The interiority of the unknown woman in film

Turner, David.

University of Kent

Abstract

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Is film an appropriate medium for the expression of interiority? Can it provide the means for exploring the notion of an 'inner' life? If so, how are such expressions and explorations achieved? And which aspects of the medium do they discover and exploit? This thesis attempts to answer these questions through the close and sustained examination of a selection of films that feature the figure of the 'unknown woman'. Part One establishes the critical and philosophical foundations of the thesis, which involves a discussion of Stanley Cavell's concept of the 'unknown woman', the philosophical background to that concept, and a consideration of its usefulness to the study of interiority in film. The films discussed at length in connection with these matters are *Psycho* (1960), *All I Desire* (1953), *Stella Dallas* (1937) and *In a Lonely Place* (1950). Each of the chapters in Part Two is devoted to a particular film's expression of an unknown woman's interiority. These chapters identify how interiority is characterised (e.g. as 'conflicted,' 'opaque,' 'performed'), and how the concept of interiority is explored, in the films in question: *Mouchette* (1967), *Le Rayon Vert* (1986), *Voyage to Italy* (1953), *L'avventura* (1960), *Persona* (1966), *Belle de Jour* (1967), and *Merci pour le Chocolat* (2000).

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

> [I]n my experience of viewing films, the medium of film — and specifically the camera — takes the nature of human interiority as its fundamental subject. If there are limits on the expressibility of human interiority (hence on our knowledge of others, and on others' knowledge of us), they are not imposed by film. These limits exist with us: We inhabit them.
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> - Marian Keane [1]

Many works of film criticism are concerned, to some degree, with the expression of interiority in film. This is inevitable and necessary, simply because, for so many films, the expression of a character's interiority (e.g. her state of mind) is of considerable importance. Of course, the nature of this importance varies enormously: sometimes the expression of interiority is discreet and economical and subordinate to other concerns, while at other times interiority is a central feature or subject. Where interiority is central, we might expect to find corresponding works of criticism which *focus* on the film's expression of interiority and identify the achievements or failings of the film in this regard. Yet this rarely happens; there is relatively little writing devoted to character interiority in the cinema. [2] This thesis is a response to that scarcity. It offers a sustained study of such expressions, examining a collection of films concerned with interiority in different ways, from the famous to the not-so-famous, with the intention of assessing the nature of those expressions, the achievements those expressions entail, and the implications of those expressions for our understanding and appreciation of the film medium.

The central claim of this thesis is that film is an appropriate medium for the expression of interiority. This claim may appear to be counter-intuitive. Isn't film restricted to presenting what is visible and audible, what we might call the surface of things, and isn't a person's inner life precisely what lies beneath that surface, invisible to the camera? Part One of this thesis is devoted to establishing a critical and philosophical foundation from which these concerns can be addressed. [3] Central

to this task is a survey of some of the existing critical and theoretical work on interiority in film, including a discussion regarding the prominence of literature in debates surrounding expressions of consciousness in the arts, and the unfortunate influence this prominence has had on the understanding of the equivalent expressions in film. Chapter One argues that although film is less adept than literature at expressing specific thoughts or conceptualising a character's feelings, it does not follow that film is an unsuitable medium for the expression of interiority. Several of the chapter's subsequent discussions affirm this point – most pertinently, the analysis of V.F. Perkins's explication of *All I Desire* (Douglas Sirk, 1953) – by drawing out aspects of interiority that film *is* suited to expressing. These discussions suggest the medium's suitability for the expression of distinct states of mind (e.g. states of self-absorption, internal tension, or heightened sensitivity), the nature of a character's interiority (e.g. interiority as something physical, or vulnerable to the influence of environment, or pervading reality, hence the chapter titles in Part Two) and the exploration of the concept of interiority (e.g. the discovery that interiority can be both plainly visible and potentially concealed). These aspects of interiority have much in common, drawing on film's capacity to present interiority as something that we meet and experience.

It is this understanding of the aspects of interiority film is suited to expressing that draws this thesis to the particular area of filmmaking examined in Part Two. Chapter Two locates and defines this area by drawing on the work of Stanley Cavell – in particular his concept of the 'unknown woman' as it appears in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*.[4] This chapter explores the divergence and overlap between Cavell's understanding of the concept and mine; an exploration that involves an extended discussion of a film to which Cavell frequently returns, *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937). This exploration identifies Cavell's broad use of the concept (he states in *Contesting Tears* that 'the specifics of what goes unknown' awaits 'the investigation of the lives figured in the details of the films in question'),[5] his emphasis on the women's theatrical *responses* to unknownness, and the relationship of the figure of the unknown woman to his interest in Hollywood

melodrama. As this chapter shows, Cavell's use of the concept contrasts with mine: in this thesis it is principally the woman's *interiority* that is unknown, and the film's expression of that unknown interiority, rather than her responses to it, that is emphasised. This use of the concept allows the thesis to examine films from different periods, places and genres. Chapter Two goes on to define the thesis's adaptation of Cavell's concept of the unknown woman and to elaborate the rationale for its use of the concept, identifying the characteristics of the unknown woman that assist the aims of this study. This involves a brief and preliminary examination of the relationship between a character's unknownness (in the film's world) and our understanding of that character's interiority, along with a discussion of the relationship between Cavellian 'passivity' (a notion he associates with the unknown woman) and the expression of interiority in film through an analysis of *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950).

In order to develop understanding of how the expression of interiority is achieved in film it is necessary to examine the particular expressions of particular films, and for that examination to be sustained. For this reason, each of the chapters in Part Two is devoted to a single film's expression of interiority. These films are selected on the basis that each is interested in the interiority of an unknown woman (or women),[6] and that each characterises and expresses that interiority differently. This selection takes in some of the variety of possible expressions of unknown interiority in film, from the physical manifestation of a character's thoughts and feelings to the gradual uncovering of the opacity of a character's interiority. The array of interrelated expressions that are collected in Part Two allows the thesis to establish the value and importance of a particular community of expressions of interiority, and hence provide a more *compelling* account of film's aptitude for such expressions. Importantly, among the films discussed in Part Two are many famous and 'canonised' works of European Cinema (e.g. *Voyage to Italy* [7] [Roberto Rossellini, 1953], *L'avventura* [Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960], *Persona* [Ingmar Bergman, 1966]), works that have received extensive critical treatment over the years. The inclusion of these films provides the opportunity to demonstrate how critical

discussion of the films can be reinvigorated through the examination of their approach to, and expression of, interiority.

The first three films discussed in Part Two – *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967), *Le Rayon Vert* (Eric Rohmer, 1986), and *Voyage to Italy* – share a number of characteristics. Each of these films suggests that the interiorities of their unknown women are coherent and consistent, hence in principle explicable and fathomable, despite also showing those interiorities to remain unacknowledged. The films also exploit the same aspect of the medium to express interiority: film's capacity to define expressive relationships between interiority and exteriority (more specifically between bodily expression and aspects of environment). A good example of this exploitation is found in *Mouchette*, the film that is discussed in Chapter Three. *Mouchette* shows the interiority of its titular character to be physically manifested in the world – present in everything from her gestures and bodily movement. The chapter demonstrates that this is achieved through a combination of performance and the careful articulation of her relationship to her environment, particularly her physical relationship with clods of mud, the lid of a coffee pot, a leaf-strewn riverbank, and so on.

Le Rayon Vert presents Delphine (Marie Rivière), an unknown woman in a very different state of mind. Delphine is self-absorbed, or more precisely trapped in a mood of her own making, unable to disentangle herself from her distressed feelings or to find a place in which those feelings can be expressed. Consequently, she is far less aware of her immediate surroundings. Chapter Four concerns the film's presentation of a world that reaches far beyond Delphine's experience; its use of contrasts and moments of harmony between performance and environment to evoke Delphine's distressed state of mind; and the effect of that distress on the nature of her experience. Also examined are patterns of performance, particularly the expressive relationship drawn by the film between dialogue and gesture.

Chapter Five explores another way in which the relationship between interiority and exteriority can be shaped in film through its discussion of *Voyage to Italy*. This film presents Katherine (Ingrid Bergman), an unknown woman whose thoughts and feelings are vulnerable to the influence of an unfamiliar environment. The chapter shows how the relationship between performance and environment is used to evoke the vulnerability of Katherine's interiority, noting the film's use of certain 'realist' or 'documentary' techniques, such as hand-held camera and on-location shooting, and certain melodramatic elements, such as non-diegetic 'expressionist' music. The presence of these elements allows the chapter to examine how realist and melodramatic elements can combine to provide compelling expressions of interiority.

L'avventura, the next film discussed in Part Two, shares some of the characteristics of the first three films, particularly their concern with the expressive uses of environment. Once again, the relationship between the unknown woman – in this case, Claudia (Monica Vitti) – and her environment is dramatised. However, here the effect is very different; for in this film, the woman's relationship to her environment (particularly the natural world, or as one critic puts it, 'organic life') is used to emphasise her lack of self-knowledge, specifically her inability to know what she feels. This inability is manifested most clearly in her *performance* of her feelings. Chapter Six shows that this performance of interiority implies a gap – an intermediating consciousness – between the feeling, and the expression, of emotion. Our difficulty in knowing what Claudia is thinking and feeling, her particular state of mind from moment to moment, and so on, points ahead to the next three films discussed in Part Two: *Persona, Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel, 1967), and *Merci pour le Chocolat* (Claude Chabrol, 2000).

These three films present unknown women with interiorities that in varying degrees lack coherence, and hence are inherently difficult to acknowledge. The expression of interiority in two of those films, *Persona* and *Belle de Jour*, draws on the capacity of film to explore the relationship between fantasy and reality through the depiction of

fantasy *as* reality, or as a form of reality. These expressions exploit the medium's tendency to imply that whatever is filmed and projected is concrete and existing. This focus on the depiction of fantasy as reality is not as much a break from the earlier discussions of the relationship between interiority and exteriority as it may initially seem. For the depiction of fantasy as reality is a presentation of interiority as exteriority, a form of joining the two together. Chapter Seven shows how this aspect of the procedure of depicting fantasy allows *Persona* to suggest that the division between interiority (including fantasy) and reality is permeable, that interiority can pervade the world. The focus of this chapter is on how the film regulates the permeation of this division, deftly modulating the epistemic status of what we see.

The following chapter shows the diversity of ways film can characterise the relationship between fantasy and reality, and the variety of effects those characterisations can produce, by switching attention to *Belle de Jour*. This chapter focuses on the film's juxtapositions of sequences depicting reality and those depicting fantasy, and their combined effect on our understanding of the interiority of the film's central character, Séverine (Catherine Deneuve). The chapter argues that the film uses these juxtapositions, along with other devices such as the isolation of areas of Séverine's body through framing and editing, to suggest that Séverine's interiority is conflicted – that she has contradictory desires and that these desires place her fantasies in opposition to her day-to-day experience. Towards the end of *Belle de Jour*, there is a similarly ambiguous merging of fantasy and reality to that found in the climax of *Persona*. This chapter shows how, in this instance, fantasy and reality remain opposed to each other, their merging resulting in a profound incoherence, rather than (as with *Persona*) the depiction of a series of ambiguous, but more-or-less coherent, events.

The merging of fantasy and reality in *Belle de Jour* renders the familiar process of inferring interiority from exteriority unstable – we do not know where interiority ends and exteriority begins. The final chapter of Part Two examines *Merci pour le Chocolat*, a film that renders that process unstable in a rather different manner, but

for related ends. The chapter argues that this instability is achieved through the creation of fluctuations in the relationship between interiority and exteriority. (As such, this chapter recalls many of the discussions of the earlier chapters.) These fluctuations are created by a number of means, including delays in the disclosure of the diegetic status of some of the film's music, contrasts between colour, and the fragmentation and rejoining of the film's spaces. Through these devices, the chapter argues, we are given glimpses of Mika's (Isabelle Huppert) interiority, without that interiority becoming explicable, or our imaginings of it becoming validated. By doing so, the film demonstrates that the expression of an opaque interiority can be more than just the presentation of an enigmatic character, or a retreat into ambiguity – that it can also explore the nature of opacity itself, its manifestation in the presence of concealments.

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[1] Keane, Marian. 'Dyer Straits: Theoretical Issues in Studies of Film Acting' *Postscript* 12: 2 (Winter, 1993), p. 38.

[2] The *Wideangle* issue apparently devoted to 'Interiority' turns out to have a disappointingly broad understanding of the concept. Only one out of the four articles is primarily concerned with character interiority; the rest consider a range of issues from 'the dissolving line between the public and the private, between the exterior and the interior, that is the hallmark of our surveillance society' (p. 5) to the 'secret places beneath cities' which contain 'the sources of the "pulp truth" animating films from the last three decades' (p. 6). See *Wideangle* 20: 4 (1998), edited by David Descutner, for more details.

[3] This introduction is shortened as a result of Part One fulfilling these responsibilities.

[4] Cavell, Stanley. *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[5] Cavell, p. 12.

[6] Both of *Persona*'s central characters can be understood as unknown women.

[7] Some of the films in this thesis have a range of titles, largely as a result of their movement between different national markets. *Voyage to Italy*, for example, is known in its country of origin, Italy, as *Viaggio in Italia*. In the body of the text I use the film titles most commonly found in English language film criticism. Both sets of titles are listed in the thesis's filmography.

PART ONE

1. Discovering Interiority in Film

Subjectivity and Interiority

In the introduction to this thesis, I claimed there is relatively little writing devoted to character interiority in the cinema. It may be objected that although film criticism has rarely paid sustained and concentrated attention to expressions of interiority, it has paid such attention to subjectivity, and that it is merely the shift in terms that creates the appearance of a critical lack. This is not so: the terms 'interiority' and 'subjectivity' have importantly distinct meanings and associations, even if they are, on occasion, used interchangeably.[1] For example, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's book *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* is principally concerned with aspects of individuality and identity – more specifically, films which, the authors' claim, 'propose the implausibility of individuality'[2] – rather than the expression of a character's inner life, or the exploration of the concept of interiority. This association with identity is a feature common to many works of film criticism employing the term 'subjectivity'. The term is used to identify a certain way of being in the world associated with a particular group or category of persons – 'contemporary subjectivity', 'female subjectivity', 'Western subjectivity'. The way character interiority is handled by films in general or particular is often relevant to such studies, but rarely a subject of sustained discussion. At other times, often during theoretical discussions of point of view or narration in the cinema, 'subjectivity' is used to invoke an opposition to, or a distinction from, objectivity – in short, to bring to mind the epistemic status of a particular shot, sound, or moment in a film. These discussions are often of more relevance to a study such as this, yet their concern with the status and category of elements of film marginalises, or even overrides, any discussion of the variety of ways in which interiority can be characterised and explored, and so on. My use of the term 'interiority' is designed to avoid associations with individuality and identity, along with the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, and to court an association with interior lives, experience and consciousness. The term 'interiority' is also intended to invoke its

apparent opposite, 'exteriority', for the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and external behaviour and appearance is a pervasive concern for the films found in this thesis.

Descriptions and Presentations of Interiority

Literature's capacity to express interiority has received considerable critical attention, partly because the expression of interiority in the work of many acclaimed novelists (e.g. Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf) has so *clearly* been a vital part of the achievements of those works. As some of these novels have been adapted for the screen (e.g. the numerous attempts to adapt the novels of Henry James) the question regarding cinema's capacities in this regard has often been raised by adaptation theorists and critics. David Lodge, a novelist himself, takes a more partisan view than some, although the thrust of his argument is one shared by many writers on the subject:

> Compared with prose fiction or narrative poetry or drama, film is most tied to representing the visible world, and least well adapted to representing consciousness, which is invisible. [...] The combination of [voice-over, dialogue, performance, imagery, music etc.] operating together and sometimes simultaneously can have a very powerful emotional effect, but it is not semantically fine-grained – it is not capable of the precise descriptions and subtle discriminations of a character's mental life that we find in the classic and modern novel. In film, the subjective inner life of the characters has to be implied rather than explicitly verbalised...[3]

Although I think Lodge is dazzled by the splendour and cultural prominence of literature's achievements, it would be wrong to deny that there is some truth to his claims. At the very least, it is true that most, if not all, forms of fiction film place limits on the verbalisation of the 'inner life' of characters in a way that many forms of literature do not. (This is not to deny that many films feature revealing exchanges of dialogue, or voice-over renderings of thoughts and feelings.) The adaptation

theorist Brian McFarlane makes this clear when he discusses the difficulties of adapting the 'first-person' novel for the screen:

> [A] sustained, non-diegetic oral accompaniment to visually presented action is scarcely feasible in relation to the feature films with which this study (like most cinema audiences) is concerned. Those words spoken in voice-over accompany images which necessarily take on an objective life of their own. One no longer has the sense of everything being filtered through the consciousness of the protagonist-speaker...One...sees everything the camera 'sees', not just what impressed itself on the hero-narrator's imaginative responsiveness. In relation to those films which employ the voice-over technique, one's sense of the character to whom it is attributed is more likely to be the product of his involvement in the action directly presented than of his occasional comment upon it, whereas this is frequently not the case in the first-person novel.[4]

Feeling the pinch of this apparent inadequacy of the cinema we may mistakenly attempt to claim that film provides the equivalent to first-person narration by *visual*, rather than verbal, means. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Jean Epstein's call in 1921 for a cinema in which we are 'with the [film] character – not behind, in front, or beside him but inside him', a cinema in which we 'see through his eyes... see his hand coming out from under [us] as though it were [our] own hand...[and for] black leader to be cut into the sequence to imitate [our] eyes blinking.' [5] The aesthetic naivety of wishes such as these are regularly and routinely demonstrated in numerous studies of point of view, often through the examination of the notorious *Lady in the Lake* (1946), a film which consists largely of optical point of view shots from a single character, Philip Marlowe. It is a film that in almost every detail answers Epstein's call; and it is also a film that is widely considered a failure. [6] As the film's failings are well-documented, I will not re-examine them all here. It is enough for present purposes, I think, to note that seeing the world from a character's physical *position* (a shot from the optical point of view of a character) is not identical with seeing the world from 'inside' the character, which appears to be the film's presumption. To think otherwise is to severely reduce the complexity of subjective experience. (The moments in the film when a disembodied hand reaches

into the frame from behind the camera inadvertently illustrate the comedy of this reduction. This is an area that *Being John Malkovich* [Spike Jonze, 1999] attempts to explore.) Indeed, as several critics have argued, it is not obvious that the term 'subjective' applies to optical point-of-view shots at all, for these shots (according to most definitions) present nothing more than a view of the character's field of vision – not even, necessarily, what the character specifically sees, but just what the character is able to see.[7] In practice, the attempt to render a character's subjective view often entails a shot that is *not* from their physical position, say a close up of the detail in question. In any case, the lack of identity between an optical point-of-view shot and a shot expressing a character's subjective experience is reason enough to abandon any hope for a visual *equivalent* (narrowly construed) to first-person narration.[8]

The discussion so far suggests that cinema is less adept than literature at representing interiority verbally and lacks a visual equivalent to first-person narration – in short, it suggests that the film medium cannot easily provide a privileged position from which the conceptual specificity of a character's thoughts and feelings can be known. This may tempt us to claim that film is unsuited to expressing interiority. But to claim that would be to reduce expressions of interiority to expressions of the specificity of a character's thoughts and feelings. This is something to be resisted. There are other aspects of a character's interiority, and of interiority in general or as a concept, that are equally deserving of expression. An important part of what interiority is, for example, derives from its relationship to exteriority – the body, behaviour and the external world. It follows from this that an expression of a character's interiority may be as much concerned with the way that interiority manifests itself in the world, its specific relationship with the character's environment, or our propensity to miss or overlook its bodily manifestation, as the eddies and nuances of a particular thought process (although we should be wary of implying that the cinema cannot express such nuances, as we shall see). The privileged position provided by many novels will often be unsuitable or irrelevant to such expressions.[9]

It may be objected that much of Lodge's claim still holds. After all, Lodge does not explicitly deny that film is capable of expressing interiority. We might take his principal argument to be that film is inferior to literature insofar as it is incapable of 'subtle discriminations of a character's mental life'. But this is, I think, a claim that can be successfully contested. Film may be unable to consistently and elaborately specify *what* a character is thinking or feeling, or to *verbally* represent the nature of a character's consciousness, but it does not follow from this that film is incapable of subtle discriminations regarding a character's mental life. Implication and suggestion can provide far more than vague, impressionistic, 'emotional' effects (albeit 'powerful' ones). As we shall soon see, we often discover much about a character's interior life through the precise use of performance, camera position, editing, and so on. These discoveries, though often the result of implication, suggestion, and evocation, can be (and often are) expressive of *particular* and *precise* states of mind, as well as suggestive of broader notions, such as the nature of a character's inner life. Because of this, films of interiority present us with the formidable critical challenge of finding words for those states of mind, finding ways of articulating how they are evoked and what those evocations reveal. The difficulty of this critical challenge – our persistent sense of the precise words being beyond our reach – must not prevent us from acknowledging the complexity of the experiences those films provide, the wonder of coming to appreciate another's interiority by way of the screen.

Examining Interiority in the Cinema

Writers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty find cause for celebration in the very aspects of the cinema Lodge criticises:

> [The reason] why the movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man [is that] they do not give us his *thoughts*, as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present to us that special

way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know. [...] For the movies as for modern psychology dizziness, pleasure, grief, love, and hate are ways of behaving.[10]

As this suggests, the means by which the cinema expresses interiority is heavily reliant on the means by which we express our thoughts and feelings to one another – namely, what we say, do, and how we say and do it, in short, our behaviour. This aspect of the cinema is made explicit by Doug Pye and John Gibbs in their article on *Bonjour Tristesse* (Otto Preminger, 1958) when they observe that 'we have to rely on accumulated experience of ourselves and others to intuit what might lie behind what we see and hear [onscreen].' [11] Leo Braudy is another critic who shares this view:

> [F]ilm accepts the necessity of defining problems of character primarily in terms of a character's actions and statements – the only avenue of knowledge we ourselves usually have. [...] Character in film generally is more like character as we perceive it everyday than it is in any other representational art.[12]

Those that doubt cinema's capacity to express interiority may well respond that this reliance is exactly the problem – that it is impossible to know, at least with any certainty, the inner lives of other people in ordinary life, and therefore it is likely to be impossible to know the inner lives of characters in the cinema. Indeed, it may seem doubtful that film characters should generally be considered to be thinking or feeling anything at all, unless the existence and specificity of a particular thought or feeling is expressed in a way – say through 'reliable' voice-over narration – that confers something like certainty upon it. In order to consider this position more fully let us examine the claims made by Deborah Thomas regarding Anthony Perkins's performance as Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960):

> Norman's lack of conscious knowledge of his mother's death, and thus his own guilt, is very precariously suppressed, and this is only made possible...by transforming much of his life into a series of inexplicable

gaps. His description of being in a private trap – "We scratch...and claw, but only at the air..." presents us with an image of him surrounded by nothing more substantial than empty space, mirroring his experience of much of his life as unfathomably empty time. His posture continually evokes withdrawal from the surrounding world, whether through the way his coat collar is held tightly closed against the rain when Marion first arrives, or the way he keeps his hands in his pockets as he enters the kitchen after spying on Marion and, later, as he greets Lila and Sam on their arrival at the motel, or the manner in which he sits on the parlour with his hands clasped as Marion eats. This is a body making as little space for itself in the world as possible, pulling back from contact with its troubling realities which present themselves to him as thin air.[13]

In this passage Thomas takes Norman's posture – particularly his repeated holding of his hands close to his body – as expressive of an aspect of his interiority, perhaps even its abiding nature: a wish or a need to withdraw from the surrounding world (and hence an experience of the world as something he needs to shrink from). Underlying this interpretation is a commitment to certain criteria of bodily expression: a body held like this, in this kind of context, expresses withdrawal, and so on. In order for her interpretation to be convincing, we must share these criteria, think them applicable to Norman Bates, and consider the criteria to be fulfilled. If we do so, her interpretation may be both convincing and *revealing*, as it is possible (indeed likely) that we have not consciously applied these criteria in this instance – or to put it another way, that we recognise we have responded to Norman as if he wishes to withdraw from the world, or that it is appropriate to respond to him in this way, but that we failed to recognise the connection between this response and the aspects of Perkins's performance Thomas identifies.

It is important to note that the sceptical viewer or critic need not be persuaded by Thomas's writing, or indeed any writing or argument. There is nothing in the cited passage that *compels* that viewer to share the criteria she applies to Norman Bates.[14] (A viewer from a very different culture with very different ways of behaving may find it extremely difficult to share Thomas's criteria.) The sceptical viewer may remain unmoved, may insist that Norman's posture is merely insignificant behaviour, or that its meaning is indecipherable, *wholly* ambiguous. The reach of the

viewer's scepticism may be confined to the question of Norman's posture, or it may (at least hypothetically) extend to the question of whether Norman has an inner life at all. Here we can see a relationship emerging between the sceptical viewer and the philosophical sceptic who doubts knowledge of other's minds in ordinary life. As Stanley Cavell famously notes, through his interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, this scepticism cannot be refuted (although it can be overcome). This is because of the nature and reach of the criteria by which we understand each other and express ourselves – their human construction, their basis in agreement. The Cavellian philosopher, Espen Hammer writes:

> Since criteria [for pain and other interior states] are only human, natural to us in virtue of the way we agree in language but not metaphysically aligned with anything in *the nature of things*, skepticism, the repudiation of criteria, is a standing possibility of humans. For Cavell, what this ought to teach us is that our relation to the world and others in it should not be viewed primarily (or only) as knowing, where knowing is construed with certainty; rather, the application of criteria is something for which we ourselves must forever be responsible.[15]

On this Cavellian account, taking a person's (and by extension, a character's) posture as mere behaviour is a choice which is always a possibility. We must be *willing* to regard certain behaviour as expressive of inner life for that inner life to be known,[16] which is another way of saying we are responsible for the application of the appropriate criteria. If we are unwilling, if the application is not made, behaviour is (for us) merely behaviour and the criteria do not function. As Hammer puts it, 'the functioning of criteria presupposes my continued willingness to take criteria of pain [or other interior states] as expressive of the inner life of the other, and hence my acknowledgement of the other's body as the home of my psychological concepts.' [17]

According to Cavell, acknowledgement is always invoked when one person expresses thoughts and feelings to another. If a person, say, screams with pain, knowing that the person is in pain entails the recognition that an appropriate response, an *acknowledgement* of that pain, is called for. On this account, failing to know the interiority of a person (and by extension, a character) when it is expressed

is not simply 'a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank.' [18] A failure to know a person is in pain when that pain is expressed is a failure to acknowledge that pain, which is 'the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness. Spiritual emptiness is not a blank.' [19] If some characters are analogous human beings, an analogous acknowledgement is called for – withholding it is to risk an equivalent confusion, callousness or emptiness and so on. Of course, this is a different form of acknowledgement than that which takes place in ordinary life, for we cannot reveal ourselves to those onscreen – there is an irreversible asymmetry between us and the characters which prevents the acknowledgement of characters from being *completed*, from those characters knowing they are acknowledged.[20] Yet the expressions of those onscreen still call for a response (a response that may take the form of film criticism).

We can now begin to see how the practice of film criticism, at least when concerned with expressions of interiority or with figures of unknownness, can be an enactment of the overcoming of scepticism, or at least an engagement with the sceptical problematic. This helps to explain the apparent peculiarity or eccentricity of Cavell's long-standing interest in both film and philosophical issues surrounding scepticism. Something of the echoes between these commitments are captured in his opus on scepticism, *Claim of Reason*, in which he writes of knowing another mind in terms of reading the human body, interpreting a physiognomy.[21] As we have already seen, films share this understanding of knowing as reading and interpreting – we might say that certain films embody a Cavellian approach to the knowing of others (here we see what it might mean to suggest that a film explores the concept of interiority), or that the Cavellian approach is derived from the tuition of films. At one point in *Claim of Reason*, Cavell makes the connection between aesthetic appreciation (in this case of painting) and philosophy of mind explicit:

> It is, I take it, this conviction, expressed by Wittgenstein as the body being a picture of the soul, that Hegel gives philosophical expression to in the following formulations: "[The] shape, with which the Idea as spiritual – as individually determined spirituality – invests itself when

manifested as a temporal phenomenon, is *the human form*...[The] human shape [is] the sole sensuous phenomenon that is appropriate to mind" (*Philosophy of Fine Art*, introduction, pp. 185, 186). (Thus may the philosophy of mind become aesthetics.) [22]

Of course, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to withhold the application of psychological criteria from certain characters, to be sceptical regarding their interiorities. The applicability of psychological criteria to film characters is a matter of judgement in each individual case. [23] In the case of *Psycho*, however, it is hard to imagine a compelling argument for such a withholding. Such an argument would have to take the form of a coherent, rival interpretation of the film and particularly of Norman's character. In order to begin to be compelling, this interpretation would need to address the narrative prominence of the psychology of Norman Bates and account for the significance of Norman's posture, gestures and so on without applying the same, or equivalent, psychological criteria to that character. Although it is certainly worth acknowledging that the applicability of psychological criteria is a matter of judgement, there is little reason to doubt Thomas's judgement in this particular case.

The question remains whether the criteria Thomas applies are fulfilled. In other words, although she may be right to think it possible that Norman's posture is expressing withdrawal, it may not be – it may be better thought of as expressing something else. This takes us back to the film and our own responses to Perkins's performance, along with other aspects of the film which shape and inflect those responses, such as mise-en-scène and so on. For our present purposes, there is no need to contest Thomas's claim in detail, but it is important to acknowledge that her claim – and claims of this sort – may well be worth contesting. Small details of performance may transform an expression of withdrawal from the world into, say, an expression of nervousness, contained excitement, bodily embarrassment, and so on (or even some combination of all of these). But this possibility is no reason to limit ourselves to the expressions of interiority in film which require less sensitivity to be

read; it is rather a reason to develop our sensitivity, to sustain our concentration and attention.

If we share Thomas's criteria, think them applicable to Norman Bates, and consider the criteria to be fulfilled, is there any remaining room for doubt that Norman shrinks from the world, that his experience of the world is something like Thomas describes? In this case, there is, perhaps, little room for any remaining doubt, but it is important to recognise that this is not because the fulfilment of criteria confers certainty. As Cavell notes, all the fulfilment of criteria confers is something like the *identity* of what is expressed not its existence.[24] It follows from this that we can be confident that Norman is *expressing* withdrawal, but not that he feels the way Thomas infers from that expression – he may be pretending to feel this way, to experience the world in that manner. In this case, though, any doubts we may have are diminished by the context of the expression. For when considering the moment in the context of the film as a whole, we can see no reason to think Norman is expressing something he does not also feel, which is to say, the film makes little sense if we take him to be pretending. (Let us not forget that on Thomas's reading in the moments mentioned Norman is expressing an aspect of his inner life that remains largely unconscious.) Moreover, other aspects of the film appear designed to support Thomas's interpretation. She goes on to note that Norman's

> postures get part of their meaning in contrast with those of Norman-as-mother, when both her strong voice and the stabbing motions of her powerful arm carve out a place for herself in the world with bold and assertive strokes. However, Norman's shrinking postures also get much of their meaning in contrast with those of Sam in the opening scene and Marion in the shower.[25]

The suggestiveness (at the very least) of Thomas's interpretation is reason enough to take seriously the nuances of performance and their potential contribution to the expression of character interiority. In his study of interiority in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), Neil Potts cites V.F. Perkins on this matter. Perkins notes, in a discussion of *Caught* (Max Ophuls, 1948), that the subtleties of performance are

matters that should not be ignored in favour of coarser, less demanding or debatable, expressions or presentations:

> It is necessary to reflect on what the gestures mean and where they come from. The camera cannot directly show what is on Leonora's [Barbara Bel Geddes] mind, but her aims and feelings are as much a part of the narrative of *Caught* as the fact that she is sitting in a millionaire's car...[26]

As Perkins suggests, the consideration of a character's interiority is essential to our appreciation of that film's narrative – it is as much a part of that narrative as other, apparently less doubtful, elements. This means that Leonora's 'aims and feelings', or Norman's way of experiencing the world, are not aspects of these characters that are hidden, or that *must* be doubted. Interpreting a character's interiority does not require that we read 'into', or impose upon, what is onscreen. In Perkins's terms, these aspects of character are filmed, they are there for competent viewers to see and hear.

Film as a Moving Image of Scepticism

We can now begin to see how the limits of film's capacity to express interiority are an important part of film's capacity to address the sceptical problematic: 'the question whether I know with certainty of the existence of the external world and of myself and others in it'[27]. In allowing us to doubt (or in being unable to eradicate such doubts) the existence of the interiorities of those onscreen, a film can also invite us to overcome those doubts, thereby momentarily overcoming our scepticism, our need for certainty in this regard. A privileged position of the kind found in some literature that confers certainty regarding the existence and content of a character's mind does not encourage us to overcome our scepticism so much as *bypass* it altogether – there is little possibility of our entertaining these sceptical doubts in such fiction, and therefore little to be overcome. In contrast, the lack of such a position (and hence the replication of the problems of communication in

ordinary life) and the possibility of sceptical doubt, readily allows a narrative to instruct or urge us to this overcoming.

This aspect of film runs parallel to film's capacity to explore scepticism regarding the *existence of the world*. For in presenting to us a world from which we are absent – in short, an image of reality – cinema can be said to be 'a moving image of [external world] scepticism'.[28] This capacity to represent external world scepticism is similarly integral to its capacity to address and overcome it. As Mulhall notes:

> [I]f the motion picture camera presents us with no more than an *image* of reality, it is nevertheless an image of nothing less than *reality*; so precisely the same aspect of photography's power which makes film an image of scepticism (its exclusion of subjectivity) also allows it to represent an acceptance of the world's independent existence.[29]

These two dimensions of film's capacity to represent (and overcome) scepticism also combine with each other in important ways. For the aspect of cinema that makes it a moving image of scepticism regarding the external world – our absence from the world we view – enhances our capacity to appreciate the interiorities of those we see onscreen, and therefore to overcome scepticism regarding the existence of other minds. It does this by allowing us to view others *unseen*, which removes the distraction of self-regard, of wondering how we appear to those we view, thereby allowing a greater concentration on the expressions of others. As Timothy Gould puts it:

> The distance created by film's screening of its subjects, allowing them to act in their own absence, permits hiddenness and safety on our side. But it also gives us the chance to study and appreciate the visibility of others, to see what their existence amounts to.[30]

Examining Interiority

> Character subjectivity is an emergent quality of the narration as a whole, not the product of any single technique.[31]
>
> - Murray Smith

The preceding section focussed on performance, which is, of course, a vital part of cinematic expressions of interiority. However, performance is far from the only element of film that contributes to expressions of interiority; any aspect of film can in principle make such a contribution. Often such contributions take the form of amplifications or inflections of performance.[32] V.F. Perkins powerfully articulates how such amplification is achieved in his analysis of *All I Desire* (Douglas Sirk, 1953). The moment he discusses shows Naomi Murdoch (Barbara Stanwyck) returning one evening, for the first time in ten years, to the home she abandoned:

> On the porch she delays, holding back tears. She stands in the shadows to look in on the domestic scene. The film cuts to a head and shoulders shot as she glances about her, hesitating. Her eyes move to a hanging flower basket in the foreground above her head. She reaches up into the top of it to take down a door key that she holds for a long moment in contemplation...She reacts in confusion to the noise of an approach, hurriedly replaces the key and retreats further into the shadows of the verandah. [33]

This opening description of the moment, which forms part of a larger discussion of its context, inevitably does little to contradict those critics which take film to show only the 'surface of things', and to struggle to express character interiority. Almost immediately, however, Perkins begins drawing out the relationships – between performance, space and place, lighting, camera movement and so on – through which the film's director, Douglas Sirk, 'has defined a complex of thought and feeling in a great actress's gestures.' [34] Perkins describes the expressivity of those gestures with precision:

What is tentative in the gesture [of picking up the key] is felt in its pacing and through Naomi's dangling the key at a distance from herself (as shown up by her white, elbow length gloves). Formality of dress and stealthiness in action conflict to present another register of uncertainty. Then her replacing of the key, and doing so hurriedly, enacts her knowledge that she is now excluded from a routine that has been maintained without her participation.[35]

It is clear from this how much Stanwyck's performance draws on everyday expressions of interiority (which appears to confirm some of the critical positions essayed earlier): a slowness of pacing, along with a distance between body and key, suggests tentativeness; a changing of pace when she is disturbed brings out some of the reasons for that initial tentativeness – that she is encroaching on territory that is dear to her yet no longer her own. None of these expressive devices are unique to this film or to the cinema; all have their roots in everyday life.

But it is also clear from Perkins' analysis that the significance of Stanwyck's performance is elaborated by other aspects of film style, such as her costume: her white gloves emphasise the distance at which she dangles the key, and the overall formality of her dress highlights this straying from formality and into familiarity, a tension that tightens with the disturbance and her subsequent haste. This tension comes from our understanding of the associations of her attire, and of the key, associations which the film has not independently established but which it invokes and exploits. Perkins goes further in explicating the integration of Stanwyck's performance within the moment when he turns his attentions to the camera:

[T]he camera's gestures are delicately graded. [...] The image dwells on 'incidental' aspects of the scene: Naomi's shadow, the movement of her gaze across the exterior of the house. Then, in the mid-shot as she reaches up into the top of the basket, the camera lifts to keep her hand within the frame. It tilts down again, reframing as she lowers the key in contemplation. [...] [As Naomi puts the key back] a repetition of the camera's tilt makes an acknowledgement in form that this act is an undoing of her first one. The repetition underscores the difference in mood between the tentative reaching and the hasty replacement.[36]

Here Perkins shows us how the film builds upon the expression of the action and its performance. That Naomi's return of the key is an 'undoing' of the earlier action is important and justly emphasised by the matching camera's movements, for the hasty return of the key acknowledges the completeness of her exclusion from the domestic world to which the spare key, hidden in this flower basket, provides a means of access. With this acknowledgement comes a deeper sense of Naomi's feelings during this moment. In this way, the significance of Stanwyck's performance is amplified and elaborated by the camera (as well as by her costume, the lighting, and so on).

As Perkins analysis continues – and it stretches to several pages – it implicitly makes a powerful case for cinema's capacity to express interiority:

> That the camera's moves could be regarded as primarily functional is an aspect of their discreet character (within the overall style of the sequence). Yet they are particularly implicated in the balance of distance and intimacy here, our sharing in and awareness of Naomi's confused, largely unacknowledged emotions in a journey she had portrayed to herself as an amusing adventure. The adjustments of the camera give our eyes a degree of participation in the gestures of taking, inspecting and giving up the key. They make us sharers in the pacing of the actions as we take the force of the thought-feelings 'once mine', 'still here, not for me'.[37]

Although the moment may at first glance be thought to show us merely that Naomi is contemplating the key, leaving the nature of her contemplation largely ambiguous, on returning to the moment with Perkins, we discover the film's precise expression of not only the tenor and motion of Naomi's thoughts and feelings but what she is thinking and feeling (those thoughts and feelings may not be *specified*, but they are particular). This moment makes for an exemplary example of cinema's power to express interiority, not only because of its precision, but because of its emblematic mix of intimacy and separateness. As Naomi's feelings are not explained or described our understanding of her interiority is indivisible from her separateness, her externality. This gives that understanding the force of revelation, the surprise of

reading the mind of someone unmistakeably other from ourselves, someone who is not (at this moment) seeking to be known, or made known by a narratorial voice (as would be likely in a novel).

Interiority and the Medium

> You shall call a fine film the one that gives you an exalted idea of cinematography.[38]
>
> - Robert Bresson

This thesis is not only concerned with showing that film can be, and has been, used to express interiority in revealing and important ways, but in explicating the achievements of the films which provide such expressions. These are not separate and distinct enterprises. Among the achievements of the films *are* their expressions and explorations of interiority, for these expressions are the result of constellations of skill and effort, fine judgement, sensitivity and intelligence. Andrew Klevan's analysis of a sequence in *The Cobweb* (Vincente Minnelli, 1955) provides an example of how a film's achievement and its exploration of interiority can be intertwined. The sequence in question involves the psychiatrist, Dr McIver (Richard Widmark), whose marriage is faltering, talking to Meg (Lauren Bacall), an admiring and attractive colleague. The two characters are simultaneously visible, sitting close to each other, but not face-to-face. Klevan's analysis is alert to the way performance and camera position combine to deepen our understanding of Meg's interiority:

> Meg shifts forward and back in her seat, and tinkers, seemingly needlessly with various cigarettes and ashtrays. Meg's gestures reflect the gathering sexual tension: she straightens her neck, plays with the back of her hair, and pulls up her knees, as if locking herself in. Bacall performs them with stealth, however: her fiddling is not fidgety, her restlessness restrained, and each of her actions is rather exactly executed. Her nervous gestures are calmed, checked, and slowed, as if they were at once involuntary *and* subject to conscious control. Bacall's performance

is aided by the dissipating effect of the framing: the camera's reasonable distance from the performers combined with the (wide) distance between the left and right boundaries of the frame. The gestures are kept open to our view, while the lack of emphasis upon them, subordinated by the widescreen, faithfully evokes Meg's desire for them to be hidden. Indeed, McIver may recognise her movements, but he may not, and the shot reminds us that such gestures may be quite prevalent, and yet remain unseen.[39]

According to Klevan's analysis, the film shows the visibility of Meg's awareness of the gathering sexual tension at the same time as reaffirming its capacity to go unnoticed and unacknowledged. To do this involves a balancing of opposing tendencies: the visibility and concealment of Meg's interiority, the film's attention to it and the credible possibility of McIver's inattention. These tensions are balanced by Bacall's performance and the arrangement of the mise-en-scène: Bacall's gestures appear both 'involuntary' and 'restrained', while the camera's 'reasonable distance from the performers' helps to dissipate the significance of her gestures, and so on. By alerting us to these tensions and the aspects of style that keep them in check, Klevan's writing implies the intelligence with which the film, at this moment, handles interiority.

It is important that Klevan explicates the film's expression of interiority, and makes a claim for its achievement, by demonstrating the film's exploitation of its medium's resources (the expressive use of camera position, performance, colour, and so on). This allows him to imply the capacities of the medium discovered by the film through his interpretation of the moment. Cavell articulates the inseparability of a film's achievement from its discovery of the medium in *Contesting Tears*:

> It has been a developing claim of mine about film since my first book on the subject, *The World Viewed*, that the most significant films in the history of the art of film will be found to be those that most significantly discover and declare the nature of the medium of film (which is exactly not equivalent to a random running through of film's various remarkable "effects," nor of its random ways of self-reflexiveness, of calling attention to its own making).[40]

Moments of Thought and Feeling

[L]et the object of your interest teach you how to consider it...[41]

- Stanley Cavell

The way in which the critical chapters of this thesis are written is largely determined by the concerns of this thesis, and the nature of the films which it studies. The expressions of interiority in the films in Part Two *require* and invite the close attention they receive. Indeed, in their own way these films themselves pay close attention to the interiorities of their characters – close attention that inspires and requests an equivalent attention from the audience and critic.

However, the kind of close attention paid in Part Two is at least as important as the fact of its closeness, the willingness shown to examine details of film style. We can see an example of the kind of attention in question by considering another passage from Klevan on *The Cobweb*. In this passage he articulates the importance of colour in an expression of Karen McIver's (Gloria Grahame) distress. She has just returned to her home and her husband after an illicit meeting:

> Karen's distress is...conveyed through contrasts in colour, as the performer clashes with the décor. She enters their bedroom, all soft violet and lilac, muted and shimmering, purples becoming light blue. The same décor reflects different grievances (and supports both performers): too airily feminine, insubstantial and cosmetic, for him perhaps; too cool and clinical now for her. She throws off her black coat, kicks off her black shoes and chucks her black bag against the mauve, satin-sheet double bed (unlike the McIvers it is worryingly undisturbed): her pent-up passion splatters the pastels (while the stabbing music surges). [...] Inside the shower, she urgently washes away her unclean encounter with Devenal. The orange, fleshiness of her upper body and scarlet lips burn against the impervious blue, shiny tiles and metallic rims and is a reminder that even incandescent nakedness may fail to re-ignite a refrigerated marriage.[42]

What is particularly remarkable about this kind of writing is its commitment to re-description, to a literary dramatisation of what happens in the moment in question. For example, Grahame's performance is described in terms of its relationship with the surrounding décor, particular its colour, rather than as a discreet element: Karen *throws*, *kicks*, and *chucks* her *black* coat, *black* shoes, and *black* bag. This sentence, which begins with demonstrative verbs, and repeatedly emphasises the word 'black', comes to fall, like the black bag, on the undisturbed 'mauve, satin-sheet double bed'. Its construction eloquently captures and evokes the disruption of Karen's entrance into the room; it shows us the dynamic between black and pastel colours, movement and stillness, which are operating expressively in this moment. This writing helps us appreciate the importance of the momentary coalescing of performance and environment (and by extension other elements of style) to the making of refined expressions of interiority; and it does so by *replicating* the film's own control over the specifics of its expression. Klevan evokes what we are engaging with, he captures the process of our watching and listening, while shaping our interpretation of what we see and hear. This allows the writing to engage more deeply with the way the medium is being used – from the aspects of style employed, to the discoveries made through their employment. Of particular importance, considering the subject of this thesis, is that such writing retains the uncertainty of our position as viewers and closely captures our relationship to what is onscreen: for the interpretation, in being presented as a description, is presented as *a way of seeing* what is there. In this regard, this writing differs from the majority of film criticism (including much of Cavell's writing) which tends to rely on assertions of interpretative positions.

[1] For example, Murray Smith uses the terms 'subjectivity' and 'inner life' to refer to what I term interiority on page 150 of his book *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. My point is that the various systematic studies of forms of subjectivity in the cinema are not also systematic studies of expressions of interiority.

[2] Bersani, Leo and Ulysse Dutoit. *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*. London: British Film Institute, 2004, p. 6.

[3] Lodge, David. *Consciousness and the Novel*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2002, pp. 72-3.

[4] McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 16.

[5] Quoted in Jean Mitry's *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*. Trans. Christopher King. London: The Athlone Press, 1998 [1963], p. 207.

[6] Edward Branigan summarises some of the arguments regarding the failings of *Lady in the Lake* in his *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

[7] In a recent article George M. Wilson put the problem this way:

> Among the shots commonly deemed to be 'subjective,' one naturally thinks first of veridical point-of-view (POV) shots. These are shots that represent (at least approximately) the visual perspective, anchored in an implicit visual vantage point, of a designated character at a given time. Although this is the simplest case, it is not really clear why veridical POV shots are regularly counted as 'subjective.' [...] Rather, it is to be imagined that the visual perspective offered on the screen arises from the same vantage point as the vantage point that fictionally the character is occupying at the time of his or her viewing. (84)

For a fuller examination of this issue see Wilson's essay, 'Transparency and Twist in Narrative Fiction Film' in *Thinking Through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*. Eds. Murray Smith and Tom Wartenberg. London: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 81-96.

[8] The 'pure' German Expressionism of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1919) poses interesting questions regarding film's capacity to visually represent interiority. In this film the landscapes and structures surrounding its central character adopt angles and shapes designed (it is commonly claimed) to suggest the subjective apprehension of reality by the character's jumbled and maddened mind. On this understanding, interiority is expressed through the distortions of the central character's surroundings. In my experience of watching this film, though, the effect of this mise-en-scène is quite different: the central character appears to be walking amidst a distorted or fantastic reality, a world that *really is* distorted.

[9] Indeed, it is important to remember that there are dangers as well as opportunities inherent to the freedom literature grants to the representation of interiority, as a recent newspaper article by Charles Fernyhough, a psychologist and creative writing tutor, warns:

Modern novelists' fondness for first-person storytelling...has often served as an excuse for writers merely to render thought, rather than getting to grips with its dynamics and complex simultaneities. [...] When thought becomes no more than unspoken speech, fiction's gleaming reputation as a mirror of human consciousness will inevitably begin to tarnish. (Fernyhough, Charles. 'What's on your mind?' *The Guardian*, Review section [15th October, 2005], p. 22.)

[10] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Sense and Non-Sense*. Trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus & Patricia Allen Dreyfus. United States: Northwestern University Press, 1964 [1948], p. 58.

[11] Gibbs, John & Douglas Pye. 'Revisiting Preminger: *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958) and Close Reading' in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*. Eds. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 125.

[12] Braudy, Leo. *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp. 184-5, p. 193.

[13] Thomas, Deborah. 'On Being Norman: Performance and Inner Life in Hitchcock's *Psycho*'. *Cineaction* 44 (1997), p. 69.

[14] Other philosophers take Wittgenstein to have refuted scepticism, to be arguing that the sceptic *must* accept that a wince is an expression of pain, that it is nonsensical or irrational to do otherwise.

[15] Hammer, Espen. *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002, p. 32. Emphasis in original.

[16] Ibid. p. 46-7.

[17] Ibid. p. 47.

[18] Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say?*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 263-4. Also quoted in Stephen Mulhall's book *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 111.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Hammer summarises the differences and the similarities between the acknowledgement of others in ordinary life and the acknowledgement of characters in the theatre:

> Does not acknowledgement...presuppose precisely that we can reveal ourselves to the other, i.e. make ourselves present to him or her? Cavell's response consists in differentiating between different forms of acknowledgement. Rather than retracting the claim that characters can be acknowledged, he suggests that there is an essential asymmetry between us and them: although the spectators are in principle excluded from their presence, the characters are in the presence of the spectators. This means that we can see and hear them on their own terms, as it were. [...] Given that the performance is successful, what happens on the stage is *alive*; it is expressive of humanity. And we do seem, in some way, to respond to a claim the characters make upon us. (89-90)

[21] Cavell, Stanley. *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy.* Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 356.

[22] Ibid., p. 357.

[23] For some films the concept of interiority is either inapplicable or inappropriate. In this regard, I concur with Adrian Martin, who argues that

> interiority, as a *theoretical* concept, surely only matters when it is wielded on films that pursue such an idea of interiority, such as the rich classical films that the *Movie* tradition valorises; its *general* significance or applicability breaks down the moment we get to Tashlin, Greenaway, Ruiz ... or, indeed, many routinely 'non-psychological' popular movie genres. (Martin, Adrian. 'Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film'. [Book review] in *Screening the Past* [2005]
> http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/reviews/rev_18/AMbr18a.html)

However, the concept of interiority can be usefully applied to a film as far removed from the classical films he mentions as *Persona*, as we shall see. We should avoid confusing the concept of interiority with a certain conception or characterisation of it (say as consistent, individuated, or naturalistic).

[24] Cavell writes:

> Criteria are "criteria for something's being so", not in the sense that they tell us of a thing's existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its being *so.* Criteria do not determine the certainty of statements, but the application of the concepts employed in statements.

See Cavell, 1979, p. 45. Also quoted in Hammer, pp. 41-2.

[25] Thomas, p. 69.

[26] Quoted in Neil Potts' 'Character Interiority: Space, Point of View and Performance in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)' in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film.* Eds. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 94.

[27] Cavell, Stanley. *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 3.

[28] Mulhall, p. 229.

[29] Ibid., p. 229.

[30] Gould, Timothy. 'Stanley Cavell and the Plight of the Ordinary' in *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema* Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan (eds.) (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): p. 114.

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[31] Smith, p. 158.

[32] In his book, *Film Performance*, Andrew Klevan offers a sustained account of how the significance and achievement of a performance is bound up in that performance's relationships with other aspects of film style, particularly camera position, location, and plot. Klevan also has occasion to note how those relationships contribute to the expression of interiority, as we shall see. For more details, see *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005.

[33] Perkins, V.F. 'Where is the World? The Horizon of Events in Movie Fiction' in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*. Eds. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 28.

[34] Ibid., p. 28-9.

[35] Ibid., p. 30.

[36] Ibid., p. 32.

[37] Ibid.

[38] By 'cinematography' Bresson means 'the medium of film' – not a particular aspect of filmmaking. See his *Notes on the* Cinematographer. Trans. Jonathan Griffin. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1986 [1975], p. 31.

[39] Klevan, p. 66.

[40] Cavell, Stanley. *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 122.

[41] Quoted in Marian Keane's essay 'Dyer Straits: Theoretical Issues in Studies of Film Acting' *Postscript* 12: 2 (Winter, 1993), p. 33.

[42] Klevan, p. 69.

2. Acknowledging the Unknown Woman

[I]t is women that bequeath psychic depth to film's interests.[1]

- Stanley Cavell

In order to explore in detail a range of related expressions of interiority on film, Part Two restricts itself to a selection of films that all feature the figure of the 'unknown woman'. To explain why the presence of this figure is a criterion for the choice of films in Part Two it is necessary to return to the work of Stanley Cavell, and its relationship to this thesis, as he is the writer most strongly associated with the notion of the unknown woman in film.

Defining Unknownness

Cavell explores the concept of the unknown woman, and its relationship to scepticism, at most length and most explicitly in his book, *Contesting Tears*.[2] The book discusses four films in detail – *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948), *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942), and *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) – which, he claims, form the film genre identified in the book's subtitle: 'The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman'. The defining characteristics of this genre are too numerous and complex to state here – partly because Cavell understands those characteristics to be derived from the features of another of his genres: remarriage comedy. It is enough to note that the concept of the unknown woman, which is clearly an important part of the genre's definition, is explicitly broad and open-ended. In the introduction to *Contesting Tears*, Cavell states that the idea of unknownness established by these films comes to 'A certain choice of solitude (figured in a refusal of marriage) as the recognition that the terms of one's intelligibility are not welcome to others – at least not as the basis for romantic investment in any present other whom those terms nominate as

eligible'. He then goes on to note that, 'the specifics of what goes unknown' awaits 'the investigation of the lives figured in the details of the films in question.' [3] As this short definition of unknownness suggests, it is the women's *responses* to unknownness – here understood as the choice of solitude and the refusal of marriage – rather than the 'specifics of what goes unknown', that is the starting point for Cavell's critical chapters.[4]

Another aspect of these women's responses to unknownness is the 'theatricality' of their self-expression. It is as if the situation of being unknown – their selfhood remaining unacknowledged – inspires a compensatory excess of expression, an impulse towards exaggeration. This aspect reminds us that Cavell's consideration of the unknown woman is at once also a consideration of a certain strain in Hollywood melodrama. It is not just unknownness, but *melodramatic responses* to unknownness, that interests him in *Contesting Tears*. According to Cavell, the theatricality of these women is part of a metamorphosis or transformation of the self, a transformation that can take place independently of social relationships and that brings about a new or original integrity. This response to unknownness can be understood as a self-reliant way of affirming the existence of the self, making it present in the world through its theatrical transformation.[5]

In the films studied in Part Two of this thesis it is principally the interiorities of the women that are unknown; in contrast to the films in *Contesting Tears*, the degree to which this unknownness extends to their sense of self-existence varies from film to film. The unknownness of the women's interiorities is important for a variety of reasons. Importantly, it blocks some of the avenues by which we would normally come to know the existence and nature of a character's interiority – most obviously, the avenue presented by fruitful and intimate relationships, the avenue of meaningful *conversation*. As each of these films offers a sustained expression of the interiority of its unknown woman, this unknownness raises matters of stylistic importance: most prominently, the question of how these films deploy style to express the nature and existence of an interiority that cannot be expressed through conversations or

within the context and facility of mutually enriching relationships.[6] Importantly, the skill and intelligence required for such a deployment makes the discussion of these matters central to the development of our appreciation of each film's achievement. As this implies, the combination of the unknownness, and the expression, of the woman's interiority, places a particular emphasis upon it; our understanding of the inner lives of these women typically exceeds that of the characters with whom they share a world, which brings to the forefront the enhancement of the women's expressions by other elements of film style. Another aspect of the importance of the women's unknownness is that the similarity of the limits placed on the expression of their interiority gives those expressions a related quality, a family resemblance, which helps this study paint a more vivid (if smaller) picture of the medium's capacities in this regard.

While at least one aspect of the women's unknownness remains fundamentally the same, the women respond to that condition in a variety of ways and consequently appear in films of various genres. This is partly because that condition has been brought about by a variety of situations, from the need to hide malevolent and hateful acts and feelings to the beginning of some form of existential crisis. Such a variety of responses to unknownness is necessary, for it is partly the differing responses of the women which bring about differing articulations of the interiorities of those women. This variety allows this thesis to examine a range of exploitations of related aspects and opportunities presented by the medium. One consequence of this variety is that, although all of the films discussed in Part Two of this thesis share a concern with philosophical ideas surrounding the notion of interiority (and by extension scepticism), perhaps only *Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel, 1967) and *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) could be said to concern themselves with a woman's theatrical transformation, the creation of a new identity.[7] Consequently, moments of theatricality (notably in those same films, *Belle de Jour* and *Persona*) take their place in this thesis alongside moments of naturalistic, undramatic, and subdued expressions of thoughts and feelings, as well as moments of reticence.

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Women, Expression, and Passivity

Underlying these differences between the unknown women found in both *Contesting Tears* and this thesis are a set of qualities that are, broadly speaking, shared. Cavell identifies the capacity of the unknown women in *Contesting Tears* to bodily express thoughts and feelings, conceptualising it with the help of terms borrowed from Freud and Breuer's accounts of hysteria. According to Cavell, Freud and Breuer note

> the hysteric's *"capacity for conversion,"* "a psychophysical aptitude for transposing very large sums of excitation into the somatic innervation," which is roughly to say, a capacity for modifying the body as such rather than allowing the excitation to transpose into consciousness or to discharge into practice. While this capacity is something possessed by every psychophysical being – that is, primarily human beings – a particular aptitude for it is required for a given sufferer to avail herself or himself of hysteria over other modes of symptom formation, as in obsessions or phobias.[8]

It is important to be clear of the nature of the relationship suggested here between the figure of the unknown woman and Freud's account of hysteria. Cavell is here using Freud's conception of hysteria to identify an advanced form of ordinary, bodily and behavioural, expression – in short, the development of a particular aptitude in a capacity common to all. Greta Garbo, who raised "'the psycho-physical aptitude for transposing... large sums of excitation into the somatic innervation" to its highest art' is for Cavell the most important single example of an unknown woman with this aptitude in film.[9] As this implies, the development of this capacity is perfectly consistent with psychical health, despite its interest to studies of psychopathology. This becomes clearer when this capacity is articulated in Wittgensteinian terms. Mulhall glosses this approach:

> In the Wittgensteinian terms emphasized by Cavell, such a capacity can be thought of as a talent for, and a will to, communicate; it is a capacity for expressiveness which constitutes a standing counter to the sceptical

anxiety of inexpressiveness that he found to be at the heart of the fantasy of a private language.[10]

The unknown women in Part Two of this thesis share with their sisters in *Contesting Tears* an aptitude for the bodily and behavioural expression of interiority, even if their expressions are often not best described as 'theatrical', and are often withheld in certain contexts or with certain people. This aptitude is, of course, an essential part of the appropriateness of this figure for the examination of interiority onscreen, as it plays a vital part in each film's expression of interiority.

The theatricality of the women's expressions in *Contesting Tears* is combined with a willingness to allow those expressions to pass unnoticed, to meet no response. This is what assures the *possibility* of their success; for without it, the 'wish to produce the response in the other' tips theatrical expression of the self into the playing of a part. According to Cavell, such an enactment has the unhappy consequence that the other's responses are 'apt to be directed to the wrong thing, to the part you have enacted'. He goes on:

> It is as an alternative to the wish to produce the response in the other that
> I claimed you must let yourself matter to the other. (There is a very good
> reason not to do so. You may discover that you do not matter.) [11]

This willingness to let yourself matter is understood by Cavell as a form of passivity, a form that is integral to the aptitude for bodily communication. He claims that this passivity is particularly important for those onscreen:

> Under examination by the camera, a human body becomes for its
> inhabitant a field of betrayal more than a ground of communication, and
> the camera's further power is manifested as it documents the individual's
> self-conscious efforts to control the body each time it is conscious of the
> camera's attention to it. I might call these recordings *somatograms* (cf.
> cardiograms, electroencephalograms), to register the essential linking of
> the pattern of a body's motions with the movements of the machine that
> records them... [...] Psychologically, submission to a somatogram – to
> the synchronization between body and camera – demands passiveness,

you may say demands the visibility of the feminine side of one's character.[12]

This quotation affirms that this passivity is a form of courageous generosity, a willingness to offer oneself to be read. As Mulhall puts it, this passivity involves allowing yourself to be known, waiting to be known, rather than '*making* yourself known, trying to direct the other's responses (thus converting her and her responses into another character in your production)'.[13] This form of waiting 'need not be thought of as purely passive, for *becoming* passive can itself be thought of as an activity, and an activity of a very important sort'.[14] Mulhall goes on to quote Cavell on this matter:

> [A]ctivity just here may well prove to constitute knowing oneself. It is the ability to make oneself an other to oneself, to learn of oneself something one did not *already* know. Hence this is the focus at which knowledge of oneself and of others meet. I should think a sensible axiom of the knowledge of persons would be this: that one can see others only to the extent that one can take oneself as an other.[15]

The unknown women in Part Two of this thesis have a complicated and variable relationship to the form of passivity Cavell identifies. For they are only infrequently willing to allow themselves to become known to their fellow characters. More often they attempt to provoke or contrive or force an end to their unknownness and suffer distress at the failure of these attempts. However, each of the films in question contain many moments in which a woman ceases deliberately demonstrative activity and reveals an aspect of her interiority – from her feelings to her concealment of them – through the smallest of gestures, her facial expression, and so on. These are often moments when the woman is alone or in private, performing an uneventful task (walking, sunbathing, drinking coffee). In such moments the women relinquish all attempts to produce a particular response from the world, becoming passive in the required sense.

Of course, in claiming that these women have an aptitude for a specific form of communication and passivity, neither Cavell nor I intend to imply that this is an

aptitude *exclusive* to women. As Cavell makes clear, the capacities on which this aptitude draws are common to all 'psychophysical' beings. However, this raises the question of why there appears to be this association between women, bodily expression and passivity in the films in question. As far as I am aware, Cavell has not yet attempted to answer this question, although some of his speculations regarding the role of women in the development of cinema and psychoanalysis are importantly suggestive:

> I begin to speculate about why it is that women play this orginating role in both of these developments by way of continuing to think about the history of skepticism in Western culture...as though both psychoanalysis and film testify that by the turn of the twentieth century psychic reality, the fact of the existence of the mind, had become believable primarily in its feminine (some may say passive) aspect. [...] But doesn't this line of speculation assume that both psychoanalysis and cinema are themselves interested in testimony to the existence of mind, that it is part of the value of both that they provide modern testimony, testimony acceptable to a modern sensibility, as to psychic reality? Yes. [16]

Karen Hanson builds on these speculations to provide the beginning of an answer, along with what amounts to a rationale for the focus on women in this thesis:

> We might... at some times, see these phases [between activity and passivity] structuring larger units of human existence, informing, for example, our sense of sexual difference, so that we call the active phase of human existence "masculine" and the passive "feminine." And if nature, nurture, or we ourselves have tended to cast women on the passive side of the human undulation, then, as Cavell says, the interventions that would help display or probe this neglected [passive] phase of the human being, inventions such as cinema and psychoanalysis, may well find deeply productive the study of the feelings and expressions of women.[17]

Passivity and the Imagining of Interiority

The stylistic tension between the expression of interiority and certain forms of masculine activity can be explicated through a discussion of *In a Lonely Place*

(Nicholas Ray, 1950). This film is appropriate for such a discussion because its plot invites a focus on the interiority of its unknown (masculine) *man*, a Hollywood screenwriter, Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart). Early on in the film, Dix is accused of the murder of a hatcheck girl, Mildred Atkinson. Neither we nor the characters in the film know for certain whether he is innocent until the film's ending. More importantly, as a result of his erratic and violent behaviour, the suspicion develops that he is *capable* of murder, even if innocent of Mildred's murder. The development of a romance between Dix and his neighbour, Laurel (Gloria Grahame) makes this suspicion pressing, particularly once their relationship falters under the pressure of the police investigation into Mildred's death. In order to assess the degree of Dix's propensity for violence, we are drawn to watch Dix for indications of his thoughts and feelings. Yet this scrutiny does not bring us to imagine the nature of his interiority in much detail. This is unlikely to be the result of a failing in the film, or more specifically of Bogart's performance, for the film has long been celebrated, and many critics have commended Bogart on his performance. If we do not arrive at a rich and nuanced picture of Dix's interiority it is, I contend, the result of our relationship to his characterisation, what responses it calls from us, rather than that characterisation being inadequate in some way. This suggests that the film's characterisation of Dix may serve to illustrate the importance of passivity or femininity for the expression of interiority by showing the consequences of masculine agency for the viability of such expressions.

Consider, for example, the sequence in which Dix directs Brub – who is ostensibly an old army friend, but is also one of the policemen investigating Mildred's murder – and Brub's wife, Sylvia, in his imagined re-enactment of the murder. Brub (playing the murderer) holds the neck of his wife (playing the victim) in the crook of his arm. At first we hear Dix's directions while watching their effects on the 'performers':

> You get to a lonely place in the road, and you begin to squeeze. You're
> an ex-GI, you know Judo, you know how to kill a person without using

your hands. You're driving the car and you're strangling her. You don't see her bulging eyes or her protruding tongue.

Brub is transfixed by Dix's storytelling: his eyes are firmly on his friend, just as the crook of his arm is firmly gripping the neck of his wife. Having established this connection between Dix's words and Brub's actions – a connection that reminds us that Dix was an officer in the army, a leader of men (including Brub) – the camera fixes on Dix in medium close-up, lit in such a way that his anthracite eyes gleam with passion at the performance of this death, a performance quickly urged on by the words: 'Go ahead, go ahead Brub, squeeze harder'.

At this point, Dix informs Brub of the killer's motivations: 'You love her and she's deceived you, you hate her patronising attitude, she looks down on you, she's impressed with celebrities, she wants to get rid of you, you squeeze harder, harder... squeeze harder...' Although this is suggestive of *Dix*'s thoughts and feelings, the connection between his words and what is taking place off-screen urges upon us a more immediate concern: has Brub escaped the hypnotic grasp of Dix's story, or is Sylvia choking? The non-diegetic music builds to a crescendo of discordant fanfares; Dix's directions conclude with the phrase 'It's wonderful to feel her throat crush under your arm,' and an accompanying, echoing flex of his bicep. At this point the film cuts to Sylvia struggling under Brub's grip as she calls to be released, confirming our concerns. What is important here is that our interest in imagining or appreciating Dix's interiority – of following the implications of the sequence's

complex expression of his thoughts and feelings – is overwhelmed by our concern with the immediate effect of Dix's words on the dramatic situation.

Similarly, the imminence and dramatic importance of *impending* action by Dix often obscures the expression of his thoughts and feelings. An example of this occurs during a moment which explicitly *calls* for an imagining of Dix's thoughts, only for that imagining to be curtailed by more pressing concerns. It takes place in the film's climactic sequence. Laurel is planning to run away from Dix to New York. After the couple's engagement party ends in argument, she flees to her apartment. Dix follows. He gains entrance to her apartment and apologises before becoming angrily suspicious at the discovery that Laurel has taken off her engagement ring. In an attempt to placate Dix, Laurel leaves the room to retrieve the ring. Dix walks to a nearby table, picks up a packet of cigarettes, and places one in his mouth. It appears that the familiarity of this motion is meant to calm his temper; but his hand shakes, expressing his barely concealed fury. This shaking continues when he lights a match, cupping his hands together ostensibly to protect the flame from draft; his left hand covers and calms the shaking of his right, neatly expressing an attempt at self control. Such a moment reveals the feminine, vulnerable side of Dix's character – here is an exemplary example of the body revealing interiority, or (to borrow from Freud via Cavell) the psycho-physical transposition of excitation into somatic innervation. A blast of horns on the soundtrack coincides with Dix raising his head to look towards the bedroom, where Laurel is retrieving the ring. The match lights the centre of his face from below – the effect is to balance the light coming from

above, which elsewhere creates hanging folds of shadow that remind us of his age and world-weariness. Now his face, wearing an expression of urgent realisation, holds within it a central, burning pool of light. We can hardly fail to read his thoughts at least this far: it has finally dawned on him that Laurel plans to break the engagement and escape; while Bogart's performance, and the lighting, is suggestive of internal tension becoming resolved into destructive rage. Yet this reading of his interiority has no time to bloom; its momentum is retarded by the immediate prospect of the *action* generated by his thoughts. He hurls the match down, discards the cigarette, and follows Laurel into the bedroom. The film cuts to Laurel, as she rips the ring out of an envelope addressed to Dix. When we return to Dix it is fearful anticipation, rather than the nature of his interiority, that dominates our attention. As this sequence suggests, we tend to imagine Dix's interiority only insofar as it indicates what his actions may be (or what he may have done). Consequently, our imaginative picture of Dix's interiority is limited, despite the nuances and complexity of Bogart's performance.

Our difficulty in imagining the nature of Dix's interiority is in accordance with the film's understanding of Dix as a masculine, sceptical, character. Throughout the film, Dix's masculinity repeatedly manifests itself in doubting, particularly doubting the loyalty and love of Laurel, and in compensatory attempts to possess her, finally and absolutely. The climactic example of both his doubts and his attempts to possess her occur in the final sequence, discussed above, which itself culminates in an almost death-dealing embrace between the two; almost as important, is that his

response to the perception of a diminution in their togetherness is a forceful and insistent marriage proposal, its force precipitating the break-up every bit as much as the pressure of the police's investigation. Dix's generally antagonistic and sceptical stance towards the world, a stance Cavell would characterise as masculine, has inevitable consequences for his relations with others, and by extension with ourselves as viewers. His sense of needing to direct others to know him (think of his pleasure in being allowed to direct Brub and Sylvia in the enactment of his imagining), to demand or even force intimacy (Laurel must instantly agree to go out with him, to marry him, if anxiety and anger are to be avoided) are related to his doubts regarding whether he is known, whether he can be known, or perhaps his frights at the prospect of allowing himself to be known (and hence allowing himself to be passed over). But such representations to Laurel, and to the camera, obscure much of the nature of his thoughts and feelings; for in trying to make himself known, he creates an obscuring presentation. Thus, his direction of Brub and Sylvia in the enactment of his imaginings serves to confuse and bewilder (both the couple and ourselves) rather than reveal; and his shaking hand and haggard face, and the brief revelation they provide, are overcome by the motion of his attempt to break through to Laurel, to pierce her deception and grasp her to him, to violently wring disloyalty from her.

The suggestion that it is his masculine agency in the world – writ large by his propensity to violence – that limits our appreciation of his interiority is encouraged when we consider how Laurel, who is more feminine and (in the required sense) passive, is characterised by the film, and how her interiority is handled. V.F. Perkins describes her entrance into the movie:

> On her first appearance, her indirectness is apparent as well as her pronounced investment in poise. She walks between Dix and Mildred in the courtyard of the apartments where both she and Dix are tenants with an 'Excuse me' that commands attention but also positions her to claim that she was only minding her own business and being polite. Here and later, she is skilfully dressed in costumes so well supplied with edges and angles to construct the space for movements simultaneously elegant,

erotically promising (she passes close enough for Dix to catch her perfume) and – hands pushed forward inside the pockets of her overcoat – held off from any risk of contact. [...] She is ever so neat. [18]

It is noticeable that here, even when she explicitly commands attention, her command is indirect, a call to be excused as much as observed. Laurel's capacity to invite and yet await attention, rather than demanding it, is a vital part of the interest others (and ourselves) take in her interiority. She appears for the second time when she is brought to the police station to corroborate Dix's alibi. Her entrance brings about hurried expressions of gentlemanliness: Brub whisks his feet from their hoisted position on a nearby chair and stands to greet her; Captain Lochner returns to formality, donning his double-breasted suit jacket. On entering the office, the most she asserts is a quizzical look directed to the Captain. Invited to sit, she sits, offering no protest at being rousted at this early hour of the morning – no protest, that is, other than a hopeful glance into an empty cup. That this is first a gesture for herself is affirmed when the glance into the cup is marked by a cut to a shot that almost shares her point of view: in close-up we see her nail-varnished fingers tip the cup towards her, a small pool of tepid coffee at its bottom.

The shot is a short, precise and functional insertion which underscores the gentle way Laurel is here encouraging others to notice and acknowledge her interiority. (Perkins notes that the image 'signals the definitive entry into the narrative of a new subjectivity.') [19] Naturally, the glance brings the attentive (and pompously chivalric) Lochner to check the coffee pot, and apologise for its emptiness, and we may

assume it was meant to, but it remains important that it is a gesture that could have been ignored, that awaited recognition and acknowledgement. For one result of her passivity in this moment is that her expression of interiority does not take the form of a demand for action; she instead shows a confidence in the intelligibility of her expression, and a willingness to let the responses of those present arise as they may. (Part of the humour of the moment is the recognition that Lochner is compelled, presumably by Laurel's attractiveness and femininity, to respond as he does, and the bluster of that response in comparison to the poise of the gesture.)

Stella Dallas

In order to establish more solidly the distinction (and the complementary relationship) between the focus of this thesis and the focus of *Contesting Tears* it is necessary to examine their differing critical emphases at close hand. To do this, I shall examine one of the films central to *Contesting Tears* – *Stella Dallas* – and compare this thesis's, and Cavell's, interest in the film.[20]

Cavell's argument is concerned to contest the widespread interpretation, as voiced by Linda Williams, that the film portrays 'the good-hearted, ambitious, working-class floozy, Stella [Barbara Stanwyck],' as sacrificing 'her only connection to her daughter in order to propel her into an upper-class world of surrogate family unity.'[21] Cavell objects that this view 'takes Stella at the end [to be] still convinced of [that] world's incalculable desirability, to taste her belonging to it through her gift of it to and from her daughter.'[22] He goes on to argue for an opposing view which 'takes Stella to learn that the world Laurel apparently desires – of law, church, exclusiveness, institutional belonging – is not to her own taste.' Part of the importance of this objection is that it makes criticism of the film on the grounds that it reflects a patriarchal ideology intent on punishing mothers such as Stella much harder to sustain. The sequence most contested by Cavell's interpretation is

the famous sequence...in which Stella's excessive costume at a fancy resort hotel makes her an object of ridicule to refined society and – so the accepted view goes, unchallenged as far as I know – precipitates her plan to separate from her daughter, the act all but universally understood as Stella's "self-sacrifice." This understanding is based on the assumption, as expressed in the essay I have cited by Linda Williams, that Stella is "as oblivious as ever to the shocking effect of her appearance" when at the hotel she makes "a 'Christmas tree' spectacle of herself" (p. 312). My thought is that the pressure of this interpretation is excessive, too insistent, that there is massive evidence in the film that Stella knows exactly what her effect is there, that her spectacle is *part* of her strategy for separating Laurel from her, not the catastrophe of misunderstanding that causes her afterward to form her strategy (though a kind of supplementary strategy afterward also turns out to be necessary).[23]

The implication, in Williams' understanding of Stella as not only oblivious to the 'shocking effect of her appearance' at the fancy hotel but 'as oblivious *as ever*' (my emphasis), is that Stella is *usually* oblivious to her effect. Cavell is right to question this; it is an implication that does not bear much scrutiny. After all, this is a working-class girl who has found a way to marry the upper-class Stephen Dallas (John Boles), a way that involved close attention to the effect of her appearance. Stella is, by the time of the sequence at the fancy hotel, only too accustomed to satisfying the tastes of others. This is something Cavell makes clear when, as part of his contesting of Williams' interpretation, he describes Stella's 'massively authenticated knowledge of clothes':

> The principle authentication is given in the sequence in which Mrs. Morrison, the highest and most humane judge of propriety in this depicted world, helping Laurel unpack her suitcases on her first visit, is impressed, even moved, to learn that Laurel's mother has herself made all of Laurel's beautiful and, what's more, exactly appropriate clothes.[24]

We may agree with Cavell's objection to Williams' characterisation of Stella and still be doubtful of certain aspects of his rival interpretation when taken in full. These doubts surround Cavell's assumption that Stella's knowledge of clothes and their effects must lead us to understand her to intend the effect of her appearance at the fancy hotel. Apart from the fact that the one clearly does not *necessarily* follow

from the other, there is the problem that arises from the observation that Stella seeks out the mother of Laurel's boyfriend, Dick, while making a 'Christmas Tree' spectacle of herself. If we are to understand the effect of her appearance to be deliberate, her attempt to meet with Dick's mother appears curious. For if Stella wishes to bring the need of the separation to Laurel's attention she need only embarrass her in front of her peers. To seek out Dick's mother is to risk offending someone who has the power to banish Laurel from the upper-class world – this is hardly in keeping with a desire to bring about a separation from Laurel that will allow Laurel to *join* that world. Could Stella be oblivious to the risk? It isn't likely. We have seen her study the workings of that world, and learn well enough to marry into it (and she has likely learned more through the failing of that marriage). By this point in the film Stella knows well the ruthlessness with which access to that world can be denied on the grounds of taste and decorum. This is, after all, presumably partly the reason she wishes to effect a separation between herself and Laurel. (The passage in which Stella's larking with Ed Munn leads to Laurel celebrating her birthday alone with her mother is one pronounced example of this ruthlessness. As if to confirm it, later on we hear a girl cattily remark that Laurel won't be wearing Dick's fraternity pin once her mother meets his.)

There is an alternative way of thinking about this sequence, one which has the advantage of taking into account the degree to which it feels an inevitable event, rather than a plot contrivance. In my view, the film prepares us for Stella's Christmas Tree exhibition of herself from as far back as Stella's demure, yet uninvited, arrival at Stephen's office early on in the film – the moment when the couple first meet. The falsity of Stella's dress and demeanour presents us with the first moment in which she is led to suppress her own taste. This suppression remains a feature of her relationship with Stephen – a matter of tension between them – for much of the film. Clearly, Stella's appearance at the fancy hotel suggests a lessening of that suppression, or perhaps an abandonment of it, temporary or otherwise. Cavell identifies the sequence in which we see Stella 'hurriedly and surely alter a black dress in which to receive her husband Stephen, who has unexpectedly shown up to

take Laurel away, this time for a Christmas vacation at Mrs. Morrison's house' as the catalyst for this change.

> The resulting, not quite basic black dress is not exactly Stella's taste...but it certainly satisfies Stephen's. He even goes so far as to suggest, as if in response, that he and Laurel might take a later train in order to stay and have dinner with her. But when Ed Munn barges in drunk, in a virtuosically destructive sequence, brilliantly played on all sides, Stephen reverts to the appetite of his disappointment and takes Laurel away at once, and Stella learns the futility of appealing to the taste of those who have no taste for her. This represents an unforeseen answer to the education she had asked Stephen for at the beginning of the film. Here he shows how effective a teacher he is.[25]

Stella may learn (we cannot know for sure) the 'futility of appealing to the taste of those who have no taste for her' here, but this need not lead us to assume that she later deliberately and provocatively flouts the taste of those whom her daughter likes and respects. It may be futile for Stella to appeal to those in that world – she may no longer wish for their approval and acceptance. But this doesn't mean that she chooses to seek their disapproval in order to separate Laurel from herself, particularly when achieving separation in such a manner would likely ostracise Laurel from that same echelon of society. Nevertheless, the possibility that she may have become less inclined to think so carefully about what she wears when in the view of such people is importantly suggestive of how we might understand the 'Christmas Tree' sequence. This is particularly the case when we consider the context preceding that sequence: Stella has been ill for much of her stay at the hotel, and this illness has prevented her from wearing any of her many 'new clothes' that her skin is, she says, 'just itching to get close to'. Taking this lessening of inclination alongside the suppression of her self-expression through clothes enforced first by an unhappy marriage, and latterly by her illness, gives us a credible (although by no means certain) explanation of Stella's partly inadvertent (inadvertent at least in the *severity* of effect) act of aesthetic rebellion. In short, she wants to wear all her new clothes, so she does – at once. The moment may be an example of her

theatricalisation of herself becoming over-exuberant, rather than an example of a charade.

As there are reasons to doubt or contest any of the available interpretations, I argue we are deliberately prevented from being able to settle the matter of Stella's intentions at the hotel.[26] This is not a failing of the film; such ambiguity imbues Stella's interiority and psychology with a richness of suggestion and possibility. As this implies, the confident assertion of any of these particular interpretations reduces and simplifies our understanding of Stella's interiority, and undermines the richness of many of the film's sequences. (Here we have an early example of how a lack of certainty can be richly expressive.) For example, Cavell goes on to state:

> On my theory of the film, Stella's plan for Laurel begins much earlier than in her raising it on her visit to Mrs. Morrison at home to ask her if she will take Laurel to live there when she and Stephen are married. I take the mark of its beginning to be precisely the close of the sequence of her final lesson from Stephen as he reneges on his expansively thoughtful suggestion that he and Laurel take a later train. Stella stands in that black dress, her back to the camera, watching the closed door behind which Stephen and Laurel have disappeared. The shot is held somewhat longer than one might expect, calling attention to itself. [...] As elsewhere, a figure on film turned away from us tends to signal a state of self-absorption, of self-assessment, a sense of thoughts under collection in privacy.[27]

The problem with Cavell's wish to 'precisely' site the beginning of this plan at this moment – aside from his failure to account for why, shortly after it, Stella protests to Stephen's solicitor about his petition for divorce – is that the *strength* of the film's evocation of Stella's 'state of self-absorption, of self-assessment...of thoughts under collection in privacy,' works to warn against it. Attention to the film's style during this moment helps to establish the power of that evocation (along with the differing emphasis of this thesis from Cavell's work), a power that cannot be accounted for purely in terms of her position in relation to the camera. Of particular importance, for example, is that the significance of her position in relation to the camera is amplified by the blackness of her dress. Against the pale shades of the wall she

faces, this sheet of black presents us with a picture of Stella's interiority that suggests both its depth and impenetrability. As this dress was adapted to fit with Stephen's taste – an adaptation completed by the turning of her away from us and the elision of the details that remain on its front – it appears that her attempt at reaching out has resulted in a closing off, a plunging into solitude. In addition, she holds her hands together in front of her, as if holding flowers. It is a posture that brings out the suitability of the dress for mourning, suggesting her loss while emphasising Stephen's contribution to it.[28] Yet these expressions, while elaborating our understanding of Stella's suffering, also observe our inability to share in it. Her facial expression is out of view, she is turned away from us. Indeed, part of the acknowledgement this moment inspires in us is the acknowledgement of her separateness: it is a moment when we are both close to her, in that we sense her suffering, and separate from her, in that we cannot speak of her suffering for her, cannot know its precise nature. With this in mind, we may contest the appropriateness of Cavell's claim that she is here beginning a plan of separation – at least, if we take Cavell to mean that the beginning of the plan is a thought about it.[29]

Indeed, if we return to the sequence's beginning, paying attention to its use of music – in particular the movement between phrases from the carol 'Silent Night' and the film's main theme – our appreciation of the depth of Stella's privacy develops even further. Strains of the carol first intrude when Stephen announces his and Laurel's invitation to spend Christmas with the Morrisons. The dissonance, both rhythmic and tonal, it brings to the swooping main theme broadens the span of the carol's

significance: the carol is not just an appropriate accompaniment for this invitation because it is associated with Christmas festivities, but also because its opening notes, both off-key and out of rhythm with the main theme's romantic lyricism is an unwelcome musical interjection, underscoring the disappointment we see on Stella's face at Stephen's unwelcome suggestion. As Stella conceals her disappointment the carol overwhelms the main theme. In time, Stella makes her decision, acquiescing to the wishes of Stephen and Laurel, and the main theme returns, orchestrated in a more muscular fashion, suggesting Stella's banishment of her own disappointment, as she instructs Laurel on what to pack. In this way, the non-diegetic music is established as an indicator of certain aspects of Stella's interiority.

Importantly, the carol returns when Stephen attempts to find a later train home for himself and Laurel. This time the tune takes over from the main theme rather than intruding upon it. Its return, at first suggesting the recovery of festivities that has been brought about by Stephen's willingness to delay the journey to the Morrison's, is quickly revealed to prompt another unwelcome intrusion: Ed sneaks in the front door, drunk, and demands to know who the company is that he's being 'kicked out because of'. The culmination of this disruption, when Ed is confronted by the sight of Stephen, brings about a similar upheaval in the music, the carol breaking into a variation of the main theme that encompasses the moment's melodrama, its crisis for Stella.

Following Stephen's abandonment of his attempt to find a later train, which appears to be a result of this intrusion, Laurel enters the room with her things, oblivious to

the dashed possibility of spending the evening as a family. With Laurel's entrance the carol once more returns, replacing and displacing the main theme. Its return is richly expressive: it brings back Laurel's feelings of festivity, which her obliviousness to the exchange between Stephen and Stella has allowed to continue uninterrupted, and at the same time brings out the contemplative quality of the carol's tune. For this carol, in its celebration of a *silent* night, reminds us in this context that part of the festivities of Christmas may well include the desirability of certain kinds of silence, particularly the kind that withholds expression of profound and distressing disappointment to husbands and children. The tune reminds us that Stella is choosing for this to be a moment of silence on her part, for her disappointment to remain unexpressed, particularly to Laurel. (Yet the film cannot be accused of seeking to justify the necessity of this silence, for the return of the carol is once again ironic, a demonstration that something foundational to the traditional understanding of Christmas – say, forgiveness, love, and compassion for friends and family – has been abandoned by Stephen.) While we may be aware of Stella's choice to be silent, and while we are in a position to acknowledge her suffering, the carol's stress on silence encourages us to appreciate that we remain unaware of the specificity of what goes unsaid, particularly once Laurel and Stephen depart and she turns her back to the camera. This stress on silence compounds the expression of Stella's privacy and self-absorption.

Deepening Stella's Interiority

At this point we can continue this departure from Cavell's work (a departure that pursues a largely parallel, or at least sympathetic, course) to consider in greater detail the film's handling of interiority, and its relationship to the film's achievements. It is profitable for such a consideration to be led by the observation that guides the above discussion: that the ambiguity of Stella's interiority contributes to its richness. This contribution is evident throughout, as the film evokes the depth of Stella's interiority by leaving its specificity poised between contrasting

possibilities. Often, as in the sequence just discussed, Stella's stillness is used to poignant effect. Another moment of this kind occurs when Stella and Laurel travel home on the night train from the fancy hotel, Laurel having insisted on leaving as a result of the ridicule heaped upon her mother by her friends. This ridicule turns out to be inescapable. As the two journey home, Stella in bed in the lower berth, Laurel in the higher, the two women overhear some of Laurel's peers gossiping about a 'funny looking woman parading the grounds'. As the woman is described ('Dresses up to here, and paint an inch thick, and bells on her shoes that tinkled all the time, and bracelets up to here that clanked…') we see Stella lying in her bed, listening. She remains still and impassive, yet clearly alert to the likelihood that the girls are referring to her. Indeed, when one of the girls announces that the 'funny looking' woman in question was 'Laurel Dallas's mother' Stella does not suddenly react; nor does the film's music, editing, camera position (and so on) respond in alarm. After a pause, Stella raises herself up on one arm, perhaps to hear better, perhaps beginning to follow an impulse to reveal herself. Moments later she becomes more upright, yet remains propped by her arm.

Her face is curdled with distress; the camera slowly moves to bring it into close-up. The stillness of her face and body, along with the nature of her posture, which is somewhere between lying down and sitting up, suggests a moment of pinching emotional arrest, a holding of a point between two conflicting responses, as yet unspecified. Such a combination, while retaining Stella's privacy, evokes some of the complexity of her emotional response to overhearing this cruel gossip.

The nature of the relationship between Stella's interiority and her world that is established in such sequences is further elaborated when the film invokes a comparison with Laurel. Such a comparison is invoked shortly after her father and Mrs Morrison ask Laurel to live with them. Laurel quickly discovers her mother's role in the offer, and guesses her reasons for effecting a separation. 'Please understand my home will be with my mother as long as I live,' Laurel proclaims, before melodramatically pacing away from Stephen and Mrs Morrison, accompanied by a pan from the camera and histrionic strings. This retreat culminates with an image of Laurel standing momentarily alone in the frame with her back to the camera, echoing Stella's position earlier. However, the two women's routes to this position are very different, and that difference is particularly expressive. Stella turned her back on the camera to turn *towards* the departure of her husband and daughter – it is a reaching out that results in privacy. Laurel also turns her back to the camera, but this turning is a closing off, a deliberate attempt at a move into privacy; it is voluntary and optional, not an inevitable result of the situation and her place in it, as it was for Stella. This reminds us of what we already know: that (so far) Laurel's thoughts and feelings gain a more ready acceptance and acknowledgement in this world, and that privacy and aloneness are not, as they are for Stella, conditions she must come to terms with. This is confirmed when Mrs Morrison approaches Laurel and easily brings Laurel to relinquish that privacy, to turn back towards the camera.

Our sense of Stella's feelings being difficult to summarise or encapsulate, of our always being in danger of simplifying her motivations, of reducing her complexity

in order to heighten her comprehensibility is affirmed by a closer examination of Stanwyck's performance. This performance often finds ways of fluidly moving between expressions of different aspects of Stella's character, thereby implying previously unrecognised connections and relationships between hitherto apparently disconnected impulses and thoughts. Consider, for example, the sequence in which Laurel returns to her mother having discovered her unselfish plan to effect a separation. Soon after returning home, Laurel nuzzles Stella's hands with the words, 'how could you think...? As if I could live with...anywhere else but with you'. Stella counters, 'you always seem to have such a good time with your father,' to which Laurel responds with a short, but impassioned speech:

> Yes, but...but good times, oh, they aren't what make you belong. [She wraps her arms around Stella, leaning her cheek into her chest.] Its...its other kinds of times, its when you've cried together, and when you've been through things together, oh, that's when you seem to love the most. It's different when you... didn't they send a telegram?'

In a traditional melodramatic framing (long since adopted by television soap opera) we are given a more perspicuous view than Laurel, whose physical closeness to her mother prevents her from seeing the tears that brim Stella's eyes in response to her words. At the end of Laurel's speech, Stella presses her eyes closed, as if staunching a painful view, and bows her head, it swinging from an upwards, imploring tilt, just in time to receive from Laurel a dainty kiss. At first it appears to express a crumbling in the face of the warm and loving sensitivity of her daughter's words and feelings. Quickly, however, it takes on another aspect, as it precipitates the

beginning of a performance of hardness, a performance that allows her to ignore the body of Laurel's speech in favour of a lying answer to her final question: 'Most likely they tried to deliver it [the telegram].' These words, delivered with brusque matter-of-factness, provide the leverage necessary for Stella to separate physically from her daughter, and to begin the process of sending her back to her father. Importantly, this visible switch between sentiment and calculation is smooth and swift. This re-affirms Stella's theatrical ability and the swiftness with which she can deploy her resources of performance, while it also implies that the move to separate herself from Laurel is continuous with a sensitivity to her daughter's love and affection. This combination complicates the moment's indication that Stella is separating from her daughter out of love for her, by demonstrating Stella's frightening ability to shut down her distress, to encase sentiment with unyielding rationality. How and why did she develop this capacity? There are only faint clues in the film itself. Yet the capacity is there. Consequently, we become convinced of the history (and hence future) of her interior life, even as it is unknown to us.[30]

Our sense of Stella's depth of feeling plays a vital role in the film's ending, supporting the conclusion of our relationship with her. In this ending Stella watches Laurel's wedding through a window, enraptured at what she sees. As Cavell notes, the lit window, and the scene that plays out behind it of an upper-class wedding, mirrors Stella's earlier, similarly enraptured, view of a romantic, glamorous movie watched on an early date with Stephen. After satisfying herself with a view of Laurel's wedding, Stella walks from the window towards us, beaming with pleasure. Having her walk towards us, *almost* facing us head-on, away from an analogous movie screen, invokes our relationship with her in a variety of ways. Her full smile provides a culmination of the film's evocation of her interiority – here her feelings burst forward, finally uninhibited – peaking our desire to acknowledge her.[31] But at the same time, her walk towards us, her gaze screened from us (as it were) by the screen at which we gaze reaffirms that any acknowledgement of her interiority that we may provide cannot, in turn, be acknowledged by her – we remain unknown to her, and so she remains ignorant of our knowledge. What makes this moment such a

fine ending is that her expression of happiness suggests she has transcended her sufferings of unknownness, that she is no longer in need of such acknowledgement having achieved a particular autonomy and integrity on her own. (Here we see the concerns of *Contesting Tears* and the concerns of this thesis meet once more.) Charles Affron writes that 'As Stella smiles and jauntily walks away from the window on which was projected her daughter's wedding (a surrogate screen), she becomes a model for our emotion in watching a motion picture.' [32] The sense in which she becomes a model for us extends to her response to her unknownness (of both her interiority and her self), and the nature of her exit. We are left in a way that encourages us to allow ourselves to be known even if there appears to be no one who wishes, or is capable, of acknowledging us, to possess ourselves – as we walk from the screen *we* have been facing – in ways that foster self-reliance, without foregoing the possibility of company.

[1] Cavell, Stanley. 'Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman' in *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema*. Eds. Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 29.

[2] Cavell, Stanley. *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[3] Cavell, 1996, p. 12.

[4] This is one of the respects in which this genre is related to remarriage comedies, the genre identified in Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1981. He writes in *Contesting Tears*:

My book the *Pursuits of Happiness* can be taken to pose the question whether
the pair of a romantic marriage – whose ambitions of intimacy are apt, outside
Eden, to trail a history of pain, of misunderstanding, and, despite the mutual
respect in friendship, sometimes villainous antagonism – can become and stay
friends. That book studies a set of films whose answer is a conditional Yes.
[...] In the set of melodramas studied in the present book, the woman's answer
to that possibility of friendship is an unreserved No. Since it follows for her
that she thereby says No to marriage as such, as presently conceived (unless it
is essentially for the benefit, or under the aegis, of a child under her protection),
it follows further that these melodramas bear an internal relation to remarriage
comedy.

The internality has to do with the principal women of both genres sharing an
image of their lives – demanding, if it is to be shared, equality, mutual
education, transfiguration, playfulness, etc. – which I find in the perspective I
call Emersonian perfectionism... In neither instance is a marriage of irritation,
silent condescension, and questionlessness found more desirable than solitude
or, say, unknownness. (10-11)

[5] This passage draws heavily from Stephen Mulhall's commentary on the subject. For more
details see his excellent book *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 239.

[6] It is an interest in this restriction of verbal expressions of interiority that partly motivates
this thesis's exclusion of films which extensively employ voice-over (although *Voyage to
Italy* uses a form of voice-over during one sequence).

[7] Claudia in *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960) performs thought and feeling, but
these performances do not form part of a transformation – her 'theatricality' is of a different
kind from that found in the films Cavell discusses in *Contesting Tears*.

[8] Cavell, 1996, p. 105.

[9] Cavell, 1996, p. 106.

[10] Mulhall, p. 222.

[11] Cavell, Stanley. *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*.
Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 382-3.

[12] Cavell, Stanley. 'What Photography Calls Thinking'. *Raritan* 4:4 (1985), pp. 14, 19.
Also quoted in Mulhall, p. 240.

[13] Mulhall, p. 140. Emphasis in original.

[14] Ibid., p. 140. Emphasis in original.

[15] This quotation is originally from *Claim of Reason:* 459. Emphasis in original. Also quoted
in Mulhall, p. 140.

[16] Cavell, 1996, p. 52-3.

[17] Hanson, Karen. 'Being Doubted, Being Assured' in *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema*. Ed. Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 196.

[18] Perkins, V.F. 'In a Lonely Place' in *The Movie Book of Film Noir*. Ed. Ian Cameron. London, Studio Vista, 1994 [1992], p. 227.

[19] Perkins, p. 227.

[20] Cavell revisits and, in certain respects, clarifies his argument regarding *Stella Dallas* in his later book *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004. This section uses quotations from both works.

[21] Williams, Linda. ''Something Else Besides a Mother' *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama' in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. BFI Publishing: London, 1987, p. 299.

[22] Cavell, 2004, p. 278.

[23] Cavell, 1996, p. 200-1. Emphasis in original.

[24] Ibid. p. 201-2. Emphasis in original.

[25] Ibid. p. 202.

[26] Andrew Klevan takes a similar position when questioning James Naremore's account of Stella's 'gaudily inappropriate finery'. He writes: 'The problem here is that the film turns on whether Stella's constumes are 'inappropriate' or not – whereas Naremore assumes it – and the film is ambiguous about whether Stella's appearance at the country club is 'pathetic' or strategic (or a bewildering mixture of both).' For more details, see *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005, p. 8.

[27] Cavell, 1996, p. 203.

[28] Thoreau's pun on mourning and morning (often cited by Cavell) is relevant here, as it brings out how this moment that expresses loss also expresses a beginning, perhaps a beginning of life without the hope of being known, of escaping privacy.

[29] Cavell's failure to fully acknowledge the ambiguity of Stella's interiority is a failure he shares with the critic that is the focus of his disagreement, Linda Williams. Although she understands the content of Stella's thoughts differently, in her desire to make her argument persuasive she presents her understanding with a weight of certainty that is not supported by the evidence she provides. When considering the moment on the train, she states that 'It is then that [Stella] decides to send Laurel to live with Stephen and Mrs Morrison and to give Laurel up for her own good.' (312) She goes on:

> By seeing herself through her daughter's eyes [on the train], Stella also sees
> something more. For the first time Stella sees the reality of her social situation

from the vantage point of her daughter's understanding, but increasingly upper-class, system of values: that she is a struggling, uneducated woman doing the best she can with the resources at her disposal. And it is *this* vision, through her daughter's sympathetic, mothering eyes...that determines her to perform the masquerade that will alienate Laurel forever by proving to her what the patriarchy has claimed to know all along: that it is not possible to combine womanly desire with motherly duty. (312-3. Emphasis in original.)

[30] In *Contesting Tears* Cavell notes the way the film's ending announces a future for Stanwyck:

Her walk towards us, as if the screen becomes her gaze, is allegorized as the presenting or creating of a star, or as the interpretation of stardom. It is the negation, in advance so to speak, of a theory of the star as fetish. This star...is without obvious beauty or glamour... But she has a future. Not just because now we know – we soon knew – that this woman is the star of *The Lady Eve* and *Double Indemnity* and *Ball of Fire*... but because she is presented *here* as a star (the camera showing her that particular insatiable interest in her every action and reaction), which entails the promise of return, of unpredictable reincarnation. (219, Emphasis in original.)

[31] In his book *Cinema of Sentiment*, Charles Affron notes that in this moment Stella

shows her feelings. And although this showing is indicated through emotional clichés – tears and a handkerchief literally held in the actress's teeth – its placement in the film guarantees our belief in its inwardness. (*Cinema of Sentiment*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 73. Emphasis in original.)

[32] Ibid., 73-4.

PART TWO

3. Physical Interiority: *Mouchette*

The Mystery of Character

> With reality as the starting point...the rest of Bresson's films are the same: it is always souls that one finds.[1]
>
> - Amédée Ayfre

> Robert Bresson does not want us to know his characters. He does not believe in psychological knowledge, he does not reveal characters, he does not trace a coherent, accessible portrait of the beings who fill the screen. Rather, he asserts that any being is inaccessible, that any character is a mystery...[2]
>
> - Jean Collet

Much of the writing that touches on character interiority in the films of Robert Bresson [3] echoes the above quotations.[4] In asserting the revelation of 'souls' or the opacity of the characters, this writing expresses a conviction in the *mystery* of interiority in Bresson's films, even as it articulates that differently. The primary difference between the two claims is one of emphasis: one is in thrall to the presence of a mystery (that of the 'soul', an ineffable notion if ever there was one) whereas the other concerns itself with the ways in which that mystery avoids explication. The complementary nature of the two claims is affirmed by the many works of criticism that combine them. Susan Sontag offers one such combination:

> The nature of drama being conflict, the real drama of Bresson's stories is interior conflict: the fight against oneself. [...] Notice...that the "interior drama" which Bresson seeks to depict does not mean psychology. In realistic terms, the motives of Bresson's characters are often hidden, sometimes downright incredible. [...] [W]hat is central to Bresson and, I think, not to be caviled at, is his evident belief that psychological analysis is superficial. (Reason: it assigns to action a paraphrasable meaning that true art transcends.) He does not intend his characters to be implausible, I'm sure; but he does, I think, intend them to be opaque. Bresson is interested in the forms of spiritual action – in the physics, as it were, rather than in the psychology of souls. Why persons behave as

they do is, ultimately, not to be understood. (Psychology, precisely, does claim to understand.) [5]

Sontag's position is helpful in that it sketchily specifies and delimits the opacity in question: she implies that Bresson's characters are opaque in the sense that their behaviour resists or frustrates psychological explanation. On her account, any psychological explanation of the behaviour of Bresson's characters is a reductive imposition. This may be a reasonable description of the titular character of *Mouchette* (Bresson, 1967) – we can certainly develop our understanding of the significance of her behaviour, but it is doubtful that this understanding provides the basis for a 'psychological' explanation – although its general applicability to Bresson's characters is more questionable.

However, it is not clear that this frustration of certain kinds of explanation deserves to be termed a form of opacity. The attempt to provide characterisation that surpasses the 'superficiality' of 'psychological analysis', and consequently transcends 'paraphrasable meaning', is not necessarily to obscure or withhold aspects of character interiority; it may be to express it more fully, to loosen the limits on expression. (Bresson appears to confirm this when he chides the psychologist for discovering 'only what he can explain' and claims to 'explain nothing' himself,[6] thereby implying that the abandonment of explanation allows for rich discoveries.) Consequently, any difficulty in offering psychological explanations of the characters' behaviour could be understood to derive from the richness of what must be accounted for, the plenitude of possible explanations and the lack of a sound basis from which to choose one *particular* solution, rather than the lack, or the obscurity, of something.[7] With this in mind, it is noticeable that Sontag later qualifies her commitment to the idea that Bresson's characters are opaque when she observes that in some of the films 'there is a subliminal revelation: ...a character which at first seems opaque becomes oddly and inexplicably transparent.' [8] This qualification suggests that the films discover and reveal *unfamiliar* ways of expressing character interiority, perhaps ways that work through a process of accumulation, that seek to show interiority and exteriority together, rather than as different realms. It is

doubtful whether this achievement is best understood in terms of an opacity that is overcome or transcended.

The crucial questions are: what is expressed and how is this expression achieved? It is, at the very least, insufficient to claim that the films reveal the 'physics of souls', as this at best generates its equivalent set of questions (from 'what is a soul and what is its physics?' to 'what do these films express of the "physics of souls" and how is this achieved?') and at worst encourages us to avoid the questions, to patronise the films with spiritual flattery (note that Sontag terms the revelations of transparency 'inexplicable'). What is needed is a detailed and sustained consideration of what we know about the inner lives of the characters and how we come to know it – an attempt to unravel the mystery insofar as it is possible. To the best of my knowledge, this is yet to be attempted.[9] This chapter aims to provide such an explication of *Mouchette*, a film which contains a particularly compelling evocation of interiority, as we shall see.

Mouchette's Unknownness

Mouchette (Nadine Nortier), a fourteen year-old girl on the cusp of womanhood, has very few opportunities for genuine conversation. She is not alone in this regard: she lives in a community united only by a savage isolation. The alcoholism of her father, and the illness of her mother exacerbates her unknownness. This unknownness becomes more acute as the film progresses and she suffers a string of crushing experiences. When Mouchette playfully bumps bumper cars with a young boy at the local fair, her father intervenes to squash the relationship with a slap and a shove. Shortly afterwards, Mouchette meets a poacher, Arsène, during a night in the woods. After suffering an epileptic fit, during which Mouchette tenderly cares for him, he rapes her. When she returns home to speak to her mother of her ordeal, she discovers her mother and baby brother are in need of her care. Later that night her mother dies.

The next day, after an angry confrontation with her father, and disregard and abuse from various villagers, Mouchette drowns herself.

Mouchette's lack of opportunities to converse with others blocks a major route for the film's expression of her interiority. Yet throughout the film we develop an intimacy with Mouchette, a developing appreciation of her thoughts and feelings. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for this appreciation is our complete willingness to accept Mouchette's sudden suicide as a compelling expression of her experience of the world. For although the harshness of her life and the distress of her recent experiences are enough to make her suicide credible these elements are not enough to make the choice of death appear to emerge from *her* impulses – indeed to be a final manifestation of those impulses – rather than the film's desire for an emphatic ending or for thematic development.[10] The question is, of course, *how* does the film manage to convince us that the choice of death is Mouchette's, how does it show that her death is expressive of her experience of the world, when it is without recourse to the depiction of revealing conversation? A hint towards an answer is provided by Charles Barr, who writes:

> An essential part of the film's meaning is there, irreducibly, in [Mouchette's] face, body and sensuous movements...: the way she grinds and pours coffee, throws the lid of the pot dextrously back into place, caresses Arsène in his fit, sings to him, clasps him even as he rapes her, washes up glasses, warms the baby's milk against her breast, rolls downhill, rides a dodgem car at the fair.[11]

This quote points us towards what makes Mouchette remarkable, and what brings the film to focus upon her: her ability to find ways other than conversation of expressing her thoughts and feelings. These ways are, as Barr's quote suggests, overwhelmingly physical, and frequently involve interactions with the physical world, the world of objects, bodies, and landscapes. The skill of the film is to elaborate, inflect, and amplify those expressions through other aspects of film style in such a way that we develop a rich appreciation of the nature of Mouchette's inner life. This process extends to her suicide which is, as we shall see, not just another

example of Mouchette's physical expressions of thought and feeling and the commingling of interiority and materiality, but the culmination of a series of more specific, stylistic, patterns.

Dancing with a Coffee Grinder

Crucial to these expressions is Nortier's unselfconsciousness and dexterity when interacting with objects. For example, early on in the film, just before Mouchette attends the fair, her interiority is evoked through the way she makes coffee for her family. She hums to herself, walking to the stove while absentmindedly swinging the coffee-grinder around by the handle, which twirls like a baton of some kind, and rattles a percussive accompaniment to her humming. Once the coffee is in its pot, she picks up a pan of hot water from the gas stove, and expertly pours it into the pot. Returning the pan to the stove, she picks up the coffee pot's lid and casually tosses it into position, before turning off the gas – all with the same hand. Her bodily knowledge of the weight of the lid and the height of the pot suggests she is at home amongst these objects, that they are extensions of her body that extend her body of expressions. This intimacy with objects, along with the unselfconsciousness of her movements, suggests a fusion of mind and body, a carefree absorption in the physical task at hand. There is no sense here of her interiority as something that is withheld or hidden – all there is of Mouchette at this moment, including the state of her mind, is there before us, as physical as the pot and the lid. Mouchette's thoughts and feelings are here *part* of the physical world, expressed by her body and its relationship to the world's objects.[12]

This sequence also demonstrates the importance of camera position for this physical expression of interiority. As she moves around the kitchen the camera's framing adjusts to house her movements more comfortably. There are no edits; the grinding and the pouring and the tossing of the lid (and so on) are all captured in a single take which cradles her fluid collection of motions, allowing their flowing continuity to manifest itself. As the sequence continues, the importance of the relationship between camera and performer becomes ever clearer. Mouchette moves across the room to finish dressing, and the film cuts to keep her in view; her father crosses the frame, momentarily obscuring our view of her. When Mouchette returns to finish making the coffee the camera has closed in on her, cutting the bottom half of her body from the frame. Her father once again enters and exits the frame in the foreground, and the camera responds by pushing in towards Mouchette – as if pushing her father out of frame – as she pours the coffee into bowls. This movement of the camera serves to retain Mouchette's command of the space onscreen by ensuring her father's absence from it; but in doing so it further restricts her space, lessening our sense of her freedom.

Clods of Anger

The elaboration of Mouchette's physical expressions of interiority through the articulation of space is central to many of the film's finest moments. An example of this occurs early on in the film, shortly after Mouchette's humiliation in front of the giggling music class. The classmates pour out of the school to play. Mouchette

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walks briskly across the road that divides the school and descends the bank that acts as a border between the road and the field beyond. The film's use of editing and camera placement is of particular importance here. As she crosses the road, the film cuts to emphasise the road's division of this space, and to catch up with Mouchette as she scurries towards the bank. The camera pushes forward and tilts down to bring Mouchette closer as she crouches, coiled, amidst the bank's undergrowth. The camera's following of Mouchette establishes the contours of the space, the bank as a physical boundary, shielding and hiding her from her classmates who have gathered by the school's wall. The sequence's emphasis on the separation of Mouchette from her classmates helps to amplify and elaborate the significance of her position on the boundary between the village and the countryside, suggesting the position expresses feelings of marginalisation and isolation.

Mouchette looks towards her classmates and the film cuts to a shot that approximates her point of view; the camera moves towards her intended targets, evoking the distance between her and her classmates. As the sequence progresses the editing continues to maintain this divide, repeatedly alternating between Mouchette, who is always alone in the frame, and her classmates, who are crowded together. This alternation of contrasting framings is particularly expressive. When Mouchette raises herself a little and throws the clods of mud we are far enough away to see that almost the whole of her body is taken up by these effortful, swiping movements, and close enough to see her sullen facial expression. This allows the camera to capture both the physical and emotional dimensions to these actions – it appears that this physical contact is intended to result in social contact, however hostile. In contrast, our closeness to the light, percussive impact of the clods on the clean, neat uniforms

and satchels worn by her classmates emphasises the physicality of the explosions at the expense of their emotional effects. All the girls hit, except for the last, remain anonymous, and largely unperturbed, the frame isolating the areas hit from the rest of each girl's body. (In the end, all Mouchette receives for her effort are a few dismissive scowls, which act to confirm her insignificance, her utter separation from those she sought to reach.) This contrast between the shots suggests that the emotional significance of the action, which is for us visible when Mouchette throws the mud-bombs, does not survive the divide between the two spaces. Yet this manifestation of the emotional in the physical affirms (for *us* and perhaps for her, although not for her classmates) the tangibility of Mouchette's angry feelings – we see and hear those feelings hit their target. Here Mouchette is attempting to provoke acknowledgement, but she does so in a way that provides her with some tangible evidence of the feelings she wishes to be acknowledged, some feedback from the physical world to compensate for the social world's disregard.[13] This marks the beginnings of her attempts to evade the need for acknowledgement by other people, a need that her isolation prevents from being satisfied.
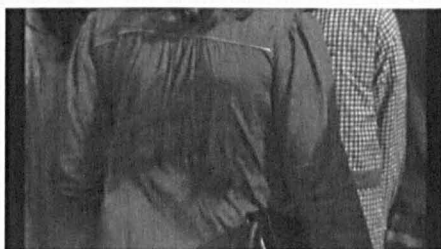
Bumping into a Boy

Although Mouchette's movements and posture often appears to be eloquently expressive, the brilliance of this expression is sometimes muted by the impassivity of her face. At such moments, the discrepancy between her face and her bodily movements suggest the banking of thoughts and feelings, a wall of defensiveness impeding the amplitude of their expression. The rich expressiveness of this

relationship between movement and facial expression is most powerfully exploited when Mouchette joins the bumper car ride and repeatedly bumps cars with a boy. In this sequence, the protective shell of Mouchette's bumper car becomes a further physical manifestation of her emotional defensiveness, and the bump becomes a provocation for intimacy, a breaching of that barrier. This relationship between the bumps and social contact is established by Mouchette's reaction to the first impact: a cut shows Mouchette give the boy a swift and faintly approving once-over; he cautiously acknowledges this and returns the compliment with an experimental smile that broadens as he turns to drive away. (The mutual attraction expressed by these looks implies that the bumps are also declarations of sexual interest.) [14] When Mouchette and the boy next bump their cars together the greater force of the collision brings about a deeper, fuller, response. The boy careers into her from behind, bracing his body a moment before impact, and the film cuts to show Mouchette's car as it is shoved violently away from the camera, hitting another car in front, rattling Mouchette about inside. The violence of this bump – enhanced by the contrasting stillness of the camera – suggests a more determined and aggressive probing of Mouchette's defenses. She responds with a facial expression that is free from inhibition, turning to look over her shoulder at the boy, her chin close to the soft, black woollen shawl draped over her shoulders, a rare smile blooming upon her face. This sudden lack of inhibition helps to create the impression that her earlier, subdued expression of approval has been released to rise more fully to the surface of her face as a result of this boy's forceful bump. This acknowledgement, this freeing of Mouchette's expression of emotion, suggests that Mouchette's feeling of isolation has diminished, as if the boy has broken her out of a shell that was both protective and inhibiting.

The film exploits our sense of the vulnerability of Mouchette's new-born smile to express the strength of the oppression Mouchette faces. After the ride finishes, Mouchette cautiously approaches the boy, picking her eyes off the floor to look at him and smile once more. Our understanding of the shocks and shakes that were necessary to bring this smile into being allows us to recognise its fragility, the all-but-spent resources of hope and courage that are invested in it. This fragility is confirmed when her father grips her by the arm and spins her round, for Mouchette's tentative smile is gone even before he firmly slaps both sides of her face. She walks a few disconsolate, considered steps away from the boy, her eyes downcast. Her father shoves her in the back, pushing her out of frame and jerking her head back. She sits down, next to her father's seat, confused and pensive, and distractedly wipes a few tears from her face. In this shot, Mouchette appears once more concerned with containing her distress rather than expressing it. Just as a set of physical impacts produced the breaking of her shell, and the emergence of an emphatic expression of a positive emotion, a similarly physical set of impacts appears to have reversed the process, forcing her to rebuild her defenses. Her father's slapping of her face scolds its sensitivity, its momentary lack of a mask.


Planting an Emblem

It appears that with the prospect of acknowledgement remote, Mouchette's physical expressions of thought and feeling cease to attempt to provoke acknowledgement from others. Instead, they take on forms which allow the physical world to register or record her expressive activity. In one case, when Mouchette gets caught in the

'cyclone' at the beginning of her night in the woods, later in the film, the expressive effect of Mouchette's actions is particularly enhanced by the film's ability to capture the materiality of the world through lighting and sound. After sheltering alone under a tree, crouched in a foetal position, her head resting on her knees, her arms wrapped around her legs, she rises and takes a few steps towards the camera. Each step makes a sucking noise, as her clogs pull free of the thick mud. As she moves towards the camera it tilts down to show her feet and the ground upon which she steps, which is almost flooded with water. The moist, sodden earth glistens in the moonlight. The film cuts to a close-up of her feet; she takes another step. Her clog sinks into the mud as before; she pauses, her weight pressing it more deeply into the ground, before slipping her foot free, leaving the clog stuck in the mud, and stepping off in a different direction. The action submits the clog to the clutch of the mud, as opposed to pulling against it. Implicit in the act is an appreciation of the muddiness of the mud, and of that mud's claim on the clog, a claim it makes each time she steps. Mouchette's willing gift to the mud of her clog [15] is the creation of an emblem of her passing. (Her clogs, in which she stomps across her classroom floor, are an established aspect of her identity by this point in the film.) By leaving her clog in the mud she attempts to register her existence in this place, along with her affinity with it. It is as if she hopes to establish the tangibility of her interiority's existence in the sensuous physicality of her expressions of it, to receive from the world's registering of those expressions a consolation for her lack of acknowledgement. At the same time, it is noticeable that this attempt to register her existence brings her to leave part of herself behind, to lose something of herself, which foreshadows the film's ending, in which her most emphatic declaration of existence brings about her total loss to the world.

The Music of Coffee Appearing

Mouchette's desire to physically express her thoughts and feelings in order to affirm their existence in the world implies a thorough conviction in the physical world's

existence, a trust in the power of its ratification. The film shares and expresses such a conviction through the evocation of the nature of Mouchette's attention, the focus of her experience upon the physical world. For example, after the fateful night in which Mouchette's rape by Arsène is followed by the death of her mother – a night that appears a threshold beyond which anything might happen – Mouchette passes through the village. The local shopkeeper, who has heard of her mother's death, offers Mouchette a croissant and a bowl of coffee. The rhythmic nature of the appearance of the gift draws our attention to the sonic qualities of the objects and textures before us. We first see the coffee and croissants when the shopkeeper emerges from a backroom and brings them to the table near Mouchette. The churchbell rings out, a resonant sound from elsewhere. The shopkeeper places the bowl on the table in a way that quietens its sharp impact, and tips two cubes of sugars into the coffee, which sibilantly splash and plop. We hear the shopkeeper's step as she turns to pick up a bowl of croissants. Her placing of that bowl next to the coffee brings this steady rhythm of very different timbres to rest.
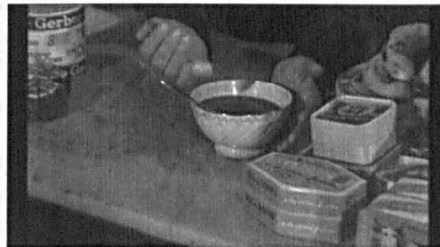
The integration of camera movement with the staging of these actions and movements narrows the moment's focus on the material qualities of the gift still further. For throughout this moment the camera closes in on the shopkeeper's actions. When she first emerges from the backroom the camera moves forward and tilts down eventually framing the bowl of coffee, the shopkeeper's hands, and a fitful fly. This closeness to the tabletop affords a scrutiny of the care with which the bowl is placed on the table, and the splashes, ripples and bubbles made by the sugarcubes. In this way, our absorption in the contrasting timbres of the world's sounds, the differing weights of the bowl of croissants and the sugarcubes, and the

tempo of the shopkeeper's movements is deepened to such a degree that these physical facts overwhelm any consideration of, say, the shopkeeper's motives.

As the sequence continues, the continuing organisation of the world's events (and particularly their sounds) culminates in a declaration of their unity that suggests a more fundamental aspect of Mouchette's experience. Now alone in the frame and facing the camera, Mouchette rests her milk jug on the table where it rattles to a standstill, and a customer enters off-screen, causing the doorbells to chime. The milk jug's rattling and the chiming of the doorbells form a miniature cascade of metallic taps and ringing vibrations which metaphorically announce Mouchette's possession of the gift of the croissants. The simultaneity of these two sounds alerts us to the simultaneity of the two actions, while the merging of the sounds belies the separateness of their sources. Following on from the rhythm of the shopkeeper's delivery of the gift, this cascade of sound hints at the magicality of the world's wholeness, welcomes us to a glimpse of its unity. If this, like the sound of the churchbell that rings throughout this sequence (and indeed the remainder of the film) hints at holiness, the sequence's involvement with the material world excludes any promise of a world beyond. Our experience is instead ushered towards a recognition of the wonder of the world, an invitation to overcome our deadened perception of it. This absence of transcendence is firmly assured as we watch Mouchette's slow stirring of her coffee, her measured dip of the croissant into the bowl, her gentle, savouring bite, and her reverential cupping of the coffee bowl with both hands, for all of these actions reflect the same attentive concentration in, and wonder at, the world's substances. Mouchette looks for nothing more than what there is and the film shares and inspires the same kind of attention, celebrating the physical world's

existence through a delight in its sensuousness and the chance of its appearance of order.

Rolling into Water

Our appreciation of the physical world's vivid existence and of Mouchette's expressive use of that world informs our understanding of her suicide. The sequence in which it takes place is not only the film's climax, but is the moment in which the relationship between interiority and physicality is most crystallised. Charles Barr is one critic who notes the importance of physicality for this sequence:

> Dying for Mouchette isn't the culmination of a steady refining process, the absorption of the physical into the spiritual, but an intensely physical act. The final scene is an absolutely superb conception, precisely realised. The suicide seems unpremeditated. She comes to a hillock with water at the bottom of it: her rolling down it is like a game, a way to wrap herself up in the dress given her by the old woman. One can't tell at what point she gets the idea of drowning, but insofar as it's a conscious choice, it is a circumstantial, almost capricious one, based on her immediate mood, her alienation from people at this moment. She accepts death not because she's weary of life but because others have *denied* her life: the shopkeeper deploring her sensuality, the old woman pressing her own obsession with the dead on her, and so on. We can't doubt that if the occasion for death hadn't presented itself – or if the tractor-driver to whom she waved before rolling down the second time had responded – she would have gone back, carrying the milk for her baby brother, profoundly alive, instinctive and resilient as she is.[16]

Once again, Barr is insightful in his understanding of the significance of the sequence and in his recognition of the importance of its use of physicality. What remains is to develop an understanding of the relationship between the two. By placing this sequence into the context of Mouchette's physical expressions of interiority, and by examining it in more detail, we can see more clearly *why* Mouchette's death is 'an intensely physical act'.

The manner in which Mouchette commits suicide is physical in a particular way – it appears designed to bring her into close contact with her environment. Her second descent of the bank begins with her easing herself flat upon the ground, wrapped in the dress given to her by the old woman a moment earlier. As she rolls we hear her clogs rattle against the firm turf. Mouchette hits the shrubbery that borders the river and we see leaves, twigs, and other organic debris have collected on her stockings and in her hair – in this messiness the distinction between her environment and her body becomes playfully mussed. This rolling also enacts a relinquishing of agency over her movement: soon after she begins rolling the slope of the bank quickly takes over, accelerating her momentum. When she finally rolls down the bank and into the river her giving of herself is complete: she enters the water which accepts her with a satisfyingly loud splash that evokes her weight, simultaneously announcing her physical presence and her disappearance from view. The film's final shot is of the convulsing surface of the river. This image suggests the river has absorbed her body into its own, that she has merged with the world as much as exited from it. It appears that her social isolation has fostered an impulse to let the physical world take her over, to restrict herself to its community. In any case, the manner of her suicide suggests it is the culmination, the ultimate expression, of her evident need to physically affirm her existence – a need suggested by the physicality of her expressions of thoughts and feelings. That this expression results in her destruction – or that this destruction results in this expression – makes her fall into the river a disturbing and desperate triumph.

Injuring Looks

[In *Mouchette*, Bresson] invests the act of seeing – and therefore the shot-countershot structure – with the full burden of fictional psychology. This radicalism has the effect of making events, which are inexplicable and frightening, seem like the natural consequences of previous events in the chain of images.[17]

- P. Adams Sitney

As we have seen, the coherence and significance of the manner in which Mouchette commits suicide is clear enough once we consider its place in the relationship between physicality and interiority drawn by the film. This may be enough for us to accept the suicide as plausible and coherent, but it still leaves the film with the difficult task of showing Mouchette's movement from life to death, the task of showing that death emerge from a particular and immediate situation and state of mind. The film fulfils this task by developing our appreciation of a particular aspect of Mouchette's experience of distress – her physical endurance of her community's disregard and disapproval – while placing her death at the end of a succession of such experiences. This involves a further elaboration of the relationship between physicality and interiority.

To appreciate this solution it is necessary to return to the sequence with the shopkeeper discussed a little earlier and to trace the film's progression towards Mouchette's suicide. In that sequence the shopkeeper's attitude changes from apparent tenderness to disgust. This disgust is expressed facially and verbally, but it is the rhythm of the editing that suggests Mouchette experiences that disgust

(particularly when it is expressed through disregarding looks) as a physical force. When Mouchette is startled by the shopkeeper's placing of a croissant in her pocket the opening of her top loosens. The shopkeeper looks at Mouchette's exposed navel, and the scratches upon her chest. Mouchette follows this look and desperately covers these scratches with her hand, a movement that is underscored by the chiming of the church bell that immediately follows.

She looks guiltily at the shopkeeper and the customer, and then back to the shopkeeper. Each time the film shows the impassive look she receives, a look which disregards her distress, and presses each look upon Mouchette by returning to a shot of her face. The rhythm of editing generated by these looks accelerates when Mouchette twists from the shopkeeper and brings her elbow into contact with the bowl of coffee, thereby shunting it off the table. This turn accommodates the force of those looks, and forms a continuation of the momentum generated by the editing. The turn, and the breaking of the cup, thereby evokes the pain of the women's disregard of her, the sense in which the looks strike the ever-sensitive Mouchette, force her to yield.
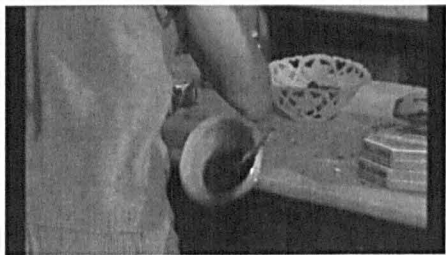
The physical power of the shopkeeper's and the customer's looks is emphasised by the film's reluctance to explicitly explain them. This lack of explanation of the

shopkeeper's disgust is felt most acutely when it becomes more pronounced – the shopkeeper calls Mouchette 'a little slut' shortly after the bowl smashes on the floor. Those that have read the book may understand the shopkeeper to have guessed the marks on Mouchette's chests are the result of a sexual encounter.[18] Or it may be assumed that the shopkeeper has heard something of Mouchette's encounter with Arsène from gossiping customers and that the marks confirm her suspicions (on this interpretation, the gift of the coffee becomes part of a cruel ruse). However it is understood, the film's emphasis is firmly on the facts of these disregarding looks, the guilt and distress they generate, and the manifestation of that distress in Mouchette's twist and the coffee bowl's crash. This emphasis allows the peculiar relationship between these events to take centre stage. Whereas the appearance of the shopkeeper's gift was shown in a way that emphasised its physicality, here the expression of an emotion is given a physical dimension beyond its actual manifestation in words or facial expression, transfigured into a strike by the rhythm of edits.

The physical power of looks receives its most startling expression during Mouchette's viewing of the rabbit shoot, which comes shortly after the sequence in the shop. Each of the farmers taking part in the shoot fires his shotgun in the usual way: raising his gun up to his shoulder and peering down the barrel, tracking the fleeing rabbit, before pulling the trigger. Given Mouchette's sensitivity to the power of looks, it is unsurprising that she is compelled to watch as the farmers' guns give their looks a particularly destructive power. Her sensitivity is, by this point in the film, matched by our own. In this sequence we also become distressingly aware of the power the gun gives to the gaze of the farmers, particularly when the film repeatedly shows one of the rabbits, alone and small in the frame, running frantically away. The camera's tracking of each of the fleeing rabbits echoes the movements of the farmers as they track these rabbits with their guns (although these shots do not seem to be from any character's point of view). Consequently, when we hear the sound of the off-screen shot, and we see an unseen bullet fatally wound one of the rabbits, the impression is created of a gaze with the power to kill, a most deadly

disregard of the life of the thing viewed.[19] (In an important sense, this *is* a gaze with the power to kill, for these rabbits were shot for the camera, shot for the shot we are viewing.)

As if to confirm the potential malignancy of the act of looking, another gaze plays what appears to be an important part in the genesis of Mouchette's eventual suicide. After rolling down the bank that borders the river for the first time, Mouchette hears a farmer pass by on a tractor. She raises herself and attempts to hail the farmer. The farmer turns to look over his shoulder towards Mouchette – he does not return Mouchette's wave. Although we cannot see the farmer's facial expression very clearly, Mouchette's rather crestfallen response suggests she does not take it to be neutral. In this way, the farmer's look provides the last of the film's examples of Mouchette's lack of acknowledgement, her isolation, her profound unknownness. But it is this look's resonance with earlier acts of looking (the shopkeeper's disregard, the farmer's deadly sightings) that is particularly significant, as this resonance provides the expectation that the disregard it expresses will produce a *physical* effect. This gives Mouchette's return to rolling down the bank, and her eventual suicide, a sense of inexorability, even if her precise psychological motivation remains ambiguous.[20]

The connection between the farmer's look at Mouchette – or indeed any of the disregarding looks Mouchette has received throughout the film – and her death by drowning is strengthened by the way her suicide is framed. At the beginning of each of her descents of the bank the camera begins by accommodating her movement with a movement of its own. As she gathers speed, however, the camera slows and

stops. She rolls quickly beyond the edges of the frame, requiring the film to cut to a new position from which it can momentarily catch her once more. This happens repeatedly – the film reacting to her disappearance from view with a cut that finds her again. These cuts fragment her movement, expressing a desire to slow her down while simultaneously showing her speed and the inexorability of her descent. When she rolls beyond the bank's boundary and into the water she rolls from view for the last time. By depicting her death as a roll from view that cannot be recovered – when the film cuts we see only the convulsions of the river – the film suggests that a wish to escape from being unsympathetically or aggressively viewed forms part of her impulse to suicide. At the same time, as Barr implies, we are shown that it is the particular combination of these experiences (the shopkeeper's looks, the rabbit shoot, the passing farmer) at that particular time that brings her to act on her impulse. In this way, the film maintains our intimacy with her even as she departs by presenting Mouchette's death in a way that profoundly integrates it into an economy of looks and reactions that reaches back to the sequence with the shopkeeper, and which itself is part of the film's abiding invocation of the relationship between physicality and interiority. In this regard the film follows the understanding of the cinema expressed in Bresson's criticism:

> [E]ach shot is like a word, which means nothing by itself, or rather means so many things that in effect it is meaningless. But a word in a poem is transformed, its meaning made precise and unique, by its placing in relation to the words around it: in the same way a shot in a film is given its meaning by its context, and each shot modifies the meaning of the previous one until with the last shot a total, unparaphrasable meaning has been arrived at.[21]

[1] Ayfre, Amédée. 'The Universe of Robert Bresson' in *The Films of Robert Bresson*. Ed. Ian Cameron. London: Studio Vista, 1969, p. 11.

[2] Quoted in Keith Reader's *Robert Bresson*. Manchester & New York: Manchester UP, 2000, p. 291.

[3] Born in the first decade of the twentieth century (in Bromont-Lamothe, France; died 1999) Robert Bresson began his artistic life as a painter, a fact that is often invoked to account for the 'flatness' of his compositions and the general 'austerity' of his style. He began filmmaking before the second world war, but came into prominence as a filmmaker in 1945 with *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*. He followed this with an adaptation of a novel by George Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, which was acclaimed by the influential critic, and founder of *Cahiers du Cinema*, André Bazin. This film marks the beginning of the most celebrated period of his filmmaking, a period that includes such notable works as *A Man Escaped* (1956), which may have drawn on his experiences as a prisoner of war, *Pickpocket* (1959), *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962), a film which appears to confirm the importance of Catholicism to his work, *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), and his second adaptation of a novel by Bernanos, *Mouchette* (1967). Although venerated by groups of critics and other filmmakers, Bresson was not always so popular with producers or audiences, particularly towards the end of his life. His final films were: *A Gentle Creature* (1969), *Four Nights of a Dreamer* (1971), *Lancelot of the Lake* (1974), *The Devil Probably*, (1977), and *L'Argent* (1983), which is sometimes referred to as a 'late masterpiece'. Although an important figure for the French New Wave, particularly Eric Rohmer, Bresson's influence is equally recognizable in contemporary art cinema such as the Dardennes' *Rosetta* (1999), and Agnes Varda's *Vagabond* (1985).

[4] Geoff Andrew, for example, notes that Bresson's 'stubborn denial of conventional psychological realism may even be seen as overcoming the cinema's inability to probe beyond surface appearances; the blank faces, inanimate objects and narrative ellipses occasionally imply the mystery of the soul.' For more details see the entry on Bresson in Andrew, Geoff. *The Film Handbook*. Essex: Longman, 1989.

[5] Sontag, Susan. 'Spiritual style in the films of Robert Bresson' in *Against Interpretation and other essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1967 [1964], pp. 187, 188.

[6] See Charles Thomas Samuels' interview with Bresson entitled 'Charles Thomas Samuels interviews Robert Bresson' (1970) http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze25jh7/, 2 April 2004.

[7] The reason that the notion of opacity persists in much criticism regarding Bresson's film is, I think, because so many critics begin by considering what is known of Bresson's filmmaking technique (including his own writings on the subject), rather than considering the films themselves. For example, the subtle performances evident in the films themselves are often obscured by the knowledge that actors (or 'models') in his films were asked to move and utter dialogue without attempting to express any emotion or state of mind. (In other words, Bresson's desire to strip away *conscious* performance is often mistaken for a desire to somehow do away with bodily and facial expression altogether.)

[8] Sontag, p. 193.

[9] Such an undertaking may come to unexpectedly complex conclusions. The expressions of interiority in, say, *Diary of a Country Priest*, differ in vital respects from the expressions of interiority in, say, *Mouchette*, despite ostensible similarities of tone, style, and concerns.

[10] It is worth noting that if the suicide appeared imposed upon Mouchette the film would implicitly disregard her autonomy. This would radically alter the film's significance.

[11] Barr, Charles. 'Mouchette' in *The Films of Robert Bresson*. Ed. Ian Cameron. London: Studio Vista, 1969, pp. 118-120.

[12] Lindley Page Hanlon writes that this is a moment in which Mouchette's interactions with these objects transforms them into 'signs for an interior state'. See his PhD thesis *Narrative Structure in the Later Films of Robert Bresson*. Ph.D. Thesis. New York University, 1977, p. 234.

[13] The importance of this is suggested by the film's repetition of the mud-throwing later in the film.

[14] Hanlon notes that 'the bumper cars also relay back and forth Mouchette's and the young man's attraction to each other...The crashes of the cars take on erotic overtones.' (242)

[15] Mouchette does not *accidentally* lose her clog, as some critics have claimed – her actions are far too deliberate, and following the submission of the clog she immediately sits down. Clearly she could retrieve the clog if she wished. Indeed, one reviewer became exasperated by this possibility: 'The camera dwells on the girl leaving a galosh in the mud: reason tells you she could easily have retrieved it, and would have in life. But Bresson said, no, let it stay there.' See John Coleman's 'Black Bresson' (Review of *Mouchette*) *New Statesman* (15 March 1968).

[16] Barr, emphasis in original, pp. 117-8.

[17] Sitney, P. Adams. *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 87.

[18] See page 86 of George Bernanos' *Mouchette*. New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1966 [1937].

[19] This sequence echoes the film's opening in which we see a similarly disregarding gaze. In this sequence, the gamekeeper, Mathieu, watches as a bird becomes trapped in one of Arsène's snares. The film repeatedly cuts between shots of the bird's desperate flaps and scurries and a close-up of Mathieu's impassive on-looking gaze. Mathieu waits as the bird struggles; he presumably hopes to catch Arsène in the act of claiming his prey. In this way, the gamekeeper's look is both implicated in the bird's entrapment, and the attempt to entrap Arsène.

[20] I am not suggesting that Mouchette's isolation, or the farmer's look, causes, in some mystical way, Mouchette to kill herself. The film scrupulously avoids any such explanation. As Bresson has himself remarked: 'There are so many motives [for Mouchette's suicide], which is why this film isn't too bad. I explain nothing, and you can understand it any way you like. Still, you must feel that no single explanation will suffice. One is the wall placed

before her by other people after the rape. She can't live in the village; she can't live in the house. Then too, she has been abused by a man whom she started to love.' (Samuels)

[21] Quoted in Sontag, p. 185.

4. Trapped Interiority: *Le Rayon Vert*

> What I say, I do not say with words. I do not say it with images either,
> with all due respect to the partisans of pure cinema, who would speak
> with images as a deaf-mute does with his hands. After all, I do not say, I
> show. I show people who move and speak. That is all I know how to do,
> but that is my true subject.
>
> - Eric Rohmer [1]

The Seriousness of 'Silly Girls'

The seriousness of *Le Rayon Vert* (1986), directed by Eric Rohmer,[2] is easily
missed. Consider the following synopsis. Delphine (Marie Rivière), an attractive
Parisian woman in her early twenties, receives some bad news: her holiday has been
cancelled at short notice. She attempts to compensate for this cancelled holiday with
excursions to Cherbourg, the mountains, and Biarritz, interspersed with periods in
Paris. Underlying her difficulty in settling anywhere – from the crowds of Biarritz to
the solitariness of her Parisian apartment – is a deep malaise, apparently brought on
by her attachment to her ex-fiance, Jean-Pierre, and the loneliness of the two years
that have elapsed since the end of that relationship. She has, then, three
interconnected 'problems': to find a holiday, to find someone to holiday *with*, and to
find a way out of her malaise. Whether on these excursions, or wandering in Paris,
she is approached by various men – the man in Cherbourg travelling to Ireland, the
passerby in Paris, Pierrot in Biarritz – but turns away from them. Finally, she meets
the apprentice cabinet-maker, Jacques (Vincent Gauthier). Unsure of his intentions,
and her own feelings, she sits with Jacques and watches for the celebrated 'green
ray', the last, refracted, ray of a setting sun on a clear day. The sight of this ray, she
has heard, allows the viewer to recognise her feelings and the feelings of others. The
film ends with the sight of this ray, and Delphine's squeals of delight.

Considered in this cursory manner, it is tempting to dismiss or patronise the film as a frivolous romance. John Pym appears to succumb to something like this temptation in his article on the series from which the film comes: Rohmer's Comedies and Proverbs. Pym labels the central characters of these films 'silly girls' and claims that the films advance charming, but ultimately adolescent, fantasies. He writes:

> [I]n each [of the 'silly girls' in the Comedies and Proverbs] the principal motive force is a peculiarly ridiculous vision of sentimental love, love at twenty (sometimes offset by visions of love at fifteen and thirty): he loves me too much, not enough, enough but in not quite the right way; he loves someone else, perhaps he loves someone else...The self-absorption is staggering.
> [...]
> All this talk of love, when it comes right down to it, means very little. It is a fantasy, an agreeable, endless, excuse-me dance. Reality is in fact, regrettably, [better represented by] Mme Cador's antique business [in Beau Marriage]. How much more agreeable, though, to see the flash of green on the horizon of the sea and to allow these silly girls their last flash of youthful brilliance.[3]

Pym may be justified in claiming that Delphine's self-absorption is 'staggering' (it is certainly extreme) and her vision of sentimental love may be naïve or overly idealistic. But if these are flaws, these are *her* flaws, not the flaws of the film. The film evokes that self-absorption, to be sure, but it also places that self-absorption in a rich and autonomous world. This placing is a vital part of the film's achievement, for it allows the film to contrast Delphine's experience of the world with a wider view of that world, thereby showing how her experience is shaped and limited by obsessional thoughts and the feelings they churn. (Here we begin to see the film's seriousness emerge from its approach to apparent trivialities.) This explains the centrality of the myth of the green ray, and Delphine's attraction to it, for that myth speaks of the relationship between heightened attention to the world (the ray is fleeting, it must be watched for) and emotional clarity – a positive inversion of Delphine's predicament for much of the film, in which her fog of feeling clouds her experience. It is ironic, then, that Pym contrasts 'all this talk of love', and presumably the self-absorption that goes with it, with a *reality* he takes to be largely

suppressed by the Comedies and Proverbs, for *Le Rayon Vert*, at least, is precisely concerned with, and operates through, an equivalent contrast.

Smothering Sadness

An example of the film's efforts to establish the autonomy of the world, its independence from Delphine's view of it, occurs early on in the film, when Delphine meets one of her friends Manuella (Lisa Hérédia) in central Paris. In this sequence we are shown that the world stretches far beyond any particular person's view of it. This is achieved through the use of off-screen space in the sequence's opening shots, which establish the nature of the place in which they are to meet. The first shot shows, from a distance, a small section of a large, historic building. We can just make out that several people are perched on the ledge that skirts the building, and that others are sat on a nearby bench. A large, circular lawn in the foreground stretches far beyond the edges of the frame. Following this brief shot is a short series of portraits of a few of the people in this space. Characteristically, the film does not differentiate here between *characters* (people who will become important to the narrative) and passersby (people who will subsequently disappear from view). Both are introduced without fanfare; they simply appear. We see a young woman, in light, billowy clothes sat on the building's ledge reading a book in the sun; another young woman, dressed in white and black, lying down on the ledge, using a crooked arm as a pillow; and then yet another young woman, lying down on her side in the opposite direction relative to the camera, her head propped up by her hand; and finally, a

middle-aged couple chatting, and a lone woman, sitting on a bench. In each of these opening shots, including the very first, we are aware that the camera's selection is necessarily excluding much of the place and its people: to begin with, the building stretches beyond the frame; then we are brought much closer to it, so close that almost all of the building and its grounds are eclipsed. There is no attempt to generate a complete picture of this place. The implication is that it would be futile; there is too much to see, the place is too big. Through the way that the film establishes this place – especially through its use of off-screen space – it lulls us to the assumption that we are moving within a world that it is impossible to hold in our minds in its entirety. This is not just a comment on *this* place, however, but part of the film's wider understanding of all its places, of its world.

This use of off-screen space is supported by the film's soundtrack. Here, as elsewhere in the film, the reverberant tone of the place – what we might call its 'ambient' sound, as distinct from the distinguishable sounds of individual people or particular, identifiable objects – is louder in the overall sound mix than is traditional.[4] This is part of the film's concern to present the world as free from its control, to hide its precision with a degree of messiness or unruliness. When the film cuts to one of the entrances to this space, which brings us closer to the road, and to the roar of passing traffic, this aspect of the soundtrack becomes clearer, for the auditory nature of the immediate space brings out the prominence of ambient sound in the film. We hear the sound of the cars passing, near and far, busying themselves in all directions, the stream of sound ebbing and flowing but never ceasing. If certain sounds are deliberately and precisely placed on the soundtrack this process is hidden by the unruly context within which those sounds are placed. However, we would hardly call the soundtrack imprecise; it has, rather, an extremely covert precision. In this regard, it is very similar to the casual and careful way off-screen space is employed, each shot surreptitiously avoiding striking compositions of the kind to be found, say, in *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960). For this film, there is no position from which the world can neatly present itself. The roar of the traffic, and the general hum of goings on far away that serves as an insistent background

throughout most of the film's sequences, suggests a world that continues oblivious to our particular view of it, our focus.[5]

When Delphine enters, the film uses our awareness of the space's abundance to show the reductive effects of Delphine's engagement with it. Unlike the camera, which appears interested in the world as it finds it, Delphine arrives with a specific agenda. She surveys the space to identify her friend, Manuella, who turns out to be the first young woman we saw. In doing so, Delphine becomes the agent that narrows the film's concerns: from the three young women we were initially introduced to one woman is picked out. Immediately after Delphine greets Manuella, she explicitly declares that she is uninterested in this bright and open space with the request for a move into the shade (the sunshine hurts her eyes).

If the film is here subtly suggesting Delphine's preoccupation with her own feelings ('my eyes hurt'),[6] and that pre-occupation's clouding of her experience and appreciation of the world about her, the sequence's gradual tapering of space affirms and elaborates this relationship between emotion and experience. To begin with Manuella resists Delphine's predilection for the shade, staying on the periphery of the roofed area to which they have moved, half of her face and body remaining in the sunlight. But quickly, Delphine's sullen gloom draws Manuella further away from the sun and the book she is reading. After Manuella solicits a response with a friendly 'Ok?', Delphine tells Manuella about the cancelling of her vacation with Caroline. For this passage of the conversation the women are in a two-shot. Delphine faces us, hunched on a stone ledge bordering a handsome Renaissance-era statue (out of shot). The shot is the end point of a steady tapering of space (and diminishing of light) since Delphine's arrival: from the outside, to the roofed area, to a small section of that area, away from direct sunlight. (Although there are no barriers between these women and the open space, they appear removed from it.) Running counter to this tapering of space is an increase in privacy; the many other people who are sharing this place are now excluded from the frame. The effect is

more stifling than intimate, however, enacting Delphine's wish to withdraw from the world at large.

Editing is used to emphasise this withdrawal. Manuella suggests that Delphine could find someone to go on holiday with, to which Delphine replies 'In two weeks? I doubt it.' It is at this point that Manuella turns to look away from Delphine and towards the open space – the space she earlier relinquished – away from the building. The film cuts to a shot from approximately her point of view.

It is the first time, since the sequence's opening shot, that we have been presented with a wide view of the space. The effect is to provide a fleeting glimpse of the joys on offer to those not sunk in despair, or obligated to comfort and console: we see boys and girls playing, adults sitting on benches, the Eiffel tower in the distance – it is an idyllic Parisian summer scene. Moreover, it supports Manuella's reassurances. Not only does the shot invoke the possibility that Delphine could find someone in two weeks by showing us a distanced abundance of people, it also quietly disputes

Delphine's assumption that she must leave Paris to enjoy her vacation. When we are returned to Delphine, the space on view is once more contracted and slightly darkened. Delphine remains oblivious to the pleasures on offer, disconsolately picking at her roll of bread. The editing of this sequence affirms Delphine's withdrawal under a blanket of dejection, a blanket that is both protective in that it hides her from the unruly and unpredictable world, and smothering in that it insulates her.

Trapped Feelings and Feeling Trapped

The role of conversation in this film is also tightly bound to the expression of interiority. Yet as the speakers are often verbose, and the words that are spoken are often in themselves unrevealing or apparently of little relevance to the film's central concerns, the sequences featuring these conversations are sometimes dismissed as peripheral. For example, Pym writes:

> For *Le Rayon Vert*, Marie Rivière (Delphine) receives a dialogue credit, which is to say that a great deal of her chatter is improvised around the director's careful plot. The talk is very talkative, even by Rohmer's standards. But one wonders sometimes – there is, for example, a wonderfully inconsequential lunchtime conversation on vegetarianism – if it is not deep down merely something of a display of pyrotechnics. Witty, entertaining, French – but also hot air. In drawing-room comedies, the repartee is more precise. Characters talk to each other; but when, as often happens, they launch into abstractions, one feels they might just as well be talking to themselves.[7]

There are many reasons to be sceptical of such a view: it reduces conversations to words and disregards the possibility that it may serve the film to have its characters talk 'hot air' – that, say, Delphine's failure to adequately address matters of consequence may itself be *of* consequence. This is particularly so in a film which concerns a character who is gripped by apparent trivialities – where to go on holiday? – that clearly have a significance for her that she finds difficult or

uncomfortable to account for. As this suggests, Delphine's unknownness comes from her resistance to, or difficulty in, letting herself be known, rather than from isolation, as is the case with Mouchette. Some of the film's sequences imply it is the inquisitive nature of others' interest that makes the thought of being known an anxious one for Delphine, a thought that provokes her defences. An insightful passage from Cavell's *Claim of Reason* can serve as a description of Delphine's resistance:

> There just are things which I want you to know but which I do not want to tell you (certain of my wishes or needs perhaps). One might say: I want you to want to know, and to want to in a particular spirit; not, say, out of curiosity. Such a wish goes into Thoreau's view of friendship. It can be overdone.[8]

In this context, Delphine's inability or reluctance to say precisely what is on her mind, and the circularity of some of the discussions concerning her situation, become central to the film's concerns. But for this centrality to be recognised, our attention must shift from the words she speaks to the significance that her gestures and postures give to her words, how they betray her distress in being asked to give a presentable account of herself.

Consider, for example, the sequence in which Delphine dines *al fresco* with friends (which takes place not long after the sequence discussed above) and talks at greater length about her predicament. Delphine's deflections of attention to her distress are shown to be partly the result of the particularly aggressive interest towards it shown by Delphine's interlocutor, Béatrice (Béatrice Romand)[9] – a friend of Delphine's. The sequence begins with the conversation already in full flight. An accusatory, interrogatory, approach is sustained by Béatrice throughout. She accuses Delphine of being sad, and suggests that Delphine should holiday alone or join a group of travellers – in short, urges an active solution to the problem of what to do on holiday, thereby dismissing the immobilising distress of which this problem is a symptom. Rivière's performance shows that Béatrice's waves of attack provoke in Delphine an inhibiting defence. When Béatrice, perhaps in an attempt to ameliorate

her aggressiveness with a show of understanding, notes how she was, for a period, also very sad, and that it was awful, Rivière's hand goes out to a plate filled with doughnuts and dusts up sugar or crumbs with her fingers as she listens. It is a gesture that takes some of her attention away from Béatrice, gives her something to do with her hands, and perhaps satisfies an anxious desire to tidy things up, to make something neat while she is being torn apart. Importantly, this gesture does not run its course. At the point when Delphine registers Béatrice's simplistic view of her predicament, Rivière suddenly retracts her outstretched hand, bringing both hands to her sides waving Béatrice to a standstill, her eyes briefly rolling, gearing herself up and settling herself down before repelling the accusation that she is emotionally upset.

As Béatrice and Delphine verbally clash Rivière accelerates the changes of her gestures: her hands approach her face as if to scream, a gesture that she pulls out of before her hands reach her face, and then returns to again, repeating the faltering process, before her hands momentarily reach her hair and the top of her head. The retreat of her hands towards her body, particularly her face and hair, which repeatedly occurs throughout this sequence, enacts Delphine's urgent need to withdraw, to check and console herself with touch. It shows her vulnerability, her need for a situation which is less hostile if she is to fully express her despair. Small wonder, then, that when Delphine is challenged to explain herself she proffers a dejected collection of unconvincing lies ('I'm fine…There is someone in my life…'). Such is the contrast between Delphine's agitation and the words she finds to

account for it, we become acutely aware of the presence of feelings her torrent of defensive words leaves trapped inside her.[10]

She is also trapped by the situation – there is a need for her to escape, just as there is a need for her feelings to escape her. The camera's roving position throughout this sequence – there are relatively few cuts – helps to demonstrate Delphine's entrapment, and to elaborate the reasons for her inhibition. Aside from the occasional cutaway to other friends sat around the table, the camera moves from a two-shot of Béatrice and Delphine, looking across the table, to closer views of either character, repeatedly retreating to the two-shot. Crucially, the *angle* from which we view Delphine never deviates more than a few degrees, so that we see a repeated image of her fixity. This fixity serves to contrast with, and hence foreground, the consternation of her gestures at the table, as she sits next to the tenacious Béatrice, clad in incandescent red. This use of camera position would, perhaps, help us to become more aware that Delphine is, as Tamara Tracz suggests, a prisoner of her own voice, of her 'inability to stop thinking and verbalizing', if it were not for the antagonism of Béatrice.[11] Instead, the relaxed rigour of the camera movements conjures the formality of the situation. The camera's sustained and interested peering at both characters from across the table shows how an ostensibly informal gathering of friends can approach – when one person becomes under scrutiny – the seriousness and intensity of a formal interview, placing pressure on articulacy.

Pym's failure to recognise the significance of the talk in *Le Rayon Vert* is made more understandable when we recognise the length of many of the dialogue sequences, including the one just discussed. This conversation goes on for several minutes, continuing long after it has established the situation of Delphine defending herself from Béatrice's attack. Moreover, the pertinent narrative information embedded in the sequence – we learn that Delphine's relationship with Jean-Pierre ended two years ago – could be much more efficiently dispatched. All of this encourages Pym's view that such conversations are indulgent 'pyrotechnics'. There are, however, good reasons for thinking the length of the conversations well judged.

Most simply, by allowing the talk to run and run seemingly without end (these conversations do not *conclude*) the film imbues the moments of aloneness and silence that eventually follow with the distant reverberation of chatter, implying that the stream of words has temporarily run underground, that the conversation continues internally. But perhaps more important than this is that the length of the conversations dissuades us from an engagement with the film that searches and grasps for pertinent information, that waits expectantly for a moment's dramatic turn, the point at which the narrative progresses. Instead, through allowing the camera to rest with the conversation, allowing that conversation to unravel unevenly, to stop and start,[12] the film encourages us to provide the receptive engagement that Delphine awaits – an engagement that offers the acknowledgement of her thoughts and feelings. (Importantly, this primes us to recognise and appreciate the nature of Jacques' attention later in the film.)

Looking out at the world

The gravity of Delphine's obsessional thoughts is sometimes reflected in the smallest, and apparently most conventional, of moments. For example, when Delphine visits Biarritz, the editing convention that follows a wide, 'establishing' shot of the location with a closer shot of a relevant character in that location is employed in such a way to evoke her feelings of separation from all that surrounds her. As Pym notes approvingly, the sequence begins with

a breathtaking high shot of the beach at Biarritz. A simple establishing shot? No, with a deft turn, the beach, carpeted with oblivious sunbathers, becomes the elegant counterpoint to Delphine's misery at having to take a holiday alone.[13]

The 'misery' that 'counterpoints' this shot emerges most powerfully a few shots later, once Delphine has returned from paddling in the sea (balking at the size of an oncoming wave) to sunbathe. Central to its evocation is the placing of Delphine relative to the camera. The shot begins with Delphine out of view. We see a young girl, maybe five years old, using a metal block to make shapes in a bucket filled with sand. She has the perfect absorption in the matter at hand that is common in young children and rare in adults. The camera pans to the left and we see Delphine, still wet from the sea, lying on her front, toying with the sand in front of her with her hands. It is, to begin with, a movement that invites an interpretation of the contrast between Delphine's distraction and the child's absorption in the shape of the sand in her bucket. As important, however, is the camera's indication of Delphine's emotional position relative to the beach's goings on – there is playing, and *then* there is Delphine. It is a camera movement that echoes an earlier pan across the beach at Cherbourg, a pan that eventually found a restless, lonely Delphine on the beach's peripheries.

Rivière's performance in this sequence once again finds the right pitch of anxiety. A cut to a frontal view of Rivière allows her to show how covertly Delphine looks at the people that pass, their shrieks and screams of playful pleasure occasionally emerging from the hubbub. Her gaze darts from one person to the next, never

coming to rest on anyone, never inviting her attention to be returned. She looks out *at* the world, from behind the invisible, but protective barrier, of disengagement, while her bedraggled, wet fringe provides a more literal cover.

Meanwhile the sheer volume of the people all around, casually established by the opening shot, and the fun they seem to be having, makes it acutely obvious that it is not the place that is the problem, or even her aloneness, but her way of being in the world. The sequence returns us to this contrast when, after another brief skirmish in the crowded shallows of the sea, she returns to her patch of sand, and her relationship to her immediate environment is again reflected upon. Rivière's performance here is again important to the moment's effect. She lies on her side, supporting her head with one hand, looking vaguely out to sea, her face pursed.

We are encouraged to imagine that her mind is boiling in thought, but those thoughts are not allowed to rupture the surface. The point is not the specifics of her thought, but that here, as elsewhere, her malaise seeps into and sullies an otherwise pleasant moment in her life. This may not be a world that knows how to accommodate her, or how to respond to her in the way she needs to be responded to, but it is – particularly in the sunny, jolly, beauty of Biarritz – shown to be a world that would be enough, if she could *enter it*, accept her distress rather than sustain her withdrawal. However, the film does not lament Delphine's failure to do this, even as it acknowledges that it is a failure, that there are possibilities to which she is blind. One of the film's achievements is that it helps us to recognise that this is no easy matter at the same time as demonstrating its necessity. As Tracz has it:

What Rohmer understands is that people can't just *do* what might be the correct solution. Gaspard *can't* choose Margot, nor, in *Ma Nuit chez Maud* (*My Night with Maud*, 1969) can Jean-Louis choose Maud, just because the audience wants them to. These people are who they are, and it is only within the parameters of *who-you-are* [that] anyone can struggle. You can't *make* yourself happy, or not-unhappy. You can't *fall* yourself in love, or out. Much of Rohmer's work is a set of continuing variations on these themes.[14]

Apart or a part of the world?

Yet for all the film's use of contrasts between interiority and environment, it manages to demonstrate that it is *Delphine* who insists on such a contrast, and playfully points out the wilfulness by which it is maintained. One such moment that achieves this uses the clashing of colour to evoke the distance between Delphine and the world, and the ease with which that distance could be closed. On the second day of her holiday in Biarritz, the weather turns overcast, and Delphine walks the coast in a bright red waterproof poncho that reaches almost to her knees, carrying a canvas bag of the same colour. In time, the day brightens, and Delphine looks out to sea. A happier character would perhaps take off the poncho to greet the sun and the view, but Delphine does not. With the sun now shining, the poncho has become incongruous; none of the people she passes in this sequence wears a raincoat – many are in swimwear. This incongruity makes the rich contrast of colours all the more apparent. Her red poncho divides her from the sea's wetness, a thick membrane against the sun's caress, and stands out against the blue of the sea and the sky. We

are reminded of her resistance to plunging into the sea and stripping off for the sun (even when sunbathing she is sure to keep herself a little covered) by this temporarily incongruous attire – it would be so *easy* for her to uncover herself and banish her separation from the environment, the moment implies, if only she had the will to do it.

The sense in which she *is* a part of this environment, despite experiencing herself as separate from it, is expressed in the moments that follow through camera position and editing. A series of briefly-held shots jointly establish the tone and flavour of Delphine's immediate environment: we see a long shot of a wave breaking against a large boulder; a much closer shot of the ending of the wave trickling towards moss-covered rocks; an extreme long-shot of various tourists and holidaymakers picking their way amongst these rocks; a medium-shot of a teenage girl and a toddler in the same area, just as the toddler slips into the shallow water with a splash; then two extreme-long-shots of Delphine as she walks along a (presumably) nearby wall. This way of establishing the area echoes the earlier sequence in which we first see Manuella amidst a collection of other people as if she were simply one person amongst many who could become a part of the film and a part of Delphine's life. This time it is Delphine who is situated in such a context, thereby presenting her as a part of her environment, a part of the life to be found here – just another tourist – despite her feelings of apartness. At the same time, those feelings of apartness are declared by the glaring visibility and incongruity (in the blazing sunshine) of her red waterproof poncho (that is, until she finally relents, and takes it off, bringing about a cut to a much closer view of her alone on the rocks). In this way, the film finds a style that places her among a community of holidaymakers, contradicting her estrangement from that community while maintaining our awareness of those feelings of estrangement.

The importance of Delphine's relationship with her environment becomes clearer still when, in a slightly earlier sequence, she attempts to order it. We see her eating, hunched on a bed in her friend's apartment, having shut herself away from the sun,

sea and fellow holidaymakers. After she finishes her meal, her eyes cautiously appraise her surroundings, taking in the full span of the room, while she absent-mindedly rubs together her fingers, suggesting an underlying hum of anxiety. Her eyes alight on the mantelpiece upon which two large portraits (presumably relatives of the apartment's owners) stand. She takes these portraits off the mantelpiece, hugs them to her upper body, and steps over to the large chest of drawers on the other side of the small bedroom. The camera pans to keep her in frame; and with this movement we become aware of the room's small size. She places these photographs into the drawer with a twist of the hips and a flourish that suggests petulant satisfaction at clearing out of sight all that reminds her of the room's possession by others. This suggestion of her wish to make her immediate environment her own, or at least to stop it from proclaiming her foreignness, gains weight when she spots two small photographs on top of the chest of drawers and quickly whisks them from view, too. The sequence ends a few moments later in a way that suggests the failure of this attempt to make her environment accommodate her, to have it lift her mood, or at least cease to lower it: standing at the bookcase, she looks all about her once more, and lets out a sigh of dissatisfaction.

Finding a place for emotional expression

> In moments of silence [Rohmer's characters] collapse into themselves. These moments of aloneness, of silence, are crucial: the sudden revelation of the real self, naked and mysterious—Delphine crying alone in a country lane, Jeanne unable to stay in her boyfriend's apartment,

trying to clear up but paralyzed by something that remains unexplained. These things are touching because what they show is the vulnerability we all carry at our core.[15]

There are two moments in the film in which a harmony exists between Delphine's interiority and the environment in which she finds herself. These moments of harmony are striking in their breaking from the film's more usual pattern of contrasting interiority with environment in various ways. The first of these moments occurs in the midst of Delphine's malaise, earlier in the film when she holidays in Cherbourg. Cavell describes this moment as 'transcendental'. He writes:

> A Rohmer film characteristically includes a passage in which a woman is taken out of the ordinary by a transcendental moment, a declaration that the world we are given to see, like the words we are given to mean, is not all the world there is, and not all we mean. A favourite instance of mine is in Rohmer's film *Summer* (also called *The Green Ray*, perhaps to distinguish it from his film *A Tale of Summer*), in which a woman, wandering away from a boring dinner party, becomes lost in an indefinite stretch of trees, and as a wind animates the trees into a state of shivering, the woman begins to sob, one would not say from a fear of being actually lost, and if from a sense of aloneness, then no more from loneliness than from a perspective of a place in nature in which she feels unencumbered, we might say no longer out of place, shaken by an ecstatic sense of possibility.[16]

A closer look at the sequence reveals the richness of Cavell's insightful suggestion that Delphine here feels 'unencumbered' and 'no longer out of place'. The sequence begins to establish the aptness of Delphine's place in the world when she walks barefoot down a narrow, grassy path which is bordered on either side by verdant shrubbery. As she goes she picks leaves here and there, smells the flowers of weeds and bushes, runs her hand through the fleeting caresses of swaying leaves and shoots. Her fragile physiognomy and airy movements echo the physicality of the moving plants and shrubs (she is even dubbed a 'plant' during the conversation on vegetarianism) that she reaches out to touch. Later in the sequence the aptness of her place in this environment seems to allow her to release some of her distress. Delphine looks past the end of the path, and we share the view: an overgrown field,

a thick clump of nettles, and on the other side, a row of trees, rich with green, and beyond, just visible against the blue of the sky, the faint darkening of the sea. She turns her back on this view of the end of land and leans against the fence, as if lacking the energy to go any further in this direction. We see the tops of some nearby trees, the branches of a nearby shrub, a clump of nettles, all shaking and swaying in the wind; we hear the blue sky rumble an announcement of rain. Those sights and sounds rhyme with what follows: a medium-close-up of Delphine, wearing a blue woollen jumper that blends with the surrounding greenery, her hair blowing in the wind, tears in her eyes. The world about her appears to be addressing or reflecting her distress while she appears to be reflecting the motion of the world, following the freedom of the gusts and sighs of wind with uninhibited sobs of anguish.

The above description also begins to unpack Cavell's insight that this is 'a transcendental moment, a declaration that the world we are given to see, like the words we are given to mean, is not all the world there is, and not all we mean'. We might continue that unpacking by noting that the environment's chance echoing of Delphine's interiority brings that environment more fully to her attention: she takes in the world for the first time in the film, and consequently must also come to remember how far the world extends beyond her usual appreciation of it. Perhaps more important than this, though, is that this echoing presents the world to us as an elaboration of Delphine's feelings – even as that world remains autonomous. The effect is a sudden revelation of how wide and deep those feelings go; they stretch as wide and reach as deep as the far off horizon. In suddenly allowing those feelings to

appear to flood the world, the film suggests a plaintive gap between all that Delphine has succeeded in expressing and all that needs to be expressed. At the same time, the non-particularity of the expression – the sense in which much of the specificity of her feelings remains unknown – maintains that expressive gap. In this moment, then, she is given to see a greater world than before – perhaps to see the greatness of the world – and she is shown to mean more through her place in that world than she could hope to articulate.

Delphine's momentary rediscovery of the world resonates with Rohmer's interest in the silent cinema and particularly the films of Louis and Auguste Lumière.[17] In a roundtable with *Cahiers* critics he claims that 'With these films we are left with the impression of having seen the world with different eyes. They make us admire things that we did not know how to admire in their original form. People walking in the streets, children playing, trains going by: nothing out of the ordinary. But this – the first feeling of wonder – is, to my mind, the most important.' [18] The similarity between Rohmer's understanding of the films of Lumière and Cavell's understanding of this moment from *Le Rayon Vert* is striking: in both the ordinary is understood to be transformed. In this regard, we might understand the moment in *Le Rayon Vert* to be a rediscovery of the cinema's capacity to reveal the wonder of ordinary things, and as a channelling of that wonder into an expression of interiority – an expression of *Delphine*'s wonder.

Talking herself into stillness

The skill with which the film shows the above moment to be a chance occurrence – the environment and Delphine's mood suddenly harmonising with each other – assures our expectancy that the moment will pass. Delphine's attitude is unchanged: still she is turned inwards and self-absorbed; it is only when the world appears to address her that she pays it much attention (a symptom of which is her tendency to view the world through a prism of 'personal' superstition). When, later on, the film

is faced with the task of showing the beginnings of the end of that self-absorption, it introduces a new character, Jacques, and a new relationship, and shows this relationship to alter the nature of Delphine's attention.[19]

It is significant that Jacques does not make an appearance until the end of the film, as this allows his entrance to contrast with the entrance of other prospective romantic partners. Although all of the men interested in Delphine – from the Cherbourgian sailor to Jacques himself – assert their interest in Delphine, only Jacques combines an intensity of attention with a willingness to be receptive, to wait for her to emerge rather than to prise an opening through flattery or premature requests for further meetings. This is evident from their very first contact with each other. Spotting her waiting for a train, he stares at her (and her book) repeatedly, insistently. (His interest in the book, or the possibility that his interest is in the book, seems to rouse Delphine's curiosity.) Yet when they begin talking he *listens* attentively but without transforming her into the subject of his curiosity. Consider, for example, the following exchange:

> Delphine:...I've loused up my vacation.
>
> Jacques: Why? Weather bad?
>
> *Delphine laughs.*
>
> Jacques: What's so funny?
>
> Delphine: It's not really funny.

This is the end of that exchange; he questions no further. She is allowed to be somewhat enigmatic. Her vulnerability is not exploited. Instead, he waits for her, takes her in, trusts her to find what she wants to say (or doesn't want to say). This is not only in contrast with the more grasping men previously in evidence, it also contrasts with many (if not most) of Delphine's previous conversations with friends and family.

The effect of Jacques attention on Delphine's state of mind is conveyed through a series of resonances with earlier conversations. Delphine's earlier conversation with Béatrice and her other friends is echoed in Delphine's exposition of her recent loneliness to Jacques towards the film's end: not only is she also sitting outside at a table in the later sequence (this time at an outdoor bar or café of some description), the subject of the conversation is more or less the same. Importantly, some of the curtailed gestures in the earlier sequence find their completion here. An example of this is the way Rivière has Delphine dust crumbs on the table with her fingers as she talks, as she dusted up the sugar and crumbs on the plate of doughnuts when dining with her friends. The repetition of the action helps to demonstrate the difference in tone of the two conversations. Here there is no Béatrice to interrupt Delphine's contemplation, and hence fewer reasons for her to bring her hand reeling back to wave and protest (although this conversation isn't without its moments of misunderstanding). A principal part of Delphine's attraction to Jacques may simply be that he allows her thoughts to unfold. As they do so, with increasing rapidity, her hands try to follow and ease the flow of her words, whether idling as she thinks, or quickly flicking her hair to take the thought of her appearance out of her head, or gesticulating in place of a word or to emphasise a point.

The change Jacques's receptive presence brings out in Delphine is confirmed through the suggestion that Jacque's mixture of attention and passivity is transferred to Delphine. This is partly achieved through the weighting of improvised dialogue between the two characters. When Delphine attempts at length to explain and describe her recent romantic history she struggles out from under the weight of that history with a question: 'Are you in love at the moment?' 'No,' he replies, 'But I hope to be...It could happen.' Leaving aside the obvious implication of Delphine's question ('are you available, could you love me?'), Jacques's answer is everything Delphine's was not: short yet as complete as it could hope to be. No wonder Delphine feels slightly idiotic after she hears it. This balancing of long answers with short ones continues throughout their exchange here. Finally, it provides the

sequence with its ending, and Delphine with her unburdening. For she begins again: 'I haven't met a guy in a long time' which precipitates an exposition regarding the unsatisfactory nature of one night stands, and how she has preferred to keep herself back: 'It's better to wait than to... than to ruin... than spoiling your hopes.' At this point, the film cuts to a close-up of Jacques who maintains his steady attention on Delphine. After her attempt at intellectualising her predicament comes two simple statements, which balance the earlier words of Jacques. 'I talk a lot but I don't expect anything,' says Delphine, the film cutting back to her. She laughs, tosses her head to one side. 'I'm fed up', she says. Her hands rise up to her head, as they were prone to do during her conversation with Béatrice. This time, however, they come to a firm rest on top of her head, as she emits an acquiescent, almost contented, sigh – something is beginning to settle. The rhythm of her words has now shifted. Her words have gained weight, and are more carefully weighted, coming into alignment with the steady and precise words of Jacques, expressing the couple's forming, as well as the dissipation of her anxiety. In this moment, both her mind and body appear to have momentarily talked themselves to a relative stillness. No longer trapped by her own chatter, or by a need to defend herself from attack, Delphine lets herself be known – and replicates Jacques's passive receptivity.

Attending to the World

This change in the nature of Delphine's conversations brings about a change in her attention to the world, a change that is expressed in the film's final sequence through another moment of harmony between her interiority and her environment. Central to

our appreciation of Delphine's development is the incorporation and inflection in this sequence of elements that appeared in earlier sequences. For example, in this sequence she sits on a bench with Jacques, looking out to sea from their position on top of a cliff. The shots of the couple sitting on the bench rhyme with the shots of her sitting on the steps when she was comforted by Françoise after her argument with Béatrice. Here, as then, the table that has typically blocked part of her from view and kept her in position during social situations has been removed. Just as before, she finds herself momentarily crying. Jacques comforts her by placing his hands gently around her shoulders and neck − around the same area that her own hands reach when she seeks to console herself − and rocking her from side to side. The rocking echoes Françoise's attempts to comfort Delphine on the steps − Françoise rocks Delphine, too, as if she were a wheel in need of being eased over a rut − and brings Delphine to sway like the swaying trees of Cherbourg. The vastness of the space in front of her − we see the sea and the setting sun from approximately her perspective, with nothing to impede our view of the unfathomable abyss − impresses upon us the prospect of a freedom hidden by her earlier enclosures. At the same time, the view's simple, yet shifting, colour scheme of reds and blues echoes her own attire, her red jacket, and pale blue top, just as her light blue clothes were in accordance with the greens and blues of her environment when walking in the countryside in Cherbourg. Once again she has found a place or a sight that is sympathetic. Here, though, she shows increased attention, sitting with Jacques and simply *watching* for the ray. Meanwhile, the musical theme associated with moments of magic − moments in which the world appears to offer portents, to address Delphine and her situation − returns, but this time unfurls into a fugue, suggesting the unfolding and elaborating of her feelings, the breaking open of the process begun during those earlier moments. Finally, the red sun sinks below the horizon. From within that red, a red that announces the dying of the day, comes a flash of green − a shoot, a beginning, permission to continue − arising from within, breaking the surface.

[1] Rohmer, Eric. 'Letter to a critic [concerning my *Contes moraux* (*Moral Tales*)]' in *The Taste for Beauty*. Trans. Carol Volk. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 80.

[2] Eric Rohmer (real name: Jean-Marie Maurice Scherer; born Nancy, France, 1920) came to filmmaking late, making his first full-length feature film, *La Collectionneuse* (The Collector), in 1967, after notable periods writing fiction and criticism. Much of his criticism appeared in *Cahiers du Cinema*, alongside work by other members of what became the French Nouvelle Vague: Godard, Rivette, Truffaut and Chabrol, with whom he wrote a book on Hitchcock. Many of his films are grouped together into series. The 'Contes moreaux' (Moral Tales) span from 1963 to 1972, and includes some of the most celebrated of his films, such as *My Night with Maud* (1969), *Claire's Knee* (1970) and *Love in the Afternoon* (1972). His 'Comedies and Proverbs' also span around a decade, from 1980 to 1990 and consist of *The Aviator's Wife* (1980); *A Good Marriage* (1982), *Pauline at the Beach* (1982), *Full Moon in Paris* (1984), *The Green Ray* (1986), and *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* (1987). Rohmer's most recent series is the 'Tales of Four Seasons' (1990-1998): *A Tale of Springtime* (1990); *A Tale of Winter* (1992), *A Summer's Tale* (1996), *An Autumn Tale* (1998). One notable film not grouped into a series is his *The Marquise of O* (1976), which Cavell classifies as an unknown woman melodrama.

[3] Pym, John. 'Silly Girls'. *Sight and Sound* 56:1 (Dec 1986), pp. 47, 48.

[4] Indeed, ambient sound is louder here than in many of the other films that make up Rohmer's 'Comedies and Proverbs'.

[5] At times ambient sound even partially obscures the sound of the characters talking – a point generally missed by those critics who assume they are obliged to take the verbosity of the film's characters as cause for delight or dismay, rather than a fact of the world of the same order as the din of traffic.

[6] The translations of dialogue in this chapter are taken from the subtitles provided by the Arrow Films DVD.

[7] Pym, p. 48.

[8] Cavell, Stanley. *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 359.

[9] Romand also plays Sabine in *Le Beau Marriage*, another film in the Comedies and Proverbs series. Just as Rivière appears in *La Femme de L'Aviateur*, an earlier film in the same series.

[10] Andrew Klevan notes a similar effect in Rohmer's *A Tale of Springtime*. He notes that the film's

> emphasis on speaking provides the route to unspoken desires. The art of the film lies not in depicting intelligent conversation *per se*, but in discovering the gaps between the characters' surface intentions and their other motivations. The gap is revealed by contrasting what is said and what is shown: the film has no

desire merely to film the intelligent speech of characters – it wishes to *show* characters who talk. (*Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film*. Trowbridge: Flicks, 2000, pp. 194-5.)

[11] Tracz, Tamara. 'Eric Rohmer'. *Senses of Cinema* (2002) http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/rohmer.html, 19th September 2006.

[12] The nature of the dialogue also encourages this engagement. As Klevan writes: 'Eric Rohmer's uniqueness lies in creating a cinema centred around dialogue without relying upon the forcefulness of a particular line or phrase.' (193)

[13] Pym, p. 46.

[14] Tracz.

[15] Tracz.

[16] Cavell, Stanley. *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 427-8.

[17] The Lumière brothers contributed to the invention of the cinema and held the first film shows. Their films typically consist of wide, single shots taking in an everyday event: the arrival of a train into a station, workers coming out of a factory, a baby being fed. The brothers famously thought that the cinema was an invention without a future. The enduring fascination of their simple films eloquently testifies to the gross inaccuracy of that prophesy.

[18] Quoted in Fiona A. Villella's 'Magical Realism in *Conte d'automne* (*Autumn Tale*, 1998)'.*Senses of Cinema* (2000) http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/autumn.html, 19th September 2006.

[19] As far as I am aware, we never hear him called Jacques in the film. I have taken this name from the credits for *Le Rayon Vert* on www.IMDB.com.

5. Influenced Interiority: *Voyage to Italy*

[T]he cinema has to teach men to know, and to recognize, one another, instead of continuing to tell the same old story.

- Roberto Rossellini [1]

Realism and Melodrama

Many critics have noted the mix of melodrama and realism in the films directed by Roberto Rossellini.[2] Florence Jacobowitz, for example, discusses the emergence of melodramatic elements in three of the most important films Rossellini made with his eventual wife, Ingrid Bergman – *Stromboli* (1949), *Europa '51* (1952) and *Voyage to Italy*. For Jacobowitz, the films have a 'realist aesthetic' derived from Rossellini's earlier neo-realist War Trilogy (*Rome, Open City* [1945], *Paisà* [1946], *Germany, Year Zero* [1947]), despite the presence of melodramatic imagery. She writes of *Stromboli*:

> The film documents the experience of displacement, of being trapped, of having to wait, of the resultant feelings of anguish and frustration. It is authentic in the way it captures what it feels like to be alive at a particular time in history. Rossellini does this by filming the island in a realist, sometimes documentary-like style but the aesthetic serves as a visualization of an 'experiential' landscape, of Karin's journey of self-discovery through her interaction with life on the island. Rossellini's choice to film on Stromboli, an inherently melodramatic island of elemental extremes centred upon a volcano which spews fire, earth and dust, allows the director to rely on a realist aesthetic, instead of distorting or overloading the mise-en-scène as is often the case in expressionist art or melodrama.[3]

Jacobowitz understanding of the film's stress on *experience* is important and insightful and could be applied to many other films directed by Rossellini, including the film that is the focus of this chapter, *Voyage to Italy* (1953). But in the above passage she does not explain how the application of 'realist' or 'documentary-style'

filming to an elemental, melodramatic subject results in such a stress, how it produces the 'document' of 'experience' she identifies. More importantly, perhaps, her article tends to ignore those melodramatic elements of the films that do not easily fit into her understanding of the 'evolution' of Rossellini's realism. The most obvious of these elements, which is also present in Rossellini's earlier War Trilogy, is the use of histrionic music at times of crisis – for example, the ending of *Stromboli*, and its use of climactic, surging orchestral strings.

Peter Brunette is much more willing to note the full range of 'expressionistic' elements (which includes many melodramatic elements) in Rossellini's work. For Brunette, however, the purpose of these elements is precisely their unsettling quality, a quality deriving from their incongruity in what are ostensibly 'realist' films. He argues that such juxtapositions of elements of realism and melodrama in films such as the little-discussed *La macchina ammazzacattivi* (1948) serve to foreground the film's 'status as artificial construct'. This provides the basis for Brunette's claim that some of Rossellini's films 'call into question the easy assumptions of the realist aesthetic within which he was ostensibly operating.' [4]

Although Brunette is right to note the presence of expressionistic elements in works commonly acclaimed for their realism, he exaggerates their incongruity. Many of Rossellini's films synthesise, or in some way combine, realism and melodrama – a synthesis that Jacobowitz's interpretation has the advantage of partially acknowledging.[5] Consequently, Brunette's descriptions of Rossellini's films must strain in order to establish a tension between their expressionistic elements and their realism. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> Rossellini's next film, *Germany, Year Zero*, the last instalment of the "War Trilogy," was made in 1947. Again, it *seems* to be intensely realistic, and *is*, given the piles of real rubble that abound and stretch the codes of realism in exciting ways. Yet this realism harbors an irreducible expressionism that is everywhere apparent once the critic's realist blinders are removed. [...] At many points in his long walks in the city, Edmund is overshadowed by barely standing buildings which emphasize

his vulnerability and isolation and strongly foreshadow Antonioni's equally masterful use of a threatening urban environment. [...] The film's soundtrack often functions expressionistically as well. The bizarre music (composed by Renzo Rossellini) continuously calls attention to itself, rather than blending in unnoticed, especially the loudly pounding bass drums that force themselves into the spectator's consciousness at key moments of tension. Just before Edmund jumps to his death, in fact, in a kind of final insult to his mind and body (and ours), a tram roars by with an obviously heightened, physically painful clatter.[6]

The music in *Germany, Year Zero* may well impose itself upon the viewer, even call attention to itself, but such an imposition is hardly as jarring as Brunette's argument requires. More needs to be said before we can accept that the use of such music undermines or unsettles our engagement with the film to such a degree that we are reminded of its artificiality. The music (and to a lesser extent the use of a 'threatening urban environment') may complicate our understanding of the film's purpose and significance, and lead us to question its realism, but this need not be unsettling to the degree Brunette suggests, unless we watch the film with a fixed critical agenda or strong expectation. However, Brunette is certainly right to notice how widespread these elements are and to suggest that any credible account of Rossellini's films must accommodate them.

Certainly, any examination of the films' expressions of interiority must consider those elements. For it is noticeable how many of the melodramatic or expressionistic elements described by Jacobowitz and Brunette are employed to evoke interiority. As we have seen, Jacobowitz talks of *Stromboli* documenting 'the experience of displacement' through an 'experiential landscape', whereas Brunette describes how Edmund's vulnerability and isolation are suggested by the 'barely standing buildings' that overshadow him. A more thorough analysis of Rossellini's interest in expressing interiority will likely account for the presence of these melodramatic elements and their synthesis with other aspects of style associated with 'realism', such as hand-held camera, and location filmmaking. There is no better way of beginning this process than by considering a film such as *Voyage to Italy*, for it is

concerned with the influence of a particular social and cultural environment over the thoughts and feelings of its characters.

Interiority and its World

The importance of Italy's culture and environments to *Voyage to Italy* is evident from the film's scenario. An English couple, Alex (George Sanders) and Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) Joyce,[7] travel to Italy to sell a recently inherited property. During their time in Italy – which is largely taken up by sightseeing and socialising – their marriage collapses. The couple's estrangement from one another seems exacerbated by Katherine's solitary visits to The National Gallery, the "little Vesuvio," and the Cumaean Sybil. Meanwhile, Alex's sojourn to Capri, which comes about through his frustration at Katherine's 'pilgrimages' to places mentioned by a former suitor, culminates with two aborted attempts at infidelity. However, at the end of the film, after having agreed to divorce, the couple are taken to excavations at Pompeii, in which they witness the shape of intertwined bodies of a couple emerge from the mud. On their way home, the couple become overwhelmed by a religious procession, and amidst cries of 'miracle!' suddenly find their way back to each other. So central is place to the film that Rossellini has described the film as charting 'variations in the relationships of a couple who are undergoing the influence of a third personage: the outside world around them.'[8]

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that *Voyage to Italy* shares with *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967) and *Le Rayon Vert* (Eric Rohmer, 1986) a concern with establishing the autonomy of the world in which characters are placed, a world which is ordinary (in the sense of not being 'fantastic'). Like those other films, it also expresses the interiority of its central characters through their relationship with that world. Its difference from the other films is in the nature of that relationship. Whereas Mouchette's (Nadine Nortier) interiority and the physical world she inhabits are often inseparable, despite that world's autonomy, and whereas Delphine's (Marie

Rivière) interiority is often enclosed, stifled behind a barrier of introspection that blocks experience of the world in which she lives, the interiorities of the central characters (particularly Katherine) in *Voyage to Italy* are continually influenced and, in the end, overwhelmed, by the world they inhabit.

The film's expression of interiority, as with both *Mouchette* and *The Green Ray*, operates primarily through the relationship between environment and character. This relationship is dynamic: our understanding of the thoughts and feelings of (particularly) Katherine shapes our experience of the world in which she is placed (we often view the world 'through' her responses), and our experience of that world contributes to our understanding of those thoughts and feelings. This echoes the dynamic between Katherine's thoughts and feelings and her experience of the world: her thoughts and feelings are frequently influenced by her experience of the world, and yet that experience is shaped by her thoughts and feelings. Tag Gallagher stresses the influence of the characters over our perception of the environment in Rossellini's films, and in doing so brings the relationship between character and environment to our attention:

> Rossellini amplifies the range of his characters' sensations, whose heightened presence excites the filmic world they inhabit. Streets, landscapes, rooms, and objects, though straightforwardly photographed, shimmer on the screen not as "mere reality" but as romance. This is what is meant by "expressionism" or "melodrama".[9]

In the case of *Voyage to Italy*, at least, it is preferable to consider the film's world as *both* reality and romance. But Gallagher's point regarding the implied expressionism and melodrama that comes from the relationship between character and world is important, and elaborates Jacobowitz's point mentioned earlier. As we shall see, an autonomous, ordinary, world is used to evoke heightened, melodramatic states, and becomes transformed in the process.

A Mutual Unknownness

The importance of environment is evident from the opening sequence. Gallagher summarises the sequence's effect:

> In any movie, a shot from a car speeding down a highway is smooth. In *Voyage in Italy* it bounces and wobbles – and it's the first shot in the film – with the result that, even while we protest such technical "amateurishness," we sense a specific road, in a specific countryside: a road not merely *seen*, passively, but actively and physically imposing itself upon us – disconcertingly, like the statues later.[10]

The opening sequence's immediate context and editing contributes to its disconcerting effect. The opening credits precede the sequence, produced in an elegant, serif typeface, and accompanied by the singing of a lilting Neapolitan song. These credits, which last several minutes, lull us into the expectation of a film that matches their orderliness and conventionality. This exacerbates the shocking skid into the film's opening shot – the view through a car windscreen of a bumpy ride along a vacant road – just after the singer launches an unexpectedly sustained high note. Once the song winds to an emphatic close, the film cuts to a train passing in the opposite direction; the train's screeching whistle is mixed unnaturally loud and close. It is then that we are introduced to the Joyces: Katherine driving in her glamorous fake-leopard-skin coat, with Alex dozing in his suit. The monotonous buzz of the Bentley's engine protrudes into the soundtrack, an insistent presence throughout much of this sequence. Our swift and unsteady movement from the neat

flatness of the credits to the shaking, barren road, from the melody of the song to the screech of a whistle, sensitises us to the contours of the environment in a way calculated to unsettle. We are thrust into a world that is presented in an unfamiliar fashion, and it is too early in the film to account for this unfamiliarity. Our aggravated sensitivity, and our alertness to the need to make sense of what we are experiencing, allows us to share the Joyces' confusion, and instructs us to attend equally to the characters and to the mood and tone of the environment.

The Joyces' confusion is exacerbated by their realisation of their depth of unknownness to each other. The film has the distinction of showing that realisation dawn on both characters, a process that is begun in this opening sequence. In this sequence, the featurelessness of the road, its lack of distraction, appears to shear the Joyces' relationship of all insulation; their thin togetherness is stretched to breaking point by the monotony of their journey along this long, largely flat and straight road, a road that sometimes appears to stretch to infinity. Gallagher notes how deep the couples' emerging uncertainties reach:

> In *Voyage in Italy* almost everything Katherine and Alex do in the opening scenes traces increasing dissolution of selfhood. Their switching [car] seats should mark mutual support. But supports are in jeopardy, falling away. Her horror at insect blood [on the windscreen] marks her vulnerability to life; his horror at the speed [of an Italian driver] marks his. Countless imponderables – awkward intonations, blurted phrases, hesitations, uncertainties in carriage and gesture – lead us everywhere to sense their growing awareness that they don't know what to do next – with each other, with themselves, in all the tiny small things of life that ground their existence. They begin to doubt they know who they are. As the film begins, they have already begun their voyage through the most elaborate of Rossellini's mazes.[11]

If the pressure of the relentless, unfamiliar banality of their environment acts as a catalyst for the couple's realisation that they are unknown to each other, it is not until later in the sequence that this realisation truly surfaces. Alex refers to the 'Lewis case', the work he finished before leaving England. This reference infuriates Katherine (we later learn that Alex talks insistently of work). She pauses, her

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thoughts galloping ahead, before suddenly exclaiming, 'Oh, what a pity John and Dorothy couldn't come with us.' Alex readily agrees. The film returns to a shot through the car's windscreen, the couple encased in glass and steel, a vertical strut of the windscreen separating the two.

A series of undramatic shots extend an uncomfortable silence (passing scenery, close-ups of the two characters gazing through the windscreen). The featurelessness of their environment and the whining of the engine are evidently inadequate distractions from discomfort. Without distraction, the couple's attention falls upon the nature of their relationship. It is Alex who breaks the silence:

> Alex: If only you'd listened to me we could have come by plane, we'd have been back home a week ago.
>
> Katherine: But I wanted you to take a rest. It didn't occur to me that it would be so boring for you to be alone with me.
>
> Alex: What's that got to do with it? I'm just bored because I've got nothing to do.

It is at this point that Katherine attempts to shift the conversation's perspective, moving away from confrontation of the other into contemplation of *their* situation: 'This is the first time we've been really alone since we were married,' she says, in a dreamy tone. For the first time during this exchange, Alex takes his eyes of the road to look at her. We might think he is about to pursue this shift, develop this contemplation, but he refuses, returning his eyes to the road and recovering his bored, slightly hostile, fractious, tone. 'Yes, I suppose it is,' he replies, blocking the

observation with literalness – a literalness that resonates with the road's refusal to permit any hint of romance. The discovery of their mutual unknownness through *this* conversation does not lead directly to a discovery of *each other*, a renewed or deepened intimacy. For Alex's inability or refusal to acknowledge Katherine's musings, and Katherine's inability to let go of the hurt this causes her, generates habits of talking and experiencing which ensure the other is obscured.

This kind of unknownness is particularly difficult to portray, for it is founded on subtleties of simmering resentment and disregard that are casual, and possibly unconscious, but recurring day after day. The complexity of the causes of this unknownness means that the film must express it through such fragile phenomena as failures to engage with one another, disagreements amplified by self-absorption and mistrust. We can see the film contend with such difficulties in the sequence that follows Alex and Katherine's arrival at a hotel on the way to Homer's villa. In this sequence, the film shows their self-concern lead inexorably to unyielding and unfruitful confrontation. An earlier ellipse plays an important part in this achievement: after the conversation described above the film dissolves to a shot of passing scenery at night, and a short while later they arrive at the hotel. This compression of time allows the slighting of Katherine to remain as fresh to us as it does to her – it remains a part of their ongoing conversation, even though hours have passed. With this in mind, when we see Katherine making up her face in the hotel mirror we see this action in relation to the couple's recent estrangement from one another; the action's privacy, which is emphasised by a camera position that is close to Katherine, comes to the fore. Yet it remains credible that Alex would understand this action very differently, perhaps even as a small romantic gesture (he does not yet know she wishes to go to the bar), which explains his suggestion that they have a drink together. Thus the clash of two different perspectives is expressed, creating the expectation of impending conflict.

When the conflict comes, the couple's habitual decorum ensures it is restrained. But the film's integration of performance and editing turns this restraint to its expressive

advantage. Alex asks, 'Shall we have something to drink?' And Katherine's answer blocks his invitation with a veiled dig: 'Yes, but not here,' she says, 'let's go down to the bar. At least there'll be some other *people* around.' Her face moves into and out of sight as she speaks those lines, a well-timed cut bringing her sardonic smile, which caps the sentence, pointedly into full view. This smile underscores that she is here responding to Alex's earlier dismissal, rather than to his more recent question. She has missed, or chosen to ignore, Alex's conciliatory tone in this sequence. Their conversation eventually reaches a potential point of contact, when Alex suggests that 'Now that we're strangers we can start all over again at the beginning. Might be rather amusing don't you think?' But that 'rather amusing' lacks the seriousness Katherine requires, and tempts her with a dismissal of her own: 'Let's go down to the bar.' The restraint of this conflict, its operation through digs and dismissals, expresses anger held in check, as well as ensuring that their unknownness remains firm.

We can see from this sequence that Katherine is articulate and in a relationship that has some small potential for providing acknowledgement – but problems and resentments on both sides stifle this potential, not least her failure to know *him*. In this regard, she differs from some of the other unknown women discussed in this thesis (such as Mouchette). Yet her unknownness is also suffered, something she wishes to escape, something which is also caused by Alex's failure to know *her*. Katherine does not consciously will her unknownness, unlike Mika in *Merci pour le Chocolat* (Claude Chabrol, 2000). And she is, we sense, knowable, capable of finding and expressing her thoughts and feelings; she has not yet become unknown to both herself and others, as we may suspect of Monica Vitti's Claudia in *L'avventura*. Perhaps she is closest to Delphine in *The Green Ray* in the sense that she is pre-occupied with herself in a way that obstructs the acknowledgement she requires (a requirement that self-defeatingly fuels her pre-occupation). Yet the possibility of that acknowledgement remains for both Alex and Katherine; the problem is that each repeatedly fails to acknowledge the other. To present this relationship to us without a hint of contrivance (the couple do not labour under a

crude misunderstanding of each other or unfounded suspicions) is undoubtedly a major part of the film's achievement.

Interrupted Thoughts

The couples' realisation of their mutual unknownness to each other deepens as the film continues. One key moment in which this deepening takes place occurs later on in the film, when Katherine returns to Homer's villa from visiting the National Museum. The couple sit around an open fire, drinking together. The words she uses to describe the sensuousness of the sculptures are prim and academic: 'What struck me was the complete lack of modesty with which everything is expressed; there was absolutely no attempt...'. This mode of communication appears to be familiar and welcome to both characters, rather than a snub to marital intimacy. It appears that it hasn't occurred to either character to develop a way of speaking private to the marriage, founded on the accretions of unspoken understanding we might expect to develop between a couple that have been together for eight years. In Italy, theirs is a mode of conversation that is not allowed to last. Mr Burton interrupts to mention that one of Homer's friends called for them earlier. This interruption brings to an end a conversation that promised togetherness, albeit of a somewhat artificial kind, and returns them both to states of uncertainty.

A few moments later, and another interruption provokes a new, or previously unexpressed, thought in Katherine. Alex sits at the dining table, while Katherine

heats a pan of oil. The couple discuss the people that came earlier to look at the house: 'What kind of people were they?' asks Katherine. 'Rather talkative,' replies Alex. This discussion, which also offers the possibility of coming together through poking fun at Italian sensibilities, is interrupted by the sound of a babble of raised voices from outside the house. Startled, Katherine rushes to the window with Alex following steadily behind. The view onto the ground below shows the parting of two people amidst a crowd. Mrs Burton calls up to the window with an apologetic explanation: 'They're getting married in a week and they're always fighting – it's jealousy'. Alex responds with characteristic disbelief, claiming to find it strange that one could be jealous *before* marriage. This is a response to the incongruity of the interruption, its expression of passion and rage. By asserting the strangeness of the interruption, Alex attempts to deny the echo of the Italian couple's confrontation with his and Katherine's difficulties – most particularly, to defend his stilted conversation with his wife from the rebuke implicit in the interruption's passionate exchange. Katherine's response is rather different, the Italian couple's confrontation inspires her to say, 'Well the time just before marriage is a very delicate one.' This thought has none of the rote quality of her earlier question to Alex; it is fresh and fertile, a thought that has found the right moment for its voicing. Perhaps as important is its metonymic quality: we realise (as does Alex) that such a thought arises with others, or from a way of thinking, and as such implies a region of Katherine's mind that has hitherto gone largely unexpressed.

The point at which this sequence ends is exemplary in finding closure in confusion. Katherine rushes back to the pan of oil. Alex is stirred by Katherine's observation;

perhaps it repeats in his mind ('Well the time just before marriage is a very delicate one'). He stays at the window for a few seconds, looking pensive, confused. He wanders back to his seat, keeping his eyes on Katherine as if determined to conquer his perplexity but unsure as to how this could be accomplished. (He could ask her to say more, but that might increase his perplexity.) The film is no less interested in Katherine's observation, and we are no less struck by it. But the film is prepared to let it remain richly suggestive, and to acknowledge its ambiguous significance – and thereby acknowledge Katherine's unknownness. As Alex sits, staring at Katherine, the film dissolves into the next sequence, allowing the mystery of Katherine's interiority to seep into the remainder of the film, to form an enigmatic background to our encounters with her. In this way, the film finds a conclusion in confusion, a conclusion to go on searching and considering rather than to wrap up and finish off this line of thinking about Katherine (as Alex seems to desire).

This sequence's use of interruptions is shared with many other moments in the film. Katherine, in particular, often suffers interruptions and interjections from her surroundings, or from the people who populate those surroundings. These interruptions typically prevent her thoughts from running their course, forcing thoughts to be broken off, fragmented, and aborted. As a consequence, these interruptions maintain a discordant, at times antagonistic, relationship between Katherine and her environment. This is exemplified by the sequences in which Katherine is led around tourist sites by dyspeptic guides; these guides direct her wanderings, lead her to look at different things, and often to look at them differently, with the brisk pace of someone who has seen it all before a thousand times. The manner in which these guides lead Katherine – the harsh, terse tone of their directions ('over here lady') – often break into Katherine's contemplations before her own response can fully form or find expression. Yet there are also many moments, such as the one discussed above, in which a series of interruptions from outside provoke new thoughts or expressions in Katherine, as well as close down older, more familiar, patterns of thinking and talking.

Deepening Influence and Isolation

Although Alex and Katherine are mutually unknown, the film is much more concerned with Katherine's interiority than with Alex's, despite our accompanying Alex on his dalliance in Capri. This may in part be because Alex's superior and self-assured manner appears to withstand the pressures of the environment and the strangeness of the situation, at least until the film's end. In any case, it is primarily through Katherine that the film charts the development of feelings of isolation from others and from the Italian environments, along with the increasing influence of those environments upon thoughts and feelings.[12]

Importantly, Katherine's interiority is shown to be profoundly affected by the change in environment while remaining separate from that environment. She remains both separate and responsive, for the film finds ways to express her responses without overwhelming the autonomy of the outside world – ways that affirm the world's ontological *independence* from Katherine's view of it (what we might call its autonomy), even while our understanding of Katherine's interiority is derived from the world's presentation onscreen. This achievement can be observed in the sequence a little earlier in the film in which Katherine drives to the National Museum. Her separateness from the world is expressed by showing her alone in the car,[13] with the outside world passing by as if on a screen.[14] She is further distanced by her dark glasses, which almost conceal her eyes, and the camera's position: we are in medium close-up, which allows the crescent of the Bentley's large steering wheel to jut out into the foreground, presenting a barrier between us. As she drives she mutters complaints about her husband to herself: 'I hate him... The brute.' She looks out past the camera at the street, her breath shallow, her lips set firm. Interspersed with this view of her are shots of the streetlife: a cut catches a bus as it passes by, its growling engine breaking the silence established by the Bentley's sealed interior. These shots, while not being precisely from her point of view, are clearly associated with her views of the passing world. At the same time, they are

bursts of reportage; shots in which Katherine is entirely absent, shots which are so rich with movement, light and texture, so evidently filmed in a simple, almost naïve, way (the camera shakes, the pans are unsteady, the compositions are raucous) from the passenger seat of a car cruising the streets that the importance of what they document, and the fact that they are documents, comes to the fore.

However, such documents, placed in particular contexts, are also extremely evocative of the nature of her thoughts. She hammers the car's horn, and a cut presents us with a shot of a collection of pedestrians, among which is a nun, scampering to safety. A look to Katherine's left is juxtaposed with a shot of two nuns walking down the street; and shortly after, the camera follows another senior member of the church as he passes in front of the car. The uniformed religiosity of her environment appears in a dynamic relationship with her thoughts: 'He thinks he understands life,' she murmurs angrily to herself, 'He ought to be punished for his pride, his self-assurance'. (Punished by whom? God? The Church? Is she coming to recognise his, and perhaps her own, lack of spiritual understanding of life? Or is she finding Alex's stiffened attitude reflected in these figures of the church?) We cannot be sure of the degree to which her thoughts are influenced by what she sees; for it remains unanswerable whether our view of the world reflects the selectivity of her subjectivity, or whether the world is prompting her mind. But in either case, the world and her thoughts are clearly closely related to each other; while what she sees remains a fact, remains independent of her mind, even as we are brought to read it in terms of her verbalised thoughts. André Bazin famously admired the way that Rossellini's films could consist of documents of reality and yet be richly

significant.[15] In this passage we can see the skill of this achievement, the editing's maintenance of an equilibrium between the shot in isolation, its documentary qualities and status, and its significance in context, its part in an evocation of interiority. José Luis Guarner makes a similar point:

> *Viaggio in Italia* uses the *contrechamp* [point-of-view shots] with great originality, not to give a subjective view of the character's field of vision…but as the objective picture of a piece of reality which is at that time affecting the character. In this sense the film is the culmination of an effort started in *Germania, anno zero* to show how environment can work imperceptibly on a human being.[16]

Even when Katherine becomes more engaged with, and less resistant to, what she sees and hears, the film retains her separateness, showing that her engagement is still the engagement of someone looking on, someone experiencing herself as separate from the world. This is particularly apparent when Katherine takes the car on another journey, this time to the Cumaean Sybil. The journey is filmed in a similar fashion, alternating shots of Katherine with shots from the car of the surrounding street-life, but a different rhythm of editing is employed.

As she drives she mutters to herself, 'To Capri, to have a good time,' commenting on the note left by Alex in which he announced his departure for Capri. Once again we view Katherine from through the car windscreen, but this time she is closer, and without the barrier of sunglasses. The comparative openness of her face is enhanced by the even and strong light with which it is lit. The sounds of singing and shouting

from the street permeate the car, along with shadows cast from outside – all of which suggests a diminishing of the boundary between the Bentley and the streets it negotiates. Yet despite having become closer to the world, she remains wrapped in angry thoughts of Alex ('If he thinks he can make me jealous...') until she is interrupted by the sight of something. The film cuts to approximately her optical point of view; we look through the windscreen, over the bonnet, towards a funeral procession. The shot is held for around ten seconds. This is long enough for the splendour of the carriage carrying the coffin, and the spectacle of grieving friends and relatives to emerge. With the emergence of this spectacle, our sense of the shot representing Katherine's view begins to fade. Our interest in the procession itself, in its story, in the fact of it, begins to take hold, just as it does for Katherine. Consequently, this entry into Katherine's interiority is also an entry into the wonder of the world. The moment presents the continuity between Katherine's thoughts and her environment. The distinction becomes erased, interiority and environment become aspects of the same whole, rather than interiority taking over the environment, changing its ontology. (As with Mouchette's death, and Delphine's walk in Cherbourg, this fusion of interiority and exteriority has the effect of diminishing the distinction, so that what is internal and so strongly individuated and delimited also appears to infuse the world. This possibility of film is exploited more fully by *Persona* [Ingmar Bergman, 1966], as we shall see.)

Uncovering Emptiness

The sequence ends with a similar pattern of shots. Katherine peers out and shots of the street follow; this time it is images of birth that catch her eye (or lead her thoughts), specifically pregnant women. The last shot of the sequence is another extreme-close-up of Katherine looking attentively at her surroundings. The shot is held for approximately ten seconds, and to similar effect; what begins as a reminder of the presence of Katherine's interiority shades into wonder at the physicality and blankness of her face. Her expression is less judgemental than usual, her eyes wide,

her skin almost luminescent – she appears newly innocent, almost reborn. Her initial, disturbed expression brought on by the presence of death and the beginnings of life – which reminds us of her turning away from her life, the most fundamental turning away, that of a denial of its beginning and end – has ceased.

It is consequently difficult here to determine her mood and the tone of her thoughts. The loosening of the connection between the shots from her point of view and her contemplation of the sights abstracts her from her own perspective. I am reminded here of Eric Rohmer's view that Rossellini's

> actors do not behave like the actors in other films, except in the sense that their gestures and attitudes are common to all human beings, but they urge us to look for something else behind this behaviour, something other than what our natural role as spectators would prompt us to recognize. The old relationship between the sign and the idea is shattered: in its place there emerges a new and disconcerting one.[17]

Rohmer is right to observe the urge to look behind behaviour, but what does that urge, if followed, reveal? In this case, at least, it reveals nothing but a very human emptiness, her reflexive responses having fallen away. We move beyond character to her forever nascent awareness or aliveness. This process of looking behind and seeing nothing may, of course, be disturbing, something we resist. It is, I think, with something like this resistance in mind that Gallagher writes:

Rossellini's minimal direction of actors – his tendency to structure their environment rather than their characterization – had resulted in the "global" non-interpretations that so pleased [Amédée] Ayfre. Nonetheless his art lay in our sense that characters were not mannequins but true individuals. Their "signs" always indicated desperation, yearning, inner voids that, frighteningly, could evidence that *our own self-hood* is nothing but self-delusion socially conditioned.[18]

Submersion and Separation

Katherine's engagement with her surroundings culminates with moments in which she is emotionally overwhelmed by what she sees and hears. This is particularly noticeable during various visits to tourist sites, such as the visit to the catacombs late on in the film, which she undertakes with Mrs Burton. Non-diegetic, 'melodramatic' music is a vital part of this expression of her experience. Katherine enters the catacombs accompanied by a piano's pounding bass notes, walking up and down a handful of notes before steadily descending. The effect is to suggest that the place has an immediate physiological effect on Katherine, that it raises her blood pressure, strains her alertness. The music retains this link with Katherine's movement around the catacombs, and her resultant state of mind. She looks furtively about her, and catches a view of a sculptural tomb, a carved stone body in pain (as a brass chord surges) and then looks away to recompose herself (the chord rushing to a standstill). A similar pattern of intervals, now dischordantly harmonised, continue to play, but are transposed to a loftier octave, and played on flutes or some kind of woodwind. Katherine spies an entrance into another room and leads Mrs Burton through the catacomb. But as she does so louder, more insistent brass instruments overwhelm the lightness of the flutes, playing a related set of harmonies that are not cyclical but which descend, with formality and certainty, striding to an emphatic closing chord. This chord comes just after Katherine and Mrs Burton enter a second room, and accompanies a panning close-up over three long lines of human skulls running parallel to each other, looking like an audience of the deceased. The chord diminishes in volume, and we see Katherine slowing to a stop in front of the skulls.

Mrs Burton anxiously checks Katherine's response. A piano offers a further, tumbling descent to a deeper chord. The rise and fall of the music evokes Katherine's private response to what she sees. We are left with the recognition of how far Katherine has become vulnerable to the influences of such environments.
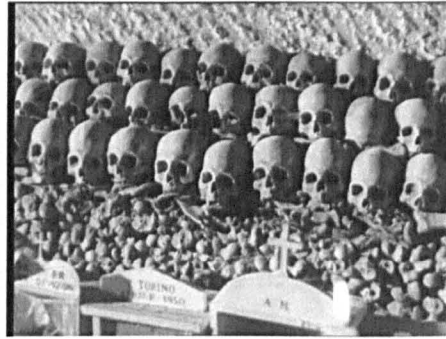
Here we see how an expressionistic element is used to heighten our appreciation of Katherine's emotional state. This is, of course, a conventional use of music, often found in melodrama. What is interesting is that here the independence of the music from the diegesis, the film's fictional world, is an important part of its expression. For it reaffirms Katherine's sense of separateness from the vivid facts that overwhelm her, which allows this overwhelming to appear unwelcome and disturbing, a threat to her. In addition, the camera's suggestion of subjectivity in the panning close-up of the skulls is balanced by longer shots which document Katherine's place in this environment. These shots help to prevent conflation of the film's perspective with Katherine's, something non-diegetic music sometimes implies. Consequently, Katherine's responses remain her own, even as they are also part of the reality with which the film is concerned.

Part of the reason why this sequence works so well is that it embodies a sophisticated conception of realism, rather than an incoherent breaking from it. In this sequence, as elsewhere in the film, 'reality' is shown to *include* mental states; it is not understood as something beyond them. In this sense, *Voyage to Italy*, can justifiably be termed 'realist', even 'neo-realist'. Gallagher elaborates this view:

"Neo-realism." Rossellini declared, "consists in following a person...through all their discoveries, all their impressions." Thus the disconcertion over *Una voce umana* and *Il miracolo* is quite understandable. They *are* inquiries into private worlds. The characters do pursue the private obsessions beyond the limits of everyday sanity – into shame. The social application of their experience is difficult to grasp. The illumination Rossellini's heroes experience is not a sense of themselves as agents of their class or community but, as Croce would prefer, a sense of their individuality as a poetic impulse opening to new, original experience. "Thoughts are the shadows of our sensations – always darker, emptier, simpler," wrote Nietzsche. For Rossellini or Croce, such illumination encounters reality; but for many social realists, it is merely mysticism, an "evasion" of actual social problems.[19]

Miraculous Experience

A short while later than the sequence in the catacombs, immediately after Katherine and Alex, in the heat of an argument, decide to divorce, Mr Burton insists that they accompany him to the archaeological excavations in Pompeii. At the archaeological site Katherine breaks down in tears at the sight of plaster casts of a man and a woman, who 'may have found death like this together', emerging from the ground. Alex and Katherine hurriedly make their excuses and leave. On the way home from Pompeii, the couple run into a religious street procession which blocks their path – the final, in a long series, of impediments to their movements, rhyming with the cattle that fill the road in the film's opening sequence. This marks the beginning of the film's final sequence, a sequence that attempts to combine an expression of the environment having a miraculous influence on both Katherine and Alex's feelings, while also being experienced as intensely unfamiliar and disorientating by both characters.

This combination is achieved partly by showing that the experience of being isolated in an unfamiliar environment is a vital part of the miraculous influence. The couple exit the car in order to get a better view of the procession as it passes. Once out of the car, and in amongst a throng of Italians, their difference from those around them

emphasises their togetherness. The couple's feelings of isolation are voiced in a conversation in which an observation of the crowd's religiosity is juxtaposed with an attempt at beginning their reconciliation:

> Alex: How can they believe in that? They're like a bunch of children.
>
> Katherine: Children are happy... Alex, I don't want you to hate me, I don't want it to finish this way.
>
> Alex: Oh Katherine, what are you driving at? What game are you trying to play? You've never understood me. You've never even tried. And now this nonsense. What is it you want?
>
> Katherine: Nothing. I despise you.

It is the physical separation of the couple by the crowd that appears to generate a desire in Alex to recover his wife. As if made uncomfortable by the threat of togetherness he first attempts to return to the car ('Well come on, let's get out of this crowd') only for a stream of people to surge forward, following the cries of 'miracle!'. Katherine is pushed away from Alex; she calls to him, waving her hand, like someone drowning. The shots of Katherine struggling against the tide, her face just visible amid the melee, evoke Alex's fresh perspective: the imminent danger of losing Katherine to the ungovernable surges of Italy.

The intensity with which this perspective is felt is expressed through intercutting between shots of Katherine and Alex returning to each other with

shots of the surrounding miracles: we see an old man holding his eyes to his face, his head raised upwards in praise of God, and after the couple embrace, and exchange loving words, we see a man waving crutches above his head, celebrating his sudden recovery of the use of his legs. It appears from this that the rush of feeling that presumably leads up to the couple's embrace is generated from the religious fervour and the unbounded sense of possibility about them. In an interview over a decade after the film's release, Rossellini claims that it shows 'sudden, total isolation' and a rush and clinging to the nearest person available that can mitigate that isolation. He goes on:

> It struck me that the only way a rapprochement could come about was through the couple finding themselves complete strangers to everyone else. You feel a terrible stranger in every way when you find yourself alone in a sea of people of a different height. It's as if you were naked. It's logical that someone who finds himself naked should try to cover himself up.[20]

Perhaps bowled over by the intensity of this ending, many critics have passed over the particularity of the final shots. Peter Bondanella is one critic who attempts an interpretation of these shots, drawing on the same interview with Rossellini quoted above. He argues that Rossellini's comments

> leave no doubt that the director did not see the sudden epiphany at the close of the film as the final word in the relationship of the English couple. That this is the case may also be deduced from the fact that it is not the embrace that ends the film but, instead, a rather inconsequential shot of a member of the village band, as if the director meant to undermine any obviously positive interpretation of the couple's reconciliation.[21]

Bondanella is right to note that the film doesn't end quite as triumphantly as it could, but he errs in calling the final shot 'inconsequential'. If we place the film's final shots in the context of our earlier discussion of realism and melodrama their significance emerges more clearly. To begin with, the invocation of melodrama brings to our attention the surge in volume of the band's music at the exact moment

of Alex and Katherine's final, passionate embrace. This surge in the music's volume amplifies the melodramatic quality of the moment, our sense that the couple have (temporarily?) relinquished their defences, are falling into each other again. Yet because the music is a part of the fictional world, its raising in volume suggests that their embrace of each other brings the world closer, as if it was also an embrace of the world, an opening up to their surroundings through an opening up to each other, resulting in an amplification of the environment's presence. With this in mind, the film's final shot provides a vital reminder of the diegetic source of the music, which ensures that we don't take the music's emphasis as an affirmation of the truth of the sentiment on display but rather as an indication of the couple's deepened immersion in the world about them, and a confirmation of that world's influence on the moment. This marks the apogee of both the film's melodrama and its realism, its demonstration that the two meet when engagement with the world, and those in it, reaches a heightened intensity.[22]

[1] Rohmer, Eric. et al. 'Interviews with Roberto Rossellini' in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*. Ed. Jim Hillier. Trans. Liz Heron. Harvard U P: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985 [1951-1959], p. 216.

[2] Roberto Rossellini's (born Rome, Italy, 1906, died in 1977) fifth feature film, *Roma, città aperta* (1945) is often considered to be the film that initiated Italian neo-realism. Neo-realism has been described in various ways: as a style (the use of location shooting, non-professional actors, colloquial dialogue, and so on), an attitude, and as an ethical position regarding the situation of ordinary, working people. As *Roma* features professional actors, and melodramatic figures, it is questionable whether its status as the first neo-realist film is deserved. The two films that follow, *Paisà* (1946) and *Germania, anno zero* (1947), make up Rossellini's so-called 'War Trilogy', and are all often thought of as neo-realist, despite

the objections of some Marxist critics and the latter film's stress on the interiority of an individual young boy. (Andre Bazin wrote a famous defence of Rossellini in 1955 which celebrates his films as neo-realist works, redefining that generic category in the process.) From 1949 to 1953 Rossellini worked with Ingrid Bergman (who became his wife) to produce a number of films, including three major works, *Stromboli* (1949), *Europa '51* (1952), and *Viaggio in Italia* (1953). These films were celebrated by critics in *Cahiers du Cinema*, but criticized elsewhere (particularly in Italy), often on the basis that Rossellini was betraying neo-realism. Later in his career, Rossellini turned to television, producing many works of documentary and cultural history. Like Bresson, Rossellini had a considerable influence on the *Cahiers* group (and hence the French Nouvelle Vague), and his mid-period work remains a touchstone for a particular kind of achievement in film.

[3] Jacobowitz, Florence. 'Rewriting Realism: Bergman and Rossellini in Europe 1949-1955' *Cineaction* 41 (October 1996), pp. 25-6.

[4] Brunette, Peter. 'Rossellini and Cinematic Realism' *Cinema Journal* 25: 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 38-9.

[5] According to Tag Gallagher, melodramatic or expressionistic elements are present in much of neo-realism:

> "Neo-realist" movies generally had plot, script, professional actors, dramatization, studio sets and lighting, and elaborate montage. Rossellini was famous for his ellipses, not his respect for real time. Rather than slices of daily life, neo-realist movies emphasized privileged, melodramatic moments. (Gallagher, Tag. *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini: His Life and Films*. Cambridge MA: Da Capo, 1998, p. 267.)

[6] Brunette, pp. 41-2. Emphasis in original.

[7] The Joyces have a relative called 'Homer'; and the memory of an old lover, who has since died, divides the couple. In these, and other, respects, the film participates in a network of allusions to mythical pasts and modernist literature, such as 'The Dead' section of *Dubliners*, and *Ulysses*. For more information on this aspect of the film, read Sandro Bernardi's. 'Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History' in *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*. Eds. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: British Film Institute, 2000, pp. 50-63.

[8] Quoted in Gallagher, p. 407.

[9] Gallagher, pp. 298-299.

[10] Ibid., p. 411. Emphasis in original.

[11] Ibid., pp. 406-7.

[12] Some of the film's interest in the relationship between interiority and environment is taken up by *Le Rayon Vert*, a film which is, of course, directed by Eric Rohmer, one of the most vocal champions of Rossellini's cinema. *Le Rayon Vert* is particularly concerned with the relationship between *attention* to the world and emotional clarity, or inattention and

emotional confusion. In *Voyage to Italy*, it is the environment's influence over Katherine, a power that becomes increasingly overwhelming that is of importance.

[13] We might think of the arguments between Katherine and Alex concerning the use of the car in the context of the role of the car in keeping Italy at a distance.

[14] As the camera does not shake, and few shadows fall into the car from outside, it is possible that the world *is* on a screen – that back-projection is being used.

[15] See his article 'In Defense of Rossellini' in *What is Cinema? Vol II*. Trans. Hugh Gray. University of California Press: Berkley, Los Angeles and London, 1972 [1971], pp. 93-101.

[16] Guarner, José Luis. *Roberto Rossellini*. London: Studio Vista, 1970, p. 60.

[17] Rohmer. Eric, 'The Land of Miracles' in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*. Ed. Jim Hillier. Trans. Liz Heron. Harvard U P: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985 [1951-1959], pp. 205-6.

[18] Gallagher, p. 406. Emphasis in original.

[19] Ibid., p. 301.

[20] Rossellini, Roberto. *My Method: Writings and Interviews*. New York: Marsilio,1995, pp. 153-4.

[21] Bondanella, p. 111.

[22] Adrian Martin suggests that moments such as this are perhaps the films' greatest legacy. He writes:

> Maybe this is the authentically Rossellinian aspect of some great, contemporary films: when they build to that strange, mysterious instant which leaves both the characters and us stunned, reeling - transformed but not yet able to articulate the structure and sense of that transformation. It is enough to live this miracle, however confusedly, enough to feel the power of the wave, to know at last that you, and the world around you, has begun to change. Rossellini's cinema is about the moment of revitalisation, on every conceivable level, personal as well as social. That moment of potential rebirth - and the need for it - will never be over for any of us living creatures. (Martin, Adrian. 'Always a window: Tag Gallagher's Rossellini'. *Screening the Past* [2000], http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/shorts/reviews/rev0300/ambr9a.ht m, 20th September, 2006.)

6. Performed Interiority: *L'avventura*

Ignorance of myself is something I must work at; it is something studied, like a dead language.

- Stanley Cavell [1]

Clarity and Ambiguity

For Ian Cameron,[2] the expression of thoughts and feelings in *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni,[3] 1960) is both clear and precise. He claims that through making the film Antonioni

> was coming to grips with the problem of communicating to an audience the feelings of the characters without recourse to interior monologue when their spoken words rarely went further than providing clues. Eschewing the use of audience identification, he realised that evidence had to be presented of mental states, and this he provided with the utmost clarity. [...] Antonioni is trying to *describe* the characters' emotions through their behaviour. He uses the camera to present the behaviour so that we will interpret it in a specific way, and be able to correlate our interpretations into a general conclusion. [...] Antonioni...has realized that it is impossible to communicate the 'interior drama' directly without the intervention of exterior drama – action or behaviour or dialogue – the evidence through which we recognize emotion in others.[4]

Peter Brunette offers a similar view when he claims that the film's use of 'gestures, expression and – most important – abstract means such as line and color' to depict interiority is part of the film's 'rigorous formalism that was utterly new to mainstream cinema in 1960'.[5] Brunette goes on to admire in passing 'the often stunning visual compositions of long hallways' which he calls 'an almost perfect example of what T.S. Eliot called an "objective correlative," that is, a symbolic formal substitution to describe an inner emotional state'.[6]

These are, perhaps, controversial views to hold about a film that is famed for its ambiguity. Perhaps the most famous example of an opposing understanding of Antonioni's work is Roland Barthes' celebrated essay 'Dear Antonioni...'. In this essay, Barthes celebrates Antonioni's refusal to 'fix' and 'impose' meaning, arguing that Antonioni's 'art consists in always leaving the road of meaning open and as if undecided – out of scrupulousness.' [7] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in his BFI Classic on the film, offers a view of interiority in *L'avventura* which is in accordance with Barthes's understanding. While acknowledging that 'Antonioni's way of looking in *L'avventura* is marked by a certain externality,' he notes that:

> The character's feelings are not directly expressed, whether in the dialogue or through the efforts of performance. An idea of what these feelings might be emerges from the way the characters are viewed and the way they are seen to react to what they themselves are shown to be seeing. If a sense of uncertainty pervades the relationships between the characters, it is because nothing is ever confirmed. [8]

The notion that we gather only an 'idea' of the characters' feelings implicitly disputes the clarity of meaning identified by Cameron and implied by Brunette's observations. For Nowell-Smith, it seems, we arrive at only a general impression of what the characters feel. His stress on indirect and cumulative expression is far removed from Cameron's stress on the film's description of emotion through the presentation of behaviour, particularly when we recall that for Cameron this presentation is precise enough to ensure a 'specific' interpretation is arrived at, one that contributes to a 'general conclusion' regarding each character's inner life. (The extremity of Cameron's view becomes clear when he claims that *L'avventura* is 'an extremely unambiguous movie'. He goes on to assert that 'The one mystery which remains unresolved – Anna's disappearance – stays that way because it does for the characters. The mystery is of where she went rather than why she went.')[9] In this regard, these two critical positions are irreconcilable.

This chapter finds Cameron's view that the inner lives of the film's characters are determinable (that we can know what they think and feel) to be unsustainable. But it

also considers his identification of a certain precision and clarity in the film's handling of interiority to be importantly suggestive. The question is how this can be so when the contents of those interiorities remain fundamentally ambiguous, or to put it another way, what aspects of the characters' interiorities are ambiguous, and what aspects are clearly and precisely delineated. In this way, a degree of reconciliation between the two critical positions may be possible. To answer these questions it is necessary to examine the film's expression of interiority in a more sustained and detailed fashion than any of the aforementioned studies provide. This chapter provides such an examination.

Performing Feeling

Although Cameron understands the film to convey thoughts and feelings through behaviour, he tends to consider behaviour in broad terms (as complete actions) frequently ignoring the specificities of performance (the manner in which those actions are undertaken). This is a problem, for the film often uses performance to call into question the relationship between a character's inner life and his or her behaviour. Consider, for example, the following sequence which takes place on the morning after Anna's (Lea Massari) disappearance. Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) and the sole inhabitant of the island, a weathered and aged man, hear a boat pass the volcanic island. Sandro grabs the islander and demands to know whose boat it is. The islander's reply, 'Lot's of boats around summer,' renders Sandro's intensity faintly ridiculous. With a push and a pull, Sandro shakes the islander just enough to make the old man teeter backwards on the rocky surface. This demonstration of anger and frustration has a control that suggests a distance between the expression of emotion and the feeling of it. If Sandro is angry, as these actions suggest, he hasn't succumbed to that feeling. We do not see his anger; at best his actions *indicate* his emotional state rather than manifest it.

Yet if this is posturing – displaying an emotion that isn't felt but needs, for some reason, to be displayed – it is also a mode of expression that is too ingrained and

habitual to appear mere pretence; Sandro's expression of emotion is consistently controlled throughout the film. There is no 'sincere' expression of emotion against which this expression becomes 'insincere'. This becomes clearer when we consider how he expresses his attraction to Claudia – an attraction that we have little reason to doubt. After his confrontation with the islander, Sandro spots Claudia as she looks for somewhere to bathe. He appears in the background while she washes her face in a shallow rock-pool, perching himself on a nearby rock. His unseen arrival calculatedly intrudes upon this private act of bathing. The reason for this intrusiveness is explicitly declared after Claudia stumbles as she attempts to walk past him, her attention apparently fixed on the uneven, harsh terrain. He catches her arm as she tries to recover her balance, exploiting this intimacy with a provocative look. This look towards Claudia is close to a leer, and prefigures the male, predatory stares from the men of Noto that Claudia is subjected to later in the film. It is a look that risks little, that substitutes a revelation of sexual desire, and all the vulnerability that entails, with a caricature of that desire, curdled with a show of arrogance. Even though we have no particular reason to doubt that Sandro feels desire for Claudia, his signalling, rather than revealing, of that desire prevents the moment from offering any benchmark for 'sincerity'.

Gabriele Ferzetti's incarnation of Sandro is certainly integral to the film's handling of interiority. But it is Monica Vitti's performance as Claudia that most refines our understanding of the place of feelings in the film. When she washes herself in the rock-pool, for example, she cups her hands, scoops water to her face; then repeats the action, ending it by pressing and holding her wet hand to her forehead. Following this, she raises her head upwards, the camera reframing to capture her

composed, yet dishevelled, hair – luxuriously thick, swirling curls of blonde – against the brooding sky. She looks to her hands, flicks her fingers dry, looks to the sky, her mouth open and expectant, retrieves a hanky. We may be tempted to dismiss this performance as overly mannered, asserting its own precision. This temptation is to be avoided, however, for once we come to realise that *Claudia* – as well as Vitti – is performing, we come to understand that the overt precision of the performance expresses a self-consciousness that retards the flow of movement, an intervening, momentary, consideration of both the feelings to be expressed and the form of their expression. This is not to say that Claudia does not feel the emotions she performs (she may) but rather to recognise that the emotion expressed and the feeling that might be felt have become estranged from one another – that we cannot tell from her behaviour what she feels. It is only her self-consciousness that is revealed at this moment. (When viewed in this way, we come to realise that Vitti's performance is finely judged.)

Of course, performance works in combination with other elements to express this aspect of interiority. For example, if we return to the moment in which Claudia stumbles, it becomes clearer how much camera position and editing contribute to this effect of self-consciousness. Disturbed and attracted by Sandro's attentions, Claudia leaves the area by moving towards him, her attention apparently fixed on the uneven, harsh terrain. Sandro shifts slightly to let her pass. Claudia's stumble is followed by a cut that takes us behind Sandro, looking over his shoulder towards Claudia. Sandro and Claudia have switched places in the frame, and the dense volcanic rock has largely dropped away, replaced by expansive sky. The symmetry and timing of this switch is pointedly exact; the cut marks the shift in register that

results from Claudia's slip with a declaration of the camera's moment-by-moment choice of position. This self-consciousness is in accord with Claudia's evident lack of spontaneity, reminding us that her slip is a product of her self-absorption, regardless of whether we understand that absorption as *distracting* from her ability to maintain balance, or as having become a device that allows her to contrive an 'accident' that brings her within reach of Sandro.

Claudia expresses a heightened emotional state in response to Sandro's touch, but even this expression takes the form of a performance. Her face wears an expression of worry and fright, mixed with interest and concern.[10] She retrieves her hand slowly and hesitantly, allowing Sandro to lightly clasp to this small contact. She looks at Sandro; looks away; tugs at her coat, which is draped around her shoulders, and then looks back. Claudia's performance becomes fragmented and sporadic as she flits between expressions. Importantly, this heightening of emotion – from mild distraction to interest and worry – does not result in a revelation of what Claudia is feeling. This is not a theatrical *manifestation* of feeling, unlike, say, Stella Dallas's (Barbara Stanwyck) melodramatic expressions of distress. For it is evident from Claudia's fitful resistance to settling on an expression, as if unsure what she should be expressing, that her consciousness intervenes, masking and mediating her feelings. Perhaps her self-control is too habitual, too necessary, to be relinquished. Whatever the reason, the persistence of this control sustains her substitution of the expression of feelings for the performance of emotion, keeping those feelings from fully emerging into the world.

Already we can see our way to elaborating and qualifying the positions taken by Cameron and Nowell-Smith on interiority in *L'avventura*. In the light of Sandro's signalling of desire, his earlier performance of anger, and Claudia's self-consciousness, her performances of distress, Cameron's assumption that we can confidently interpret the characters' inner lives from their actions and behaviour is placed in doubt. This leads us to sympathise with Nowell-Smith's view that we only acquire an idea of what the characters may be feeling, and that their feelings are 'not directly expressed' and remain unconfirmed. However, Nowell-Smith's stress on the ambiguity or uncertainty surrounding the characters' feelings ignores the precision with which those feelings are performed, something to which Cameron is alert. In one sense, the film's description of feeling *is* precise – states of interiority are *precisely* performed or signalled by the characters. Such precision is certainly revealing of aspects of interiority, of an abiding self-consciousness and a particular internal relationship to emotions, but it is not revealing of the emotions themselves.

This internal relationship emerges more clearly when we recall Cavell's idea, examined in Chapter Two, that a certain kind of passivity assists the process of becoming known – that we become known by letting ourselves be known, rather than by imposing a picture of ourselves upon others. Given that in *L'avventura* the failure of emotional expression typically takes the form of a performance of feeling, and hence an expression of self-control, we might understand these characters as lacking the willingness to risk exposure, thwarted by the frightened desire to precisely control what is expressed. Importantly, this has consequences for our understanding of their inner lives. For a lack of expression of what one feels, when it is persistent or complete, is a form of avoiding acknowledgement of one's feelings.[11] Espen Hammer notes Cavell's understanding of the consequences of this:

> According to Cavell...the logic of acknowledgement extends to and is equally significant for understanding first-person cases. Just as knowledge of the other's pain finds expression in our behavior, so the recognition of our own pain finds behavioral expression. A refusal to give expression to one's own pain would therefore in the end be tantamount to not knowing it...[12]

Positions of Enquiry

One of the dangers inherent in presenting characters who perform interiority is that we may become reluctant to think of those characters as having interiority at all. For it is easy for characters which display or perform emotion to appear to be *without* emotion, and hence dehumanized or stripped of personhood, an implication that would be disastrous for a film that wishes to present characters who are opaque to themselves, who lack self-knowledge. *L'avventura* often avoids this implication by placing the camera in positions that pose questions regarding the thoughts and feelings of the film's characters (a related technique is adopted for similar reasons in *Merci pour le Chocolat* [Claude Chabrol, 2000]). An example of this occurs early on in the film when Claudia is forced to wait outside Sandro's apartment while he and Anna are reunited. Anna enters the bedroom, slips off her dress and pivots to meet Sandro's embrace. We see this embrace from the foot of the bed; the baroque, ornate bed-frame dominates the composition, jutting in from the right, stretching almost as high as the two figures it encloses. A cut takes us to the other side of the couple, pushing the bed-frame to the margins of the frame and opening out the space.

Sandro's broad back and the back of his head are rooted in the middle of the frame; Anna wraps herself around him (facing the camera), scrutinises his face and strokes and pets the back of his head. Behind her – just visible through a window which looks out onto the street – we can see Claudia, still waiting outside, swinging her bag. The camera's position guides us to certain speculative questions regarding Sandro's thoughts and feelings – is he distracted by Claudia's presence? Is he

wishing to signal to Claudia that she may have longer to wait? Is he simply wishing to seal the privacy of the bedroom? This invited investigation cannot be concluded for his interiority is, at this moment, explicitly unreachable (he is turned away from us). Yet by inviting speculation about his interiority the film leads us to assume its existence.

The following shot offers a similar invitation. A cut abruptly banishes us from the intimacy of the bedroom, and the angle of our view is reversed: Claudia is now in the foreground, also turned away from us. We look in the same direction as Claudia, following what we imagine to be her gaze to Sandro, who can just be seen in the background, framed by the bedroom windows. Sandro pulls one of the curtains to the right and Claudia's weight shifts in the same direction, her body settling into a slightly unbalanced stance. The shot is held for a moment, suspending and sustaining the ambiguity of Claudia's movement: does it suggest resignation, boredom, mild annoyance or none or all of these? This ambiguity is increased by our inability to see her face. In this way, the film poses the question of Claudia's feelings at the same time as assuring that those feelings will remain private, unreachable. [13] We are invited to investigate this character's interiority, but not to conclude our investigation.

Breaking Emotional Convention

Placing Claudia's and Sandro's avoidances or failures of emotional expression in context helps to draw out their significance. From early on in *L'avventura*, when

Anna and Claudia arrive at Sandro's home, we are made aware of social pressure to display conventional and 'appropriate' emotional responses. Claudia assumes that Anna will rush to see Sandro – she is late for their reunion – but instead Anna heads towards a nearby café for a drink. Claudia is alarmed by Anna's behaviour. Her protest takes the form of a description of Anna's situation – that she hasn't seen Sandro for a month, and that he awaits her – as if that was enough to urge a particular response, the reunion. As Anna's interiority is much more transparent than any other character's, when she twists back to look towards Sandro's home, apparently in response to Claudia's urging, we can see the glimmer of interest raised by Claudia's words falter at the thought of entering the building and seeing Sandro again. 'I feel as if I'd rather not see him today,' says Anna. This meets with more resistance from Claudia, but of a different kind. 'But we hurried here...' is quickly followed by a switch in attitude towards mock-sorrow and playful petulance: 'so it's bye-bye cruise,' says Claudia, swinging her handbag. These responses refuse to see Anna's actions as a manifestation of disturbing feelings, preferring to view them as nothing more than further evidence of her capriciousness and selfishness. It appears that it doesn't cross Claudia's mind that Anna might suddenly be wary of re-joining Sandro, she so strongly holds the expectation that Anna *should* wish to see her boyfriend after all this time.

This is confirmed by Claudia's unnerved bewilderment at Anna's explanation of her emotional state. 'It's torture to be apart...' says Anna. Claudia springs round to face Anna, shocked by the severity of her words. Anna's explanation continues in an earnest register quite different from her more usual sulky, uncommitted responses. The imploring quality of this speech is amplified by the repetition of the word 'understand?' (*'capisci?'*). Yet Claudia shows no signs of understanding – for much of Anna's justification of her emotional response to this situation Claudia is silent and out of the frame, or has her back to the camera.

As this small moment suggests, despite Anna's evident selfishness (she thinks only of *her* feelings, it seems), Anna is exemplary in one way: she is aware of what she

feels, and changes in what she feels, from moment to moment. Indeed, her selfishness helps the film demonstrate that awareness, as it means that she acts in accordance with those feelings, manifests them unquestioningly. This willingness to allow no separation between action and feeling, and this *un*willingness to perform the feelings that convention or consideration obligates, is shown by her spontaneous response to Sandro's call ('I'll be right down') from the window. His appearance, and the sound of his voice, it seems, changes much, although it is difficult to say whether it arouses her interest or concern. In any case, she doesn't wait for him to descend, or make her escape, as she was about to do, but swiftly enters his home to meet him.

All that follows confirms Anna's spontaneity, largely through Massari's ability to convey sensual, instinctive responses through movement. When she enters Sandro's home he grips her cheeks with his hand, bringing her lips to his. The effect of his commanding, dominant, gesture is to solicit her attention. She responds by taking him in from close quarters, cautiously, intuitively. There is no assumption here that Sandro is the same person he was, that his laying claim to her has any foundation. Instead, she re-assesses him. She walks away before turning to stare back at him, as if trying to find a more perspicuous viewpoint. At the same time, she pays a similar attention to this newly-unfamiliar habitat. Her handbag is dropped onto a nearby coffee-table where it rattles an ashtray, announcing her immediate and total claim to this territory. She makes her way to the balcony, opens the doors, and raises herself onto her toes to breathe in the air, completing this motion of re-acquaintance. Similarly, moments later she brushes past the curtains, caresses the wall, and then rests her hand on a bar that runs across the room, leaving her touch behind, as she slinks past Sandro and into the bedroom. Her spontaneity, disregard for convention, and perhaps selfishness, are encapsulated in her silent unbuttoning of her dress, and its confident appeal for sex, while Claudia awaits downstairs. (In this way, Anna – but I think Anna alone – corroborates Cameron's claim that the feelings and urges of the film's characters are directly manifested in behaviour.)

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Anna's evident awareness of changes in her feelings has an important relationship to her eventual disappearance. This relationship is implicitly addressed when Anna discusses her feelings with Sandro on the islandic rock, Lisca Bianca, early on in the film. The conversation climaxes with Anna's declaration of a wish to be alone, which is followed by an acknowledgement of the distress that would bring her: 'The idea of losing you makes me want to die,' she says, before adding, 'and yet...I don't feel you anymore'. This is close to an acknowledgement of a lived scepticism in regards of Sandro, a failure to truly or consistently respond to him as another person, with an inner life rich with thoughts and feelings of his own. Significantly, his response neither acknowledges nor denies the lack of an emotional connection between them. Instead, it transposes the question of a connection to the question of Anna's sexual satisfaction, vulgarising Anna's metaphor with a reference to the pleasure of their lovemaking the previous day ('Didn't you feel me yesterday?'). This reference to Anna's bodily pleasure and sensation betrays the extremity of his scepticism – that the registers he responds to, that count for him, are registers of physical and physiological responses, and nothing more.[14] We may wonder why this is so, and this may lead us to speculate that the question of whether he feels *her* anymore is lost to him, unanswerable; hence, perhaps, his claim that words – which under normal circumstances would likely play a major part in such characters coming to feel one another once more – have become unimportant. When Anna drops out of this world never to return the film implies the impossibility of such a person as Anna living in a milieu populated by people who are unknown to themselves, who collectively distract themselves from that unknownness, and therefore people for whom the question of unknownness to others has long since languished, become unasked.[15] (We know Anna is strongly influenced by Sandro's presence, for she says to Claudia, in regards to her relationship with him: 'When someone's in front of you, that's everything there is...'.)

This gives us some understanding of the significance of Anna's disappearance, but it also leads us to appreciate the purpose of that disappearance for the film as a whole. This purpose derives from the profound uncertainty it generates in the other

characters. For her disappearance is mysterious, despite her argument with Sandro – she may have committed suicide, died accidentally, or she may have deliberately disappeared. This mysteriousness leaves those left behind in an unusual and ambiguous situation – should they grieve, become angry, or worry, to name a few possible responses? Matters are particularly difficult for Claudia and Sandro, who become the centre of attention for the group Anna leaves behind, without knowing what is expected of them. What should they do? How should they respond? Most importantly, what should they feel now that Anna has disappeared? This last question becomes still more difficult to answer when Claudia and Sandro become attracted to each other, which explains Claudia's repeated exclamations that she is confused. The root of this problem is their difficulty in *knowing* what they feel in this situation, a difficulty that the unfamiliarity of the situation uncovers. (Social convention is of little help for them now.) This understanding of the film is in accordance with Antonioni's view. He is quoted as saying:

> I wanted to show that sentiments which convention and rhetoric have encouraged us to regard as having a kind of definite weight and absolute duration, can in fact be fragile, vulnerable, subject to change. Man deceives himself when he hasn't courage enough to allow for new dimensions in emotional matters – his loves, regrets, states of mind – just as he allows for them in the field of technology.[16]

Landscapes of Unknownness

> [T]he landscape is a component of primary importance. I felt the need to break up the action by inserting, in a good many sequences, shots which could seem banal or of a documentary nature (a whirlwind, the sea, dolphins, etc.). But in fact these shots are essential because they help the idea of the film: the observation of a state of affairs. We live today in a period of extreme instability, as much political, moral, and social as physical. I have made a film on the instability of the emotions, on their mysteries.
>
> - Antonioni [17]

By having Anna disappear from a social milieu characterised by isolation and unknownness into a natural, elemental landscape – she is swallowed by the roaring wind and sea surrounding Lisca Bianca – the film implies that such a landscape offers something very different, possibly even a corrective to life in that milieu. Certainly, the film's juxtaposition of Claudia's performances of feeling and the emotionally evocative landscape on the Lisca Bianca provides an importantly expressive contrast. A good example of this occurs during the sequence inside the hut on Lisca Bianca. The islander, who lives in the hut, mentions that a lamb of his fell from the cliffs nearby. Claudia's distress at hearing this information has a familiar exactness and fragmentation. She looks angrily at Sandro, throws down her coat, then steps away from him, looking out towards the door, her breathing shallow and flat. Sandro turns towards her, and her eyes dart in his direction once again; she moves once more, this time out of the door and into the pouring rain. When she reaches the top of a nearby ridge, she bellows out 'Anna!' into the vast sea and sky before her, the last syllable falling into anguish, drowned out by a rumble of thunder, as her sodden head falls into her hands.
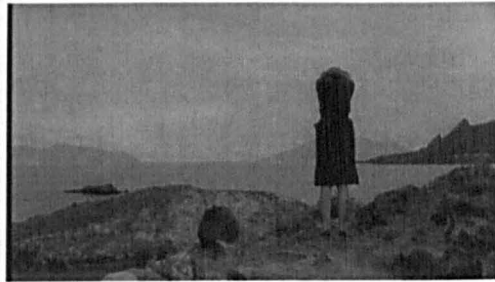
The rain-swept, barren, landscape in which she stands has a complex relationship to her interiority, a complexity that many critics are unprepared to acknowledge [18] – this is not simply a case of pathetic fallacy, of the weather and the landscape providing a picture of Claudia's emotional state. Granted, the elemental exteriority suggests the passions and drives that may be stirring, that exist in the world and presumably in Claudia. But her performance of anguish appears all the more a conscious display when set against such an unadorned and uncontrolled background.

This reminds us that Claudia's passions and drives are largely unexpressed and unacknowledged – that they are, at best, signalled, indicated or performed. Seen in this way, the rain's flattening of her buoyant and styled hair, its dampening of her elegant dress, physically manifests the landscape's implicit rebuke at her affectedness.

Claudia's wish to enter into the wind and the rain at this moment, though, is part of a significant pattern that runs for the rest of the film's duration. William Arrowsmith charts Claudia's relationship to what he terms the 'organic life':

> Just before Anna disappears, she seals her decision – whatever her decision is – by putting her blouse into Claudia's bag. The blouse is dark and interwoven with what seems to me a network, or tracing, of leaves. These leaves are the link – the organic link – between the two women; Anna gives Claudia an amulet of leaves. [...] [Also,] when Claudia dances in ecstasy to the music of the sound truck outside, we see her framed by a screen of leaves, to which the camera keeps returning. [...] And finally, at the ending...when Claudia comes up behind Sandro, sitting on the bench, weeping, we see her look at the leaves trembling in the dawn breeze, and then a shot of the leaves, only the leaves. As if she had to touch something that stirred in herself before being able to confront Sandro.[19]

Although for Arrowsmith, Claudia is the principal character that 'keeps in touch with this organic life', in the context of our discussion this seems unlikely, and the fact that it is Anna who leaves this 'amulet of leaves' becomes particularly significant.[20] We might understand Anna's complimenting of Claudia when wearing the blouse, and her gift of it, as a way of encouraging Claudia to re-examine her relationship with the natural world, and thereby her relationship with aspects of herself to which she is estranged. Arrowsmith elaborates on what those aspects might be:

> ...I see no harm, and some advantage, in calling the leaves an affinity with the organic, with the organic life of earth that is prior to us and therefore, like our past or our instincts, our affinities with animal and plant, still living in us, whether we acknowledge them or not. It is also

the life of our feelings, the feelings which are prior to our reasons and logic, and, lacking rapport with which, our rational life, our wills, even our faith in life, are poor and stunted. Without this organic sense, we do not know ourselves, we cannot reach or act upon our feelings. Our grasp of reality is prosthetic, enabled by instruments at a remove, it is not ten-fingered. We have no sense of inner quiet, or tranquility, unless we can touch the leaf life, the plant beneath the animal in us. We cannot know ourselves. Worse, we cannot *be* ourselves.[21]

This complex relationship between Claudia and the natural world is encapsulated in one of the moments Arrowsmith picks out in the first quotation: the moment at the end of the film when she contemplates the swaying leaves of a nearby tree. Unfortunately, Arrowsmith's description of the moment is inaccurate.[22] There is no shot 'of only the leaves', as if from her point of view. The shot he is presumably thinking of is *dominated* by the leaves, but Claudia is also in the frame. In fairness to Arrowsmith, however, although the shot may not depict her point of view, it does provide an image in which Claudia is shown to be in harmony with the natural world. Claudia stands to the far right of the frame, her hair's movement in the wind echoing the swaying of the leaves, the blackness of the top she wears echoing the tree's trunk. Meanwhile, the slightly overcast sky makes the shades of grey across the frame fairly uniform, which flattens the distance between Claudia and the leaves. In addition, her visual anonymity reduces our appreciation of her individuality, which enhances the overall appearance of her absorption into the environment.

My dispute with Arrowsmith comes when he suggests that this is a moment in which Claudia touches something 'that stirred in herself', that it is a moment of deep self-reflection. His implicit argument seems to be that Claudia here feels an affinity with

the organic life and through that affinity can reach her feelings, can know herself. But does she feel such an affinity? How do we know? This image, in which she echoes and blends with the swaying leaves, is also an image of privacy. It invites us to speculate about Claudia's thoughts and feelings (in a similar way to the moment in which she waits for Anna and Sandro) but it does not reveal them. Indeed, her merging with the trees makes Claudia become, for us, for a short moment, a part of the unspeaking landscape, a landscape that resists fixed significance. This merging may show us that an affinity between Claudia and the 'organic life' is possible, even hint that she desires it, but it does not show that this affinity is felt by Claudia. An aspect of the shot Arrowsmith omits to mention is crucial in this regard: Claudia views the leaves from the railings surrounding the raised car park in which she stands. In this respect, the moment is a late example of a pattern that runs throughout the film in which we view Claudia from behind as she views the landscape that surrounds her from windows and balconies. Because of this, we know Claudia to be at a distance from what she views, even though that distance is obscured (the composition places the railings out of view). She looks *at* 'the organic life'; she is not *in* it or a part of it. It is the camera's position – our position – that suggests an alternative possibility and that allows our understanding of Claudia's predicament to outstrip her own.

This interpretation acquires a greater weight, I think, when the film returns to Claudia a few moments later, and she cries in medium-close-up. Here Claudia once more performs distress – a performance that is framed as theatrical by the perfection of her whitened face and outlined eyes, against the blank backdrop of the sky. When she hears Sandro approach she self-consciously looks to one side, then the other, in a play of consternation. This effect is enhanced by a lack of fit between the sounds of her sobs and our view of her crying (presumably the sound was overdubbed). Claudia's display of distress suggests she remains unable to acknowledge her own feelings, remains unsure of what those feelings are. This reassertion of a gap between Claudia's feelings and her behaviour makes it difficult to understand the

earlier shot as a moment in which she was in touch with feelings, a moment of successful self-reflection.

In any case, the film ends in a way that suggests Claudia either lacks Anna's capacity to acknowledge and act upon her own feelings, or lacks the capacity to recognise and respond to the reality of her situation. The film's narrative organisation plays its part in this, for although it is often claimed that the film lacks resolution,[23] it closes on a moment in which the relationships between Sandro, Claudia and Anna have decisively shifted. Sandro's affair (or *avventura*) with Gloria is significant in this regard, in that it places Claudia in the position of being the abandoned girlfriend, rather than mistress to Sandro and a substitution for Anna. In Claudia's adoption of Anna's old relationship to Sandro, and the film's return to the sea (we see Claudia gaze out at it when she looks for Sandro, and the sound of waves runs through the final sequence), the film implies a resumption or a repeat of the state of affairs at which Anna disappeared. Unlike Anna, though, Claudia chooses to forgive and return to Sandro, despite it being apparent to us – as it was to Anna – that a relationship with him and a life among his friends will confine her to unknownness and isolation.

The film's music confirms that this reconciliation with Sandro seals Claudia's sorrowful confinement. When she stands behind Sandro, wondering whether to reach out to him, we hear a clarinet repeat a mournful, falling, resigned, cadence, as Claudia's head drops and she looks to her hand. The film cuts to a close-up of her pale hand against the darkness of Sandro's jacket. The size of her hand in the frame, and its visibility against the jacket, amplifies her signalling of deliberations: she raises her hand in starts and stops, flexes her fingers one way, then another, before allowing her hand to fall once more, its fall underscored with the clarinet sounding a bass note. When the film returns us to a view of Claudia's head-and-shoulders, alone against the rooftop of an old building and an expanse of sky, the unaccompanied tones of this clarinet reminds us of her isolation, her wish to be with someone, to be integrated into the world through company, through being known. In this context,

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when she reaches out to Sandro to ruffle his hair, and the music underscores the moment with a rich chord of woodwind, and a high-pitched percussive, ringing sound, a moment of connection is suggested. But the grating, unsatisfying nature of this connection emerges as the music continues, and the other instruments follow the clarinet's series of angular cadences, scoring clashing parallel stripes. As the series of cadences comes to an end the music builds in volume and thickness, the pulse of a drum bangs the beat of a frightened heart, and the music ends with a repeated, emphatic, suspended chord, burdened with tension.

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[1] Cavell, Stanley. *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy.* Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 385.

[2] The book in which he writes is co-authored by Robin Wood, but Cameron takes credit for the chapters on Antonioni's black-and-white films.

[3] Michelangelo Antonioni (born in Ferrara, Italy, 1912) began his filmmaking career by writing screenplays for such notable filmmakers as Roberto Rossellini and Marcel Carné. He became a feature filmmaker after neo-realism's heyday in 1950 with *Cronaca di un Amore*, but it wasn't until 1960 that he rose to prominence. The events that followed the first showing of *L'avventura* (1960) at the Cannes Film Festival give an indication of the aesthetically controversial nature of Antonioni's contributions to the development of European cinema. Famously, the film was heckled and booed during the screening, only for a group of critics and filmmakers to issue a supporting statement on its behalf the following morning. (In the end the film won a special award at the festival 'for its search for a new cinematic language and for the beauty of its images'.) Antonioni's working relationship with Monica Vitti, which began in *L'avventura*, proved very productive. She features in his next film, *La Notte* (1961), in which Jeanne Moreau stars, and shares double-billing with Alain Delon in *L'Eclisse* (1962); she also plays the central character in *Il Deserto rosso* (1964), the film that is sometimes said to complete Antonioni's 'Monica Vitti Quartet' (although the latter film is in colour, and many consider the film to mark the beginning of a new era in Antonioni's filmmaking). Antonioni went on to work in England, where he made *Blow Up* (1966), which clearly influenced both *The Conversation* (1974) and the John Travolta vehicle *Blow Out* (1981). Antonioni also went to the United States to make *Zabriskie Point* (1970), and *The Passenger* (1975), which starred Jack Nicholson. His last major film to date is *Identification of a Woman* (1982), after which he suffered a stroke. Despite ill health, however, Antonioni continues to make films with the help of others, most notably Wim Wenders, with whom he co-directed *Beyond the Clouds* (1995).

[4] Cameron, Ian & Robin Wood. *Antonioni.* London: Studio Vista, 1968, pp. 6, 8.

[5] Brunette, Peter. *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 10.

[6] Ibid., p. 39. It is possible Brunette may contest this relationship with Cameron's work, for it is unclear to what degree he thinks we acquire a specific and detailed understanding of each character's inner life. His interest largely lies in other aspects of the film, such as its self-reflexivity. However, the rhetoric he uses in his brief comments – e.g. he talks of 'a symbolic formal substitution to describe an inner emotional state' – strongly implies an affinity with Cameron's view.

[7] From Barthes's 'Dear Antonioni' which appears in the appendix of Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's monograph *L'avventura*. London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 65.

[8] Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. *L'avventura*. London: British Film Institute, 1997, p. 46.

[9] Cameron & Wood, p. 6.

[10] Monica Vitti's physiognomy is perhaps perfectly suited to such a performance, for the features of her face are widely set, which leaves her facial expression slightly abstracted.

[11] In a powerful passage in *Claim of Reason*, Cavell writes:

> [S]aying that I cannot just not know myself amounts to saying that I am the one who is fated to have, or to begin with, an average knowledge of myself. And doesn't this amount to saying that I am the one who is fated to keep myself in a certain (average) ignorance of myself? What is the form of this ignorance, an ignorance of something I cannot just not know? Is it to be thought of as keeping a secret? But in what form can I keep a secret from myself, keep silent? To keep silent around myself I have to silence myself; I keep myself in the dark by darkening myself. Presumably I would not come to treat myself as dark unless others had treated me so. And presumably they would not have treated me so unless they so treat themselves. – But isn't "being dark to oneself", like "someone else's being opaque to oneself", nothing but a picture? – If being blind to oneself or to others is nothing but a picture. The aspect to which I am blind is dark to me. The figure of which it is an aspect is opaque to me. (If I can darken myself, can I enlighten myself? The news of those conversant with the subject seems to be that I cannot. If I give over darkening myself the result will be my enlightenment.) (Cavell, 1979, p. 388.)

[12] Hammer, Espen. *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002, p. 65. It is intriguing to note that Antonioni struggles to articulate a very similar idea in his introduction to the screenplays of the Monica Vitti Trilogy. He tells the following story in order to illustrate his view that 'the world today is filled more with dead feelings than with live ones.'

> A man is in love with a woman who does not reciprocate. The woman doesn't even know it. Nobody knows it. The man suffers in silence, without mentioning it to anyone, without letting out a single hint of what is happening to him. His life goes along as though that feeling did not exist. I wonder whether it isn't

true that that feeling doesn't exist until the time someone discovers it. (Antonioni, Michelangelo. *Screenplays*. London: Souvenir Press, 1963: xii.)

[13] It is common in *L'avventura* to show Claudia turned away from the camera, particularly during moments in which we may wonder what she is thinking or feeling.

[14] This moment brings to mind Cavell's taking of

> the existence or occurrence of the woman's satisfaction (the satisfaction of our feminine side?) as the essential object or event of the skeptical question: Is she satisfied and is the satisfaction directed to me? There is no satisfaction for me (my masculine side) apart from a favorable conclusion here; it is a conclusion that must be conferred, given, not one that I can cause or determine on the basis of my senses. My senses go out; satisfaction happens in my absence, only in it, by it. To elicit this gift, the extreme claim of male activeness, thus requires the man's acceptance of his absolute passiveness. (Cavell, Stanley. *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 34-5.)

[15] That we never discover her to have found somewhere else to live, a different milieu, prevents the film from implying that there is such a thing as escape from her predicament, given the time and culture in which she lives.

[16] Quoted in Cameron & Wood, p. 22.

[17] Antonioni, quoted in Cameron & Wood, p. 25-6.

[18] When interpreting such moments, Cameron tends to understand the relationship as a mirroring – he mentions a 'visual parallel' between the 'instability of the elements' and the characters' interiorities (25-6).

[19] Arrowsmith, William. *Antonioni: The Poet of Images*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 45.

[20] Close inspection of the blouse suggests that Arrowsmith may be mistaken to claim that its design includes leaves, it is difficult to tell conclusively; it is probably safer to claim only that its design consists of natural shapes, geometrically ordered.

[21] Arrowsmith, p. 46.

[22] The book from which these quotations were taken was posthumously published from a variety of sources, including handwritten manuscripts, dating back some years. This may partially account for the mistake.

[23] Cameron writes 'Structurally the film is remarkable for its almost complete lack of resolution...' (9)

7. Pervasive Interiority: *Persona*

> It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with.
>
> - Stanley Cavell [1]

Psychoanalysing *Persona*

The articles on *Persona* (1966) that are most interested in its concern with the mind – if not specifically *interiority* – typically understand the film to be an expression of 'a neurotic problem'[2] suffered by its director, Ingmar Bergman.[3] These studies find support for such an interpretation in what they take to be the film's surreptitious depiction of the psychoanalytic process.[4] Göran Persson is particularly emphatic in this regard, arguing that the section of the film in which Elisabet (Liv Ullmann) listens attentively to Nurse Alma's (Bibi Andersson) long monologues presents 'the paradigm of psychoanalysis, with Elisabet as the analyst, and Alma as the analysand.'[5] However, for Persson, and indeed P. Adams Sitney, it is not just that particular passage of the film that charts the therapeutic process. Sitney puts it most succinctly when he states that 'the entire film reflects the perspective of a patient in psychoanalysis'.[6]

These accounts have the virtue of referring to the film's totality – all of the film's events and passages receive some attention – but the vice of ignoring the richness of many of its sequences. In Sitney's essay, this problem can be traced to the decision to consider Alma and Elisabet as '"masks" for a very different drama than the one we seem to be witnessing during most of the film'.[7] This 'different drama' is presumably the drama of the psychoanalytic process, in which, according to Sitney, Bergman explores 'the sources of his cinematic creativity'.[8] Persson makes a similar interpretative decision – for much of his analysis he takes Alma to be Bergman's proxy – but comes to a different diagnosis, arguing that the film as a whole

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expresses Bergman's confrontation of 'a basic, great and intense conflict in himself, between a belief that he has to merge with others or with something greater in order to remain in existence, and the necessity to develop a separate identity.' [9] The problem is that in treating Alma and Elisabet as 'masks' or proxies or symbols of some kind, and the film as a collection of symptoms from which to make a diagnosis, the specificity of the drama that unfolds between these two characters becomes an unwelcome distraction, something to get *past* (or *un*mask). Consequently, the film's nuanced and sustained evocations of the interiorities of Elisabet and Alma, which are a significant part of this drama, are largely ignored.[10]

The uncertainty regarding which sequences depict reality and which fantasy also receives insufficient attention by both writers. For Persson, the significance of this uncertainty lies primarily in what he takes to be its evocation of the experience of being analysed. He claims that after a breakthrough in analysis 'The experiences during the analytic hours then periodically tend to lose their clear demarcations: it is…not clear what happened in reality, and what was only wished for, or dreamt, and what is a combination.' [11] By interpreting the film's depiction of a projector-breakdown as representing Alma's (and hence Bergman's) breakthrough in analysis, he is able to claim that the confusion of reality and fantasy that follows contributes to the film's 'admirably exact and clear' demonstration of 'how…analytic experiences are structured.' [12] This allows him to quickly dispense with this confusion without considering its specificity or its relationship with the rest of the film. This is a problem, for the film's interest in the relationship between fantasy and reality is sustained – it is not confined to the film's second half as he implies.

Sitney goes further, encouraging us to 'resign [our] efforts to distinguish between reality and fantasy or dream in the central story of the film' in order to 'get at the content of the analysis, the neurotic problem', arguing that 'equal "psychological" status' should be given to 'the interruptive frame story' and the drama between Elisabet and Alma.[13] However, it is not clear that we can 'resign' those efforts (in the sense of ignoring the confusion) without also resigning our efforts to understand

the film. For granting an 'equal "psychological" status' to the film's entirety does not clarify the relationship between reality and fantasy in the film's central story, it only transposes the confusion into a 'mental universe', postponing, but not dispelling, our interpretative difficulty. Susan Sontag was among the first to point this out. She describes why such a critical move is ineffective:

> *Within* the structure of what is shown, the elements continue being related to each other in the ways that might have led the viewer to settle for supposing some events to be "real" and others visionary (whether dream, fantasy, hallucination or extra-worldly visitation). [...] These discordant internal relations are only transposed, intact, when the whole film is relocated in the mind.[14]

Of course, Sitney may wish to cease attempting to distinguish between reality and fantasy in the relevant sequences for a different reason: because the film makes it impossible to distinguish between the two with much confidence. However, this lack of confidence, this impossibility, is itself much more significant than he credits. It is the result of a complex and ambiguous relationship between fantasy and reality, a relationship that should not be obscured by the application of a global 'psychological' status. This is confirmed by the views of many other commentators. Stanley Cavell (following Elliot Rubinstein's reading of *Belle de Jour* [Luis Buñuel, 1967]), for example, argues persuasively that the film's 'procedure of unmarked juxtapositions of reality with some opposition to reality', and its maintenance of 'the irresolution of them, through to the end' is central to the film's achievement.[15]

Ironically, then, some of the essays and articles most interested in *Persona*'s concern with the mind approach the film in a way that obscures its expression of the interiorities of its characters, and sidelines its examination of experience. In order to explicate more fully this concern of the film, this chapter takes a different approach, focusing on the relationship the film draws between fantasy and reality, drawing out 'the details of psychological insight manifest in [its] *mise-en-scène*', [16] and examining the metaphoric power of the film's allusions to filmmaking, and their contribution to the film's understanding of interiority.

Conceptions of Unknownness

Persona differs from all the other films in this thesis insofar as it offers two candidates for the role of the 'unknown woman': the voluntarily-mute actress, Elisabet, and her psychiatric nurse, Alma. Elisabet's unknownness is perhaps the most striking. We learn that she ceased to talk onstage during a performance of Euripides' *Electra*, and has not spoken since. It appears she understands all self-expression (including expressions of thought and feeling) to be inevitably inauthentic. Her refusal to speak is perhaps best understood as a declaration of her belief in the inevitability of unknownness, an attempt to acknowledge it and thereby salvage some sense of integrity. In contrast, Alma's unknownness is initially less pronounced. At the beginning of the film only a hint of it occurs: we see that she is holding her hands anxiously behind her back as she listens placidly to Elisabet's psychiatrist. It is only later, when she gratefully fills the silence left by Elisabet with her own confessional monologues, that her unknownness fully emerges. For in these monologues she releases a torrent of memories and feelings. These monologues appear to diminish her feelings of isolation (she remarks that 'No one's ever bothered to listen to me [before].')[17]

Crucially, both characters are eventually confronted with their mistaken understanding of what it means to be known, and to know another. Although intended as an acknowledgment of the inevitability of unknownness, Elisabet's silence functions as a complex but revealing expression of her state of mind. This expression ironically contributes to the overcoming of her unknownness, for Alma learns to interpret that silence, a learning viciously expressed when she describes Elisabet's behaviour as not only (implicitly) a performance, but a performance of *health*, a way of concealing aspects of herself she would rather not acknowledge, much less express ('They said you were mentally healthy, but your madness is the worst'). Conversely, although Alma's monologues initially diminish her feelings of

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isolation, those feelings return when she reads Elisabet's letter to the psychiatrist in which her candid confessions are disclosed in a condescending tone. Alma's anger at the letter suggests distress at the discovery that the memories and feelings she felt herself to be expressing have been interpreted in ways other than she wished, that there is a frightening gap between what she intended to express and the significance of that expression – in short, that being known is not a matter of presenting the self to another, say through speeches.[18]

Bound up in the characters' conceptions of selfhood and knowledge of others are their conceptions of interiority as something that is either inherently and exclusively interior, and therefore altered or compromised whenever expressed (Elisabet), or something that requires and awaits external existence (Alma). The film counters these understandings of interiority, and hence also undermines those related conceptions of selfhood, by showing the thoughts and feelings that its characters consider unexpressed, or purely interior, to pervade the world. Through the conflict that erupts as a result of Elisabet's letter the two women confront each other with the mutual visibility of each other's thoughts and feelings, bringing their experience, and the film's understanding of interiority, into near-alignment. The film's final third suggests that this change in the women's understanding of interiority brings about a traumatic reversal of their experience of unknownness, culminating in the experience of themselves as fundamentally exposed, without the comfort of being sure where self ends and the rest of the world (including each other) begins. The depiction of the merging of the two characters, which is encapsulated in the famous close-up of Alma's face, upon which half of Elisabet's face is superimposed, evokes this experience – its excessive, surreal quality helping to express the confusion of interiority and reality experienced by the characters.

Imagining Reality

An early passage in the film, in which Alma prepares for bed after her initial meeting with Elisabet, gives an early indication of the film's characterisation of interiority. Alma raises herself out of bed to rub cream onto her face and neck, and to reassure herself of her future. She talks aloud of marrying Karl-Henrik and raising children; these possibilities are 'decided' and 'inside' of her. Her liking for her job is 'good too, but in another way.' She repeats this verdict several times in a soft, consoling tone of voice, as if gently tending a long-held truth, while she replaces the cap on the bottle and settles back into bed, switching the light off once more. (Her performance of contentment and confidence in this vision of the future is subtly undermined by the application of the cream, which presumably is a beauty treatment of some kind, with youth-preserving qualities.) In the darkness, Alma thinks aloud about her new patient: 'I wonder what's really wrong with her? Elisabet Vogler.' She repeats the name in an incantatory tone – 'Elis-a-bet Vog-ler' – and at almost exactly the same time, the film conjures Elisabet by cutting to a wide shot of her room in the psychiatric hospital; she is awake and out of bed, her pale nightdress lit by a television's spectral flicker. The ghostliness of this view of Elisabet, and the darkened screen that precedes it, illuminates the possibility that it is Alma's thought of her that has brought this view of the world into being, that what we see is, or could be, as much the projection of Alma's imagining (or dream) as it is the presentation of what is happening in Elisabet's room. In having Alma's idle thought bloom into a vision of its subject, the film hints that interiority may emerge in excess of its conscious expression.

The notion that filmed images of reality may also depict interiority is expanded upon in the sequence that follows. To begin with the film holds to the wide shot as Elisabet moves towards and then away from the television, caught in currents of interest and inattention. We cannot see what is on the television's screen, although we can just hear a male voice reporting news of US planes dropping bombs on 'Vietcong positions'. As the television's images begin to show a riot in Vietnam (the newsreader continues to talk of the war) the sound from the television is raised on the soundtrack, and Elisabet turns to watch attentively. The film cuts to a position that faces the television, then cuts again, making its images entirely fill the frame, evoking the strength of its claim on Elisabet's attention. Amidst a tumult of hurrying bodies we see a seated monk has set himself on fire. Smoke pours from him, while supporters rush to their knees to bow. The film cuts to a close shot of Elisabet – the first of a series of cuts between her and the television's images. She backs away from the television and the camera, holding her hand over her mouth in horror, yet unable to shift her attention.

A consideration of the relationship between Elisabet's thoughts and feelings and this television broadcast of a real, contemporaneous, event (this is famous documentary footage) is invited by the extremity of Elisabet's reaction to what she watches, along with the sequence's repeated cutting between Elisabet and the television's images. A degree of affinity between Elisabet and the monk is immediately recognisable. The monk's self-immolation is, like Elisabet's decision to be silent, at once both a withdrawal from the world and a pronounced statement to that world. Elisabet's horror at these images may well stem from her recognition of the monk's calm expression of despair, a recognition that feels like catching an unexpected view of herself, a view that reveals her own desire for self-destruction. As Robin Wood puts it, 'It is evident...that [Elisabet] partly identifies with [the monk] – with his agony, his protest, his ability to go all the way'.[19]
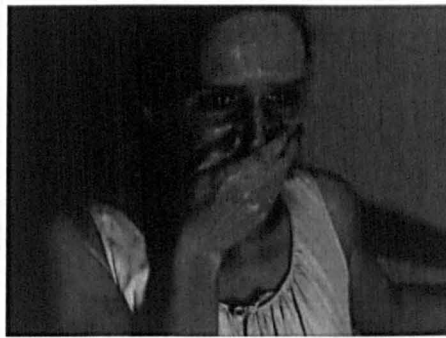
Film as Mental Image

In the light of the above explication, the significance of *Persona*'s opening sequences, in which the film's own projection is depicted, emerges more clearly. The film famously begins with a shot of the carbon rods of a projector's lamp heating up. Light erupts from these rods in an explosive flash. We hear a projector start to run and film running through a sprocket wheel. The projector's light, which flickers as film spools past, glares into the camera. Film leader appears ('Start', '10', '9', '8', and so on), accompanied by discordant wheezing blasts, as if an accordion was taking its first tentative breaths. A few moments later, the camera films the

projector's light, moving towards the projector until that light fills the frame, and the light emitted from the depicted projector, and the light emitted from the *cinema*'s projector (i.e. the projector that is projecting *Persona*) become merged, as if identical. By this point in the sequence oneiric fragments and noises interrupt the depiction of the film's technological origins: there is a flashcut of an erect penis, underscored with a comic synthesised blip; an upside-down cartoon of a woman bathing (penny whistle music plays); we see hands apparently going through 'washing movements',[20] reminiscent of the motions of a conjuring trick; a slapstick sequence of film (from Bergman's *The Devil's Wanton* [1949]) involving a skeleton, a man in a nightdress, and the devil). After this passage the shots of the projector cease, and the images become more explicitly nightmareish: we see a large spider, a sheep being sacrificed, a hand being crucified.
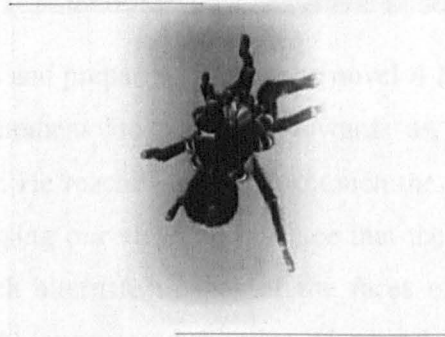
Although this sequence is too abstract to be anything other than ambiguous, these oneiric sounds and images appear to be the (inevitable? natural?) result of setting the projector in motion. Bergman explains this sequence in the following manner:

> While I was working on *Persona* [when in hospital], I had it in my head to make a poem, not in words but in images, about the situation in which *Persona* had originated. I reflected on what was important, and began with the projector and my desire to set it in motion. But when the projector was running, nothing came out of it but old ideas, the spider, God's lamb, all that dull old stuff.[21]

Following these images, the film arrives at a morgue, and discovers a young boy. Bergman claims that the boy represents himself, a boy 'who'd died, yet who wasn't

allowed to be really dead, because he kept on being woken up by telephone calls from [Bergman's then-employers] the Royal Dramatic Theatre.' [22] Regardless of whether we accept this interpretation (Bergman also acknowledges the sequence's ambiguity), a link between the film's opening images and the boy's interiority is implied when the young boy awakes; for this presents the possibility that the fragments of sound and image that began the film depicted his dreams or nightmares.

After putting on glasses and preparing to read the novel *A Hero of our Time*, the boy turns and for a brief moment looks directly towards us, before shifting his gaze slightly to look beyond. He reaches out as if to touch the invisible barrier between us. The film cuts, reversing our view, and we see that the boy is reaching out to a blurred screen on which alternate images of the faces of Elisabet and Alma (or Ullmann and Andersson) emerge and dissolve. His hand caresses every portion of the frame, as if lamenting the impossibility of caressing the (composite) face that is projected. From this cut it seems we are no longer in the morgue, or anywhere else: the screened images he attempts to touch fill the background, nothing exists but the boy and this screen. We appear to have slipped back into the boy's interiority as he dreams or imagines again. This moment establishes the film's most persistent metaphor (also encountered when Elisabet watches television) in which the mind is equated with the projection (or transmission) of images.

The closeness of the relationship between the screen at which he looks, and the screen at which we look (they appear to be two sides of the same screen), implies an equivalence between the projection of his thoughts and the projection of *Persona*.

This equivalence is encouraged by *what* he watches, which could be understood as *Persona* in microcosm: the alternating images of Alma and Elisabet make a composite face, suggesting the merging of the two characters which (in some sense) occurs later in the film – indeed, the images that the boy watches are almost a prototype for the famous composite face that appears during the film's climax. In addition, the boy's reaching out for someone it is impossible for him to reach, resonates with Alma and Elisabet's sufferings of unknownness. As if to confirm this equivalence, *Persona* returns to the boy and his viewing at the end of the film, framing the intervening portion of the film as an elaboration of the boy's imagining. Leaving aside the question of the boy's identity,[23] the significance of this framing, and indeed the film's opening as a whole, is its suggestion that the film we are watching, and the compelling, naturalistic drama it goes on to depict, is as much a manifestation of the imagination as it is a depiction of reality. This suggests imagination and reality are, for this film, from the beginning, infused with one another.

Enclosed in Thoughts

In the passage discussed earlier, in which Alma thinks aloud about Elisabet, and Elisabet watches the news broadcast, interiority is shown to pervade reality through the juxtaposition of sequences – the transition from Alma thinking of Elisabet to Elisabet pacing in her room – or through the insertion of shots of broadcast images. Elsewhere the film finds ways to hint at interiority pervading reality through little more than nuances in performance, camera position and so on. This is never more

evident than in the sequence in which Alma waits for Elisabet to cut her foot on a piece of broken glass, which takes place shortly after Alma discovers, to her fury, the letter written by Elisabet to her psychiatrist. Here Alma has adopted Elisabet's stance of silence and is attempting to contain her anger, which makes the power of the film's evocation of her interiority all the more noticeable.

The sequence begins when Alma returns to the house and attempts to let the sunshine and breeze lift her mood. The film's economic use of camera position here evokes her attempt to conceal and control her angry feelings. In a black bikini, she sits on a bench just outside the house; we view her from a wary distance, outside her space – a low wall marks the gravel's boundary – and from the tree-dappled shade. She places her hat and glass of milk beside her, and raises her face to the sunlight. One leg is bent, protectively, comfortingly, folded into her chest. She picks up her hat and accidentally knocks her glass of milk onto the floor, where it smashes. Importantly, the film does *not* cut to a closer shot, despite the accident's later dramatic importance. (Indeed we only register the *shattering* of the glass through the soundtrack, for the glass falls out of view behind the wall.) This choice of camera position echoes Alma's subdued reaction as she – without so much as a whispered curse – goes about clearing up the debris; it resists the temptation to cut to the breakage, which matches Alma's resistance to the provocation of her own clumsiness, her refusal to allow her anger at the letter to find expression in her response to the shattering of the glass. At the same time, our distance from her, and our interest in her thoughts and feelings at this moment, forces us to focus on a small portion of the frame, thereby shutting out much of her environment, as if her mood casts its own shadow.[24] (I am reminded here of Cavell's attention to Wittgenstein's remarks near the end of the *Tractatus*, in which he remarks that the world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.[25])

Andersson's performance plays an important part in evoking this mood; she dismantles Alma's strained pose of repose in a way that eloquently suggests Alma's suppressed anger and her reluctance to abandon her attempt at relaxation. After the

glass is smashed, Andersson drops her raised foot to the ground and pauses, braced for activity; she reaches for the shards of glass gingerly, then briskly wipes her hands on her thighs. Returning from indoors with a brush and pan, she once again leans awkwardly towards the breakage, breathes in sharply (we hear the sound of Alma and her immediate environment as if we were much closer to her), and picks daintily at the glass. When she begins to return to the house with the pan full of debris, she wipes her feet on her shins and fussily shakes out the brush behind her, like a disgruntled cat shaking its tail. Importantly, Andersson does not overstate Alma's fastidiousness; it does not suggest neurosis. She portrays it as a symptom of Alma's suppression of her feelings (her adoption of Elisabet's withdrawn silence) rather than a direct expression of them – a gust of steam that rises from a covered, simmering, pot.

This evocation of Alma's thoughts is intensified by the sequence's apparent alignment between Alma's imaginings and its presentation of Elisabet's movements. When Alma spots a shard of glass that remains to be recovered and leans over to pick it up, Elisabet opens the French windows behind Alma. Now that Elisabet has appeared, Alma elects to leave the glass where it is. A deeper immersion in Alma's interiority is suggested by the cut that follows, bringing her into medium-close-up. Suddenly her pensive, frowning, glazed expression dominates the frame, as she listens to Elisabet's movements. It is a mark of the strength of the sequence's evocation of Alma's interiority that the evocation is intensified, rather than dispersed, when what we see, and what Alma sees, becomes importantly different. We see Elisabet, through the window behind Alma, walking inside the house, veiled

by the curtain. In contrast to Alma's physical tangibility – Alma's chest glows white in the heat, while much of her neck and brooding face is cast into a dark shadow by her sunhat – Elisabet appears ghost-like behind the curtain's gauze: she is uniformly faded, her facial expression obscured; only the sound of her steps reassures us of her physical existence. Her appearance here echoes her appearance in an earlier sequence in which Elisabet visits Alma's bedroom one misty night, a sequence that the film suggests may depict an erotic fantasy or dream of Alma's, rather than an actual event. This association, this ghostliness, along with our awareness of the focus of Alma's attention, creates the impression that Elisabet appears to us as Alma imagines her.

As the sequence continues, and Elisabet repeatedly walks back and forth over the patch of ground on which the shard of glass lies, our awareness of a harmony between Alma's malevolent thoughts and Elisabet's actions increases. Elisabet exits the house and walks barefoot past the broken glass, with the camera following her feet in close-up. After a few more steps, Elisabet returns to walk past the glass once more, and the camera watches as her feet narrowly avoid laceration. Although Elisabet's repetitive movements are perfectly plausible – she may, for example, keep forgetting items from the house – the film elides their overall purpose by the camera's focus on her bare feet and Alma's observation of them. The result is an emphasis on the relationship between Elisabet's movements and Alma's thoughts, or what we imagine to be Alma's thoughts: it appears that Alma is daring herself to cause Elisabet pain, that each time Elisabet is about to step on the glass she loses courage, becomes merciful, and allows her to pass unscathed, only to will her to return; as if, in short, Elisabet's movements were a realisation of Alma's surging and

subsiding malevolence. If so, that malevolence eventually overcomes her, for Elisabet changes direction *again* and steps on the glass, exclaiming in pain. (Of course, we may also understand Elisabet to be deliberately tormenting Alma here. But this interpretation does nothing to weaken our feeling that Elisabet's actions and Alma's thoughts are here intertwined to the point of inseparability.)

Simultaneous Breakdown

> Breakdown…is both theme and form – that is to say, it is experienced both by the characters and by the artist, the 'formal' collapse acting as a means of communicating the sensation of breakdown directly to the spectator.[26]
>
> - Robin Wood

Robin Wood notes that the 'incident with the broken glass completes the exposition of [Alma's] discovery of reality (the reality of herself) through her experience of Elisabeth,' and contains the moment in which 'Alma, the nice, normal, altruistic young nurse, is forced to confront her own potential for cruelty'.[27] In the moments that follow, the emotional effects of this self-discovery are evoked through an extension of the metaphoric association of mind and projector established in the opening sequence. We see Alma from outside the house, looking through the curtained window at which she stands. She peels the curtain aside, an action that unveils her; a reverse-shot shows her view of Elisabet, who wears a hurt expression,

and looks back towards the window. We return to Alma. To our surprise, the film containing this shot of Alma appears to unspool: the image becomes scarred by a jagged cut that runs through the middle; part of the image disappears; and a jarring, mechanical sound tears through the soundtrack. Alma looks up and the light of the projector appears to burn through the image, burn through the centre of her face, until all we see is the white of its light. This disruption of an image of Alma expresses the disruption of Alma's self-image, or identity, following the incident with the broken glass.

When the projector's light burns through an image of her face the film declares the very foundations of Alma's identity, unconcealing the technology that gives her life and brings her into being. This declaration, of course, disrupts everything (Alma's world is burned up, too), including our engagement with the film's fictional world and its characters. This raises the possibility that the device is too severe, that it threatens the very foundations of what it seeks to express. This would be so, perhaps, if Alma's crisis was not of an equivalent severity; but the revelation of her own cruelty has uncovered the groundlessness of her identity, revealed it to be fictional and contingent, and thrown her world into doubt. With this in mind, it is entirely appropriate that our experience of that world, and our understanding of Alma's identity, is similarly thrown into doubt. The moment's paradoxical, even self-defeating, quality is an essential part of its evocation of Alma's groundlessness – more importantly, perhaps, it is a way of *sharing* in that groundlessness, confirming the film's position that there is no end to the contingency of meaning.[28]

Another aspect of the significance of this sequence is revealed when we consider its echoing of the film's opening sequences. This echoing begins with the moment's invocation of the projector, and continues when we watch and hear a series of images and sounds that are reminiscent (or repetitious) of the film's prologue: over the white screen we hear the sound of a male voice played backwards; there are flashcuts of a man dressed as the devil, a chase involving a man in a nightdress and two policeman, and a skeleton (echoing the extract from *The Devil's Wanton* seen earlier); a scream is heard, we see a hand being crucified once more; and the film cuts to an extreme-close-up of an eye. It was suggested earlier that the equivalent sounds and images in the prologue depict the boy's dream in the morgue, a dream that is followed by the imagining or the fantasy of two merging, unreachable, women, the two principal women in the film. This movement from his dream to his fantasy appears to be repeated when these oneiric images are here taken over by a blurry shot of Elisabet, as she, just like Alma prior to the projector-breakdown, goes to the window to look outside. In this way, the film begins again, rebuilding layers of imagining, passing through the boy's dream and subsequent fantasy on the way back to Elisabet and later Alma, and eventually to the evocation of *their* imaginings. This passage of the film, then, momentarily reminds us of the fundamentally ambiguous mingling of imagination or fantasy and reality established in the film's opening sequences and, in doing so, foreshadows the collapse of the distinction between fantasy and reality that is to come.

Confusing Imagination and Reality

The collapse of this distinction occurs shortly after the projector-breakdown. This section of the film begins 'with Alma in bed, tossing in a half-sleep, and ends with her waking up'. Wood, among other commentators, notes that it is 'tempting, of course, to interpret it all as a dream, but not quite possible.' [29] This is largely because of the careful balancing of implications throughout these sequences: we are

never allowed to settle on an interpretative position regarding the nature of what we see – whether it is real or imagined – but are forced to accept our uncertainty.

The sequence in which Elisabet's husband visits is among the most striking of this section of the film. Wood notes that the way this sequence is shot 'suggests that, if we are watching a dream, it is as much Elizabeth's as Alma's.'[30] This indeterminacy begins to emerge early on in the sequence when Alma first encounters Mr Vogler, who mistakes Alma for his wife. Elisabet floats into view from behind Alma and places Alma's hand on Mr Vogler's cheek. The act is perfectly poised between the suggestion that Alma is fantasising reassurance from Elisabet that she may adopt her role, and that Elisabet is herself directing or controlling the action, and hence is the source of what we see.

As the sequence continues this poise is retained. After Alma (as Elisabet) embraces Mr Vogler, the film cuts to an extreme-close-up of Elisabet, staring into the camera, which fills the screen. This close-up may initially be understood as the intrusion of Elisabet into Alma's thoughts and feelings, an evocation of Elisabet's presence for Alma (it depends, of course, on how the preceding moments are interpreted). But when the camera pulls back it brings Alma and Mr Vogler into view, while keeping Elisabet in the extreme foreground, which alters the composition in such a way that the embracing couple now appear to be a manifestation of Elisabet's imagining. Whenever this close-up is returned to later in the sequence it has the same ambiguous significance, both evoking Alma's recurring alarm at her imagined adoption of Elisabet's role, and suggesting that Elisabet is imagining what we see.

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The combination of these suggestions produces a third: that neither Alma nor Elisabet are the sole source of what we see, but that both are experiencing it at the same time. This raises the possibility that it is an event external to both interiorities, yet viewed (as it were) *through* those interiorities. It is as if the two women, after their prolonged and fraught intimacy, have come to see no distinction between their experiences of the world – a suggestion born out by other aspects of the film, particularly the sequence which culminates in the composite image of both women's faces.[31]
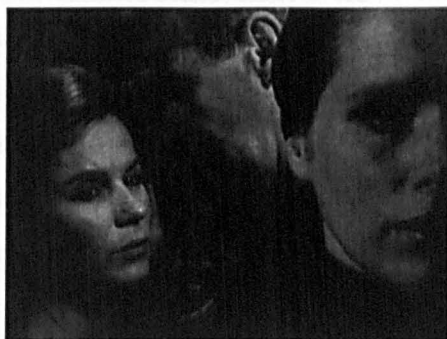
Susan Sontag emphasises the sequence's relationship to the film's reality:

> [N]othing we see justifies describing [the scene in which Alma makes love to Elizabet's husband] as most critics have done as a "real" event…But neither can we be absolutely sure that this, or something like it, isn't taking place. After all, we see it happening. (And it's in the nature of cinema to confer on all events, without indications to the contrary, an equivalent degree of reality: everything shown on the screen is "there," present.)[32]

Given the necessity of accepting that what we see is both imagined and in some sense really happening we might be tempted to claim that this sequence is among the film's most explicit expressions of thoughts and feelings pervading the world. However here, as with the sequences that frame the film, and the sequence that depicts the projector's breakdown, the distinction between what is imagined and what is real has seemingly collapsed, which means that the notion of interiority pervading reality has run its course. Interiority (or more specifically, fantasy) and reality are here revealed to have a deeper affinity.

In the article cited earlier, Cavell identifies *Persona* (and *Belle de Jour*) as among a collection of films which discover 'that screened events remain intelligible to us if, even without conventional (or grammatical?) warning – specifically, without changes in the sound track, or the acting, or the modes of filming – they alternate between the depiction of the real and of the fantasied, call it the alternation between the indicative and the subjunctive.' [33] While Cavell initially appears to be only referring to the discovery that we can infer the alternation of fantasy and reality without 'grammatical' assistance, in the context of this chapter another aspect of his insight is revealed: that the film discovers that a form of intelligibility and significance is evident even when, or precisely *because*, we cannot be sure of the epistemic status of what we see. No doubt this is partly why Cavell attaches importance to the 'irresolution' of 'juxtapositions of reality with some opposition to reality' that *Persona* and *Belle de Jour* sustain 'through to the end'. For this significance arises within the space made by this irresolution, generated by the variety of registers of confusion between fantasy and reality established by the film[34] – from Elisabet's movements in her room at night ambiguously emerging from the reverberation of Alma's thoughts, to the sequences in the film's final third, in which the distinction between what is thought and felt and what takes place appears to collapse. The importance of these registers is their contribution to the film's expression of the idea that fantasy and reality can all too easily appear inseparable, even when reality bears no obvious marks of alteration.

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[1] Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [Enlarged Edition]. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979 [1971], p. 85.

[2] P. Adams Sitney uses this phrase in his essay 'Saying "Nothing": *Persona* as an Allegory of Psychoanalysis' in *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature*. New York & Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 134.

[3] Ingmar Bergman (born Uppsala, Sweden, 1918) became internationally well-known when *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955) took the jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival. The films from this period form the first major phase of his filmmaking, and include *Journey into Autumn / Dreams* (1955), *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), *The Seventh Seal* (1957), with its famous, and oft-satirised, passages in which a knight plays chess with death, and *Wild Strawberries* (1957). During this period Bergman's name became synonymous with 'artistic' cinema (Hollywood cinema was in the process of being critically rehabilitated). He went on to make *The Virgin Spring* (1959) and a trilogy of films: *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *The Communicants / Winter Light* (1962), and *The Silence* (1963). As professionally involved in the theatre as in film, Bergman also produced productions of Stringberg's and Ibsen's plays (amongst others), and wrote for the stage himself. From 1963 to 1966 he headed the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, which gave him access to a group of actors which he regularly cast in his films. His second major phase is usually considered to begin with *Persona* (1966) and continues with another trilogy: *Hour of the Wolf* (1968), *Shame* (1968), and *A Passion* (1970). Following the acclaimed *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) Bergman retired from directing feature films, although he continues to write scripts (see Liv Ullmann's *Faithless*, 2000) and to direct films for television.

[4] Aside from Sitney's and Persson's accounts, the psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg describes *Persona* as reproducing 'in essence the transference-countertransference situations that develop in the treatment of severely narcissistic patients.' (Quoted in Sitney, 233). And although uninterested in psychoanalysing Bergman, Bruce F. Kawin makes a related, if more persuasive, argument with similar emphases in his book *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film*. New Jersey and Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1978. He claims that 'every frame in *Persona* makes manifest a dialectic...in which the self-conscious artist and the self-conscious audience engage across the self-conscious mind of the work.' (116)

[5] Persson, Göran. 'Bergman's Persona: Rites of Spring as Chamber Play' *Cineaction* 40 (May, 1996, p. 24.

[6] Sitney, p. 135.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Sitney, p. 125.

[9] Persson, p. 31. However, he does acknowledge that 'the film is also a tale about what took place between nurse Alma and actress Elisabet,' (26) even if he passes over many of the nuances of that tale.

[10] Is this because of the undoubted contributions of Ullmann and Andersson to these evocations? If so, this hardly excuses the omission, but rather increases the need for a less restrictive approach. Indeed, it is hard to see how such an omission can be excused, for even if the film's significance is taken to lie in its expression of *Bergman*'s state of mind, its detailed evocation of the mental states of its characters would still seem to be of great relevance.

[11] Persson, p. 26.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Sitney, p. 134.

[14] Sontag, Susan. 'Persona: The Film in Depth' in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Stuart M. Kaminsky with Joseph F. Hill. London: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 255.

[15] Cavell's comments on *Persona* (which are also comments on *Belle de Jour*) are responses to Eliot Rubinstein's paper 'Buñuel's World, or the World and Buñuel' in *Philosophy and Literature* 2: 2 (Fall 1978), pp. 237-248. Cavell continues:

> [*Persona*] has as what we might call its subject something about the imagination of a woman, or of a beautiful woman, or perhaps of two women; which no doubt in part means: a man's imagination of the imagination of women, or perhaps a man's compulsion to imagine the imagination of a woman. More particularly, both films concern the meaning, or limits, or conditions, of female identity, hence no doubt of human identity.' (Cavell, Stanley. 'What Becomes of Things on Film?' in *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984, p. 179.)

[16] Wood, Robin. 'Persona'. *Movie* 15 (January 1968), p. 24.

[17] The translations of dialogue in this chapter are taken from the subtitles provided by the Tartan DVD.

[18] Alma's rage at what she takes as her inability to control the significance of her expression (or to control the significance Elisabet attributes to it) and Elisabet's fantasy that she cannot be known, echo what Cavell identifies as the 'fantasy, or fear, either of inexpressiveness, one in which I am not merely unknown, but in which I am powerless to make myself known; or one in which what I express is beyond my control.' He continues, 'One fantasy may appear as a fear of having nothing whatever to say – or worse, as an anxiety over there being nothing whatever to say.' (See Cavell's *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 351.)

[19] Wood, Robin. '*Persona* Revisited' *Cineaction* 34 (June 1994), p. 62. A similar idea is taken up by Stanley Cavell, who captures the ambiguity of the relationship between the two figures. He writes that 'The maddened, speechless heroine stares at the burning priest both as if she has been given an image of her pain, even a kind of explanation of it, and as if she is the cause of such pain in the world, as of its infection by her.' (Cavell, Stanley. 'The Fact of Television' in *Cavell on Film*. Ed. William Rothman. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 83.)

[20] Kawin, p. 109.

[21] Quoted in Kawin, p. 107.

[22] Ibid.

[23] In my view this question is unanswerable: the boy could plausibly be understood as Bergman, Elisabet's son, Alma's aborted baby, the young boy that impregnated Alma, the

boy in *The Silence* who is played by the same actor and reads the same novel, or some combination of all of these.

[24] In Chapter Four we saw similar techniques employed in *Le Rayon Vert*.

[25] Cavell, 1984, p. 181.

[26] Wood, 1968, p. 23.

[27] Wood, Robin. *Ingmar Bergman* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 151.

[28] By arguing for this justification I follow Robin Wood in dismissing the idea that the projector breakdown functions as a Brechtian or Godardian 'alienation effect'. He writes:

> Useless to talk of the sudden mid-way reminder of the medium (the depicted projector-breakdown) in terms of the Brechtian (or Godardian) alienation effect. [...] Bergman...draws the spectator into the film, demanding total emotional involvement: the pre-credit and credit sequences shock and disturb rather than detach; the fiction that follows up to the midway point engrosses, with nothing either to distance or distract us from a moral and psychological exploration of the characters and their relationship, via the emotional-intellectual processes through which we customarily experience fictional narratives.' (Wood, 1969, p. 145.)

[29] Wood, 1969, p. 151

[30] Ibid., p. 152.

[31] Of course, we may be tempted to take the suggestion that this sequence depicts both Alma and Elisabet's dreams at face value; in other words, to take it for a *shared* dream. But such a position needs to account for why this sequence – along with several others – is the only depiction offered of events which we must take to have, in some sense, occurred, if the film is to be at all intelligible. For we must surely understand the two women to torment each other, to lose a sense of their identities, and we must surely take this sequence, and several of the sequences that follow, as portraying this process.

[32] Sontag, p. 257.

[33] Cavell, 1984, p. 177. It could be argued that the mode of filming changes somewhat in the film's final third, but this change doesn't provide the warning to which Cavell refers.

[34] Underlying these remarks is Cavell's remarkable insight quoted at the beginning of this chapter: 'It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with.' (Cavell, 1979, p. 88.)

8. Conflicted Interiority: *Belle de Jour*

> And does someone claim to know the specific balance sanity must
> sustain between the elaborating demands of self and world, some neat
> way of keeping body and soul together? [1]

- Stanley Cavell

In the previous chapter I quoted from Stanley Cavell's response to Elliot
Rubinstein's reading of *Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel [2], 1967). In that response, Cavell
elaborates Rubinstein's argument, grouping *Belle de Jour* and *Persona* (Ingmar
Bergman, 1966) together as films which explore (among other things) 'something
about the imagination of a woman, or of a beautiful woman, or perhaps of two
women,' through the 'the procedure of unmarked juxtapositions of reality with some
opposition to reality,' which he invariably calls 'fantasy'.[3] This view of *Belle de
Jour* has its antecedents: in an article printed in the year of the film's release, Elliott
Stein makes the following observations:

> ...Buñuel has turned the book [*Belle de Jour*, by Joseph Kessel, on
> which the film is based,] inside out, ripped the surface from it, and
> stitched inside to outside with such invisible mending that much of the
> time the heroine's real life, her fantasies and childhood memories, are
> integrated as a fluent story in which past, present, and the merely
> possible form a solid block of narrative. With her, we fall through
> trapdoors of consciousness, and then with relief, fall out of them – but
> only into new ones.[4]

Although this view of the film is widely held, and broadly correct, it is important to
acknowledge that it omits certain important details. [5] As Michael Wood observes, in
many instances the film's movements between reality and fantasy or dream are
declared. For example, after Séverine's (Catherine Deneuve) first day at the brothel,
following her feigning of illness to Pierre (Jean Sorel), there is a shot of Séverine as
she falls asleep, accompanied by the sound of ringing cow-bells. This precedes and
signals the film's movement into a depiction of a dream of Séverine's. Devices such

as these implicitly fragment Stein's 'solid block', and 'mark' (at least in one sense) Cavell's juxtapositions. However, this observation need not greatly undermine Cavell's underlying and crucial point that the film's depictions of reality and fantasy are presented in much the same way. Wood argues that the film remains 'faithful' to this idea 'in its broadest, simplest sense. Séverine's memories and daydreams don't have special lighting or sound effects, the imaginary coachmen are manifestly as substantial as the real doctors, the main characters look and talk the same in both sets of sequences.' [6] This faithfulness leads Wood to offer a view that implicitly elaborates Cavell's:

> Buñuel [in *Belle de Jour*] wants to insist on the permeability of the worlds of reality and dream, and on their equal status as objects of interest and aspects of lived life. He is also suggesting, in practice, that film is the perfect medium for this perception, since unless a director makes strenuous efforts to signal otherwise...we are disposed to believe everything we see on the screen is real. It is all real, Buñuel is saying. Why would the contents of our minds be less real than the contents of our living rooms? [7]

These related interpretations of the effects of the film's juxtapositions of reality and fantasy clearly contribute to our understanding of the film's expression of interiority. After all, Séverine's fantasies are an aspect of her interiority, which means that the film's juxtapositions of those fantasies with reality, and the equivalence those juxtapositions suggest, will have implications for our understanding of her inner life. Yet the discussions mentioned so far tend to avoid considering these implications, preferring to focus on the film's definition of the relationship between fantasy and reality, and the philosophical position that definition implies. This chapter draws out those implications, thereby redressing this omission, and assesses the related contribution of other aspects of the film's style, such as framing, editing, performance, and costume, to the film's overall expression of interiority.

Fantasy in Conflict with Reality

Catherine Deneuve beautifully catches the vague sullenness of [the character she plays]: her beautiful eyes glaze over, suddenly clicking back to reality, disappointedly; her jaw becomes mournfully set, giving her face a skull-like quality under its soft whiteness. In her secret violence and hesitant docility, Séverine is halfway between the heroines [she played in] *Repulsion* [1965] and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* [1964].[8]

- Raymond Durgnat

Belle de Jour frequently eschews opportunities for deepening our appreciation of Séverine's emotional state. [9] Consider, for example, the sequence that precedes her first visit to *chez* Anaïs. After Séverine arrives at the turning into Jean de Saumur (the street on which Madame Anaïs runs her business) she pauses, before walking past the turning and towards the camera that waits for her a little further down the road. Her eyes are downcast; she is distracted. As she meets the camera it turns to capture her in medium-close-up and in profile, tracking with her as she continues to walk aimlessly away from the door to Anaïs's apartment building. The prolonged close-up is a device often associated with evocations of interiority; but in this case our expectation of such an evocation is, to a significant degree, frustrated. Séverine's face, transformed by make-up into an almost necrophilic mask, dominates the frame, but expresses little other than absorption in thought, and the occasional twitch of self-consciousness. The background is similarly unevocative of her interiority: the nondescript cul-de-sac she passes is out of focus, detached from Séverine by the

camera's shallow depth-of-field – this may reaffirm Séverine's absorption in her own thoughts, but it does little to elaborate their specificity. Diegetic sound has a similar effect. As we peer at her perfectly neat face, the traffic's rumble grows louder, with veins of noise coming to surface as vehicles roar down nearby streets, only to sink back into the body of sound, the street's indistinct hubbub. The effect is to remind us of the vast city that surrounds her, and the diminishing of her awareness of that vastness by the internal chatter and tension that clouds her face.

Even the aspects of this sequence that hint at her feelings do so in a way that resists deepening our appreciation of them. The use of costume in this sequence is a good example of this. For the internal tension between Séverine's desire to enter the brothel and her fear of discovery and scandal [10] is neatly captured in her outfit, which consists of a buttoned-up, double-breasted black coat, and matching hat and handbag. This militaristic design[11] disguises her – particularly once she finally tops it off with dark glasses – yet at the same time is so elegant it attracts attention and proclaims her class, her incongruity in a brothel. (A little later Anaïs examines this coat and observes that Séverine is losing a button, as if wishing to nurture that incongruity, sensing its importance to Séverine, as well as its monetary value.) However, the film's capturing of this tension so neatly in her costume does not take us deeper into Séverine's interiority so much as confirm and encapsulate our assumptions in an underplayed visual joke (it is, after all, obvious enough that Séverine feels caught between conflicting desires at this moment). We are kept on the surface, reminded of Séverine's unrelenting preoccupation with finding the right clothes.[12]

As the sequence progresses, it continues to maintain Séverine's depthlessness while elaborating the *conflicted* quality of her interiority. This is achieved through the relationship between her fantasies, memories, dreams and so on, and her immediate experience of the world, a relationship that is – as the discussions mentioned earlier attest – often expressed through juxtapositions of sequences depicting reality and those depicting fantasy. The particular manner in which these juxtapositions are made is important here. We can see this in the sequence under discussion, for it announces its shift to depicting Séverine's interiority in a way that maximises the appearance of opposition and discontinuity between her imaginings and her reality. A few moments later, Séverine ascends the stairs to Anaïs's apartment. She looks about her, presumably in order to find the correct door. The camera flash-zooms towards her stoic face, which is now wrapped in large black sunglasses. As the camera is above Séverine, tilted down towards her, the zoom presents a fall towards her, a plummet into the mind hidden behind the dark glasses. At the same time, we hear Latin spoken on the soundtrack, she turns to face the camera, as if to identify some kind of intrusion, and the film cuts to the first shot of a sequence in which we see a young Séverine refuse Holy Communion. (This is the second time the film depicts Séverine's childhood memories; in the first of her memories we see a workman hold and kiss her.) Unlike equivalent transitions in other films (see the movement into Mika's imagining in *Merci pour le Chocolat* [Claude Chabrol, 2000] in Chapter Nine) which typically present movement into a character's interiority in a way that suggests a gradual immersion (e.g. through the use of a slow dissolve), here the film's style works to exacerbate the shock of the switch, and the jump backwards

in time: [13] the Holy Communion sequence breaks into and overwhelms reality, much as it appears to break into and overwhelm Séverine's experience, as if falling into her consciousness from a great height.

Yet despite this depiction of Séverine's interiority, and the suggestion of her inner conflict, her interiority remains depthless. This is in large part the result of the nature of the depiction. In the depicted memory we see a priest, in all his formal finery, offering the body of Christ to an assembled group of children. The camera moves in closer to the priest and the detail of his uniform and accoutrements is revealed: the embroidery on his tunic, the lace edges to his sleeves, and the lustre of the chalice from which he pulls another disc of bread. A cut reverses the view, and we see the young Séverine refuse the disc of bread held out by the priest (she clamps her mouth shut, turning her lips inwards, looking down, and shaking her head). The clarity created by the luminosity of the uniforms and the closeness of the camera is the most visible indication of the sequence's concern with the visual specificity of what Séverine remembers, and its lack of interest in the emotional and psychological significance of the memory itself. In short, we are once again on the surface of things: we can clearly see what the older Séverine is remembering, and what the younger Séverine is doing, but we are unable to discern the emotional causes or consequences of the memory, or the reason for the young Séverine's refusal of the bread.

However, it is worth noting that some critics take a different view, suggesting that the young Séverine refuses the bread because she feels guilty after the workman's

molestation of her, and that the adult Séverine's guilty feelings as she ventures towards prostitution bring back that memory.[14] But this speculative interpretation, although plausible, presumes too much, filling in the film's carefully whitewashed areas.[15] There is, after all, nothing to suggest that the film wishes us to make such interpretative leaps – it would be relatively simple for the film to confirm Séverine's guilty feelings, to firm up the link between the two memories. The film keeps the significance of this memory ambiguous because it does not believe in the certainty, the coherent, explicable self, that such psychological interpretations imply. Following this understanding, it is better, I think, to take the memory as it is presented, which is as an internal firework (it is extinguished as quickly as it erupts, the film cutting back to Séverine on the stairs), rather than a psychological clue.

Importantly, by suggesting her inner conflict at the same time as maintaining the depthlessness of her interiority the film is able to keep the ontology of Deneuve's character in question. Is she a fantasy figure, or a (fictional) person? There are reasons to think either. The very idea of Séverine – a prim bourgeois house-wife with a thirst for illicit sex – is undoubtedly a fantasy for some; indeed, Husson's (Michel Piccoli) interest in her seems related to this fantasy, although he wishes to think of her as a figure of innocence awaiting corruption. Casting and costume also add to the suggestion that Séverine is a fantasy figure, for Deneuve's severe beauty, dressed in forbidding yet figure-hugging contemporary (to 1967) fashions, is an idealised image of a certain kind of French bourgeois wife. Added to this are the film's decisions to initially introduce us to (what turns out to be) a *fantasised* Séverine (a Séverine of Séverine's fantasies) and to draw no sharp distinction between this Séverine and the Séverine that imagines her. Yet the idea that Séverine is a fantasy figure is undermined by other aspects of the film, including the intimations of her interiority already mentioned; for these intimations *imply* she is a person, even if they lack the depth necessary to establish her personhood. Perhaps most important is the individuality and autonomy that Deneuve's performance brings to the character. Consider the sudden authority, for example, that emerges from her voice – her femininity solidifying into a steely sternness – when she

responds to Marcel's (Pierre Clémenti) threat to beat her in the second half of the film ('Do that one more time and you'll never see me again').[16] This suggestion that Séverine embodies some kind of ambiguous combination of fantasy and reality is one of the ways in which the film prepares us for the explicit confusion of fantasy and reality in the film's final sequences.

Elisions and Revelations of Tension

> [T]hroughout Buñuel's work, the camera reduces a "character" to a hand or a head or a garment or – *passim* – a foot, much in the manner of Eliot's Imagist verse. The disintegration of the self...is irresistibly imaged in the dismantling of the body.[17]

- Elliot Rubinstein

The suggestion that Séverine's interiority is full of competing and conflicting feelings and thoughts is maintained by the film's use of camera position, particularly its use of close-ups of areas of Séverine's body. A key example of this occurs when Séverine returns to *chez* Anaïs to work for the first time. She ascends the staircase once more, eventually reaching the stone-floor landing. As she does so she nears the camera, until her feet and shoes are in close-up, while the rest of her body is out of frame. Her feet, shod in impeccable, shiny-black low-heels, with a square golden buckle, pause and swivel. One foot raises to take the first step towards the exit but

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the feet swivel once more and Séverine continues up the stairs. Michael Wood argues that the shoes 'are the form her uncertainty takes on film.' He continues:

> By this stage – after *Viridiana* and *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964) – shoes were an expected part of Buñuel's signature on film, not so much a fetish as a joke. There is...the delightful suggestion [here] that these neat little shoes are on their way to misbehave, that a fastidious fashion is about to get itself involved in sleaze. And indeed, a little later, when she is stripped down to bra and pants and being mauled by her first client, Séverine is still wearing the little shoes – a modern Cinderella at the brothel ball. In showing us these shoes on the stairs...Buñuel is working in a kind of shorthand, leaving inferences to us, where another director, most directors perhaps, would have treated us to a considered picture of the state of Séverine's soul. Imagine Bergman, for instance, showing us shoes instead of faces.[18]

Although Wood's interpretation is importantly suggestive, it overlooks certain aspects of the close-up's significance. To begin with, the shot's isolation of Séverine's feet has the effect of suggesting that her indecision or uncertainty is a feature of only a *part* of her. The rest of her body – which may or may not express feelings that qualify or even contradict the feelings expressed by her feet – is cut out. This is an elegant way of implying that the coherent expression of her feelings requires parts of her – parts that may conflict – to be kept out of sight. (We should not be surprised by this; we know her to be full of conflicting feelings and desires.) The *quality* of her shoes also has significance in addition to the saucy joke that 'these neat little shoes are on their way to misbehave'. For the newness and vogueishness of the shoes transforms her expressions of indecision into gestures of display. The swivels as she turns back and forth mimic the turns a model takes at the end of a catwalk, turns which are designed to show off the clothes and accessories worn by the model. In this shot, then, there is a reminder of the possibility – or likelihood – that a coherent expression of Séverine's interiority requires the isolation of a particular aspect of it, and an expression of the partial smothering of those feelings by the accoutrements of her class. (It may be an awareness of this smothering that earlier led Séverine to fantasise about the mistreatment of her shoes and stockings.) Importantly, once again this is achieved without the suggestion that

we plunge *into* Séverine's state of mind – instead, we learn about Séverine through a low-key gag which reminds us of Buñuel's hand in the proceedings, questioning our belief in Séverine's existence.

The film adheres to this metaphor and elaborates it as the film progresses. This is most clear during a moment in one of the film's final sequences. By this point in the film Séverine (much like Alma and Elisabet in *Persona*) is beginning (at the very least) to lose any sense of the distinction between what she imagines, dreams, or remembers and what is happening. Husson arrives to tell Pierre, who is now disabled, about Séverine's life as 'Belle de Jour' (earlier in the film he visits *chez* Anaïs). After Husson leaves, Séverine walks to the room in which Pierre sits. The sound of the rain outside diminishes to be replaced by the chiming of a nearby clock. The film cuts to a shot of her legs and heels as she walks briskly over a densely patterned rug. The brightness of the outside light that hits her smooth, stockinged legs amplifies our surprise at being taken away from her face and her hands, which moments before were fidgeting anxiously. This shot, unlike the shot of her shoes mentioned earlier, focuses on a part of her that reveals no uncertainty or agitation. A swaying tilt and pan changes our understanding of Séverine's interiority, however, as it brings the camera to isolate her right hand, which tries to rub away her uncertainty against the firm edge of a marble table-top. (Meanwhile, the clock strikes five, ironically announcing the hour at which Séverine was released from her role as 'Belle de Jour'.) This moment reprises the metaphor of parts of the body standing for different emotional states, but does so in a way that evokes the continuity between those states – the camera moving from one part of the body to

the other, rather than cutting – just as this passage of the film establishes continuity between fantasy and reality, despite their opposition. This marks a joining of two distinct areas (from feet to hands) and emotions (from calmness to agitation) which foreshadows the conjoining a moment later (as we shall see later in this chapter) of guilt-ridden reality and happy fantasy (or guilt-ridden fantasy and happy reality).

The suppressed overall tension between opposing feelings and desires that this isolation of body parts implies is more explicitly expressed when a wider view reveals contrasts between different areas of Séverine's body. Such a contrast can be found during Séverine's first session as a prostitute. Anaïs goes to fetch more champagne for the 'girls' and Adolphe (Francis Blanche), a wealthy confectioner, fond of assertions of *bonhomie*. Meanwhile, Séverine pulls out the pin that holds her hair up; the film cuts, and we view her from behind as her long, blonde hair cascades into place. We hear Adolphe, whom we have not yet seen, growl 'A new girl! Are you hiding her? Go get her fast! Or I'll go get her myself.' Séverine's panic at the sound of Adolphe's aggression and desire is expressed by her rushing to and fro to pick up her bag and hat and coat – to recover her protective outfit. However, this panic is qualified by the physical contrast between her head and torso as she moves about the room, often with her back to us: her hair shakes with each turn of her head, while her tightly cut dress stays tight to her movement. The contrast between her head and the rest of her body captures the tension she feels between her panic – perhaps even disgust – at what is about to happen, and her need for it to happen, her belief that it will release her from the tailored constrictions of her bourgeois life.

The film's relationship between suppression and expression is perhaps most effectively elaborated moments later, when Adolphe pushes her onto the bed and she falls into submissiveness, her whole body becoming limp, doll-like. He dives in to press his lips against her face, blocking our view of her. His aggressive smothering of her face provides the perfect background for her hand to express a touching tenderness: her elegant, porcelain fingers gently caress the black hair on the back of his head.[19] Camera position and blocking here makes the distinction between her face and hands a metaphor for the distinction between conflicting aspects of her identity – one part of her body (her face), or one aspect of her identity (her severe respectability), must be suppressed or occupied for another (her hand / her sensuality) to find expression. This relationship between suppression and expression is, of course, rooted in the film's organisation around Séverine's double life of a sexually unfulfilled bourgeois wife, and an increasingly popular prostitute, and the incompatibility of both lives. The achievement of such stylistic elaborations of her emotional conflicts and tensions is that they make manifest, from moment to moment, Séverine's need to conceal or suppress one aspect of her self in order to express another.

Another consequence of the expression of internal tension through isolation or contrast between areas of the body is that it lends evocations of the *wholeness* of the body a particular emphasis. Such moments are infrequent in *Belle de Jour*, as we might expect. But consider, for example, the famous shot a little later in the film, once Séverine has become accustomed to her new profession, which follows her session with the Asian man and his mysteriously buzzing box. Séverine lies on the

bed, facing towards its stern, her dischevelled hair echoing the crumpled and rumpled sheets that fail to cover the lower half of her body. The maid misinterprets Séverine's stillness and expresses sympathy: 'I'd be afraid of that man. It must be hard at times, all the same'. Wood commends Deneuve's performance here. He writes, 'The camera closes in on Deneuve, who slowly lifts her head, and whose face expresses fatigue but also a wonderful, weary, deep delight. 'What do you know about it, Pallas?' she says.' What deepens the significance of this 'weary, deep delight' is the wholeness with which she expresses fatigue: [20] her head is evidently as weary as the rest of her body which lies so flat, so sated on the bed. For once, presumably as a result of the realisation of her fantasies with the Asian man, in a moment poised between her two lives and two identities – after working as a prostitute, before returning home – Séverine has a moment in which she feels unified and whole.

Drifting into Incoherence

Peter William Evans writes:

> No one who has ever written on *Belle de Jour* has failed to be perplexed by the ending, but perplexity only arises if one is looking there for an answer to the question of Séverine's perversion. If instead the ending is simply taken as another reformulation of her conflicts between libidinal and social desires, a further expression of the time-locked, libido-releasing function of the brothel, no other conclusion is possible...[21]

Like Evans, I take the film's ending to be a 'reformulation' of Séverine's internal conflict. Such an approach has the advantage of not requiring the solution of the endlessly debated, and almost certainly unsolvable, riddle of what is real and what is not during the film's final sequences. Indeed, it requires the reverse: a claim to be made for the sequences' refusal of such a resolution. Consequently, I will here chart our interpretative difficulties, rather than attempt to dispel them.

It is difficult to pinpoint the moment in the final quarter of the film in which the epistemic status of what we see first becomes in doubt.[22] The slenderness of the film's earlier indications of shifts in epistemic status (indications which occasionally rely on little more than the peculiarity of what we see, our difficulty in understanding it as actually taking place) always leaves open the possibility that we have missed such a shift. However, a plausible candidate is the moment when we first hear the gunshots that apparently cripple Pierre. Séverine raises her head up from the couch upon hearing the shots, implying that she may have been woken by them – or that she may be asleep and imagining all, or some, of what we subsequently see and hear.

The generic quality of the action that follows supports the interpretation that it is only taking place in Séverine's mind. Shortly after the shots, Marcel flees in his car. The camera provides an exhilarating view through the windscreen as he races down a street. Shortly after skidding round a hairpin bend another car pulls out, blocking Marcel's progress, and a crash ensues, which alerts a nearby policeman. The policeman gives chase, blowing his whistle, dodging Marcel's bullets, returning his fire. Exposed in the middle of the street, Marcel turns defiantly to face the policeman, but his gun clicks empty. The policeman shoots and Marcel crumples to the ground, clutching his stomach, tossing his pistol flamboyantly to one side. This largely unheralded evocation of the cinematic dreamland of chases and shootouts between flamboyant gangsters and determined policeman is reminiscent of early Godard [23] in its borrowings from Hollywood and the *policier* films of Jean-Pierre Melville.[24] Coming so soon after seeing Séverine rise from her slumber, it inevitably contributes to our doubts regarding the epistemic status of what we see.[25]

These doubts reach a greater intensity when we discover that Pierre has been paralysed by the shots that appear to wake Séverine. For in a film so clearly concerned with the interplay between interiority – particularly fantasy – and reality the abrupt condemnation of an ostensibly innocent character to a wheelchair cannot but raise doubts, particularly when the event itself is hidden from view. This is so,

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even when we acknowledge the plausibility of such a sudden and harsh blow to Pierre being deliberately administered by a director such as Buñuel, for we must also acknowledge the plausibility of a guilt-ridden and masochistic Séverine punishing herself by administering the same blow to the Pierre of her imagination.

More doubts are raised by the appearance of the wheelchair itself, which is identical to the wheelchair Pierre takes a passing interest in earlier in the film. This would, perhaps, confirm for us that Séverine is using that memory to build a remorseful fantasy, if the wheelchair did not remain in the room in which Pierre is confined, even after he rises from it (which on this interpretation brings to an end her remorseful fantasy and a return to the depiction of reality). After all, the wheelchair makes for an extremely incongruous object in an apartment that entirely lacks eccentricity. Yet the opposite interpretation is also unsatisfactory. For if we take Pierre to be in reality paralysed and in Séverine's fantasy to have recovered, the pronounced foreshadowing of his fate undercuts the credibility of that very reality. Wood sums up the problem, arguing that the early appearance of the wheelchair is

> a fragment that couldn't work. Buñuel can't believe in the closure, or even the seriousness, of plot, and like a person achieving irony through overpoliteness, expresses his doubts in the form of excess. He is genuinely clumsy about his foreshadowed end, and makes it more or less impossible for us to see Pierre's plight, anticipated or lived, however interpreted, as anything other than a melodramatic and convenient fiction.[26]

The film's confusion of fantasy and reality in these sequences is as suggestive of Séverine's state of mind as the earlier juxtapositions between fantasy (or memory) and reality were – just as earlier it appears that a memory falls into her consciousness, eclipsing her experience of the world, here it appears that her fantasies are mixing with her experience of the world in a bewildering and confusing manner. A moment which occurs shortly after we discover that it was Pierre who was shot confirms this suggestion and encapsulates the discordance that the film's mixture of fantasy and reality brings about. From below we look up to the tops of

stone terraced houses, possibly the houses across the street from Séverine's apartment. The camera drops to street level, but as it does so, a shot of autumnal trees is superimposed. In this shot the camera moves up the trees, echoing a shot of identical trees in the film's opening 'fantasy' sequence. The complexity of the image is further complicated when the speed of this rise is accelerated by a dissolve which elides some of the camera's passage. The effect is compellingly kaleidoscopic: upwards and downwards motion, greys and golden yellows, and associations of reality and fantasy, are all blended together. A cut follows, and we see a pensive, disconsolate, Séverine look out from the rain-soaked window of her apartment. Raymond Durgnat points out that the film presents this loss of legibility as an experience of Séverine's, although he defines that loss of legibility as a 'breakthrough'. He writes: 'The presence of so conspicuous an optical at this one point only in the film suggests that a major breakthrough has been made in Sévérine's mind – that contrarieties are ceasing to be mutually exclusive.' [27] While Durgnat is right to note that the moment suggests that the legibility of the distinction between fantasy and reality has become impaired for *Séverine* (as well as the film), it is questionable whether this should be described using as positive a term as 'breakthrough', for this superimposition sustains a disorientating contrast between the image of reality and the image of fantasy.[28] It does not, after all, result in a composite image in which fantasy and reality fit neatly together. The 'contrarieties' of fantasy and reality may no longer be 'mutually exclusive' for Séverine, but the moment reminds us that they are still opposed to each other, that their combination results in conflict not coherence.

A Fantasy of Closure

The film's uncertainty as to what is real and what is fantasy during its final sequences is an acknowledgement of its sharing of Séverine's confusion.[29] The degree to which the film shares this confusion is affirmed by Piccoli's and Deneuve's performances in these sequences. For example, when Husson arrives at Séverine's apartment and announces that he wishes to tell Pierre of Séverine's life as a prostitute, these performances sustain our awareness of the peculiar, epistemologically uncertain, register in play. Husson swiftly apologises for not arriving sooner, explaining that he was out of town. In performing Husson's arrival, Piccoli has him chat to Séverine as if he was about to fulfil the relatively trivial obligation of wishing Pierre a speedy recovery (is even *Husson* capable of such expansive gestures, of smiling when explaining his late arrival, when about to perform so disruptive an act?). His insouciance even extends to lightly teasing Séverine about her outfit, describing it as the look of a 'precocious schoolgirl'. This ironic reference to his knowledge of Séverine's double life (he can hardly still believe in her childish innocence) brings Séverine to ask what it is he intends to tell Pierre. The answer comes swiftly: 'all I know about you,' he says, gracefully folding his coat about him, sitting down, and extending a hand to Séverine's arm to calm her. Deneuve judges Séverine's response perfectly, resisting any show of alarm. As Husson voices his concern that Pierre now feels a burden, Séverine remains still, her head bowed, her eyes lowered. Husson continues ('He's ashamed of the trouble he gives his "pure" wife') and Séverine drops her head further. This, however, is the limit of her agitation. Deneuve remains still, as if portraying a precocious schoolgirl who has disobeyed and become penitent. So far is Séverine from protesting, it appears that Husson's words, which have a surety that belies the fact that he is yet to see Pierre since his accident, are in accordance with Séverine's guilty thoughts. This opens up the possibility that we are both watching what Séverine is imagining, and watching her as she imagines it.
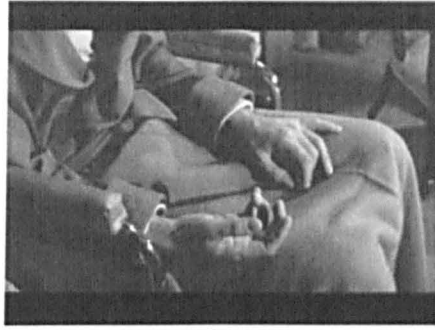
The film's movement between sequences towards the end of the film brings fantasy and reality closer together while maintaining their opposition to one another. Editing plays a crucial part in sustaining our expectation of this opposition. The relevant passage of the film begins when Séverine joins Pierre after Husson has left, calls to him, picks up her embroidery and sits, then slumps, on a nearby couch. A cut to a medium shot of Pierre follows, which begins a quickening in the rhythm of the editing. The camera pulls back from Pierre, but this motion is curtailed by another cut to a different angle: we are suddenly close to Pierre, looking down at him, the camera taking us to his limp, useless hand, laying palm-up on the blanket that covers his legs. (The sharp rhythm of the cut and the angle of the hand have led many to take this shot as signifying Pierre's death on hearing the truth about his wife.[30]) This is quickly followed by a shot of Pierre from yet another angle, looking up at him from near the floor; and then a return to Séverine, who moves forward towards Pierre, as if greeting the camera that meets her. (At this point we hear the sound of cowbells, which recalls a previous fantasy of Séverine's.) [31] Séverine, looking at Pierre, smiles. A cut to Pierre reveals him to be smiling back, his dark glasses now held in one of his hands, as he shifts in his chair, evidently no longer disabled. 'What were you thinking about?' he asks her, recalling the film's first shift from fantasy to reality. 'About you,' she replies. A new sequence appears to have begun, and a shift in epistemic status (from reality to fantasy or visa versa, we cannot be sure) appears to have occurred. The degree of continuity that runs across these two sequences (Pierre and Séverine remain in the same room, wearing the same clothes, sitting in the same places, at apparently more or less the same time) reaffirms the convergence of fantasy and reality for both the film and Séverine (no longer does the switch from

one to the other bring about a change in time and place). Yet the opposition between fantasy and reality, as a result, becomes all the more evident: Pierre is disabled, possibly dead, and then, a moment later, he is alive and well. [32] The passage's use of angular, sometimes arhythmic, cuts prepares us for the emergence of this conflict. Indeed, it appears that the abrupt cuts from fantasy to reality that occurred earlier in the film have been replaced by abrupt cuts from one angle to another, their disjunctive quality serving to remind us that what we see could be *either* fantasy or reality, or could change from one to the other, without any signalling other than a switch in camera position.

Given the film's sharing of Séverine's inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, it is appropriate that the film drifts into a moment of dreamy (perhaps even 'mock') happiness that provides a fantasy of narrative closure. [33] Séverine and Pierre come together for a chaste embrace, a sly parody of the traditional 'happy ending' in which the principal romantic pair are reunited. While in this embrace, Séverine hears the higher-pitched bells associated with the landau (and hence her fantasies). She asks Pierre if he also hears the bells, before going to the balcony to look outside. We see her looking fondly downwards. A cut provides us with an elevated view of the park or avenue in which the film's opening sequence took place (identified in the screenplay as the Bois de Boulogne) – as if from her point of view. The familiar landau drives past, although this time neither Séverine nor Pierre nor the Duke are riding in it. This clearly is a fantasy – her apartment does not face that area – but whether it is a fantasy within a fantasy (within a fantasy?) we cannot say.

By ending as it began, but with a much greater degree of confusion, the film implicitly places in doubt our prior confidence in inferring the switch from fantasy and reality that takes place at the end of the film's first sequence. It leaves us wondering whether there are limits to our doubts about what we have been watching. With this, the question of whether Séverine is a (fictional) person, or some kind of fantasy figure, resurfaces once more.[34] But by now it has become eminently clear that there is no answer the film wishes us to believe in, just as there is no believable answer to the question of what actually happens during these final sequences. For this film, there is no place from which fantasy can be distinguished from reality with total confidence. The film suggests that Séverine has lost 'the specific balance sanity must sustain between the elaborating demands of self and world'. The conflicting pull of her desires and the world she shares with Pierre has been transformed into a hallucinatory incoherence, rather than resolved or held in equilibrium. By sharing in her confusion the film suggests that such a balance is, or has become, more or less impossible. In another film, then, this profoundly ambiguous ending may appear to be unsatisfyingly noncommital, an avoidance of a conclusion, and a shirking of narrative responsibility. But here, it is something like the opposite, as it brings out what much of the film has playfully sought to establish: not only that fantasy and reality are equivalent to one another, but that the thought of escaping from fantasy is the biggest fantasy of all. In its concern with these matters, then, the film is exemplarily coherent.

[1] Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [Enlarged Edition]. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979 [1971], p. 85.

[2] Luis Buñuel's (born 1900 in Calanda, Spain, died 1983) cinematic career is extraordinary by anyone's standards. His first film, apparently funded by his mother, was a collaborative effort with Salvador Dali: *Un Chien andalou* (1929). There can be few film debuts that have received as much critical attention – perhaps only Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) could be put in the same category. This film inaugurated Buñuel's surrealist phase of filmmaking, which continued with the celebrated *L'Age d'or* (1930). After this early phase, he spent time in Hollywood, working in various capacities, before moving to Mexico to work as a jobbing director. The films he made in Mexico have tended to receive little critical attention, although *Los olvidados / The Young and the Damned* (1950) has received some acclaim. *Los olvidados* led to a series of International co-productions: *Robinson Crusoe* (1952); *Cela s'appelle l'aurore* (1955); *La Fièvre monte à El Pao* (1959) among others. A much more successful period was to come. *Viridiana* (1961) reinvigorated Buñuel's career, and *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) and *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964), starring Jeanne Moreau, followed. By this point, Buñuel was once more one of the most celebrated of International filmmakers. In 1967 he made *Belle de Jour* which was both a commercial and critical success. However, it may be for his final trilogy that he is best known: *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), which won an Oscar, *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), which famously (and without explanation or fictional motivation) has two different actresses play the same character.

[3] Cavell, Stanley. 'What Becomes of Things on Film?' in *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984, p. 179.

[4] Stein, Elliott. 'Bunuel's Golden Bowl'. *Sight and Sound* 36: 4 (Autumn, 1967), p. 173. Stein's view echoes Buñuel's professed intentions before making the film:

> This novel [*Belle de Jour*, by Joseph Kessel,] of the twenties, of the period of Paul Morand, done in a realist style, is about the masochistic impulses of a woman who, fearing that she is frigid, ends by working in brothels. I hope I can save such a stale subject by mixing indiscriminately and without warning in the montage the things that actually happen to the heroine, and the fantasies and morbid impulses which she imagines. As the film proceeds, I am going to increase the frequency of these interpolations, and at the end, in the final sequence, the audience will not be able to know if what is happening to her is actual or the heroine's subjective world – reality or nightmare.' (Quoted in Aranda, Francisco. *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography*. Ed. and trans. David Robinson. London: Secker & Warburg, 1975 [1969], pp. 226-8.)

[5] Raymond Durgnat offers an opposing view that also over-simplifies matters. He argues that the 'fantasies are clearly signalled, either by their intrinsic improbabilities, or by the jingling of carriage bells'. (Durgnat, Raymond. 'Bunuel: Belle de Jour' *Movie* 15 (January, 1968), p. 27.) Also quoted in Michael Wood's *Belle de Jour*. London: BFI, 2000, p. 47.

[6] Wood, p. 46. It is clear from Wood's analysis that the film is particularly faithful to this idea in its final sequences, in which our attempts to confidently discern reality from fantasy

are frustrated. (It is those sequences, I presume, that Stein is referring to when he talks of repeatedly falling through trapdoors of consciousness.)

[7] Ibid., 46.

[8] Durgnat, Raymond. *Luis Bunuel.* London: Studio Vista, 1967, p. 143. Also partially quoted in Wood, p. 18.

[9] Séverine's 'opacity' is often remarked upon by critics. For example, Stein paraphrases the achievement of Deneuve's performance in this way:

> Deneuve's glacial in-gazing is a wondrous sight. She often looks as impressively opaque as Ingres' 'La Grande Odalisque'; sometimes like *Marnie* [sic] reading between the lines in *Alice in Wonderland.* [...] Her finest role. (175)

[10] This scandalousness has already been demonstrated by Séverine's gossipy conversations about that other bourgeois prostitute, Henriette.

[11] Yves Saint Laurent designed her costumes in this film, and apparently still clothes Deneuve today.

[12] Wood remarks on the importance of clothes for the film:

> Deneuve's clothes and hairdo, of course, as has often been said, add hugely to the sense of someone who is meant to be looked at but can't be understood – either because her privacy is so securely locked away inside her or because there is no one there to be understood. Buñuel gets Yves Saint-Laurent to dress her in neat, shortish suits and dresses and coats, all with a slightly military air, as if she were a fabulous, feminine, toy soldier. In the last scene in the film she wears a sober little black dress with a large white collar. [...] There is some resemblance here to what Hitchcock does with his blondes from Grace Kelly to Kim Novak to Tippi Hedren, where the woman, in each case, becomes a doll to be dressed up and manipulated, even violated, by the director and by the chief male character. (19)

[13] Peter William Evans notes that the juxtapositions of fantasy and reality often bring about breaks in temporal continuity.

> [T]he film fails to respect the priorities of chronology, its narrative shifting...through various levels of time past (two flashbacks to Séverine as a little girl), to time present, to the future, to hypothesized or frontier-less time-zones of reverie and dream, thus allowing the text's own seemingly chaotic structure to subvert bourgeois obsessions with order. (159)

This alteration of time is particularly noticeable in the film's early passages in which Séverine appears to daydream of a *fin de siècle* Paris and to remember her youth.

[14] Julie Jones makes this claim in her commentary for Miramax's DVD release of the film.

[15] Some critics appear to assume that Séverine's memories in the film have roughly the same significance as Séverine's memories in Joseph Kessel's book on which the film is based. Consequently, Séverine's memory of a workman holding and kissing her is described as a 'The key incident and root cause of [Séverine's] spellbound condition, from which the film develops all sorts of subsidiary interests.' (Evans, p. 163) At best, the film only hints at such significance. Evans's interpretation fits much better with Kessel's *Belle de Jour*, which contains a prologue that ends:

> He glanced around sharply and grabbed Séverine with both hands. A smell of gas, of animal strength closed against her. Two ill-shaven lips burned her neck. She fought back.
> The workman laughed silently, sensually. Under her frock his hands were caressing the soft flesh. Suddenly Séverine stopped struggling. She was stiff and white. The man put her on the floor and left noiselessly.
> Séverine's governess found her lying in the hallway. She thought the girl had slipped. So did Séverine.
> (Kessel, Joseph. *Belle de Jour*. Trans. Geoffrey Wagner. London: Pan Books, 1969, p. 7.)

[16] The translations of dialogue in this chapter are taken from the subtitles provided by the Miramax DVD.

[17] Rubinstein, Elliot. 'Buñuel's World, or the World and Buñuel' *Philosophy and Literature* 2: 2 (Fall 1978), p. 243.

[18] Wood, pp. 12-3.

[19] This is an echo of a much earlier moment. Pierre's kiss of Séverine just after she fantasises her rape at the hands of the coachmen is shot in a similar manner. In the earlier moment, it is also noticeable that the visual smothering of Séverine appears to release tenderness.

[20] Wood goes on to note that this evocation of her delight doesn't bring us closer to Séverine. He writes that 'the effect of distance, curiously, remains. Deneuve is as alone with her happiness as she is with anything else. We can read her face, that is, but we are as far as ever from being able to read her mind.' (19)

[21] Evans, p. 171.

[22] It is worth noting that the earlier section of the film in which Séverine meets the Duke at a local café (while Buñuel overlooks from a nearby table) also has a deeply ambiguous epistemic status.

[23] Particularly *Breathless / A Bout de Souffle* (1959).

[24] The suggestion that the pair form an allusion to *Breathless* is first made much earlier in the film, when Marcel and Hippolyte are introduced and Hippolyte buys a *New York Herald Tribune* from a street seller. The irony of this allusion emerges later on, however, when Hippolyte admits to being unable to read English. Rubinstein comments on this aspect of the film:

No moviegoer of the sixties should have suffered confusion over this establishing shot, for what it establishes is, specifically, the world of *Breathless*, and more generally the world of American criminality translated to the streets of Paris, the world recast by Jean-Pierre Melville. Gangsters will, inevitably now penetrate this scene...and one of the gangsters will, inevitably, become the lover of Séverine and assassin *mangué* of her husband – all this, presumably, within the "objective" world of the "principal characters." But if the world of movies is not the world of our "daydreams," none will ever be. Séverine's gangster-lover is born of film itself.

All of the last third of *Belle de Jour*, that section of the film in which Séverine's world of prostitutions and humiliation collides with her world of *seizième* complacencies, proves as fantastic as anything that precedes. There can be no line of discrimination: though both are clearly denoted, the abrupt advent of gold-toothed gangster lovers in Séverine's world is neither more nor less subjunctive than her husband's stunning recovery from paraplegia and blindness at the end. (246-7)

[25] We have, of course, already followed some of Marcel's criminal activities earlier on in the film, but this sequence *presents* such activities very differently. A good example of this occurs shortly after we are introduced to Marcel and Hippolyte, when the pair enters a lift in order to rob a payroll clerk. This robbery is filmed obliquely. Unlike the climactic shootout at the end of the film, it is not presented as exhilarating or sensational – the violence is hidden from view.

[26] Wood, p. 69.

[27] Durgnat, 1967, pp. 141-2.

[28] As Stanley Cavell notes, 'the capacity to let fact and fantasy interpret one another is the basis at once of the soul's sickness and of its health.' (Cavell, Stanley. 'The Fantastic of Philosophy' in *Cavell on Film*. Ed. William Rothman. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 152.)

[29] This sharing may extend to Buñuel, who is quoted as saying that the film's ending is 'the moment where I don't know what to do, I have various solutions, and don't decide on any of them. So in the ending I put my own uncertainty into the film. It's happened to me before.' (Quoted in Wood, p. 45.)

[30] Among those critics is Durgnat, who writes:

> [A]fter Husson's departure, Séverine goes in to Pierre. His face is bedewed with tears; his hand opens, and falls back, in the conventional screen gesture for death. But abruptly he rises from his chair, miraculously cured, and ever-loving. The jingling carriage of Séverine's fantasies passes under their window, empty, and, it seems, no longer needed. (Durgnat, 1967, p. 139.)

[31] This fantasy followed Séverine's first day as a prostitute. She imagines Husson and Pierre and a herd of bulls. Two of these bulls have names: 'remorse' and 'expiation'. She then

imagines Husson flinging mud at her. In short, the sound of these cowbells invokes the memory of an earlier remorseful fantasy.

[32] Of course, it is *possible* that Pierre simply recovers, and that an unsignalled ellipse has occurred. But as Wood argues:

> The problem with this interpretation is not its implausibility, but the reverse. It is perfectly plausible, and perfectly banal, and requires us to believe that Buñuel, whatever he said about his ambiguous conclusion, replaced Kessel's grim and moralising pessimism with the irenic [i.e. conciliatory, pacific] suggestion that everything will be all right in the end. (63)

[33] Durgnat has a slightly different, but closely related, view of the ending, partly because he is inclined to favour the interpretation that Pierre is crippled, and that Séverine fantasises that he is not, preferring to remember him as he was:

> All through the film she has believed she would have to pay for her sins, but now her beloved Pierre has become the scape-goat for her sado-masochism. Hence the flagellatory carriage appears, for the last time, empty. Her eroticism has been overwhelmed by a sado-masochistic frigidity. Now her daydreams can become normal, i.e. switch round to a banal sentimentality. Her crippled husband is seductive again, because she will always remember their happy times. That memory is the biggest lie of all. But it's a memory, which fools Séverine, of a superficial reality. Hence the last fantasy doesn't need its quotation marks. Séverine has fooled herself, immolated herself, become a devoted wife, a monster, a living lie. (Durgnat, 1967, p. 145.)

[34] Wood claims that Séverine is something other than a person:

> The overwrought symbolism of her dreams, the Angelus, the flung mud, the duel, the obsessive presence of Husson in her mind and her life, the impossibility of linking her fantasies with any account of them she might give to her husband, all add up not to a person but to a kind of theatre...' (58)

9. Opaque Interiority: *Merci pour le Chocolat*

> Sometimes I feel I am proof that nothing exists.
>
> – Isabelle Huppert [1]

We have already seen, in the chapter on *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967), the critical tendency to regard characters in the films of this study as 'opaque', rather than unknown. In the case of that film, our appreciation of the nature of the central character's interiority and its relationship to the world in which she is situated suggests that the term is somewhat misleading. We come to appreciate Mouchette's inner life – the nature of her experience, her emotional state, and so on – to a considerable degree, even though her motivations, or reasons, for committing suicide are deeply ambiguous. Claude Chabrol's [2] *Merci pour le Chocolat* (2000), [3] however, presents us with a woman who *is* justifiably termed 'opaque', and whose opacity is profound, and indeed the film's subject. Such an understanding of the film accords with Guy Austin's view on characters in Chabrol's films. He writes:

> Although he is greatly interested in character and situation, Chabrol does not concern himself with psychology as an area of knowledge. Human motivations remain obscure rather than transparent. Actions (particularly crimes) and their consequences are shown in uncompromising – and often blackly comic – detail, but no comforting explanations are given. As Chabrol says, 'mon grand plasir, c'est de révéler l'opacité' ['my great pleasure is to reveal opacity'] ...This is particularly true of his female characters. [4]

The central character in *Merci pour le Chocolat*, Mika (Isabelle Huppert), is opaque to a much greater degree than Austin's stress on the obscurity of motivations suggests. The film places us in a position of profound uncertainty regarding the nature and specificity of her interiority for much (if not all) of its duration. For in this film, the process of inferring interiority from behaviour and its presentation is deliberately rendered unstable. Consequently, a vivid picture of her interiority can never be fully constructed, despite our awareness of the *existence* of hidden thoughts

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and feelings that underlie her actions. In responding to similar expressions of opacity in Chabrol's films, Robin Wood and Michael Walker (writing in 1970) identify an expressive contrast

> between surface [in Chabrol's films] and all that is implied beneath it: between the perfect clarity and sureness of the *mise-en-scène*, where actions, gestures, expressions, camera-movements, seem precisely defined and purposeful, and our awareness of the perplexing tangle of ambiguities and complexities of motivation that the *mise-en-scène* seems at once to express and conceal.[5]

To a certain degree, this chapter applies and elaborates the above quotation, investigating how the film's mise-en-scène can appear to be both expressive and concealing of aspects of interiority. To this end, particular attention is paid to the use of performance, music, colour and space to create fluctuations in the relationship between interiority and exteriority. These fluctuations help the film to reveal the opacity of Mika's interiority, to bring it to our attention, so that the significance of her inexpressive and concealing actions can be acknowledged. But first this chapter charts the role of narrative organisation and film style in grading the prominence of Mika's opacity, presenting it as something which *emerges* as significant, despite its sustained visibility.

Concealing Concerns

Given the film's interest in Mika's opacity it is important that its narrative is organised in such a way that it avoids any implicit commitment to providing an explanation of her actions and motivations.[6] This is why the film approaches that opacity through the pursuit of an unrelated mystery. This mystery emerges when Jeanne (Anna Mouglalis) discovers there was a mix-up at the hospital in which she was born and that there is a slim possibility that she is André (Jacques Dutronc) and Lisbeth Polonski's daughter. The mystery generates narrative momentum when Jeanne calls on the Polonskis to ask for an explanation. After being assured that

André isn't her father, Jeanne is invited to Guillaume's room to see photographs of Lisbeth, who died years before. In the reflection of one of those photographs Jeanne sees Mika (André's current wife) *deliberately* spill a flask of drinking chocolate on the floor. Jeanne's suspicions regarding this act brings the question of Mika's motivations to our attention, but this question is soon superseded by more pressing concerns. Jeanne's boyfriend, Axel, who works in a criminological laboratory with Jeanne's mother, analyses a sample of the chocolate on Jeanne's request, and discovers it contains a large dosage of Rohypnol. When Guillaume discloses the role of sleeping pills in Lisbeth's death, the narrative's prior mysteries – is Jeanne André's daughter, why did Mika spill the chocolate? – become displaced by the pressing questions of whether Mika contributed to Lisbeth's death, and whether Jeanne and Guillaume are in immediate danger. Although these questions inspire a redoubled scrutiny of Mika and bring more fully to our attention her opacity, their solutions do not require that opacity to be breached. This is crucial, for it means that the film can find closure in the full unmasking of Mika's murderousness (the film's confirmation of Mika's role in Lisbeth's death and her attempted murder of Jeanne and Guillaume) rather than in the clarification of her psychology, motivations or the nature of her experience – we never discover precisely *why* she performed those murderous acts. In this way, Mika's opacity emerges as central to the film's concerns, yet in an oblique relationship to its narrative.

This delayed emergence of the centrality of Mika's opacity allows the film to tease us with intimations of that opacity which slide past, unsettling us without establishing their importance. For example, when Jeanne visits the Polonskis, after the initial surprise and introductions, Mika retreats to the couch, allowing Jeanne and André to talk about music. There she continues her knitting of a chocolate, web-like shawl.[7] Jeanne and André's conversation concludes with André's invitation to Jeanne to return. The film cuts to a close-up of Mika that begins at her knees, and tilts up to her face. Guillaume asks if she wants something to drink, but the question fails to rouse her – her eyes remain fixed on her knitting – which confirms her pensiveness. Guillaume departs, and Mika's nail-varnished fingers absentmindedly

probe the area inbetween her mouth and chin, pressing her deliberations to a conclusion, before she slips into action and rises to her feet, inviting Jeanne to see portraits of Lisbeth. The camera's close attention to Mika's pensive face brings our attention to its opacity, but not the depth or importance of that opacity. It is only once we know of her deliberate spilling of Guillaume's chocolate, and the contents of that chocolate, that this moment, in which she presumably develops her malevolent scheme, accrues its narrative emphasis. By organising its narrative in this way the film tempts us to pass over this suggestive expression of Mika's opacity in favour of apparently more arresting details, such as the development of the relationship between Jeanne and André, or Guillaume's sulking presence.

Dispelling Evocations of Interiority

...Chabrol's understanding of Lang and Hitchcock most frequently results in a productive tension between their two legacies – between expressionism and voyeurism, objective camera and subjective camera, fate and personal responsibility.[8]

- Guy Austin

As we saw in the moment above, the camera's interest in Mika's implacable and pensive face directs our attention to our inability to read Mika's thoughts and feelings, even as the narrative's organisation withholds the significance of that inability. This often happens in the first half of the film, when Mika's opacity is yet

to be established as among the film's central concerns. In some of the passages during this period, aspects of the film's style assist the narrative's development of the prominence and significance of Mika's opacity by conjuring, and then dispelling, evocations of her interiority. These moments also serve to make us aware of the existence of Mika's interiority without suggesting its nature or disclosing its contents, thereby preventing Mika from becoming an arid enigma.

One of the ways this is achieved is by shifts in the presentation of the film's music, most notably the concealment, and revelation, of its place in the diegesis (the fictional world). An example of this use of music occurs when Mika returns home from her meeting with Jeanne's mother. Her footsteps along the gravel driveway beat out a rhythmic accompaniment to the foreboding opening strides of Liszt's *Funerailles*. It is not immediately obvious where this music comes from. By withholding the source of the music we hear, the film is better able to use that music to lure us towards imagining Mika's interiority. We peer down at Mika from the flight of steps she begins to ascend, the bass notes of the piano colouring our understanding of all that is below, particularly her implacable up-turned face. The combination of sound and image gently suggests the nature of Mika's thoughts and feelings – their darkness, their relentlessness, perhaps even their malevolence. (The gentleness of this suggestion comes partly from the domination of the music by the sporadic chirrup of birdsong, which is fluid and high-pitched, a joyful celebration of the day just passed.)

The moment's nudging suggestion of Mika's interiority is dispelled when the source of the music is revealed (or perhaps confirmed). Mika stops, in close-up, halfway up the steps and looks into the house through a window. The film cuts and we follow Mika's gaze: André is stood behind Jeanne, who is sat in front of a grand piano, attempting to play the Liszt to his satisfaction. Mika's look, and the accompanying shot, identify and emphasise the source of the sombre music. This separates the music from Mika's pensive face and automatic movements, momentarily undermining the music's power to evoke Mika's feelings (even as the shot itself allows us to share her attention).

The film often creates a similar effect by modulating the relationship between interiority and exteriority through the presentation of décor, space and so on. For example, when Mika enters the house and walks past the practice session the film initially shows her passage through these spaces in a way that suggests her state of mind. She passes beyond the pianos, pausing to look towards them (and us), far enough away not to be noticed. Meanwhile, the music continues: its discordant series of chords and cavernous bass notes beat out intensified pulses of feeling. After moving out of sight to our right, she reappears in close-up. Her face remains strikingly inanimate, and our scrutiny, which is rushed by the brevity of the shot, finds little but surface. Her almost involuntary, evenly-measured footsteps now take her to our *left*, past an abstract painting which is further abstracted by our partial view. The reversal of her direction relative to our position and the lurch from a medium-long-shot to a close-up fractures the continuity of the action. Her walk begins to become less a travelling towards something than an engine to her thoughts,

the changes in environment reflecting their development. She reappears, her head and shoulders floating above a large fin of dark-wood (the inside of a piano-lid), and a deeper yet impenetrable shard of shiny black (the outside of another piano-lid) that fills the bottom-half of the frame, dominating our view. She is pushed into the distance by the two pianos, her body severed by the cut of the lids. She looks once more towards André and Jeanne, who remain off-screen, generating the strident blocks of sound that help transform Mika's look into a veiled glare.

This evocation of Mika's interiority through the expressionistic presentation of space and décor, and the soft-pedalling of the diegetic quality of the music, is balanced by a moment that dispels it. Appropriately enough, this is achieved through a recovery of the wholeness of the space, along with a reemphasis of the diegetic quality of the music. This process begins shortly after the film cuts at the beginning of a new musical phrase, once again reversing Mika's direction relative to our position: she now walks to our left, suddenly closer, but with her face hidden from view. We follow her as she walks through a room and a doorway. The camera's movement, which takes the place of a cut, begins to reform this tensely fragmented and distorted space into something more continuous, coherent, and open. Mika moves away from us, outstripping the camera. The continuity of the shot allows her walk to regain a clear direction, situating it in a coherent space. At the same time André's voice breaks in over the music, stopping its flow with a comment on its quality. With Jeanne's reply – like André's muffled by its distance from us – the film emphasises the sound's physical place in this space, its origin in a room nearby, just as the

camera's movement emphasises the dimensions and shape of that space, thereby undermining its evocation of Mika's state of mind.

Evoking Expectation

Moments later, the film conjures the appearance of a passage into Mika's interiority, using camera movement, performance, music and colour to evoke a drift into the realm of her subjectivity, only to reveal that the passage returns us to the objective world. The sequence begins in Guillaume's room. Mika walks slowly and methodically, almost without agency, towards us and to our right. She is alone. The world is hushed, apart from the faint sound of a bird call from outside, the dull sound of her steps. The camera adjusts to hold her in frame, but a little too slowly, as if unsure of where she is going or nervous of her movement towards us. She becomes so close that a small step allows her to slip almost completely from the frame, just the tips of her hair remaining in view. The camera appears momentarily mesmerised by Mika's strangely inexpressive movements; our view becomes fittingly vacant, plunged into the blurry, faint blue-grid (or web) of Guillaume's wallpaper. All that binds us to the moment's action is the fibre of Mika's hair, and our momentum towards Mika and the object of her gaze, generated by her tugging movement. She stops moving and our momentum returns us to her face, which re-emerges into the frame like a planet adrift in space, urgently tactile, alarmingly close, exerting its gravitational pull. The camera glides over Mika's inexpressive face and towards the object of her gaze, implying a shift to Mika's point of view. This movement briefly

plunges us once more into Mika's indistinct surroundings as we sail towards Lisbeth's portrait (picturing Lisbeth holding her head in her hands), which hangs on the wall. Its autumnal colours and distinct lines are attractively vivid against the somewhat sterile and cold obscurity of much of the environment. The warmth of the picture is underscored by a piano sounding a soft, solitary bass note as it drifts into view. Mika reaches out and brushes the photograph with her fingertips while the music slowly billows upwards, each reverberant note rippling the stillness, delicately and softly struck by an unseen hand. The film cuts, as if passing through the photograph and into Mika's imaginings.

The suggestion of passing into Mika's imagining is counter-balanced by the subsequent shot's evident objective reality: we see Jeanne and André in a room downstairs, not a memory of Lisbeth, as we might expect. Consequently, the cut to André and Jeanne appears to mark a shift of concern from Mika's reverie to a different strand of action. The music, which remains a consistent volume and clarity, bridges the gap between the two shots (along with the continuation of the photograph's autumnal colour-scheme), but quickly confirms this defeat of our expectation: the music is revealed to come from the speakers mounted in this room, situating it in a particular location within the house, binding it to this space and time. (We may remember at this point the discussion we over-heard as Mika climbed the stairs, in which André asked Jeanne whether she had 'heard the Arrau recording?'.[9]) As it is questionable whether Mika could hear the music at all from Guillaume's room, and impossible that she could hear it so loudly and clearly, the cut suggests that the music's association with Mika's reverie is the result of an elegant sleight-of-edit.

Yet the shot of André and Jeanne never entirely loses its connection with Mika's reverie. For Jeanne raises her hands to hold her head, copying Lisbeth's posture in her portrait, amplifying her visual similarity with Lisbeth. The camera looms towards her until it frames her, for a brief moment, in close-up, matching the photograph's composition. In so doing, the shot follows what we may imagine to be Mika's train of thought, a meditation on the similarity between Jeanne and Lisbeth, even as its evocation of that thought breaks apart.[10] The moment's combination of contrasting movements – both away from, and towards Mika's interiority – suggests that we have slipped off, rather than broken through, Mika's opaque, implacable surface. In the process we have been stirred to imagine Mika's interior life, which assures us of its existence, and asked to recognise that such imagining is, at best, faltering and uncertain. This raises the opacity of her interiority to a greater prominence.

Revealing Elision – Flashback

In the moment in Guillaume's room we momentarily *appear* to enter Mika's interiority. A little later in the film, when Mika is lying in bed next to André, the film enacts a more explicit and less qualified entrance into Mika's imaginings. Importantly, the depiction of Mika's imagining brings the opacity of her thoughts and feelings – more specifically, their absence from view – more fully to our attention.

As with the earlier moment discussed above, the film evokes an entrance into Mika's interiority through camera movement, contrasts in colour and piano music. Once Mika and André turn out the lights the frame is washed in a blue, subdued, light that mutes the colour-dynamics. We are above the bed, slipping inexorably downwards, towards Mika, who stares pensively into space, perfectly still, specks of bright white light in her eyes. André slides from the frame as we come closer and closer to Mika's face. Just when Mika's face in extreme close-up suggests a boundary has been reached, a soft, low piano note is heard, followed by lightly chiming chords. These sounds are quickly shown to be harbingers of the dissolve that follows, and that melts away all physical barriers. We plunge into a shot bathed in warm, glowing yellows and reds, taking us out from the cold, and hinting at the source of the specks of white seen in Mika's eyes.

Yet rather than entering into a different kind of world, one that is altered by its subjective status, we enter into a world remarkably like the one we have just left. The shot brings us back in time, but keeps within the boundaries of Mika's home. We are now downstairs. André is playing the piano; Lisbeth is watching; a young

Guillaume, nursing a strained ankle, is reading a comic; and Mika is pouring Lisbeth a drink. The film quickly brings us further into the space, and much closer to Mika, who is doubled by the mirror in front of her. But the effect is not to reveal what Mika is thinking; for the cut returns us to her implacable expression. André's playing bridges the gap between the prior image of Mika's head upon a pastel-coloured pillow with this view of Lisbeth's last night. The piano's lilting tides fill the air, dampening Mika's movement as she floats across the room to Lisbeth with soft and even steps. Lisbeth takes the glass from Mika and puts it to her lips. No words are exchanged; no sounds break the music's flow. And crucially, there is no voice-over to present a view of what we are seeing, to depict a thought-process. The music gathers itself – cut to Mika in bed next to André – before the next musical phrase begins, the sound of the world unbroken by the switch in space and time.

The absence of *thought* in this depiction of her imagining is highlighted when our submersion in Mika's reverie is more fully released. The camera backs away from Mika, and the piano fades, eventually to silence, which reverses our plunge into Mika's interiority. This silence is broken by Mika whispering reverentially, 'If you want her to work, shouldn't she spend a few days here?' Her reverence resonates with the ritualistic perfection of what she is imagining, but its sibilance cuts through the air, which has been emptied of the piano's resonant harmonics; the reverie is burst by this whisper, despite its hush. The whisper's contrast with what precedes it – a contrast as vivid as a drop of ink into clear water – alerts us to our difficulty in discerning the thoughts that accompanied Mika's imagining, that presumably led to this reverential whisper. For the reverie is rich in texture and tone but absent of anything that suggests calculation. To judge from the depiction of her imagining, it appears she does not even recall drugging Lisbeth's drink (all we see appears benign) which makes it difficult to make even vague inferences regarding her thinking. In providing us with the imagining that is the source of her whispered question the film sketches the boundary of what is unknown – it discloses what little can be disclosed. The glowing clarity of this imagining thickens the darkness that shrouds her thoughts and feelings, making her opacity appear more impermeable

than ever. Ironically, then, the moment we have the most explicit and sustained access to Mika's interiority is also among the film's most tangible revelations of its opacity.[11]

The Revelation of Concealment

> It is true of a great deal of what goes on in me that normally if it is to be known I must tell it, or give expression to it. But for nothing in me is this absolutely true. Whatever in me I have to conceal I may betray exactly by the way in which I conceal it. Just *that* is what is concealed; the concealment of what it is up to me to express is a perfect expression of it – the slight edge to my denials, the over-casualness of my manner, the tint of automatonity in my smile or gait or posture, each of which I might succeed in concealing. . . . There are those who know how to read such concealments. [...] About human beings there are only open secrets or open questions.[12]
>
> - Stanley Cavell

The film's revelation of Mika's opacity involves an increasing awareness of what we are unable to determine: Mika's attitudes, motivations, thoughts, and feelings. This awareness brings attention to Mika's concealments of those things – her studied vacancy, her evasive and slippery responses to personal questions – and the latent significance of those concealments. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the role of the house's spaces and décor in conjuring and dispelling evocations of Mika's interiority, that the tasteful tones and textures of Mika's home are subjected to the same form of scrutiny once her opacity has been fully revealed and declared.

The sequence following André's confrontation of Mika, and her tacit admission of foul play, hints at the latent significance of the décor in Mika's home. André phones Jeanne's mother, Doctor Pollet, in the attempt to prevent harm from coming to Jeanne; he is in pin-sharp close-up, but the open doorway behind him, and the room beyond, are heavily blurred by the lens's short focal length: a couch and its cushions

are transformed into a cream-coloured *block* with *pastel* patches, the room's lamp into a blob of light. As the conversation progresses ('Tell her to stop and wait') Mika wanders into view through the doorway, and sits on the couch. The light-green shawl she wears across her shoulders, her auburn hair, and the tone of her skin, are blended into the room's décor by the shallow focus, emphasising the continuity between her, and the room's, appearance. Her stealthy appearance in the background of the shot, camouflaged by her harmony with her habitat, imbues the room with threat.

After André puts down the phone, Mika calls him to her. A cut to a distanced view through a different doorway brings Mika and her surroundings into focus. This room's distribution of colour – cream and beige tones predominate – assists the room's impression of cleanliness, tidiness and clarity. There are no magazines or books scattered upon the low, modern, coffee table that sits in front of the couch. Instead a series of square pieces of pink, yellow and sky blue material, laid out in an orderly row, adorn its dark-wood surface, perhaps designed to serve as coasters. The arrangement of these coasters rhymes with the row of cushions (mostly in an array of blues) which evenly line the cream and chocolate couch. Even the painting which hangs upon the far wall – a dark blue dog against near-white paving – fits easily into this colour-scheme. This is evidently a room devoted to being presentable, its décor a display of taste, neatness, and care.

However, by this point in the film we have come to be suspicious of such tidiness, of mess cleared away: from Mika's insistence on washing the handkerchief used by Jeanne to mop up Guillaume's spilt chocolate, to Mika's much more recent attempt

to destroy the evidence of her malevolence by cleaning the remnants of Rohypnol from Jeanne and Guillaume's coffee cups (the act that brings about André's confrontation), the acts of washing, cleaning, and clearing away have become associated with concealment and control over appearances. As a consequence of this, the controlled clarity of the décor's arrangement (a clarity which is emphasised by the shift to a much sharper focus) alerts us to all that has been concealed, becomes a kind of evidence of concealment.[13] In this context, the room's tastefulness is cause for alarm; we notice, perhaps for the first time, that its unity of colour and texture and cultural associations is worryingly immaculate – it is difficult to believe it reflects the family's, or even simply Mika's, taste. Instead, the coherence of its surface speaks of calculation, an activity that is characterised as a symptom of malevolence when Mika later says, in the midst of her confession, 'I calculate everything'.[14]

Opacity's Web of Relationships

As the film progresses, it begins to hint at the extent to which all interiorities have opaque regions, as well as continuing to investigate the presence opaque interiorities find in the world. This hint is elegantly achieved through Mika's place in the centre of a web of relationships. For the film's intertwining of its principal characters allows the revelation of her opacity to imply opaque areas in others, particularly those closest to her, such as André.

Important to this achievement is the film's suggestion that Mika is frequently involved in the uncovering of her own concealments, that her own actions bring the concealments of her malevolence into prominence. This involvement is evident from her resolution to repeat as exactly as possible her murder of Lisbeth in her attempt to murder Jeanne. Her insistence on doubling *everything*, right down to Guillaume's hurt foot (this time she scalds it with boiling water), André's lack of Rohypnol, her acceptance of an offer to fetch the prescription, creates a perfect echo of the prelude

to Lisbeth's death. As a result of this, the completion of this doubling of the night of Lisbeth's death – her washing Jeanne and Guillaume's cups after they depart for André's prescription, which is ostensibly motivated by the wish to eradicate evidence of her tampering – becomes a declaration, as well as a concealment, of her murderousness. It is as if she desires her malevolence to be acknowledged through her concealments. Forcing André to provide such an acknowledgement by provoking a confrontation is her perverse and self-destructive way of ending the unknownness she helps to perpetuate, her way of becoming more fully known, ensuring André comes to appreciate *her* talent, what she calls her 'knack' for doing wrong.

By showing Mika's concealments to be evident to those within the film's world the film develops our understanding of André, revealing the opaque areas of his interiority. For it seems from discovering Mika's concealments that in the figure of André we have someone who has failed to see or to read the person closest to him. Something like this interpretation is urged upon us at the film's end when Mika responds to André's claim that she fools everyone by pointedly noting that 'Some people fool themselves'. In this regard, the confirmation of Mika's malevolence serves to uncover an aspect of André we may have missed. His shambling vacancy, his absent-mindedness, his reliance on Rohypnol to sleep (even when tired), his obsessive piano-playing, and so on, become suggestive of a desire to evade the reality of his life with Mika, and perhaps the state of his own mind after the death of Lisbeth. This brings us to realise how little we understand André's interiority, how we have passed over its areas of opacity.

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The tightness with which our understanding of Mika and André's inner lives are bound together is most clear during André's confrontation of Mika in the kitchen at the film's climax. Huppert's performance is the foundation of this expression. André spins Mika, who is washing the cups, around to face him, causing her to drop a cup onto the hard kitchen floor. His demand for sincerity takes the form of an order: 'Look at me!' Mika does not immediately obey. Preparation is needed. She breathes out through her nose, emptying herself of the tension built up by André's prior, brief interrogation, before revealing her eyes to him with a blink that covers the switch of her gaze. Her face is still, apart from the slight raising of her eyebrows, which suggests that her compliance to André's demands is also a defiance of his deepest wishes. It is an expression empty of pretence and deceit, just as it is empty of the emotions we might expect her to be feeling. In the vacancy of her expression, Mika offers no view, or characterisation, of her own behaviour, of herself, and yet she also does not obstruct André's (and our) view of her, say with a masking expression. Her refusal to admit what she has done or protest her innocence speaks of a confidence in his ability to read her expression. Here Mika's opacity blends into a profound emptiness – there is nothing beyond the surface of her face at this moment.

When the film cuts to an identical close-up of André – the film exploiting the shot/reverse-shot convention – it provides us with a direct comparison between André and Mika's expressions. The frankness of Mika's gaze, its utter emptiness and openness, exposes the clumsy performance with which André has stumbled into his confrontation with her: his furrowed brow, the dimness of his eyes, the anger of his voice, all appear forced concealments of his *lack* of shock and surprise, his prior, repressed, knowledge that all was not well.[15] Dutronc's performance expresses a quiet resistance to Mika's honesty (even as his character also demands it), a befuddled retention of a self that needs protecting from the frankness of her gaze.[16] In this way, André's lack of fury, which may at first appear implausible, helps to deepen our awareness of the reciprocity of significance between these two characters.

This chain (or web) of revelations continues. For our revised understanding of André raises questions concerning some of the film's other characters, particularly Jeanne. Given that Jeanne is perceptive enough to recognise Mika's suspicious behaviour, why does she miss or ignore the strangeness of André's? Were her adoptions of Lisbeth's poses unconscious or calculated? Is she attracted towards him, and if so, in what way? These questions present the possibility that Jeanne's immediate suspicion of Mika was not (or not just) the result of her ability to read Mika's concealments but was primed by a sense of competition with her. In this context, a range of possible motivations emerges, including: professional ambition, her concern for Guillaume's safety (which also has an ambiguous significance), the wish to usurp Mika's position, and the wish to recover a father-figure. However, none of those motivations explains Jeanne knowingly putting her life in danger (and again adopting Lisbeth's role) when she *offers* to fetch André's prescription. We are left, as we might expect, contemplating her opacity. In this way, the film reminds us that all interiorities have their opaque areas, and that knowing another involves acknowledging and considering those areas, as much as acknowledging expressions of thought and feeling when they arise.

[1] This quotation is taken from a documentary entitled *Isabelle Huppert: Une vie pour jouer*, directed by Serge Toubiana, copyright ARTE France / MK2TV, 2001

[2] Claude Chabrol's (born Paris, 1930) first contributions to cinematic culture were as a critic writing for *Cahiers du Cinema*. Like so many of the critics writing for that journal during the fifties, he became a founder-member of the French New Wave; indeed, his first film, *Le Beau Serge* (1958) is often thought to be the first film from that school of filmmaking. After his other New Wave films, including *Les Cousins* (1959), and *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960), he struggled to fund his films and made a series of movies in various popular genres, which received critical disapproval (in the pages of *Cahiers*, among other journals) and accusations that he had betrayed his New Wave colleagues. This setback didn't stop him from becoming a prolific director, and from creating an extraordinary body of work. To some extent, his critical reputation recovered when he made *Les Biches* (1968), the first of a series of films with his second wife, Stephane Audran, termed the 'Hélène Cycle' after the name of a character that reappears in each film, often played by Audran. *La Femme infidele* (1968), *Le Boucher* (1969), which is the most acclaimed of this cycle, one of many examples of Chabrol's imaginative elaborations of the thriller genre, and *La Rupture* (1970) quickly followed. Later in his career Chabrol began making a series of films with the prominent French actress Isabelle Huppert, which include *Violette Nozière* (1978), *Une affaire de femmes* (1988), *Madame Bovary* (1991), *La Cérémonie* (1995), which furthered his critical rehabilitation, *Merci pour le Chocolat* (2000), and the recent *L'Ivress du pouvoir* (2006).

[3] As *Merci pour le Chocolat* has a relatively complex plot the following synopsis may be useful:

Switzerland, present day. Mika, the head of a chocolate company, and André Polonski, a celebrated pianist, remarry. A student pianist, Jeanne, discovers that there was a mix-up at the hospital in which she was born, and that she may be André's (but not Mika's) daughter. Jeanne visits the Polonskis and shares her discovery, and receives assurances that she is not André's daughter. While at the Polonskis house she sees Mika deliberately spill a flask of drinking chocolate meant for Guillaume. Jeanne becomes suspicious and has traces of the chocolate analysed by her boyfriend, Axel, who works in a criminology department with her mother, Doctor Pollet. According to Axel, the chocolate contained large quantities of Rohypnol (a sleeping draught and notorious 'date-rape' drug). Mika visits Dr Pollet to inquire about Jeanne and (perhaps) to determine whether she really could be André's daughter. Dr Pollet refuses to either entertain, or entirely dismiss, the possibility. André begins teaching Jeanne to play Liszt's *Funerailles* for a forthcoming competition. Guillaume confronts Jeanne and accuses her of attempting to exploit and exaggerate her physical likeness to Lisbeth, André's first wife and his (or possibly Jeanne's) mother. Jeanne tells Guillaume that his chocolate was drugged. Guillame tells her that Mika always prepares the chocolate, and that Lisbeth died by falling asleep at the wheel of a car when driving to fetch Rohypnol for André, who cannot sleep without it. He also tells her that the autopsy discovered alcohol and sleeping pills (i.e. Rohypnol) in Lisbeth's body, yet Lisbeth never normally took sleeping pills, and that she died the day of his tenth birthday while he nursed a sprained ankle. In bed with André, Mika remembers the night in which Lisbeth died, and suggests to André that Jeanne should come and stay at the house. Jeanne accepts Mika's offer to come and stay, against Dr Pollet's wishes. Dr Pollet reveals to Jeanne that her husband (and Jeanne's father) was infertile, and that Jeanne was conceived by artificially inseminating donated sperm. Mika rings Dufreigne, a troublesome colleague, and arranges a meeting. Jeanne stays with the Polonskis and André continues to teach her. Mika scalds

Guillaume's foot with boiling water. Night comes, and André discovers that he is out of Rohypnol. Jeanne offers to drive into town to pick up his prescription. Guillaume accompanies. Mika washes up after dinner and coffee. André confronts Mika and discovers Jeanne and Guillaume are in danger. He rings Dr Pollet. Jeanne and Guillaume crash. In the midst of Mika's confession, someone rings to inform André that Jeanne and Guillaume are unhurt. André plays Liszt's *Funerailles* while Mika lies still, silently crying.

[4] Austin, Guy. *Claude Chabrol.* Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. 4-5.

[5] Wood, Robin & Michael Walker. *Claude Chabrol.* London: Studio Vista, 1970, p. 106.

[6] The degree to which the film avoids offering any psychological explanation of her behaviour is quite extreme. It appears that Mika abandons her attempt to kill Guillaume – switching her attentions to Jeanne – when she hears of the possibility that Jeanne and Guillaume were switched at birth, which suggests that she wishes to kill the offspring of André and Lisbeth, whoever that may appear to be. But this is no more than a suggestion, and a vague one at that. The film never confirms why Mika attempts to kill Jeanne or Guillaume.

In this regard the film differs greatly from the book on which it is based. In *The Chocolate Cobweb* (written by the self-proclaimed 'mistress of suspense', Charlotte Armstrong) it is made clear that Mika (or rather 'Ione' – the book names its characters differently) drugs Guillaume's chocolate because she wants to rid the world more completely of Lisbeth, and that she knocks over the chocolate when Jeanne's announcement puts Guillaume's lineage in doubt. As a consequence, it is clear that Mika's attempt to kill Jeanne is strongly related to the possibility that she is André's daughter. (The book also repeatedly emphasises that Mika is a possessive character, presumably in order to psychologically underpin her murderous expression of jealousy.) See Armstrong's *The Chocolate Cobweb.* New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1948.

[7] The motif of the cobweb recurs throughout the film, often by the placing of this shawl somewhere in the frame. It encapsulates both the interconnectedness of the film's mysteries and characters as well as providing a metaphor for the trap that Mika's home has become.

[8] Austin, p. 10.

[9] All the translations of dialogue in this chapter are quotations of the subtitles that appear on Artificial Eye's DVD of the film.

[10] Jeanne was looking at this photograph when Mika spilt the chocolate. It is not, therefore, incredible, or in some way fantastic, that Jeanne should adopt this pose.

[11] There are obvious similarities between this sequence and the depiction of Séverine's memory of Holy Communion in *Belle de Jour*: for example, both depictions are fairly unrevealing of specific thoughts and feelings. However, the depiction of Mika's memory has a much richer tone and mood, which assists the impression of *entering* her interiority. This difference is no doubt partly the result of the film's conviction in the existence and personhood of Mika. For unlike *Belle de Jour*, Chabrol's film avoids suggesting that its unknown woman could be a fantasy figure of some kind.

[12] Cavell, Stanley. *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy.* Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 459. Emphasis in original.

[13] The spiked drinking chocolate Mika gives Guillaume also conceals manipulation with an offering of bourgeois luxury (this is no *ordinary* drinking chocolate, after all). The chocolate's capacity to cover is most explicitly displayed halfway through the film when thick drips dribble over the shiny flask into which it is poured.

[14] Guy Austin notes that this use is characteristic of Chabrol's films. He writes: 'Although the shadowy lighting and unsettling camera angles prevalent in expressionism are used sparingly in Chabrol's films, the symbolic significance of expressionist décor is a constant. Houses and apartments almost always express their occupants' state of mind or destiny.' (159-160)

This use of décor may be an example of Chabrol's Langian tendencies. Consider, for example, Andrew Klevan's interpretation of Alice's (Joan Bennett) apartment in Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window*:

> The apartment is dotted with anonymous, ornamental objects, and its clean and shiny surfaces give off an air of mock deluxe. Those invited into it are presumably conscious of their comfort, or luxuriate in an idea of expensively maintained comfort, although effortless relaxation is effectively disallowed and intimacy forbidden. The place where Alice engages in loveless relations is essentially barren, and its anonymity protects her, ensuring that she cannot be discovered, or known, through an assessment of it. Yet it probably also seals her in, surrounding her with a lifelessness which stifles self-discovery, and continues to confirm her own inhibited assessment of herself. (Klevan, Andrew. 'The Purpose of Plot and the Place of Joan Bennett in Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window*' Cineaction 62 [2003], p. 19.)

[15] It's noticeable that this is the only moment in which Mika is unmasked when face to face with another. Jeanne's suspicions are most fully aroused when viewing her through the reflection provided by the glass framing Lisbeth's self-portrait. And, towards the end of the film, Guillaume thinks he sees Mika put something in Jeanne's coffee when viewing her by way of a mirror (he is mistaken on the particulars, it seems, but not mistaken in observing Mika's malevolence). The repetition of the use of reflections – along with the motif of doubling that runs throughout the film, not least in Mika's doubling of Lisbeth's murder – helps to suggest that there is, at this moment, a similar mirroring, that when André looks at Mika's blankness it is as if he is looking into a mirror and seeing a part of himself hitherto unacknowledged.

[16] It is moments such as this that give credence to the idea that Chabrol is influenced by Freud. Wood and Walker write:

> Chabrol's awareness of powerful determinant forces, uncontrollable because below the level of the conscious mind, makes him perhaps the most Freudian of all important directors. His films revert repeatedly to the idea of the impossibility of 'reading' appearances: of reading the thoughts, emotions, motives behind the masks. More than this, there is the sense...that the

characters themselves know little of what is going on behind their own masks.
(15)

Conclusion

The central claim of this thesis is that film is an appropriate medium for the expression of interiority. This is a view that is, perhaps, counter-intuitive, particularly for those steeped in the achievements of literature. Film is often thought to be restricted to the surface of things, unable to plunge into the depths of consciousness. In particular, as Chapter One notes, it has been argued that film is incapable of expressing 'the precise descriptions and subtle discriminations of a character's mental life' found in the modern and classic novel. Chapter One concedes that there is some truth to this claim. Film is indeed less well-suited to providing *descriptions* of a character's interiority, and to specifying the contents of a character's thoughts, than literature. But as this chapter goes on to demonstrate, this does not mean that film is incapable of 'subtle discriminations of a character's mental life'. Film can be used to evoke particular and precise states of mind, along with the overall nature of a character's experience, and is well-placed to explore the concept of interiority. Part Two of this thesis is devoted to elaborating and substantiating this claim through the examination of a selection of films that feature the figure of the 'unknown woman'. The chapters in this part of the thesis identify techniques and aspects of film style used to express interiority, and the importance of unknownness to many of those expressions. It is now time to draw out the implications of these discoveries for our understanding and appreciation of the medium through a recapitulation of some of the main critical points made in this thesis.

Interiority and Performance

Part One of this thesis identifies the importance of bodily expression for films of interiority through a discussion of Stanley Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, and Deborah Thomas's interpretation of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Part Two began with an explication of *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967) that confirms this

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importance. Early on in this chapter is an examination of Mouchette's (Nadine Nortier) movements when making coffee for her family. In this sequence, Mouchette twirls the coffee grinder like a baton (while humming), deftly pours the coffee into the pot, and casually tosses its lid into position. The flowing quality of her movements manifests her momentary carefree absorption in the task at hand. Much of this chapter shows how Mouchette's interiority is present in her movements and gestures, often when performing uneventful tasks, like eating croissants and drinking coffee. There is, perhaps, no better example in this thesis of film's aptitude for displaying what Emerson calls 'manners': 'thought entering the hands and feet, controlling the movements of the body, the speech and behavior'.[1]

This chapter explicates the importance of the developing relationship between Mouchette's gestures and movements for the expression of interiority. For example, the chapter shows how Nortier's bodily expression of affinity with the physical world and its objects (as found in the moment mentioned above, among others) primes us to appreciate the significance of the physical quality of her death: her easing herself flat against the ground before she begins her descent of the riverbank, her becoming covered in twigs and leaves and other kinds of organic debris, and her plunging into the river – her merging with it. Indeed, the chapter argues that the accumulated significance of Mouchette's movements and gestures, along with the film's emphasis on the physicality of the world she inhabits, leads us to understand her interiority as *consisting* in her physicality and the physicality of the world in which she lives. In this regard, we might think of the film as exploring an aspect of the ontology of interiority, its presence in the body and the physical world, through patterns of performance. It appears from this, and from many similar examples, that the expression of interiority in film is best thought of as something that emerges and accumulates, rather than something that is established or stated.

The other chapters in Part Two collectively demonstrate the breadth of possibilities for the expression of interiority in film that bodily expression affords. Chapter Six's discussion of *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960), for example, shows how

Monica Vitti's performance as Claudia – particularly her movements and gestures – refines our understanding of the place of feelings in the film. Central to this demonstration is the discussion of Claudia's bathing in a rock-pool on the morning after Anna's disappearance, particularly the revealing over-precision of her movements – she cups her hands; scoops water; looks up; flicks her fingers; each gesture separate and distinct. This description forms the basis of a claim that bodily expression is here used to express an intervening self-consciousness – that Claudia (not just Vitti) *performs* feeling rather than expresses it – and that this contributes to the film's suggestion that Claudia has become unaware of her own feelings. In this way, bodily expression – or alternatively its momentary obstruction – contributes to the evocation of a persistent aspect of her interiority, as well as her self-consciousness at this particular moment.

The possibilities presented by bodily expression are extended when combined with inventive use of other aspects of film style, as found in Chapter Eight's discussion of *Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel, 1967). The chapter argues that this film uses the contrast between areas of Séverine's (Catherine Deneuve) body as a metaphor for the conflicted nature of her mind. Early on in the film this is indicated through the isolation of her shiny, chic shoes in close-up as she walks up the stairs when she returns to the brothel for her first day at work. We see her feet swivel and turn back the way they came. Following on from an interpretation of her costume, the chapter claims that the shot's isolation of her feet at this moment implies her indecision is a feature of only a part of her, and that other aspects of her body may express a different, perhaps opposing, range of thoughts and feelings. The chapter found such an implication to become more explicit later in the film when a wider view shows different areas of her body to be expressing desires that conflict with one another (e.g. the contrast between her head and the rest of her body when rushing to retrieve her coat and handbag during her first day at the brothel). This metaphor is shown to be further elaborated when, during the film's climax, the camera moves between a close-up of Séverine's feet, as they walk calmly to the room where Pierre (Jean Sorel) is sat, and a close-up of her hand, which rubs anxiously at the side of a table.

In this way, the possibility of camera position inflecting the significance of performance, and the rhetorical power of extended metaphors in film, is clearly demonstrated.

It is significant that in the moments mentioned above the significance of gesture and movement is amplified and inflected by other aspects of style in a relatively transparent manner (indeed, the most demonstrative effect is the close-up). Mouchette's making of the coffee, for example, is held in a single take that cradles her motions, the camera unfussily accommodating her movements with a pan and tilt, thereby emphasising the continuity of her actions and enhancing our sense of her absorption. In this sequence the film seeks to enhance Mouchette's expression without overriding it, without speaking for her. All of the sequences mentioned so far share this quality: our perspicuity is heightened, but the character's expressions remain her own. This allows us to be aware of the women's separation from ourselves, even as we come to understand their state of mind and the nature of their interiority. This helps to make that understanding revelatory and experiential, even if it also ensures it is uncertain and provisional.

Interiority and Environment

As Chapter One argued, bodily expression of interiority is possible only when we are willing to apply the appropriate psychological criteria to a performer's behaviour. This application of criteria takes behaviour to be an exterior manifestation of inner life. In moving from exteriority to interiority we move from surfaces, textures, movements, colours etc. to thoughts, feelings, states of mind. Once we become attuned to understanding the closeness of exteriority and interiority in this regard it becomes easier to recognise the ways in which the presentation of other aspects of the exterior world, such as a character's environment, can be used by films to evoke interior states. This aspect of the expression of interiority in film is discussed most extensively in the first three chapters of Part Two.

Chapter Four examines rare, but significant, moments in *Le Rayon Vert* (Eric Rohmer, 1986) which present a harmony between interiority and environment. In one moment, when Delphine (Marie Rivière) goes for a walk in Cherbourg, this harmony is achieved through the visual rhyming of Delphine's body with organic or natural objects such as trees, grass and shrubbery: she stands, at the end of a narrow country pathway, blown about by the wind, and cries. The chapter describes how the film juxtaposes her sobs with shots of the quivering, shivering bushes and trees around her. This rhyming allows her environment, from the path in which she stands to the far-away horizon, to evoke the depth and breadth of her distress. This is not simply 'pathetic fallacy': her environment acts upon her; it brings those feelings to expression, reminding us of the film's concern with her difficulty in finding a place in which she can express her distress. Our recognition here of the depth of her feeling affirms the degree to which it is withheld, banked-up, elsewhere. This passage of analysis, as with much of the chapter, demonstrates how the film shows interiority to be something that is also expressed through a character's engagement (or lack of engagement) with her environment, her particular relationship with it.

Chapter Four's discussion makes clear that *Le Rayon Vert* more often employs expressive *contrasts* between performance and environment, despite containing moments, such as the one discussed above, in which the two are in harmony. In doing so, the film demonstrates another possibility provided by film's capacity to define the relationship between bodily expression and environment: the evocation of profound self-absorption, and the diminishing of awareness that results. The chapter argues that the film establishes a world that is vast and autonomous, that extends beyond any single person's view of it. By placing Rivière's performance of sullen and dulled pensiveness into this world the film raises our awareness of what Delphine fails to see. Among several examples used by the chapter to demonstrate how this is achieved is one of the sequences in which Delphine sunbathes alone in Biarritz. The opening shot of the sequence begins with a distanced and raised view of a beach, which is dotted with thousands of sunbathing and swimming

holidaymakers. The shots which follow find Delphine in amongst those holidaymakers, shrinking from the crashing waves. As with the beginning of many sequences in this film, this series of shots initially appears to merely establish the sequence's setting. Moments later, however, we see that those shots also provide an important expressive contrast with the shots that follow: we see Delphine lying down on the beach, her face pursed, looking vaguely out to sea, oblivious to those about her. Her lack of engagement with an environment that is vivid to *us* helps to evoke the busyness of her mind; her lack of engagement becomes a clear symptom of her persistent pre-occupation with pondering her malaise.

The plethora of possibilities afforded by film's capacity to dramatise the relationship between a character and her environment becomes clearer still when this thesis examines *L'avventura*. This film is also shown to present environment as separate from the interiority of its unknown woman but to an importantly different effect. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the film's repeated viewing of Claudia from behind as she stands at windows or balconies looking out at the landscape that surrounds her. The chapter argues that this attention to an environment she is slightly removed from, and the separation it implies, is used particularly powerfully towards the end of the film when Claudia views the swaying leaves of a nearby tree from the railings of a raised car park. In this moment the camera's position, which elides the railings and compresses the distance, presents a harmony between Claudia and her environment similar to that found in Delphine's moment of distress in the Cherbourgian countryside (here, too, there are visual rhymes between the wind's ruffling of the woman's hair and the swaying of the trees, and so on). The difference in effect of the two moments comes from our knowledge that Claudia is removed from what she sees (Delphine is *surrounded* by greenery, even if she stands at the boundary of a field). Consequently, this harmony appears to be an expressive possibility that is out of Claudia's reach. This combines with the suggestion that she *performs*, rather than expresses, her feelings (mentioned above) to form part of the film's intimation that Claudia suffers from an internal disconnection, an inability to know what she feels.

In film, thanks to its basis in photography, a fictional environment can also be a document of a real time and place. This allows film to invoke and exploit the culture and history of a place in its expressions of interiority. An example of this is found in Chapter Five's discussion of *Voyage to Italy* (Roberto Rossellini, 1953). In this film we are often encouraged to infer Katherine's (Ingrid Bergman) thoughts and feelings from the film's presentation of Naples, and to allow those thoughts and feelings to shape our appreciation of that place (to see it as Katherine sees it). This is nowhere clearer than when Katherine drives to the National Museum. Shots which establish her fury at her husband, Alex (George Sanders), are juxtaposed with shots of passing street life that accompany her glances out of the car's windows. These shots are bursts of reportage, evidently filmed using a handheld camera from a car as it cruises the streets of Naples, rather than simulated in a studio, or created using a legion of carefully orchestrated extras. These shots are both documents of the time and place and, as a result of their juxtaposition with shots of Katherine, evocative of the nature of her thoughts. This is particularly evident when she sees (and the documentary shots display) members of the clergy amongst the Neapolitan public. The uniformed religiosity of her environment is placed by the film in a dynamic relationship with her voiced thoughts, as she complains of Alex's arrogance, his belief that he 'understands life', and asserts that Alex should be 'punished for his pride, his self-assurance'. Whether what we see reflects the selectivity of Katherine's subjectivity (the thoughts of punishment leading her gaze to alight on Catholic clergymen and women) or whether the world is influencing her thoughts (as it is for much of the film) is unknowable. But the use of documentary footage adds to the suggestion that Katherine's interiority is in a dynamic relationship with the vivid culture and history of the place, rather than simply with the physical aspects of its environment.

The Depiction of Interiority

Another major possibility of film explored in this thesis is its capacity to depict fantasies, memories, dreams, and so on. This might be understood as an extension of film's capacity to use aspects of exteriority, such as bodily expression and environment, to evoke interiority. Certainly, there is an affinity between moments in which exteriority reflects interiority – when the two, or many significant aspects of the two, are fused – and moments in which exteriority *depicts* interiority. An example of the expressive use of this affinity was found in Chapter Seven's discussion of the moment in *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) in which Alma (Bibi Andersson) watches as Elisabet (Liv Ullmann) cuts her foot on a piece of broken glass. This sequence uses familiar devices to suggest our immersion in Alma's thoughts and feelings: we watch her in medium close-up as she fumes over Elisabet's letter to the psychiatrist. The first hint that the epistemic status of what we see may be undergoing modulation occurs when Elisabet appears in the window of the room behind Alma, made ghostlike by an intervening diaphanous curtain – an echo of her earlier appearance in a sequence of even greater epistemic ambiguity. (This hint is able to surface in large part because of the film's abiding refusal to clearly mark its shifts between fantasy and reality, which makes us acutely sensitive to any suggestion of a shift in the epistemic status of what we see.) As the sequence progresses this ambiguity is developed: the film shows Elisabet walking to and fro several times, repeatedly passing the shard of glass that Alma has left to injure her. By eliding Elisabet's reasons for repeatedly changing direction, the film allows Elisabet's motions to match, and hence possibly realise, Alma's surging and subsiding malevolence. Consequently, it appears that Elisabet's movements follow as much as provoke Alma's thoughts and feelings as she sits fuming in the sun.

This moment's demonstration of the affinity between the evocation and the depiction of interiority raises the possibility that there is a continuum between the two. The discussions of *Persona* and *Belle de Jour* in this thesis confirm and explore this possibility. The chapter on *Persona* examines a sequence which is neither a

straightforward depiction of a fantasy, nor the evocative presentation of an actual event, but something in-between the two: it is the sequence in which Alma appears to sleep with Elisabet's husband, Mr Vogler. As Susan Sontag rightly notes, the implausibility of what we see and hear makes it difficult for us to interpret the sequence as presenting 'a "real" event'. Yet 'neither can we be absolutely sure that this, or something like it, isn't taking place,' for the sequence provides the film's only representation of developments in the women's relationship that must, in some sense, have actually occurred.

What affirms this ambiguity is the sequence's oscillation between Alma's and Elisabet's point of view. When the sequence begins, and Alma chances upon Mr Vogler, Alma appears to be at the centre of its events. But the emerging presence and agency of Elisabet, who directs Alma to engage with Mr Vogler, questions this appearance. As the sequence progresses, the ambiguity of its point of view is sustained through editing and camera movement. When Alma, playing the role of Elisabet, embraces Mr Vogler, the film cuts to an extreme-close-up of Elisabet's face. If this cut suggests the intrusion of Elisabet into Alma's thoughts, the camera movement that follows suggests something rather different: the camera retreats bringing Alma and Mr Vogler into view, while Elisabet remains in the foreground staring towards us. This alteration of composition suggests that Elisabet is imagining the embracing couple – the mobility between the close-up and the wider view implying continuity between the two suggestions. This raises the possibility that what we see is shaped by the hallucinatory experience of both women, which affirms the suggestion that what we see is both (in some indefinable sense) imagined and really happening. At the same time this aspect of the sequence implies that Alma's and Elisabet's experience of the world is becoming merged, which helps to elaborate the psychological effects of the women's prolonged and fraught intimacy.

This thesis's discussion of *Belle de Jour* makes clear that when film is used to depict fantasy it can exploit what Susan Sontag calls 'the nature of cinema to confer on all events, without indications to the contrary, an equivalent degree of reality:

everything shown on the screen is "there," present.' [2] For even though the notion of depicting fantasy depends on there being some indication that what we see is imagined, those indications can be of varying strengths, thus allowing a considerable degree of flexibility for filmmakers wishing to explore the reality of fantasy (and visa versa). Chapter Eight's discussion of this film identifies how the relationship between fantasy and reality can be explored through juxtapositions of sequences depicting the two. The nature of those juxtapositions is found to be importantly expressive of Séverine's conflicted interiority. One key example occurs when Séverine ascends the stairs to *chez* Anaïs's for the first time. Midway through her ascent the camera flash-zooms towards her face. She turns to face the camera, as if suddenly aware of an intrusion of some kind. A cut follows, presenting us with a depiction of her memory of refusing Holy Communion. The abrupt appearance of this sequence – which is in marked contrast from the conventional slow transition, often by way of a dissolve, between reality and memory – helps to evoke the opposition between this memory and her experience of the world, the sense in which the memory breaks into that experience, takes it over. At the same time, although we can infer that this sequence depicts a memory of Séverine's, the film stops at this inference, refusing to mark out this sequence as different *in kind* from the sequence that precedes it and (at least ostensibly) depicts reality. This forms part of the film's suggestion that our memories, fantasies, dreams and so on are better thought of as things which can be confused with reality, rather than worlds apart from it. As such this moment is not only an example of the medium being used to evoke the nature of a character's interiority, but is also an example of an exploration of the ontological relationship between fantasy and reality in film.

In the moments described above film's reliance on conventions, hints, suggestions, and implications to confer a particular epistemic status on a sequence is exploited in a variety of ways. Chapter Nine's discussion of *Merci pour le Chocolat* (Claude Chabrol, 2000) shows another way in which the fundamental ambiguity of adjustments in point of view in film can be used expressively. In this case, it is the *expectation* created by techniques often used to express shifts in epistemic status that

is exploited. In the sequence in question, Mika (Isabelle Huppert) examines a photograph of Andre's (Jacques Dutronc) dead wife, Lisbeth. The film uses variations on certain familiar techniques – e.g. close attention to a contemplative facial expression and musical underscoring – to evoke the drift into Mika's imagining. Mika enters Guillaume's room, and floats past the camera, which almost loses sight of her, before being pulled towards the focus of her gaze, passing again across her face and out towards her outstretched hand as she caresses Lisbeth's self-portrait. Meanwhile, the hush of the moment is made sonorous by the sounding of a soft, piano bass note as the photograph appears. The camera's movement, Huppert's performance, and the moment's music lead us to expect the arrival of a shot that depicts Mika's thoughts about Lisbeth. This expectation is frustrated when the cut that follows brings André and Jeanne (Anna Mouglalis) into view, and shows them to be listening to the music we took to express Mika's state of mind. As the chapter shows, this confounding of our expectations is incomplete, however. We see Jeanne adopt a similar pose to Lisbeth in the photograph we have just left, which allows the shot to follow a possible aspect of Mika's thoughts even while reminding us of the impossibility of plunging into Mika's interiority. In this way, we are brought to imagine her interiority without that imagining becoming validated. This effect, the chapter finds, forms part of the film's overall evocation of Mika's opacity, an evocation that repeatedly exploits the fluidity of relationships in film (whether between shots, sound and image, or bodily expression and environment).

Interiority and Dialogue

Chapter Two notes that the unknownness of a character often provides certain restrictions on the expression of interiority. The most obvious of these is that it restricts the use of dialogue; for it is clear that in many films our understanding of the inner lives of characters comes from their verbal expression of these lives to one another, a process that the abiding unknownness of a character necessarily prohibits. However, it is doubtful that this prohibition is as nearly limiting as it might first

appear – indeed, it may be more enabling than limiting. For in the films discussed in this thesis, *difficulties* in verbalising thoughts and feelings (which when acute is a partial cause of unknownness) are often exploited to expressive effect. Consider, for example, the relationship between bodily expression and dialogue in *Le Rayon Vert* when Delphine talks to Béatrice (Béatrice Romand). Delphine's gesticulating hands – as she gears herself up to respond to Béatrice's critical urgings – repeatedly retreat towards her body, often touching her face and hair, suggesting Delphine's need to console herself and her wish to withdraw, hence her deep vulnerability. The words Delphine utters become, in the context of these gestures, desperate attempts to ward off Béatrice's probing ('I'm fine...There is someone in my life...'). In this way, the difficulty of verbally articulating certain thoughts and feelings becomes an eloquent expression of a particular state of mind.

Similarly, this thesis shows that unsatisfactory conclusions to conversations can be used to express interiority. Chapter Five discusses the use of interruptions in *Voyage to Italy* to express the influence of Naples on Katherine's train of thought. One particular interruption, in which an Italian couple approaching their wedding day have a noisy argument, provokes a short, but evocative, exchange between Katherine and her husband: Alex comments on the strangeness of the couple being jealous *before* marriage, but Katherine is stirred more deeply by the couple's passionate exchange; she responds by saying, 'Well the time just before marriage is a very delicate one.' This thought has a freshness that her conversation with Alex typically lacks; it appears an orphaned thought from an area or mode of thinking that has hitherto remained unexpressed. Consequently, we become (like Alex) aware of the degree to which Katherine remains unknown. Importantly, Katherine does not pursue this thought, hurrying back to her preparation of their dinner. The sequence ends on Alex's perplexity as he wanders away from the window and back to his seat, keeping his eyes on Katherine, the film dissolving into the next sequence as he sits down. The dissolve allows the mysteriousness of Katherine's comment to remain (we receive no explanation) and yet not be delimited to the moment, but to seep into the rest of the film, to become a loose-end suggesting a wealth of possibilities. Here

we see an example from this thesis of the evocation of interiority being at once an evocation of unknownness – a suggestion of the depth of a character's privacy. It appears from moments such as this that the unknownness of a character can complement, rather than frustrate, the expression of interiority.

Unknownness and Interiority

Chapter Two shows that it is not only possible for a character to remain isolated and unknown and for her interiority to be expressed in film, it is often *helpful* for that character to be in a position in which she is unable to impress her existence on others. In this chapter, the characters of Dix (Humphrey Bogart) and Laurel (Gloria Grahame) from *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950) were examined. An important part of this discussion was the moment at the climax of the film in which Dix barges his way into Laurel's apartment, initially to apologise for his earlier anger. On discovering that Laurel is without her engagement ring he becomes angry and suspicious, and demands that she retrieve it. As she does as he commands, he lights a cigarette to calm himself, his hands shaking with fury. The match lights the centre of his face, creating a burning pool of light, just as the realisation that Laurel is about to leave him falls across his face. It is a suggestive, and richly evocative, moment. However, as the chapter argues, our imaginings of Dix's interiority are curtailed by his immediate recourse to action: he rushes into Laurel's bedroom and violently confronts her. Our fear for Laurel's safety punctures the evocation. This moment, the chapter claims, suggests that the imagining of a character's interiority requires time, and the suspension of overtly demonstrative activity, to bloom.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that so many of the moments examined in this thesis involve characters performing a routine task, perhaps travelling somewhere, or simply sitting and thinking: Mouchette brewing coffee; Delphine walking in the countryside or sitting on the beach; Katherine driving through Naples; Claudia looking out of a window; Alma sunbathing; Séverine ascending the staircase to *chez*

Anaïs; and Mika looking at a photograph. Moments such as these can appear, at first glance, to be peripheral to the concerns of the films in question, embellishments or pauses before the narrative picks up momentum. This thesis has sought to demonstrate that close attention to the subtleties of style and performance can reveal the significance and centrality of such moments.[3]

However, even though these moments are often evocative of the nature of these women's interiorities, or a passing state of mind, it is important to acknowledge that the contents of those interiorities typically remain, at least to a significant degree, unknown to us. The unknownness that remains is not, though, best understood as evidence of a paucity or lack of expression but as part of the expression itself. Indeed, it is often the many moments in which interiority *is* there to be read, moments which perhaps disclose a state of mind, that help to suggest the existence of a largely undiscovered region of thought and feeling. In short, our developing appreciation of the women's states of mind, and our understanding of the nature of their inner life, increases our awareness of all the thoughts and feelings that exceed the women's, and the films', capacities for expression. It is in this way that the vastness of the areas that are unknown is *uncovered*. Film's aptitude for such uncoverings suggests that the medium is well placed to explore what Cavell calls 'the distance between the depth to which an ordinary human life requires expression, and the surface of ordinary means through which that life must, if it will, express itself.' [4] Is there an aspect of interiority that is more deserving of exploration?

[1] Quoted in Stanley Cavell's 'What Photography Calls Thinking' in *Raritan* Vol. 4 Pt. 4 (1985): 14. Originally from Emerson's essay 'Behavior' which can be found in *The Conduct of Life and Society and Solitude* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900 [1883]): pp. 135-159. Emerson continues: 'There is always a best way of doing everything, if it be to boil an egg. Manners are the happy ways of doing things; each once a stroke of genius or of love, – now repeated and hardened into usage.' (139)

[2] Sontag, Susan. 'Persona: The Film in Depth' in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism.* Ed. Stuart M. Kaminsky with Joseph F. Hill. London: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 257.

[3] In this regard, we might understand this thesis as building on the insights of Andrew Klevan's book *Disclosure of the Everyday* which shows that 'film is a suitable medium to reveal the significance in uneventful activities such as tidying up.' (See Klevan, Andrew. *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film.* Trowbridge: Flicks, 2000, p. 207.)

[4] Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [Enlarged Edition]. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979 [1971], p. 180.

Appendix 1: Filmography

Mouchette
1967, France, bw, 90m
d Robert Bresson *cast* Nadine Nortier, Jean-Claude Guilbert, Marie Cardinal, Paul Hébert, Jean Vimenet, Marie Susini
Nouveaux Pictures DVD

Le Rayon Vert (The Green Ray / Summer)
1986, France, Colour, 98m
d Eric Rohmer *cast* Marie Rivière, Lisa Hérédia, Béatrice Romand, Vincent Gauthier, Eric Hamm, Rosette, Vanessa Leleu, Irene Skobline, Carita
Arrow Films DVD

Voyage to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)
1953, Italy/France, bw, 100m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Ingrid Bergman, George Sanders, Maria Mauban, Anna Proclemer, Paul Muller, Leslie Daniels, Natalia Rai, Jackie Frost
BFI Films DVD

L'avventura
1960, Italy / France, bw, 145m
d Michelangelo Antonioni *cast* Monica Vitti, Lea Massari, Gabriele Ferzetti, Dominique Blanchar, James Addams, Lelio Luttazi
Criterion DVD

Persona (Person)
1966, Sweden, bw, 81m
d Ingmar Bergman *cast* Liv Ullman, Bibi Andersson, Margaretha Krook, Gunnar Björnstrand
Tartan DVD

Belle de Jour
1967, France/Italy, colour, 100m
d Luis Buñuel *cast* Catherine Deneuve, Jean Sorel, Michel Piccoli, Genevieve Page, Pierre Clémenti
Miramax DVD

Merci pour le Chocolat
2000, France, colour, 97m
d Claude Chabrol *cast* Isabelle Huppert, Jacques Dutronc, Anna Mouglalis, Rodolphe Pauly
Artificial Eye DVD

All I Desire
1953, USA, bw, 79m
d Douglas Sirk *cast* Barbara Stanwyck, Richard Carlson, Lyle Bettger, Maureen O'Sullivan, Richard Long, Lori Nelson

Being John Malkovich
1999, USA/GB, colour, 112m
d Spike Jonze *cast* John Cusack, Cameron Diaz, Catherine Keener, Orson Been, Mary Kay Place, John Malkovich, Charlie Sheen

Bonjour Tristesse
1958, GB, colour/bw, 93m
d Otto Preminger *cast* David Niven, Deborah Kerr, Jean Seberg, Mylene Demongeot, Geoffrey Horne, Juliette Greco, Marita Hunt, Walter Chiari, Jean Kent, Roland Culver

Caught
1948, USA, bw, 88m
d Max Ophuls *cast* James Mason, Robert Ryan, Barbara Bel Geddes, Natalie Shafer, Curt Bois

The Cobweb
1955, USA, colour, 124m
d Vincente Minnelli *cast* Richard Widmark, Lauren Bacall, Charles Boyer, Lillian Gish, Gloria Grahame, John Kerr, Susan Strasberg, Oscar Levant, Tommy Rettig, Paul Stewart, Adèle Jergens

The Devil's Wanton (Fängelse)
1949, Sweden, bw, 80m
d Ingmar Bergman *cast* Doris Svedlund, Birger Malmsten, Eva Henning, Hasse Ekman

Diary of a Chambermaid (Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre)
1964, France/Italy, bw, 98m
d Luis Buñuel *cast* Jeanne Moreau, Georges Géret, Michel Piccoli

Europa '51
1952, Italy, bw, 110m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Ingrid Bergman, Alexander Knox, Ettore Giannini, Giuletta Masina

Gaslight
1944, USA, bw, 114m
d George Cukor *cast* Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, Joseph Cotten, Dame May Whitty, Barbara Everest, Angela Lansbury, Edmund Breon, Halliwell Hobbes

Germany Year Zero (Germania anno zero)
1947, France/Italy, bw, 78m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Edmund Moeschke, Ernst Pittschau, Franz Krüger

A Good Marriage (Le Beau Marriage)
1982, France, colour, 97m
d Eric Rohmer *cast* Béatrice Romand, André Dussollier, Féodor Atkine

In a Lonely Place
1950, USA, bw, 93m
d Nicholas Ray *cast* Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame, Frank Lovejoy, Carl Benton Reid, Art Smith, Jeff Donnell

Lady in the Lake
1946, USA, bw, 103m
d Robert Montgomery *cast* Robert Montgomery, Audrey Totter, Lloyd Nolan, Tom Tully, Leon Ames

Letter from an Unknown Woman
1948, USA, bw, 89m
d Max Ophuls *cast* Joan Fontaine, Louis Jourdan, Mady Christians, Art Smith, Marcel Journet

The Machine That Kills Bad People (La macchina ammazzacattivi)
1952, Italy, bw, 80m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Gennaro Pisano, Marilyn Buferd, William Tubbs

The Miracle (Il Miracolo)
1948, Italy, bw, 40m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Anna Magnani, Federico Fellini

My Night at Maud's (Ma Nuit chez Maud)
1969, France, bw, 110m
d Eric Rohmer *cast* Jean-Louis Trintigant, Françoise Fabian

Now, Voyager
1942, USA, bw, 117m
d Irving Rapper *cast* Bette Davis, Claude Rains, Paul Henreid, Gladys Cooper, John Loder, Bonita Granville, Ilka Chase, Lee Pattrick, Charles Drake, Franklin Pangborn, Janis Wilson

Paisà
1946, Italy, bw, 115m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* William Tubbs, Gar Moore, Maria Michi

Les Parapluies de Cherbourg
1964, France/Germany, colour, 92m
d Jacques Demy *cast* Catherine Deneuve, Anne Vernon, Nino Castelnuovo

Psycho
1960, USA, bw, 109m
d Alfred Hitchcock *cast* Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles, John Gavin, Janet Leigh, John McIntire, Martin Balsam, Simon Oakland

Repulsion
1965, GB, bw, 105m
d Roman Polanski *cast* Catherine Deneuve, Ian Hendry, John Fraser

Rome, Open City (Roma, città aperta)
1945, Italy, bw, 101m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Aldo Fabrizi, Anna Magnani, Marcello Pagliero, Maria Michi

Stella Dallas
1937, USA, bw, 106m
d King Vidor *cast* Barbara Stanwyck, John Boles, Anne Shirley, Barbara O'Neil, Alan Hale, Marjorie Main, Tim Holt

Stromboli
1949, Italy, bw, 107m
d Roberto Rossellini *cast* Ingrid Bergman, Mario Vitale, Renzo Cesana

A Tale of Summer / A Summer's Tale (Conte d'été)
1996, France, colour, 113m
d Eric Rohmer *cast* Melvil Poupaud, Amanda Langlet, Gwenaëlle Simon

Vertigo
1958, USA, colour, 128m
d Alfred Hitchcock *cast* James Stewart, Kim Novak, Barbara Bel Geddes, Tom Helmore, Henry Jones

Viridiana
1961, Spain/Mexico, bw, 91m
d Luis Buñuel *cast* Silvia Pinal, Francisco Rabal, Fernando Rey

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