1986)

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