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UNIVERSITY OF KENT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

School of Drama, Film and Visual Arts

Magnificent Intimacy: A Relationship of Style in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema

By

Steven John Peacock

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2005



F206726

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

Abstract

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF DRAMA, FILM, AND VISUAL ARTS

Doctor of Philosophy

MAGNIFICENT INTIMACY: A RELATIONSHIP OF STYLE IN CONTEMPORARY
HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

By Steven John Peacock

Economically and aesthetically, the grand scale of contemporary Hollywood cinema is often considered in pejorative terms. The weighty influence of the system and the inflated style of its films are subjects of censure. Concentrating on a relationship of style, this thesis sees the grand designs of contemporary Hollywood as constituting a possibility for the period. Four films of grand conception are shown to shape their designs, in measures of magnitude and exactitude, to convey expressions of human closeness. The films under consideration are: *The Age of Innocence* (Scorsese, 1993), *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood, 1995), *The Insider* (Mann, 1999) and *The Straight Story* (Lynch, 1999). The relationship between ‘big’ and ‘little’ concerns is explored in the films through their handling of points of style: in patterns, arrangements, concentrations of detail, and measures of refinement and integration. In large-scale compositions, the films bring out the intricacies and intimacies of their characters’ relationships to their environment and each other. In a series of close readings, the thesis considers the films’ handling of particular elements of style, as components of their ‘big architecture’: location and landscape, performance and gesture, dialogue, music, editing and camerawork. As Film Studies predominantly considers contemporary Hollywood film from different perspectives – historically, socio-economically, in a cultural context – the thesis offers another way of understanding and appreciating works of the current period. Equally, the thesis redirects the principles of evaluative criticism, in adopting an approach of ‘close analysis’ that is normally applied to classical Hollywood. A concentration on intimate expressions realized in an environment of amplitude allows for the consideration of an overlooked achievement of contemporary Hollywood. In discerning the different ways the films achieve their expressions, in making precise discriminations of the detail of moments in film, the thesis extends the vocabulary of sustained criticism on contemporary Hollywood cinema.

Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Chapter 1 Place and Patterning	Page 27
Chapter 2 Gesture	Page 58
Chapter 3 Voice and Conversation	Page 81
Chapter 4 Music	Page 97
Chapter 5 Dissolve and Ellipsis	Page 110
Chapter 6 Position and Perspective	Page 126
Conclusion	Page 160
Filmography	Page 168
Bibliography	Page 169

Acknowledgements

There are many people I would like to thank for their help in the completion of this thesis. First and foremost is my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Klevan. Without his tutelage none of this work would have been possible. I would like to thank him for his continuous and unfaltering support, guidance and teaching. I would also like to thank all members of the Department of Film Studies at the University of Kent for their support. Special thanks must go to Sarah Cardwell, Alex Clayton, David Turner and Thalia Baldwin. It is an ongoing pleasure to share time “in and out of school” with you all. Outside the Department, I would also like to thank David Scorey and Matthew Roach for the generosity of their time, the patience of their conversation, and the perspicacity of their thoughts.

Equally important are friends and colleagues at Southampton Solent University, in particular Darren Kerr and Karen Randell. My family is a crucial source of inspiration: thanks to my parents and to my brother David, who always asks for the clearest definitions, and never allows academic obfuscation. Finally, thank you Leigh. You are an inspiration, guide and source of boundless warmth and wisdom. This work would not have been completed without your support and understanding.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the AHRB for its source of financial support.

Introduction

Matters of Scale

There is a tendency in Film Studies to bemoan the output of contemporary Hollywood in terms of scale. Problems are seen to stem from both the vastness of the current day Hollywood system (the industry), and the shaping of contemporary American film as spectacle (the image). In terms of its industrial sway, concern is raised over Hollywood's global domination, with emphasis on its control of the overseas market. In *Global Hollywood*, Toby Miller considers how "Hollywood owns between 40 per cent and 90 per cent of the movies shown in the world" and how "Los Angeles-New York culture and commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe."¹ Equally, importance is placed on Hollywood's current involvement and position in "vertically-integrated media conglomerates", in which the major studios "serve as the base to dominate a plethora of media industries – from television and film, from home video to cable TV, from publishing to theme parks."²

Hollywood's control of the marketplace is reinforced by the phenomenal success and domineering presence of its "big budget" productions. Geoff King describes the predominant visual form of contemporary Hollywood as comprising the "epic landscape to sumptuous interior ... [of] expansive vistas spread out across the width of the big screen, their presence magnified by the aural impact of multi-channel sound."³ Moreover, Hollywood's weighty corporate interests are seen to inform the shape and content of its films. King notes that, "in an age in which the big Hollywood studios have become absorbed into giant conglomerates, the prevalence of spectacle and special

¹ Toby Miller et al, *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2001), pp3-4. See also Tino Balio, "'A major presence in all of the world's important markets': the globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s", in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2000).

² Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history", in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2000), pp. 52-53. Further, Jon Lewis notes that, "The movie business in the nineties was characterized by an increasing concentration of industrial power among a select group of multinational players. Relevant here are four big mergers – Time and Warner Communication, Paramount Communications and Viacom, the Disney Corporation and Capital Cities/ABC, and Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting (a deal complicated further by an end-of-the-century merger-in-principle with America Online). To this growing conglomeration of vertical and horizontal integration we can add some significant inter-industry developments: strategic allegiances between internet companies, telephone carriers, cable television outfits, and what were once upon a time just film studios", *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 2.

³ Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (I. B Tauris, London and New York: 2000), p.1.

effects has been boosted by a growing demand for products that can be further exploited in multimedia forms such as computer games and theme-park rides – secondary outlets that sometimes generate more profits than the films on which they are based.”⁴ Corporate investment, considerations of secondary outlets and “the prevalence of spectacle” lead to a pervasiveness of large-scale blockbuster movies. As Sheldon Hall opines, “While at one time blockbusters were distinguished partly by their exceptionalism, their status as an economic category different from and ‘above’ from the normal run of general releases, it now seems possible to believe that Hollywood makes nothing *but* blockbusters.”⁵ Again, it is not only the dominance but also the scale of the films that causes concern. Critics lament the “Age of the blockbuster” as bringing a glut of “large-scale, impersonal Hollywood productions,”⁶ and “disappointing exercise[s] in overindulgence.”⁷

Problems of size and scale are not only restricted to the contemporary blockbuster. So-called “prestige films”⁸ such as *Heat* (Michael Mann, 1995) are seen to exhibit forms of “widescreen largesse”, symptomatic of the “highly polished New Hollywood cinema multiplex audiences flocked to in the 1980s and 1990s.”⁹ Even Hollywood features that appear to carry ‘independent’ credentials come under similar criticism. For example, Kent Jones describes *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2001) as “sprawling”, and as “a singularity in American movies: a big, self-important, overreaching, but fundamentally sweet picture that fancies itself a major achievement.”¹⁰ Industrially and aesthetically, contemporary Hollywood is seen to carry too much weight. The vocabulary of the above academics and critics evokes a Hollywood at once powerful yet boorish in its inflated state. Gavin Smith encapsulates the mood when he speaks of the “nineties cul-de-sac of *bloated*, corrupt mediocrity.”¹¹ Whilst acknowledging the presence of much “mediocrity” in terms of recent cinematic output, this thesis negotiates a route around the “cul-de-

⁴ Ibid: pp.1-2.

⁵ Sheldon Hall, “Tall Revenue Features: The Genealogy of the Modern Blockbuster”, in Steve Neale (ed.) *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2002), p. 11.

⁶ The quotation comes from a review by Kirk Honeycutt of the film *XXX: State of the Union* (Rob Cohen, 2005), *Hollywood Reporter*, (April 25 2005), sourced online at www.hollywoodreporter.com.

⁷ The quotation comes from a review by Bob Kay of the film *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004). The review is sourced online at www.flixnjoystix.com.

⁸ Sheldon Hall lists the following as prestige films: *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998) and *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000). Hall, “Tall Revenue Features: The Genealogy of the Modern Blockbuster”, in Steve Neale (ed.), *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, p. 23.

⁹ Nick James, *Heat* (London: BFI, 2002), p. 29.

¹⁰ Kent Jones, “White Noise”, *Film Comment* (Jan/Feb 2000, vol. 35, no. 7), p. 33.

sac". The following study claims the inflated or "bloated" state of contemporary Hollywood as constituting a *possibility* for the period. It brings to light a particular stylistic relationship that exists precisely because of the grand scale of contemporary American cinema.

The Little within the Big

This thesis shows how a certain group of films uses the grandeur and sweep of contemporary Hollywood cinema to create expressions of intimacy. Particular works are seen to exhibit a particular rhetoric of expression, drawing on the relationship between 'the big' and 'the little'.¹² A line from the critic Raymond Durnat acts as the catalyst for the following considerations, as he notes how, "All too often, 'big architecture' dwarfs a film's characters, makes them small, remote and cold."¹³ Durnat's remark leads to thoughts on the precise constituents of a film's "big architecture." Further, the claim encourages us to look for alternative cases, lying outside the "All too often." That is to say, it promotes a test of an alternative possibility, that rather than creating "remote and cold" characterization, the constituents of a film's "big architecture" might also be capable of rendering expressions of human closeness.

Thus, the thesis responds to two over-arching notions. First, that the grand gestures of modern American cinema can be seen to facilitate certain expressions of intimacy. Secondly, that a sensitive handling of large-scale concerns allows little details to be brought out in a certain way. The four films considered in the following chapters are seen to craft intelligent, subtly realized instances within an environment of amplitude. It is a possibility of modern American cinema to use its own expansiveness to shape and exhibit delicate points of entry into the subtleties and complexities of human negotiations. The "big architecture" of certain contemporary Hollywood films brings out the details and intricacies of the characters' relationships with the world and each other.¹⁴

¹¹ Gavin Smith, 'Inside Out', *Film Comment* (September/October 1999, vol. 35, no. 5), p. 58 (my italics).

¹² All of the films included in the thesis are connected through their own relative involvement with matters of 'the little' within 'the big'. The terms 'little' and 'big' are used as deliberate 'catch-all' definitions. Together, they constitute the conceptual paradigm of the thesis. It is the aim of the thesis to refine this critical vocabulary, of considerations of contemporary Hollywood cinema.

¹³ Raymond Durnat, *A Long Hard Look at Psycho* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 73.

¹⁴ The thesis is not concerned with the "discovery" of an overarching tendency of modern American cinema, across decades. Rather, it offers thoughts on a set of films with shared aspects and binding concerns, expressing a particular achievement of the contemporary movie.

The Four Films

The four films to be considered in the following chapters are *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, 1999); *The Bridges of Madison County* (Clint Eastwood, 1995); *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993); and *The Insider* (Michael Mann, 1999). In a twofold sense, all the films are works of grand conception. First, they are ‘big budget’ movies, heralded as “prestige pictures” for major studios, with the involvement of ‘big name’ directors and actors.¹⁵ Secondly, and as the key point of focus here, all four films operate on a grand scale in their visual, aural, spatial and temporal compositions. In this thesis, the films are of particular interest for the way they shape their grand dimensions to express the close and complex relationships of characters, settings, and communities.¹⁶

The Straight Story explores one man’s extensive journey across the American Midwest, over many months and miles. In its handling of the intricacies of a vast landscape, the film expresses particular facets of its main character. In its measurement of a long, personal pilgrimage, the film explores the bond between brothers, and the lasting pleasures of transient experiences. Whilst *The Bridges of Madison County* shares the Iowan landscape of *The Straight Story*, it differs in the handling of time and space. Despite concentrating its attention on a brief, four-day affair, *The Bridges of Madison County* achieves a sense of expansiveness through the density of its exploration. Charting the details of the short-lived affair, the film gradually reveals the charge and intensity of the lovers’ relationship. Equally, it conveys the resonance of the brief encounter in a larger timeframe, shuttling between the intense “past” of the affair to events of the “present”. Similarly, *The Age of Innocence* explores an illicit affair between lovers, across many decades. It focuses on the relationship as clandestine, as a bond developing in fragments of shared time, with the lovers stealing moments together in occasional and fleeting meetings. At the same time, the film explores how the relationship is restricted by the opulent trappings of a beautifully created environment. It charts the couple’s personal relationship within the grand and public settings of this world, in Opera houses, Ballrooms and Dining Halls. This concern chimes with a central matter of the fourth film, *The Insider*. Throughout the film, grand and public settings of a contemporary

¹⁵ *The Straight Story*: production by Walt Disney Pictures, distribution by Buena Vista Productions; *The Bridges of Madison County*: production by Amblin/Malpaso, distribution by Warner Bros.; *The Age of Innocence*: production and distribution by Columbia Pictures; *The Insider*: production by Touchstone Pictures, distribution by Buena Vista.

¹⁶ To represent the shared involvement of filmmaking, I mostly refer to “the film” throughout the thesis, as in “the film does this, that or the other.” To follow Andrew Klevan, “I hope this generosity will mean that the reader will accept that “the film” only appears to have a life of its own.” *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), pp. 8-9. On occasions, I do refer to a director, and have no methodological problems in doing so.

urban world are charged with expressions of intimacy. Paradoxically, vast city architecture allows the film to convey particular nuances of trust in the tentative friendship between two men. *The Insider* also considers how trust may be forged within the environment of the “big institution”, in the publicly charged arena of politics, the American legal system, and the industry of ‘Big Tobacco’.

Previous Attention

The thesis claims that the relationship between the “big architecture” and intimate concerns of the above four films is a crucial and overlooked aspect of the works. It does not claim the films themselves, *in toto*, to have been critically ignored. There is a substantial, pre-existing body of writing which recognizes the films as intelligent and of value. Moreover, rather than highlighting the particular, individual concerns of the films, the focus of previous consideration is predominantly placed on the works’ relationship with their source material. *The Insider* and *The Straight Story* are both fictionalized accounts of real-life events, drawing their details from factual newspaper articles.¹⁷ As a result, many writers discuss matters of verisimilitude, in terms of the “accuracy” of the cinematic portrayal, or the effectiveness of the films’ translation of real events into mythic or allegorical representations.¹⁸ In a similar vein, the majority of critical attention on *The Bridges of Madison County* and *The Age of Innocence* is devoted to comparative analysis of the films with their source novels.¹⁹ In general, although the writers see the works as “good

¹⁷ The source for *The Insider* is Marie Bremner’s news article, “The Man Who Knew Too Much”, *Vanity Fair*, May 1996. One report of the factual origins of *The Straight Story* is provided by Martha P. Nochimson, as she details how, “Straight’s existence comes to Lynch’s attention after Michael Almereyda sent Lynch’s companion, Mary Sweeney, an anecdotal clipping from a Midwestern newspaper noting his trip from Iowa to Wisconsin on a tractor-mower”, “The Straight Story: Sunlight Will Out of Darkness Come”, *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 7, 2005, p. 1.

¹⁸ Debates on *The Insider*’s treatment of factual events appear in, for example, *Written By*, vol. 4, no. 4, May 2000, p. 10-13; and *Premiere*, vol. 13, no. 4, December 1999, p. 59-62. Writing on *The Straight Story*, Bert Cardullo moves from considerations of, “what Lynch saw in this *Reader’s Digest* material”, to a reading of the film as biblical allegory: “Like Christ and his human counterparts in the episodic mystery or morality plays of the Middle Ages, Alvin is travelling his own *via dolorosa*”, “Getting Straight: On Lynch’s *The Straight Story* (1999, USA)”, *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art*, (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p. 151-163.

¹⁹ The source novels for the two films are Robert James Waller, *The Bridges of Madison County* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), and Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, (Appleton-Century: New York, 1948). For a comparative account of book and film versions of *The Bridges of Madison County*, see Richard Alleva, “The Bridges of Madison County”, *Commonweal*, July 14, 1995, v. 122, no. 13, p. 17, and Walter Metz, ““Another being we have created called ‘us’”: Point of View, Melancholia, and the Joking Unconscious in *The Bridges of Madison County*”, *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 39, spring, 1997, p. 66-83. For corresponding articles on *The Age of Innocence*, see Philip Horne, “The James Gang”, *Sight and Sound*, January 1998, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 19-21; and Karli Lukas, “Creative Visions: (De)Constructing “The Beautiful” in Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*”, *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 3, no. 25.

adaptations”, they refrain from exact accounts of the particular measure and manner of the films’ achievements.²⁰ If the films are not discussed in terms of their “fidelity” to the source texts, they are positioned in relation to broader contexts: within the director’s body of work, in relation to generic formulae, within ideological or socio-political frameworks.²¹ Whilst many of these comparative and contextual pieces offer worthy considerations, little attention has been paid to the particular merits of the films as films, in and of themselves. These treatments are symptomatic of a failure to sustain a discussion of a film’s detail. It is precisely this failure that leads previous attention to have overlooked the *concentration* of detail within the four films, and the expressive possibilities therein. It is one of the central purposes of this thesis to see what is achieved in concentrations of detail. To do so, the thesis attends to matters of style.

Style and Interpretation

Paying attention to particularities, relationships and patterns of style allows the viewer to unlock, understand and appreciate the concerns of a film. In engaging with the four films’ features of composition – of camera position, movement, cut, décor, gesture, costume, colour, music, sound and lighting – the thesis simultaneously, inescapably, engages in a process of interpretation. To cite John Gibbs and Douglas Pye in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*:

To understand style is to interpret what it does ... Every decision taken in making a film – where to place the camera, which lens to use, when to cut, how to place the actors in space, how to clothe them – is taken in a specific context, informed by powerful conventions but unique to this moment in this film. Each decision – made in relation to the multiple patterns being built up across the film – develops the narrative and thematic web. Every shot is a view of something, every cut is from one specific view to another, every costume decision bears on considerations of character, situation, fashion context, colour design, and more. Much filmmaking seems to encourage us to treat this complex tapestry of decision making as ‘transparent’, so that we are

²⁰ There are notable exceptions, cf. Leslie Stern, “Time’s Covetousness: The Age of Innocence”, in *The Scorsese Connection* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 220-226.

²¹ Martha P. Nochimson sees *The Straight Story* as only “appearing” to stand as antithetical to the rest of Lynch’s *oeuvre* (“The Straight Story: Sunlight Will Out of Darkness Come”), whereas Cardullo sees the film as operating on a distinct, singularly “transcendental” plane (““Getting Straight”: On Lynch’s *The Straight Story* (1999, USA).”) In his consideration of *The Bridges of Madison County*, Walter Metz draws together notions of genre and ideology, whilst also seeing an “intertextual” connection of the film with an earlier work of American cinema: “Such an analysis of *Bridge*’s intertextual relationship to *All That Heaven Allows* continues a recent trend in melodrama criticism to rethink the valuation of modernist techniques in melodrama as the sole mechanism for the cinema’s development of critiques of dominant culture”, in ““Another being we have created called ‘us’”: Point of View, Melancholia, and the Joking Unconscious in *The Bridges of Madison County*”, *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 39, spring, 1997, p. 67.

often unaware of the craft and artifice involved. But all this decision making is material and it has material effects on our experience of them.²²

This quotation introduces a number of matters for consideration, crucial when attending to and interpreting style in film, and central to this thesis. The remarks by Gibbs and Pye also lead to thoughts by kindred writers and thinkers, equally essential to this project. First, whilst narrative cinema uses a set of conventional techniques of form and expression, the *particularity* of a film's handling of a point of style, as "unique to this moment in this film," carries potential and individual meaning. For instance, in *Reading Hollywood: Spaces and Meanings in American Film*, Deborah Thomas calls attention to the meaning found in the choice and display of décor in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946). The scene in question concerns Peter Bailey (Samuel S. Hinds) as he tries to persuade his son George (James Stewart) to come to work at the Bailey Building and Loan Company after his time at college. Thomas makes the following observations:

The subtleties of the two actors' performances are worthy of our attention and make it difficult to detach ourselves sufficiently from the emotional focus of the scene to look around at the details of the domestic setting. However, if we manage to do so, we may notice two cases of mounted butterflies in frames on the wall in the background behind Peter Bailey. It may be presumed that the butterflies have been collected by George, since they make an appearance later in his marital home, a repetition which reinforces the sense of their importance, and one of their functions in the scene with George and his father is undoubtedly to enhance the homeliness of the setting and to indicate the pride that George's parents feel towards their sons. Nevertheless, in a film about an angel trying to earn his wings and in which George himself longs to travel and is continually frustrated in his desires – while having to show pride and conceal resentment at his younger brother's wartime success as a flier – it is certainly pertinent that the objects on the wall are butterflies rather than anything else ... This one small detail in the film's décor serves to unlock a number of issues relating to other scenes and characters than the ones at hand, while ranging over a number of important themes: freedom, filial duty, disappointment...²³

To understand a point of style, an apparently irrelevant and non-prominent item of décor, Thomas offers an interpretation. A moment of choice, by the film, allows it to express "key aspects of [its]

²² John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (eds), *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film* (Manchester: MUP, 2005), pp. 10-11.

²³ Deborah Thomas, *Reading Hollywood: Spaces and Meanings in American Film* (London and New York:

thematic concerns by integrating such issues into the setting itself.”²⁴ The close consideration of an individual aspect of style in a moment of film can unlock meaning. It is also crucial to consider the relationship between different stylistic elements, the interplay of one to the next. For example, the gesture of a performer will be shot from a certain perspective and distance, it may follow an important edit or noise on the soundtrack; a different perspective or a different soundtrack will mean that the gesture expresses a different meaning. To return to Thomas’s example, further meanings of the décor arise from considerations of the placement of the camera, and the positioning of the character:

[T]he fact that the butterflies are visually linked to George’s father more than to George himself through the composition of the image which places the butterflies at Peter Bailey’s back is also important ... [as he] increasingly reveals his own disappointment through the scene, encouraging George to do all he can to get away from Bedford Falls and realize his ambitions, rather than remaining and crawling to Potter (Lionel Barrymore) as he himself has had to do.²⁵

It is the interaction of stylistic elements that creates a “complex tapestry of decision making”, and, in turn, significance in film. As V. F. Perkins pronounces in *Film as Film*, “The specifically filmic qualities derive from the *complex*, not from any one of its components. What distinguishes film from other media, and the fiction movie from other forms, is none of the elements but their combination, interaction, fusion.”²⁶

Just as one is called upon to consider the interaction of a film’s stylistic components, it is equally vital to attend to their complex and shifting relationship, as it develops moment to moment. As Perkins writes, again in *Film as Film*, “In order to comprehend whole meanings, rather than those parts of meanings which are present in verbal synopsis or visual code, attention must be paid to the whole content of shot, sequence, and film.”²⁷ A response of this kind is found in Thomas’s interpretation of the butterflies in *It’s a Wonderful Life*. One recalls the claim that, “This one small detail in the film’s décor serves to unlock a number of issues relating to other scenes and characters than the ones at hand, while ranging over a number of important themes: freedom, filial

Wallflower, 2001), p. 3.

²⁴ Ibid: p. 5.

²⁵ Ibid: p. 4.

²⁶ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (London and New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 117.

²⁷ Ibid: p. 79.

duty, disappointment...” Attention to content from shot to shot, sequence to sequence also allows for a clearer consideration of the “multiple patterns built up across the film” referred to in Gibbs and Pye’s remarks. Thomas is alert to the meaning that can be accrued by visual patterning when she states, “It may be presumed that the butterflies have been collected by George, since they make an appearance later in his marital home, *a repetition which reinforces the sense of their importance...*”

It is in the organization of moments, the arrangement and relationships of style, and the patterning of details that a film creates meaning. In *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan details the depth of integration that is achieved in certain films, and in certain moments of film. Treating “performance as an internal element of style in synthesis with other aspects of film style”, Klevan explores “the achievement of expressive rapport.”²⁸ Considering a pivotal sequence in *The Scarlet Empress* (Josef von Sternberg, 1934) – in which the young Catherine the Great, formerly Sophia (Marlene Dietrich) transforms from “a young flirtatious girl frolicking on the cusp of womanhood to the hardened Catherine the Great”²⁹– Klevan provides the following passages of interpretation:

The integration of performer and environment effectively express changes in scale; Dietrich’s body and costume are placed in relation to the surrounds to adjust her shape and size. Catherine seems squashed into the small stairway as she descends, still looking like a girl – rather like Alice after a potion, too big for the tiny doors and passageways of Wonderland – but one now growing to fill her surroundings. Her proximity to the walls is emphasized by her raised left arm, her palm patting the surface as she clip-clops down the steps. Her increasing intimacy with the décor, throughout the sequence, is intimately connected to her touching it; the tactility is potent, and here the image of Dietrich’s hand and the sound of her feet draw out the textures.

The crowning shot of the sequence soon follows, where Catherine matures before our eyes, transforming herself into the Scarlet Empress. The shot only lasts 15 seconds but it is economical and dense, one of the mostly richly achieved moments of transformation in cinema. It is a summation of the concerns of the sequence – shaping this soft woman and hardening her – and an occasion to view the performer in exquisite symbiosis with her environment. Performer and surrounds meld, and Dietrich is well *cast*. Catherine follows Count Alexei running up the stairs that she had only a moment ago descended. Her urgent ascent is viewed from the top of

²⁸ Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), preface (i).

²⁹ *Ibid*: p.47.

the stairs, and she gets ever closer, eventually enveloping the image: she runs headlong into a darkness that she herself creates. This is the point at which the film moves back inside the bedroom and the Count shuts the secret door. This grained wooden door fills the frame, and dissolves slightly, decreasing in prominence, to show Catherine standing behind. The wood is patterned with a 'V' shape, and the dissolve allows it to graphically match the 'V' of Catherine's dress, gluing the images together, and tightening the superimposition. She seems to occupy exactly the same space as the door; a ghostly figure caught walking through a wall. She stares out, as if watching them, and because we are able to see her, through the solid door, it appears that she is able to see through it. She does in fact *see* even though she cannot see (into the room). Indeed, the door then evaporates completely, and as Catherine is left clear in the image, she is left to see a clear picture. Suddenly, she sees through everything.³⁰

The involvement of the writing centres on the involvement of points of style, in significant relationships. The first sentence announces an interest in the "integration of performer and environment", a relationship that tightens with "increasing intimacy", inspired by the proximity and tactility of character to décor. In these moments, in this film, the integration of stylistic elements is achieved at the deepest level. A sense of the tightness of synthesis is evoked in the language used, as "Performer and surrounds meld, and Dietrich is well *cast*", creating an "exquisite symbiosis." Considering the final moments of Catherine's transformation, Klevan sees the use of a dissolve heightening the effect of integration, "gluing the images together, and tightening the superimposition." As Catherine and her surrounds unify, so too do points of style and significance. Whilst the performance of Dietrich, the form of the décor and the use of a dissolve are persuasively detailed as individually expressive, the profundity of the moment's meaning is seen to stem from the depth of stylistic integration.

At the same time, Klevan attends to the film's achievements in moment-by-moment shifts and developments, in the modulations that lead to the final point of calcification. While sustaining attention on two consecutive sequences, he considers the significance of their singularity, interrelation, and place in the film as a whole. The opening lines alert us to "changes in scale", and relations of body and surroundings that "adjust [Catherine's] shape and size." The significance of each shot and sequence is bound to the relationship between them, in adjustments from one to the next. Catherine's transformation is *achieved* in the film's development, moment to moment. Klevan notes the film's variation of rhyming movements, up and down stairs. Whilst Catherine goes down girlishly, "squashed into the small stairway as she descends", she ascends to become Empress,

³⁰ Ibid: pp. 50-52.

“running up the stairs that she had only a moment ago descended.” The rhyme of moments highlights the distinction between them, and thus emboldens Catherine’s act of change. In between these two moments, Catherine’s relationship with her environment is seen to develop gradually, shot to shot, as she grows closer to the surrounds, yielding to and absorbing their qualities of hardness. Finally, incremental development gives way to a moment of firm transformation. As “a summation of the concerns of the sequence”, the film’s momentary movement through a dissolve is seen to allow for a shifting effect, with the meaning of the moment transforming alongside the Scarlet Empress: “Suddenly, she sees through everything.” In a sensitive scrutiny of details, Klevan’s evocative descriptions convey the film’s achievements of stylistic integration, and the evolution of meaning, moment to moment.

The strength of the following chapters, of sustained attention on four contemporary films will, to follow the words of V. F Perkins, “depend largely on the attempt to comprehend the nature and assess the quality of [their] created relationships.”³¹ In the four films, intimacy is found in the close, significant relationships of style, and in the close, significant relationships between characters. Both are bound.

Method and Approach

This thesis considers the above relationships in a series of close readings of moments from the four films. On occasion, the same moments will be considered more than once, from different perspectives and with the emphasis on distinct points of style. In all cases, the analysis stems from the act of viewing and reviewing the films on DVD, often pausing or shuttling back to replay an instant, skipping to test claims for patterning, searching for the right words to describe and interpret each sequence. In all cases, I aim to ensure I am “responsive to what [the films] have to say, and that I find words I can believe in, words accurate to my experience of them.”³²

Following the above method, and invoking the words of writers such as John Gibbs, Douglas Pye, Deborah Thomas, Andrew Klevan and V. F. Perkins, the thesis hopes to be continuing the expressive tradition of film criticism, or what is more commonly, and more problematically termed “mise-en-scène analysis”, or “close textual analysis”.³³ The definition and application of the term “mise-en-scène” is particularly slippery, though as a concise and practicable

³¹ Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 118.

³² Marion Keane and William Rothman, *Reading Cavell’s ‘The World Viewed’: A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), preface, p. 11.

³³ Other writers of noteworthy critical significance, and personal influence, include George M. Wilson, Stanley Cavell, Robin Wood, Adrian Martin, Gilberto Perez, and William Rothman.

definition of the term, John Gibbs offers, “the contents of the frame and the way that they are organized.”³⁴ The meaning of the title “close textual analysis” appears (historically) less opaque, yet is often used to describe a process far removed from the attempts at sensitive and sustained scrutiny of film style offered by Gibbs, Pye, Klevan et al.³⁵ One form of “close textual analysis” is perceived as a process of detection, in which hidden meanings are deciphered, uncovered or even ‘planted’ in films.³⁶ In his essay “Must We Say What They Mean? Film Criticism and Interpretation”, V. F Perkins responds to such perceptions and offers clarification of an approach to film criticism:

I suggest that a prime task of interpretation is to articulate in the medium of prose some aspects of what artists have made perfectly or precisely clear in the medium of film. The meanings I ... discuss ... are neither stated nor in any sense implied. They are filmed. Whatever else that means ... it means that they are not hidden in or behind the movie, and that my interpretation is not an attempt to clarify what the picture has obscured. I have written about things I believe to be in the film for all to see, and to see the sense of.³⁷

Looking at and thinking about what is there “for all to see”, the following chapters of interpretative criticism are guided by the films themselves, as fluid appraisals, free from preordained outcome and the search for a ‘proof’. As Perkins notes elsewhere in the same essay, “No intra-textual interpretation ever is or ever could be a proof. Most often, it is a description of aspects of the film with suggested understandings of some of the ways they are patterned. Rhetoric is involved in

³⁴ John Gibbs, *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), p. 5. For an account of the critical history of mise-en-scène, also see Gibbs, *ibid*: pp. 55-66.

³⁵ Cf. Thomas’ criticism of such “how to” books, in *Reading Hollywood*, pp. 1-2.

³⁶ “Concentrating on a moment may be the prerequisite for complex involvement – and dedicated interpretation – but it cannot ensure it. Many undergraduate essays look to be dissecting the form of a film, engaging in what is often called “close textual *analysis*”, but good films will not allow themselves to be ‘solved by analysis’, so for all their apparent closeness, the interpretations remain far away. Crudely speaking, and without guidance students tend towards two approaches when interpreting style: in one approach, meaning is obvious, and in the other, it is obscure. In the first case, elements of style guide our responses to the film, straightforwardly, and the interpretation becomes a deliberate, step-by-step articulation of this process. In the second case, elements of style work more ‘unconsciously’, meaning is hidden, and the interpretation deciphers and translates. The former takes the meaning to be broadly explicit, and the latter takes it to be implicit. Both find a favourite vehicle in *The Alien Cycle* (Ridley Scott 1979; James Cameron 1986; David Fincher 1992; Jean-Pierre Jeunet 1997): there is the essay on suspense that tells us about how elements of style trigger the spectator to feel this, that or the other, or we have the essay that reveals the vaginal imagery of the Mothership. The insights of each essay have their place, but they are too often derived from methods that are systematic rather than from critical principles encouraging flexible and agile involvement.” Andrew Klevan, “Notes on teaching film style”, in Gibbs and Pye (eds), *Style and Meaning*, p. 216.

³⁷ V. F. Perkins, “Must We Say What They Mean? Film Criticism and Interpretation”, *Movie*, 34/35, p. 4.

developing the description so that it evokes a sense of how, seen this way, the film may affect us, or so that it invites participation in the pleasure of discovering this way in which various of the film's features hang together."³⁸

Structure

The thesis offers sustained meditations on the way the four films “hang together” as explorations of human closeness, in and of the world, and the way they are patterned to express these meanings and feelings through an organization of “big architecture”. The detailed specifics of this significant organization comprise the films’ points of style and their relationships therein. Whilst being alert to the crucial notions of interplay and integration, the thesis is organized so that each chapter considers an individual point of style. There are six chapters, each detailing moments from two or three of the chosen films, each bringing out different ways in which the films handle a related point of style.

Chapter 1 addresses the films’ interest in place and patterning. Moving from rural to urban settings, it details the films’ measures of distance and movement, containment and release. Connecting with aspects of ‘hold’ and ‘release’, Chapter 2 explores the films’ attention to gesture. It considers the films’ concentration on and of gestures both declamatory and quiet, in the performance of personal and professional negotiations. Chapter 3 attends to dialogue, as ‘voice and conversation’. It details how a precise crafting of words gathers meaning across the body of a film, in moments of garrulity and punctuations of silence. Chapter 4 continues the discussion of aural intricacy in the films, moving on to consider the musical elements of the works. Specifically, it notes the precise introduction, placement and development of pieces of music, of repetition and variation, and the coupling of particular overarching *themes*. Chapter 5 concentrates on the precise employment of dissolves and ellipses to compress great spans of time, and to weight the significance of certain experiences and events. The sixth and final chapter addresses aspects of position and perspective. In particular, it returns to considerations of place and setting from Chapter 1, to extend thoughts on the way the camera and characters catch at peripheral details, in glances and glimpses, in wider environments.

The consideration of these specific points of style, chapter by chapter, reveals intricate and expressive patterns of organization. Together, the chapters aim to show how the relationship forming the keystone to the thesis – of the ‘little’ in the ‘big’ – is created at the deepest level of interplay and synthesis. Through their handling of style, the four films offer particular

³⁸ Ibid: p. 4.

achievements in balance and integration. Grand vistas and imposing landscapes, sweeping musical soundtracks, complex timeframes and elaborate social structures are shaped in precise grades and degrees. Involved tapestries of words, gestures, views and sounds form delicate and intricate patterns. The films achieve a particular modulation of scale, as ‘big’ and ‘little’ interlock with the same unity, and profundity, as form and content.

Redirecting a Critical Approach

Yet this last claim is complex, and complicated by the difficult relationship between interpretative criticism and contemporary Hollywood cinema. Despite being fundamentally informed by certain critical principles, particularly those suggested by V. F. Perkins, the thesis redirects this tradition by applying it to contemporary Hollywood movies. There appears a resistance in expressive criticism to offer interpretations, to make sense of the style of, modern American film. Correspondingly, there is a belief that contemporary movies resist this kind of treatment. Perkins posits a standpoint on modern Hollywood in a round-table discussion for *Movie*. (His comments centre upon an earlier period than concerns this thesis; however, they are still informative):

Maybe one could risk a bolder statement by summing up the change in movies since the mid 1960s in terms of the death of *mise en scène*. By that I mean that in my experience of American films of the last five years, the stylistic strategies tend to be either blatantly point-making or to be totally arbitrary choices of what you put where, or what you cross-cut fast or what lens you use. In *Pickup on South Street* [Fuller, 1953] (just because I’ve seen it recently) there is a rhetoric more or less constantly in play which is nevertheless not a particularly obtrusive rhetoric (one or two points aside). Nowadays I find the strategy of style, the oscillation between point-making and arbitrariness, less and less penetrable compared to the kind of camera placement in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* [Ophuls, 1948] or *On Dangerous Ground* [Ray, 1951].³⁹

Perkins makes a crucial distinction between the “rhetoric” of particular Golden Age films and that of modern works. Modern movies are seen to be driven by an “obtrusive” rhetoric, comprising “blatantly point-making” or “arbitrary” choices. Thus, he discerns a break from the synthesis of form and content found in particular earlier films. In place of balance and integration, comes asserted meaning (“blatantly point-making”). As Perkins states in *Film as Film*, “Asserted meanings, crude juxtapositions, tend to be both blatant and unclear, like over-amplified noises

³⁹ V. F. Perkins et al, “The Return of *Movie*”, *Movie*, No. 20 (spring 1975), p. 6.

bellowing from a faulty loudspeaker. When a film's significance is wholly formed at this level it is better described as *imposed* rather than as contained."⁴⁰ At the same time, the moments of choice in modern movies are seen as "arbitrary". Even further divorced from considerations of shape and significance found in *Film as Film*, and in works of the Golden Age, the organization of style in the modern film appears randomly devised and arranged. With no correlation of components into "significant relationships", the content of the film is rendered crude.⁴¹

One can acknowledge that many modern American films display a less than penetrable strategy of style that oscillates between "point-making and arbitrariness", a strategy beloved of the "high concept" blockbuster. Equally, however, the interpretations in this thesis lead to the discernment, in certain mainstream movies of the 90s, of significant patterning, intricacies of structure, and qualities of organization and coherence.⁴² Perkins' discussion of rhetoric is crucial here, and may lead to a better understanding of why and how modern films *appear* to resist the application of particular critical criteria. The term recalls a linguistic allegory favoured by Gibbs and Pye, in considering the relationship between critic and film:

As in conversation we constantly have to judge a speaker's relationship to the registers of language she uses, so we have to assess the film's relationship to its stylistic registers, the status decisions take on by virtue of their specific use in context.⁴³

If the rhetoric or stylistic register of contemporary films differs from that of the Golden Age, then our response, within a critical dialogue, may also require a reshaping of words with which to understand and judge the newer form. Contemporary Hollywood film speaks to us in a language that is related to the classicism of the Golden Age, but moves beyond it, branching out into distinct trajectories of stylistic relations. Adrian Martin calls for attention to be paid to this suggestion, and connects with thoughts on Perkins' position, in his article, "*Mise en scène* is dead,

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 119.

⁴¹ Ibid: "The special concern of the movie is to put [its] components into significant relationship; their correlation is the content of the film," p. 118.

⁴² In detailed considerations of the place of coherence as a valid criterion, Robin Wood provides an insightful definition: "[C]oherence, by which I understand the internal relations that give a work its structure ... needs to be carefully disassociated from any nonsense about artistic 'inevitability' – the mystical notion that every detail in a given work had to be that or no other. The artist is at all times confronted with choices, within definable limits: some alternatives may be demonstrably better than others (as we can see, for example, by following the evolution of Yeats's *Sailing to Byzantium* through all its rough drafts) ... / ... the notion of coherence is only meaningful in conjunction with concepts like 'complexity', 'density', 'inner tensions' ... / ... the work of any major artist bears testimony to the thesis that arts strives towards coherence." *Personal Views: Explorations in Film* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), pp. 18-19.

or The Expressive, The Excessive, The Technical and The Stylish”:

In the relation of style to subject, of ‘how’ to ‘what’ – and this is, at base, what all arguments over *mise en scène* are about – Perkins favours a carefully built-up, somewhat unobtrusive stylistic rhetoric ... That is, the themes, ideas, events, situations, meanings, understandings, attitudes of the fiction are served and expressed by the stylistic strategies. This is – roughly – a definition of classicism in cinema; and, like all artistic forms, it posits a particular *economy* between the elements of style and subject. Is it true to say that contemporary – post-classical – American cinema is completely devoid of such an understanding of style? ⁴⁴

Providing his own response, Martin discerns three tiers of “style-subject” relations in contemporary Hollywood cinema. Each tier is composed of works whose “textual economy” is classical, expressionist or mannerist. Martin provides a series of “shorthand equations” for the three groupings. Films working with a strategy of style in the classical sense operate such that “modulations of stylistic devices ... are keyed closely to [their] dramatic shifts and thematic developments.”⁴⁵ Expressionist works have a textual economy “at the level of a broad fit between elements of style and elements of subject ... in which general strategies of colour coding, camera viewpoint, sound design and so on enhance or reinforce the general ‘feel’ or meaning of the subject matter.”⁴⁶ Mannerist films (the group which correlates most closely with Perkins’ perspective on the modern movie) are of the sort “in which style performs out on its own trajectories, no longer working unobtrusively at the behest of the fiction and its demands of meaningfulness.”⁴⁷

A consideration of Martin’s terms allows for a further refinement of my own thesis, in allowing me to test the criteria of the groupings against the stylistic rhetoric of my four chosen films.⁴⁸ In displaying intricate patterns of organization and coherence, all four films appear to belong to the first grouping, as works in which stylistic devices are “keyed closely to dramatic

⁴³ Gibbs and Pye, *Style and Meaning*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Adrian Martin, “*Mise en scène* is dead, or The Expressive, The Excessive, The Technical and The Stylish”, *Continuum*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1990, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Martin places three of the four directors into his groupings. Clint Eastwood is seen as a classical director, Michael Mann as an expressionist, whilst Martin Scorsese works with a film style that “virtually functions on all three tiers simultaneously.” *Ibid.*: p. 4. Elsewhere, Martin describes Eastwood as a “sublimely classical director”, and notes, on Scorsese, he is “right on the trembling edge of the classical style: there is just enough of a shred of continuity left before the scene splinters into a modernist chaos.” In “Placing *Mise en Scène*: An Argument with John Gibbs’ *Mise-en-Scène*”, *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 20, June 2004, p. 10.

shifts and thematic developments.” Yet, this ‘pairing’ is made complex, as elements which may be initially perceived as “broad fit” components – epic landscapes, expansive vistas, magnified sounds – are also “keyed closely” to the dramatic concerns of the four films, shaped to form expressions of intimacy. Thus, when dealing in the particular (of a certain film, of a certain moment of film), more precise discriminations move us beyond the ‘sliding scale’ of Martin’s groupings. In certain instances, the “big architecture” of the films is shaped into meticulous patterns of composition, repetition and variation. Equally, at points, there is a balance of grandeur of scale, and austerity of action. Other moments accrue significance from the way ‘bold’ stylistic statements are “refined by the pattern of detail built over and around them.”⁴⁹ It is one of the aims of the following chapters to distinguish how the four films discriminate in this way.

Martin’s tiers and definitions offer a crucial entry point, facilitating discussions of the relationship between the rhetoric of expressive or *mise-en-scène* criticism, and that of classical and contemporary Hollywood film. This thesis aims to continue, and continue to refine the vocabulary of, sustained criticism of modern movies. In his response to John Gibbs’ book *Mise en Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*, Martin raises the point that “it is not hard to form the impression of a critical practice still lolling in the sophisticated pleasures of *The Philadelphia Story* and *Touch of Evil*, and not moving much beyond that golden age of Hollywood classicism at its most refined and complex ...”⁵⁰ Alongside Martin, there are a small number of critics who both have ‘lollled’ in the “sophisticated pleasures” of the Golden Age, and turned their attention to the expansions of contemporary Hollywood.⁵¹ In opening up thoughts on a particular pattern of significance or modulation of scale (or, to use Martin’s words, a “particular *economy* of style and subject”) I hope to be contributing another aspect to this body of writing.

Film Studies and Contemporary Hollywood

A further reason why the modern theorist has resisted interpretative criticism is that the attention of Film Studies, in the age of contemporary Hollywood, has moved elsewhere. Gibbs and Pye raise

⁴⁹ Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 119.

⁵⁰ Adrian Martin, “Placing *Mise en Scène*: An Argument with John Gibbs’ *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*, *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 20, June 2004, p. 4.

⁵¹ Robin Wood has written extensively on both Golden Age and contemporary Hollywood film. See, for example, his monographs on *Rio Bravo* (London: BFI, 2003), and *The Wings of the Dove* (London: BFI, 1999). In *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan discusses the “expressive rapport” of *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940), whilst in *Film Studies* (Issue 1, spring 1999), he examines the refined integration of dramatic moments in *Tin Cup* (Ron Shelton, 1996). Edward Gallafent has considered the “sophisticated pleasures” of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers (*Astaire and Rogers*, Columbia University Press, 2002), and the “gallery of heroes” in modern American cinema created by Clint Eastwood

awareness of this factor in the introduction of *Style and Meaning*:

In an era dubbed ‘Post Theory’ by David Bordwell and Noel Carroll – the title of their 1996 edited collection – the average university student will encounter a wide range of ways of engaging with the subject ... / ... As a counter to what he identifies as the top-down approaches of subject-position theory and culturalism which proved so influential in the film studies of the last thirty years, Bordwell draws attention to another, more diverse trend in recent film scholarship. What he calls ‘middle-level research’ includes ‘new film history’, which has deepened our understanding of, among other topics, early cinema, non-Western national cinemas, industry practices, film reception and the history of film style; it also embraces work on film narrative, genre and point of view, as well as accounts of spectatorship which challenge the models presented by Theory ... / ... An important but, on the face of it, curious feature of Bordwell’s account of middle-level research – given the significance of film style within the field he describes – is the exclusion of interpretation.⁵²

As interpretative criticism resists, for the most part, articulations on contemporary Hollywood, Film Studies withdraws from the tradition. Predominantly, Film Studies foci on contemporary American cinema tend towards considerations of the broad over the particular. To borrow from the collective headings of *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith), there are currently five principal strands of study in this area. First (and perhaps as a binding concern), Film Studies considers the historiography of modern Hollywood.⁵³ Secondly, and echoing my opening comments, many scholars consider the economic situation of contemporary American cinema. In particular, aspects of globalization and of the industry’s business practices are examined in terms of their effect on the films produced.⁵⁴ Thirdly, forms of

(*Clint Eastwood: Actor and Director*, London: Studio Vista, 1994).

⁵² Gibbs and Pye, *Style and Meaning*, pp. 1-2.

⁵³ See, for example, Murray Smith, “Theses on the philosophy of Hollywood history”, in Murray Smith and Steve Neale (eds), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3-20; Richard Maltby, “‘Nobody knows everything’: post-classical historiographies and consolidated entertainment”, *ibid.*, p. 21-44. Elsewhere, indicative writings include Myros Konstankarakos, *New Cinemas: A Journal of Contemporary Film* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002); Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starwood, 1992).

⁵⁴ Douglas Gomery, “Hollywood corporate business practice and periodizing contemporary film history”, in Murray Smith and Steve Neale (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, p. 47-57; Tino Balio, “‘A major presence in all of the world’s important markets’: the globalisation of Hollywood in the 1990s”, *ibid.*, p. 58-73. See also Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

technology used in Hollywood film are considered.⁵⁵ Fourth (and as a collation of distinct approaches sharing a focal point), the audience of contemporary American cinema is explored.⁵⁶ Fifth and finally, there is a marked tendency to see the output of contemporary Hollywood as symptomatic of cultural concerns.⁵⁷

When a concentration on an individual film does occur, it is often rendered as a ‘case study’. In such an instance, a theoretical framework is used to “map” the “text”, thus to “decode” their meanings. In particular, there is considerable interest in applying this process to analyze sexual and racial difference in contemporary popular films, to uncover underlying “power structures”. Two indicative passages are cited below. The first comes from an essay by Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith, entitled “*Wall Street*: Good capitalism and bad – The all-male family vs. homosexual seduction”, the second from “Tell the Right Story: Spike Lee and the Politics of Representative Style” by Sharon Willis. Willis discusses the position of two characters in Lee’s *Jungle Fever* (1991):

Wall Street figures capitalism through the relationship of three white males ... In screening what the film presents as different types of capitalism, the struggles over paternity in *Wall Street* act as a kind of master-code, displacing and domesticating its critique of Reaganomics ... Behind

⁵⁵ Many scholars are involved in explorations of the effect and affect of a “technology of effects” on forms of narrative. See, for example, Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster*. Others negotiate aspects of “specularity” engendered by current forms of technology on and in film: see Warren Buckland, “Realism in the photographic and digital image (Jurassic Park and The Lost World)” in Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2002), p. 195-219.

⁵⁶ This grouping accommodates the recent surge of interest in Reception Studies, as well as cognitive and epistemological approaches to contemporary Hollywood film: Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practice of Film Reception* (New York: NYUP, 2000); Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (London: Clarendon Press, 1995); Ed S. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., 1996); Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, “Cognitive Theories of Narration”, in Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2002), p. 168-194.

⁵⁷ Indicative in this respect is the popular and acclaimed journal *Sight and Sound*. As a publication including much work on contemporary American film, it often employs a methodology of cultural critique. See for example, the writing of B. Ruby Rich on *Kill Bill Vol. 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004): “Forget the fan-boy in-jokes, *Kill Bill Vol. 2* is actually a radical remapping of traditional family values with nods to the Oedipal myth, female-centred horror movies and the Old Testament”, in “Days of the Woman”, *Sight and Sound*, June 2004, online article; and Kim Newman on *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005): “Of course, this is an invasion informed by 9/11, especially when Ray [Tom Cruise] wakes up to find an airliner crashed in the street outside ... Spielberg’s invaders – in their carapace-like machines, ignoring the native peoples except to imprison them and subject them to meaningless privations, so incapable of understanding the climate of the land they have conquered that a plan brewing for “a million years” is undone because they didn’t take elementary precautions against disease – stand less for al-Qaeda or Saddam Hussein than for George W.

the screens of paternity, then, male homosexuality appears as the master-code underlying the film's disgust at Gekko's moral corruption, so that good and bad capitalism are encoded less by contesting affiliations between good and bad fathers, than by the conflict between allegiance to good father and to (male) seducer.⁵⁸

In a dominant cultural field that privileges visibility, that struggles with anxieties about the non-coincidence of the visible and the essential, *Jungle Fever* seems to play as much with the question of how people *look* – in both senses of the word – as it does with a discursive war of positions about the meaning of race and miscegenation. If Flipper and Angie are ciphers, their status as such is visually inscribed. More looked at than *looking*, their individual points of view are gradually submerged in the figure they make together that is the object of other people's looks ... Once they are coupled in two-shot ... these characters rarely support point-of-view shots that would allow our gaze to coincide with theirs. This is the cinematic mechanism that evacuates their interiority, but it also puts us in a position to observe how they function as signs that the other characters continually interpret.⁵⁹

Whilst the writers are “mapping the text” to discover what is “really going on”, and “decoding” the “ciphers” and “signs”, little attention is paid to the shifts and developments in the film's meanings, moment to moment. In other instances, practitioners of Film Studies declare the desire to move away from the binary discoveries of decoding, to hold attention on specific moments of a film. An example of this type of writing is declared in John Orr's book, *Contemporary Cinema*. In a review of Orr's book, Tico Romao describes the work as comprising “close interpretations”, and examples of “evaluative criticism”.⁶⁰ The following three passages are extracted from chapter 6 of *Contemporary Cinema*, in which Orr considers the film *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch, 1990):

In *Wild at Heart*, the landscapes of the American South-West with its harsher light define the journey from the lushness of the old South into ochre desert landscapes. The photography of Frederick Elmes with its saturated reds and yellows stresses pitiless heat and luminous summer

Bush's America at work in Iraq, Afghanistan or Guantanamo Bay”, *Sight and Sound* (September 2005), p. 84.

⁵⁸ Jude Davies and Carol R. Smith, “*Wall Street*: Good capitalism and bad – The all-male family vs. homosexual seduction”, in Davies and Smith, *Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality in Contemporary American Film* (Keele University Press: BAAS Publications, 1997), p. 27.

⁵⁹ Sharon Willis, “Tell the Right Story: Spike Lee and the Politics of Representative Style”, in *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 168-169.

⁶⁰ Tico Romao, “The International Cinema of Poetry”, *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 49, December 1999, pages 1 and 5.

light, offset by the deep blacks of the nightscapes in New Orleans and the open road during the crashed car sequence. In the motel scene where Bobby Peru (Willem Defoe) threatens to rape Lula the burnt gold feel of the interiors is a match to the exterior hues of a parched landscape. The local feel of the American South-West means we are patently somewhere, but we also feel we could be anywhere. The place has a name but no nature. It is a non-place on the road to unknown destiny.⁶¹

The film is a 1990s version of *Love Me Tender*, where tenderness is the restful aftermath of lust, not its sentimental prelude. Yet though Lynch is symphonic, his narrative rests ... on disconnection. Flashback, ellipsis, continuity cuts and parallel montage offer the audience the chance to go with the metaphor of the road, a rapid-gear changing scenario to contrast with the actuality of the smooth convertible in which they drive.⁶²

Lynch's film shows that while [Fredrick] Jameson's 'postmodern' is misplaced, his view of American conspiracy as the quest for an unreachable totality is unerringly right.⁶³

The first passage promises sustained attention to particular moments of *Wild at Heart*. Orr chooses to concentrate on particular aspects of style, on landscape and colour. His descriptions are atmospheric, detailing the "ochre desert landscapes", and the "deep blacks of the nightscapes". In drawing attention to the "ochre" of the land, and "deep blacks", Orr is responding to a particular possibility of contemporary cinema. In modern film, intense textures of colour, sound and visual effect are made possible by advanced technological allowance. Adrian Martin considers the possibilities and intensities of these features in his article "Delirious Enchantment."⁶⁴ Focusing on modern film, Martin describes the textural magnificence that is achieved by certain works, in moments of "fine grain aesthetic control".⁶⁵ In considering expressions and achievements of 'magnificent intimacy', my thesis also brings out textural details made possible by the new sound and image capabilities of modern film. It explores aspects of amplification and refinement both visual and aural, such as the opalescent shimmer of light-beams in the closing moments of *The Age of Innocence*; the patterns of greens in the fields of *The Straight Story*; and the deep crunch of tires in gravel in *The Bridges of Madison County*. Marking a distinction with the technical limits of

⁶¹ John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 167.

⁶² Ibid: p. 168

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Adrian Martin, "Delirious Enchantment", *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 1, no. 5, 2000.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

earlier films of significance, these properties contribute to the expressive achievements of modern cinema.

Although Orr offers thoughts on individual moments in a film, emphasizing the use of colour, his remarks move increasingly away from the particular towards the broad. In the final lines of the first passage, vague condensations take the place of precise discriminations: “The place has a name but no nature. It is a non-place on the road to unknown destiny.” The sentences move the appraisal away from the particular and individual arrangements of the film, into opaque declarations of ascribed meaning.

The second and third passages evade “close” considerations of the film. A list of stylistic techniques – “Flashback, ellipsis, continuity cuts and parallel montage” – takes the place of detailed scrutiny of the distribution, emphasis and significance of these effects in moments of the film. Rather than being alert to the evolution of the film’s use of particular points of style, Orr lists them together as an “offer” to “the audience ... to go with the metaphor of the road, a rapid-gear changing scenario to contrast with the actuality of the smooth convertible in which they drive.” The act of placing the points of style together so hastily may be seen to capture the sense of speed expressed by the film, at this particular moment. Yet it remains unclear how a flashback or indeed any of the effects convey a particular aspect of travel (in this moment, in this film). Orr refrains from offering any sustained criticism of a handling of style. Correspondingly, the precise nature of the “metaphor of the road”, in this particular instance, remains hidden. The third passage reveals the piece to be ultimately using *Wild at Heart* as a case-study, in a search for a proof of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, as Lynch’s film, “shows that ... Jameson’s ‘post-modern’ is misplaced.” Although Orr provides evocations of a general atmosphere, he does not interpret the chosen moments of film, other than to test the findings against theoretical models.⁶⁶ He does not consider the individual resonances of particular aspects of style (in shot, sequence, and film).

As an indicative piece of academic writing on style in contemporary Hollywood cinema, Orr’s essay illustrates some prevalent evasions. There is a lack of distinction and discrimination, in terms of both the language used, and in attending to decisions “unique to this moment in this film.” There is a tendency to summarize, to offer opaque assessments rather than

⁶⁶ Romao asserts, as does Orr, that the “primary intention of his book is to single out a ‘dominant and guiding feature in the development of the cinema over the last thirty years’ (ix). Orr designates this dominant trend as ‘the cinema of poetry’, taking up and expanding upon notions initially advanced by Pasolini in his influential 1965 essay of the same name. In Orr’s hands, ‘the cinema of poetry’ is used to delineate certain thematic and stylistic tendencies that characterize the European art cinema of the 1960s as a whole, and which he sees as having been subsequently re-deployed internationally by a range of filmmakers of various national origin.” Romao, “The International Cinema of Poetry”, p. 1.

perspicacious interpretations. A commitment is required, to remain attentive to the film's modulations of its effects, and to work to find the right words to articulate them, "to do justice to the visual and aural specifics of a film's expressive personality."⁶⁷

There are a small number of writers working in the "specifics", whose work informs the direction of the following chapters. These writers offer sustained interpretations on moments in modern American film. In devoting attention to the particular handling and consequences of a film's style, they yield evocative and sensitive observations. Their writings are *involved* in the expressive possibilities of contemporary Hollywood cinema. Considering *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992), Ed Gallafent details a moment in which a "trailhand" offers a pony in recompense for his partner's earlier disfigurement of a local whore:

This is an important moment in *Unforgiven*, expressive of the limit to which a plea for forgiveness can be taken, of how far the social order which we are seeing here is capable of change. The tempo of the sequence slows in a series of close-ups as the whores consider the possibility of a world based on impulses other than bodily urges and property rights – a gesture expressive of the difficulty of this moment is when one young woman lifts a muddied hand to her brow. But the offer is doomed – behind the young trailhand is an unlikely but appropriate sign – its message reads 'Meat Market'. It is Strawberry Alice who speaks in furious rejection of the gift, and again – now Delilah and another girl are exceptions – the whores throw dirt at the retreating cowhand ... The importance of the sequence is that it expresses the paradox at the heart of the presentation of Big Whiskey, a place in which it seems that a movement away from a degraded and barbarous order cannot actually be achieved, but where the possibility of something better is persistently sensed, and felt to be perhaps only just out of reach.⁶⁸

Gallafent demonstrates his claim for the importance of the moment through the detailing of its synthetic qualities. To focus on one aspect of the interpretation, the significance of a single gesture is noted, "when one young woman lifts a muddied hand to her brow." The interpretation sees the gesture as encapsulating both the tension and complexity of the moment. We can picture the movement of hand to brow, and sense the ambivalence held within it, as a gesture at once impulsive and measured, outwardly demonstrative yet defensive, ready to grab and yet restrained, dignified but, in this particular instance, "muddied." The movement and the moment are seen as

⁶⁷ Andrew Klevan, "The mysterious disappearance of style: some critical notes about the writing on *Dead Ringers*", in Michael Grant (ed.), *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), pp. 163-164.

⁶⁸ Ed Gallafent, *Clint Eastwood: Actor and Director* (London: Studio Vista, 1994), p. 219.

expressing a paradox, the little gesture detailing the wider expression of a place “where the possibility of something better is persistently sensed, and felt to be perhaps only just out of reach.” The interpretation is sensitive to the film’s own sensitivity, of holding these matters in *suspension*, as delicately poised as the hand to the brow. “Honing in on moments”, as Klevan notes, “is a method of magnification.”⁶⁹ He continues, “We can survey the interweaving contours of the drama and better discern the undulating lines without needing to straighten them out.” In this way Gallafent’s interpretation, rather than trying to ‘solve the film by analysis’, is “responsive to the overlaps, [keeping] in play the balance of meanings.”⁷⁰

A passage of Klevan’s own writing on contemporary Hollywood emphasizes how concentration on a moment may open up a better understanding of the film as a whole. Again, a seemingly minor gesture captures a wider concern. Writing about *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), Klevan is also alert to notions of *balance*:

In a film of much flooding, and falling, and flailing, it is pleasing that the film’s most potent moment, or at least for its protagonist Rose (Kate Winslet), is a sight of human stillness, a posture of bodily poise necessitated by upper class manners. Rose looks across the extravagant dining hall and sees a young girl with her family. The camera then indicates Rose’s particular attention: the young girl is making the effort to position her legs *correctly* so as to allow her napkin to remain tidily and safely perched upon her lap. Class rules often convincingly masquerade as essential practicalities, but this picture of precious suspension permits Rose a moment of lucidity, where she comprehends a young girl’s social and parental education, and hence her own, both in terms of straining towards contrived balance, and keeping one’s legs together ... Thus the ship’s massive break-up services Rose’s own desire to break out, a dream of wild release, expressed in the form of a recurring nightmare for the upper classes, where a world of people obsessed with bodily composure endlessly slide and slide – unlike the napkin – down and down the deck.⁷¹

The passage brings together, and highlights the integration of, distinct elements of style. Moreover, in doing so, it details the film’s graded measures of assertion and delicacy contained in a single scene: the grand setting of the “extravagant dining hall”, the little trapping of the napkin, the carefully considered gesture. Chiming with Gallafent’s piece, this single gesture is seen to carry aspects of significance that are patterned throughout the film. The delicate poise of the

⁶⁹ Klevan, “Notes on teaching film style”, *Style and Meaning*, p. 215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

napkin carries the weight, in pocketed form, of the “contrived balance” of the upended boat towards the end of the film. The interpretation also reveals further aspects of poise and balance found within the film: of human stillness against frenzied movement, of control and containment against “wild release”. Again, a passage of writing opens an understanding of the film through sensitivity to its suspensions. There is another grade of significance here. To capture the expressive form of this disaster film’s moments, Klevan uses words loaded with life. To cite his own phrase, especially apt for a watery work such as *Titanic*, Klevan shapes the interpretation with words in the “stream and flow of the film.”⁷² Consider again the opening lines:

In a film of much flooding, and falling, and flailing, it is pleasing that the film’s most potent moment, or at least for its protagonist Rose (Kate Winslet), is a sight of human stillness, a posture of bodily poise necessitated by upper class manners.

The immediate repetition of ‘f’, with the flatness of the sound gliding the words together captures the fate of the passengers of the *Titanic*, as they “endlessly slide and slide ... down and down the deck.” These last lines reemphasize the effect. The repeated, elongated vowel sound of “down” conveys stretches of sustained motion; the change to the more abrupt and harshly clipped “deck” sounds the grim end of the fall. Correspondingly, the slide of “flooding, and falling, and flailing” is brought to a stop by the repeated ‘p’, of “pleasing”, “protagonist”, “potent”, “posture” and “poise”. The pert ‘p’ stands in counterpoint to the flat ‘f’, carrying the way the controlled position of the young girl’s legs and napkin contrasts with the shifting havoc of the shipwreck. Moreover, the prim sound of the repeated ‘p’ expresses the ‘just so’ precision of the girl’s efforts. Action and words are *composed*. The use of language adds another level of interpretative evocation to the writing, in turn heightening our understanding of particular achievements of the film. The words are precisely chosen to meet the particular stylistic register of *Titanic*, pointing up the delicate weighting in a huge film preoccupied with matters of size and scale.

The following chapters seek to hold true to the principles guiding the above passages of interpretative criticism, to produce, in the pursuit of persuasive evaluation, a better understanding and appreciation of the fine-grain distinctions within the films themselves.

⁷¹ Klevan, “*Titanic*: James Cameron, 1997”, in *Mortality*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1998, p. 307-308.

⁷² Klevan, *Op. cit.*, p. 224.



The inflatedness of contemporary Hollywood cinema allows for particular patterns of expression. It is an overlooked possibility of the modern movie, as shown in the four films under scrutiny, to shape potentially “bloated” components into fine-grain arrangements of significance. The handling of points of style, and stylistic relationships that comprise the “big architecture” of a film, allows for articulations of intimacy. The concerns of this thesis continue a tradition of expressive criticism, and redirect the principles, making claims for discernible patterns of organization and synthesis in contemporary Hollywood film. Against certain highlighted tendencies and evasions of ‘Post-Theory’ Film Studies, the thesis offers another way of considering and appreciating contemporary Hollywood. The following interpretations join the contributions of a small and growing number of critics, seeking to understand and elucidate some of the rhetorical features of modern American cinema.



Chapter One

Place and Patterning

As the most demonstrative visual element of a film's "big architecture", the landscape – settings, location, space and place – is often revealed in declamatory measures. In general, works of "epic" proportion or "prestige" status use long-shots of sweeping panoramas to heighten the sense of grandeur. To recall the words of Geoff King, the predominant visual form of contemporary Hollywood comprises, "expansive vistas spread out across the width of the big screen..." There is a tendency to use the width and breadth of the landscape as a magnificent backdrop, in front of which the characters conduct the business of the film. In contrast, the three films considered below craft the landscape to express particular and precise facets of their main characters. The films are alert to a series of intertwining relationships: of their understanding and shaping of the wider environment; of the character to the landscape; of the characters to each other within the landscape. Equally, in their integration of character and setting, the films attend to the shifts and changes of this relationship, as aspects alter, moment to moment. Modulations of the tone, fabric and texture of the landscape convey shifting moods, perspectives and understandings of the characters. All three films express these shifts and developments by patterning views of landscape and locale. Each return made to a particular setting is attuned to the meaning carried in repetition and variation: of composition of the landscape, in rhymes and adjustments of camera-angle and placement, in degrees of lighting, arrangements of décor, and in the movements of the characters in and around the spaces of the settings.

Sharing their attention to the intricate patterning of place, the films differ in the particular ways they handle their grand-scale environments. *The Straight Story* sustains its focus on one man's *situation* in the natural terrain, byways and towns of Middle America. Through precise arrangements of position (of character) and composition (of landscape), expansive vistas are "keyed" tightly to the dramatic concerns of the film. In charting an extensive road journey, the film forms patterns in an ever-changing landscape. Patterns also form in the rhyme and repetition of particular motifs, developed on a spiraling scale of circular movements over the land. *The Bridges of Madison County* concentrates its attention on a smaller number of settings, achieving a sense of expansiveness in the density of its expressions. The film is also alert to the significance of change in repeated views of the same setting. Slight modulations to the conveyance of the solid architecture and spaces of the home carry particular resonance. Equally, *The Bridges of Madison County* focuses on the developing negotiations of its main characters, in and of the settings. The film develops its

choreography of movements, in and around a domestic space, in the American heartland of Madison County. Moving away from the rural settings of the above two films, *The Insider* turns its attention to the designs and dimensions of the contemporary urban landscape. It focuses on the way a tentative relationship between two men grows in the anonymous city spaces of Chicago and Louisville.



The Straight Story

Movements across the Landscape

In *The Straight Story*, Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth) makes the momentous decision to travel more than three hundred miles to visit his ailing brother Lyle (Harry Dean Stanton). However, due to his own deteriorating health, Alvin is unable to drive a car. As such, a further decision is reached, to make the trek by the unusual method of riding a sit-on lawnmower across country. The great distance in miles is met by the extent of the men's emotional separation, of the thirty years they have chosen to remain apart.

The film focuses on Alvin's travels from Laurens, Iowa to Mount Zion, Wisconsin. It presents a journey of immense personal importance over the awesome terrains of the American Midwest. Certain critics have alluded to the film's handling of matters of magnitude within one man's personal odyssey. Stanley Kaufman proclaims that, "Lynch has made a small epic."¹ Rather opaquely (though beautifully), Wesley Morris sees *The Straight Story* as, "A journey film kissed by tiny magic."² Both remarks touch upon a relationship existing within the film, of grand-scale matters (the "epic" nature of this "journey film") measured out in diminutive detail ("small" and "tiny magic"). This chapter explores the intricate facets of this relationship at work in the film, of a significant journey formed through an accrual of illuminating moments. First, the analysis focuses on the film's handling of the connections existing between its two most prominent subjects: Alvin and the natural landscape. The film is seen to use the fact of Alvin's presence within the wider surroundings to explore particular aspects of the individual journey, and the great lands.

Charting the length of Alvin's vast journey, *The Straight Story* frequently moves to sweeping long shots of the natural landscape. With the breadth of a bird's eye view, the camera glides over lines of trees, crop fields and hillsides. Held across the expanse of widescreen, these

¹ Stanley Kaufman, *The New Republic*, Issue 4426, (November 15 1999), p. 28. My interpretation of this remark (in fitting with Kaufman's laudatory review as a whole) takes "small" to mean 'intimate', and not 'insignificant' or 'inconsequential'.

² Wesley Morris, www.sfgate.com, Oct 22 1999.

imposing vistas of the Midwest at once convey the scope and weight of Alvin's pilgrimage. However, by degrees, the film develops this relationship beyond a simple tallying of scale. It pays attention to the way natural details alter the overall shape of the land, moment to moment. Consequently, the film avoids leaden or reductive expressions, of a burdensome voyage over vast countryside. It gradually reveals the particularities to be found within different features of the all-encompassing landscape.

In the low, sweeping long shots, the film focuses on the precise arrangements of the land. Repeatedly, the camera follows the geometrical composition of lines of crops. Passing over the rows, it shows how some stalks and branches are bent in naturally warped uniformity (FIGURE 1).

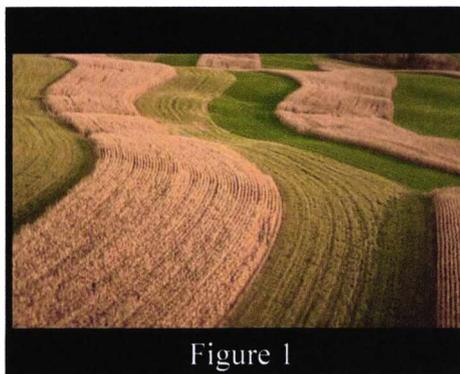


Figure 1

In alternating its focus between such intricacies of the land, and Alvin's movement forwards, the film suggests how the natural arrangements reflect the ordered composure of the character's travels. The progressive, unbroken curves of wheat and grass rhyme with the Alvin's smooth, unruffled turns along the road. Thus, far from expressing the daunting nature of a grand space and task, the film uses the long landscape shots to suggest the tempered fluency of Alvin's progress.

The film refines the connection, shaping its treatment of the landscape to capture particular, passing moods of its central character. It follows the lines of the land to convey the shifts and turns in Alvin's attitude towards his journey. Two instances can be detailed, to show how the film's movements across the land express exact feelings of pleasure and disquiet. In the first instance, Alvin deviates temporarily from the highway to shelter from an encroaching storm. As the rain begins to drive down, he draws under the frame of an empty barn, set atop a hillock by the roadside. He is then shown to wait patiently under the arches of the barn, for the storm to subside. In the early morning conclusion of the 'stop-over', the state of the land expresses Alvin's refreshed approach. Angling up from the sheltering barn, the camera cuts through sunshine to show a landscape charged with a sense of restoration. Appearing grey and dour during the rainfall, the terrain is once again infused with bright greens and yellows, as light dapples the smooth swells of the hills. The leisurely

movement of the lens, forwards and from side to side, gracefully traces out the flowing warp and weft of field and way. The satisfying fusion of colour, texture and movement suggests the pleasure to be taken in this passage.

However, alongside appreciative views of journeying, the film occasionally secretes brief instances of toil. These fleeting moments hint at passing sensations of strain within a continuous movement onwards. Just prior to Alvin's encounter on the road with a group of passing cyclists, the film uses a dissolve to bleed together a close image of the mower and a long shot of the landscape. The mower is shown travelling slowly along the horizontal axis of the road. As the views merge, this right-to-left movement is held in tension with an upward track along vertical columns of wheat. Alvin is seen to move 'against the grain' of the crops (FIGURE 2). Crucially, this crossing only endures within the space of the dissolve. The suggestion of modestly laboured movement exists as a twinge, subtly and momentarily expressed.

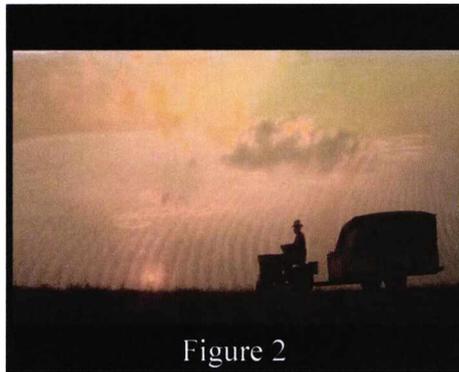


Figure 2

As well as being alert to the expressive potential of the rural landscape, the film pays equal attention to one determining feature of the terrain: the pervasive track of the road. As with the surrounding fields and hills, the film explores the intricacies of the road through Alvin's presence. Equally, as with the greater landscape, the sight of a boundless American space is thus refined, and individually inflected. As a monumental icon, 'The Road' carries with it a weighty set of associations. Discussing the photographic work of Robert Frank, Jay Tobler describes, "the American highway stretching endlessly into the distance," as "a potential symbol of freedom, endless promise, and possibility."³ At the same time, he sees the road as capable of suggesting "the alienating effects of a vast, unbroken emptiness, the anxiety of the traveller with too far to go and too little gas."⁴ *The Straight Story* combines the two understandings, though in measured, personal forms. It uses a repetition of corresponding long-shots to express the "endless" nature of this

³ Jay Tobler, *Art USA* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999, 2001), p. 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*

constant dusty yellow line, tracing its tracks over the hills. The long-shots capture the “unbroken” nature of the road, leading Alvin to his brother. It is shown as a connecting thread, offering a continual reminder of the “possibility” of reconciliation with Lyle. In turn, the film’s use of extreme long-shots may at first be seen to stress the “anxiety” created in Alvin by the scope of his journey. The high shots show a tiny vehicle on a vast strip, as a fly on flypaper. However, in coupling the wide views with optical point of view (POV) and reaction shots, the film alters this sensation, instead creating expressions of a favourable dependency.

In its combination of perspectives, the film expresses how Alvin is enjoying his position, placing faith in the road, taking pleasure in its features (as addressed, in detail, in Chapter 6). In particular, the film uses a recurrence of tight POV shots of the road’s surface, from Alvin’s perspective. Instantly, the POV shots emphasize the physical proximity of traveller and road. Through these shots, the film focuses on the slow, rhythmic passage of dashed road markings. The individual nature of Alvin’s mode of transport affords him a greater sense of involvement with his surroundings. Removed from the restrictive casings of a normal car, Alvin is able to peer down, to scrutinize the textures and markings of the road. Moreover, the slow speed of the mower allows him to study these features for longer. In a corresponding manner to the shots of the natural landscape, the style of the film’s concentration on a particular feature of the road expresses a certain aspect of Alvin’s demeanour. In this instance, a sense of steady resolve is felt as the road is measured out in equal strokes. The smooth flow of uniformly spaced lines expresses the regular pace and measured persistence of his passage to Lyle.

As well as examining features of the highway itself, the film pays equal attention to the mower’s position on the road. The film gradually increases the bond between traveller and terrain by moving through views of Alvin on the road in a particular order. The order can be traced through in the analysis, moving from wide views of the mower on the track, into corresponding close shots. In repeated long shot, Alvin is shown driving tight to the side of the highway, taking up little space on the strip. His position underlines his humble standpoint. He accepts a situation suited to his gradual progress, yielding the main part of the road to the speedier passage of cars and trucks (FIGURE 3).

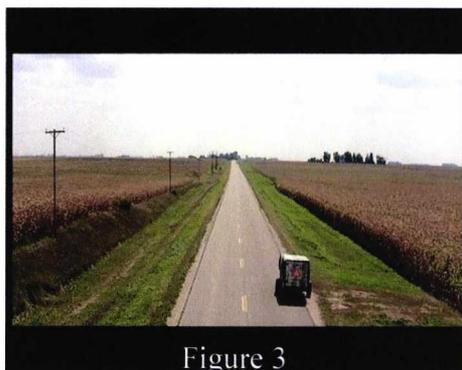


Figure 3

Crucially, in this position, the wheels of the mower are seen to straddle the road and the verging grassland. From the all-encompassing distance of a long-shot, the position of the wheels creates a tangible bond between the mower and the landscape. The mower's straddling of two distinct spaces, of road and field, succeeds in bringing both aspects into purveyance at the same time. Simultaneously, the position involves Alvin in both aspects of the immediate surround. Road and track support the mower; in turn, Alvin's rig acts as a supporting device for the different surfaces. It suspends the two planes, holding them in tension. As the film cuts to closer shots of the mower (and so to its wheels), the inference is developed even further. In close shot, the superimposition of a single wheel on the broad natural canvas inflects the appearance of both. The adjacency of two familiar sights, of a mower and a rural highway, makes them strange. The wheel vivifies the views of the landscape, and vice versa.⁵ Natural and synthetic textures meet in the arching presence of the mower.

Furthermore, the film is equally as careful in its withdrawals of the camera from the mower, as with its approaches. At points, the film reduces the "alienating effects" of a vast landscape by gradually disclosing its far-reaching views, moving from the mower outwards. To cite a striking example, this effect occurs as the mower passes a hitchhiker waiting by the side of the road. Alvin's approach towards the girl opens with a close-up shot of the mower's wheel. Moving tightly across the body of the vehicle, the camera slowly pivots out, revealing the surroundings in a widening viewpoint. In the instance, the mower acts as a mainstay to the motion. The film introduces the greater vista by subtle degrees, whilst keeping tight to the vehicle. Rather than counter Alvin's diminutive position with the grandeur of 'Nature', the move allows the film to release views gently alongside him. In turn, the association between the individual man and the composite surroundings is made closer. In moving towards and away from the mower with equal measures of delicacy, the film individualizes the vast tracks of road and field. Progressively, the broad canvas of the landscape is imbued with Alvin's presence.

Circles and Straight Lines

Alvin's journey is measured as a series of concise circular moves, with the incremental development of these circles composing a 'Straight Story'. On the broadest level of narrative structure, the film charts Alvin's progress in a straight line. It adheres strictly to chronological,

⁵ The effect is repeated elsewhere in the film. As Alvin sets up camp in the Riordan's backyard, the friendly couple brightens up his shelter with colourful wooden decorations. With the camera positioned close to the shelter's canopy, a long-shot lays one of the delicate adornments over an image of the family home, looming black in the distance. As with the mower-wheel, Alvin's presence shapes the views of a familiar setting. As Alvin himself remarks to Danny Riordan (James Cada), "you'll be a stranger in your own backyard."

linear development. However, even on this level, the film creates circular moves. The most momentous instance occurs as Alvin's mower breaks down. Stranded on the road, Alvin makes the decision to return home and start the journey again. Yet, the film also presents circular moves that carry Alvin forwards. A repeated juxtaposition, of close shots of the mower's turning wheel with long views of the road, conveys this idea in its simplest form. However, *The Straight Story* creates intricate designs, exploring the accrual of circular turns in much greater depth. The mower's wheel can be seen as the starting point of the film's explorations. It is also a lynchpin, to which the film often returns in its circular designs.

There are two distinct, though interrelated ways in which the film creates individual, circular patterns of Alvin's progress. First, circles are formed in the physical movements of the camera, in the turn of the lens over long-shots of the terrain. The film can be seen to carry smoothly across distinct locations by following a single, continuous 'through-line' of camera movement. Such fluid movements consist of a meticulously arranged series of circles and straight lines. Secondly, *The Straight Story* creates circles in its patterning of particular visual motifs. In Alvin's various meetings and encounters on the road, the film creates a series of miniature 'tales' that appear self-contained, as complete in and of themselves. At the same time, the encounters appear as integral parts of the character's greater expedition. The film can be seen to achieve this dual effect through the shaping of circular patterns of motifs. Through camera movement and editing, *The Straight Story* presents a single journey unfurling through the passage and growth of compendious circles.

In the opening sequence, the film immediately introduces its interest in circular arrangements and patterning. At the same time, the sequence encapsulates the wider concern of the film, of a great journey across prodigious settings. The methodical, calm approach of Alvin is also captured, as the initial passage across the landscape is shaped into four easy moves. Slowly, the camera releases its gaze from a sky of stars to turn and sail over crop-fields, on into the town of Laurens, before settling in front of Alvin's yard. Through each turn, the film increasingly narrows its point of focus, moving from a myriad stars, to a single house. The effect hints at Alvin's own trajectory, as he takes in the sweeping vistas offered by the countryside, before finally directing his focus, steering the mower down the narrow pathway to Lyle's lone shack. The sequence is alternately performed as a series of circular rotations and straight courses. First, the camera is seen to turn around the land. It then advances over consonant surfaces in vertical lines. The order is repeated before we reach the Straight yard. Two full turns and strokes of the land carry us to Alvin's house, from the stars. In the form of the shots, the film moves fluidly through each turn. The completion of each arc leads seamlessly into a straight move forward.

As well as moving the camera in precise ways to couple the settings, the film bleeds together corresponding textures and forms. A brief description of the four dissolve shots can be used to point up the precise arrangements at work in the film's opening sequence. First, the film moves from a long shot of the stars to a bird's eye view of a tawny field. The shift is smoothly completed as the surfaces, seen from these angles, share a certain resemblance. Through a dissolve, the scattering of tiny dots of light bleeds into a similarly intricate pattern of wheat. In a second dissolve, the film connects in a closer view of a thresher at work in the field. The lines of crop rows in the previous, circling shot connect with the parallel lip of a far border hedge in the view of the thresher. Lastly, two further dissolves lay the fading ribbons of crops across a bird's eye view of matching lines, of the streets of Laurens, before moving to focus on Alvin's house. The film's precise merger of intricate details and matching lines enmeshes the broad views together. At the same time, the regular pace and move of the camera over the settings – circle, stroke – acts as a further, guiding agent, binding the views into a single rhythmic pattern.

Thus, the film's introductory journey, from the stars to Alvin, is achieved through precise measurements of movement and integration. In the uniformity of each individual circular turn and straight stroke, the film establishes a regular, slow rhythm of motion. The rhythm is then taken up in the main part of the film by the mower's mechanical chug forwards. Equally, the consistent measure of each stroke and turn in the opening sequence anticipates the sight of regularly spaced road markings passing rhythmically by, under the curving wheel of the mower. The regular, laggard rotations of the first images of the film set the pace for Alvin's own moves across the landscape.

The film develops its intricate designs 'on the road', within the development of Alvin's journey. In one particular instance, two consecutive legs of the journey are bound together into a single circle. Akin to the opening sequence, a bind is achieved through an exact match of parallel lines, formed within a circling turn. In this instance, the film sustains the same level of precision as in the earlier sequence, achieved in a coupling of much wider panoramic views. The instance occurs as the journey takes Alvin from road to bridge, prior to his crossing of the Mississippi. The film shapes extreme long-shots of both settings, of road and bridge, into fractions of a single circular movement. Primarily, the camera leads steadily away from the multiple branches of a road junction, along one horizontal strand of the track. From the bird's eye view, the road is shown as a thin grey line set atop swathes of grassland. In the rotation, the road slowly appears to turn as a needle on a compass, north by northeast. As the line turns, the film dissolves in a corresponding view of the bridge set vertically up the frame. In the instant of the dissolve, the angle of the road almost precisely matches that of the bridge's main span. Both lines point in the same direction, point the way forwards for Alvin. The film continues to rotate both views, turning around road and river

crossing by equal degrees. In the final seconds of the dissolve, both spans are glimpsed in near perfect parallel (FIGURE 4).

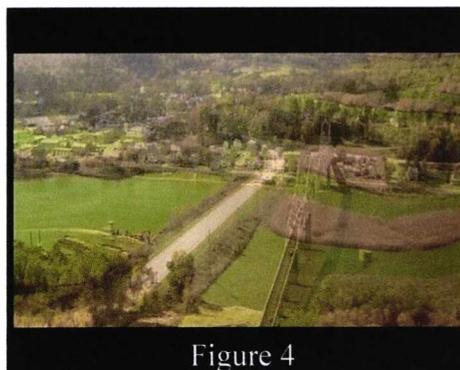


Figure 4

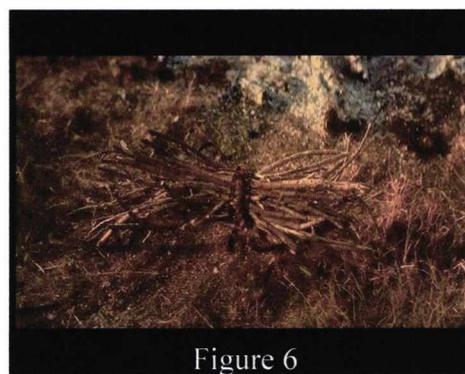
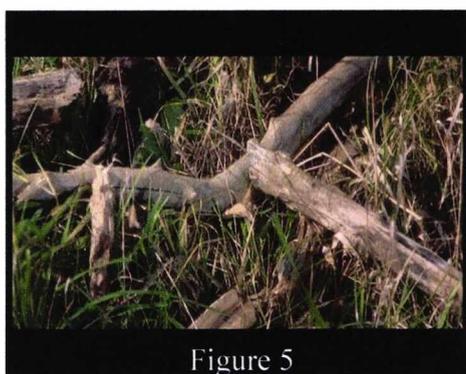
Through the camera's tracing of a circle and the use of a dissolve, two monumental settings – the Midwest road and a bridge crossing the vast width of the Mississippi river – are precisely linked as matching, straight lines. As the single circle is sealed, the film suggests how each stage of the journey feeds perfectly into the next, as a series of connected endeavours. Equally, as the circle closes, the two grand expanses form one minor part of Alvin's pilgrimage.

The film shapes Alvin's passing encounters with people 'on the road' in a similar fashion. On one hand, each meeting appears 'complete', as if Alvin and his momentary companion(s) have fulfilled all and any promise of their time together. At the same time, as each meeting is essentially transitory ('by the way' in an ongoing trip), the encounters are expressed as fragments of a much greater journey. Each meeting plays a minor, though crucial role in Alvin's pursuit for re-union with his brother. Again, the film's development of circular patterns is fundamental to this dual effect. In certain instances of Alvin's meetings, circles are formed through a careful ordering of rhyming views. Such an instance occurs as Alvin sets out from Laurens a second time. After the mower is shown passing the benchmark site of the Grotto, the film concentrates on moments of preparation for nightfall, and rest. Two corresponding series of shots show Alvin moving by day and sheltering by the fire at night. On the second day of travel, Alvin is seen to pass a lone hitchhiker (Crystal, played by Anastasia Webb). On the evening of the same day, he meets her again. In a rhythmic ordering of shots, Alvin's meeting with the hitchhiker is a tale told in and of itself. It exists as a miniature cycle of days and nights, of corresponding actions and circumstances, of raising and lowering light. Yet, even tighter sets of circles are formed in the film's rhyming of particular views: of horizons; the sun; bundles of branches; and of Alvin's quietly expressive features. The repeated views form individual motifs. With each return, the motif develops. At the same time, each motif interconnects. Through dissolves and in matching colours, shapes and

textures, the images tightly cohere. They appear organically bound. There is a natural congruity to the progressive views of wood, sun and fire.

Whilst tightly sealing this particular event as a notable incident, the developing patterns simultaneously connect the event with the more momentous meaning of Alvin's journey to his brother. An analysis of two particular motifs, of the horizons and bundles of wood, can be used to detail this effect. In terms of the first motif, the sequence contains three views of horizons. Each of the three distant shots is closely connected. In each shot, the land is viewed from the same angle and distance. Each time, the point where the sky meets the earth appears on the same level of the frame. The colours of each skyline reflect each other in a marbling of blue and orange. As the horizons form a circular pattern, as the appearance of each skyline recalls the first, they also convey the linear passage of time. Through the three shots, a sunset leads to crepuscular shadows, and into a sunrise. Thus, the movement of the sun charts the entire encounter with the hitchhiker. It acts as an overture to the piece. Simultaneously, the circular progression of the sun quietly calls to mind the meaning of time's passage for Alvin. For the ailing elderly man, time is short. Equally, the motif delicately points up Alvin's need to reach his brother in time, in case Lyle's condition should worsen.

The opening and closing shots of the sequence mark the appearance of the second motif, of the film's momentary focus on bundles of firewood. The 'book-ending' correspondence of the images seals the circle of this particular scenario, of Alvin and the hitchhiker. Yet within the rhyme lies a crucial distinction. The opening shots show a naturally irregular pile of wood. The branches lie pell-mell. Contrastingly, the final shot shows a neatly bound bundle of sticks. The package is handcrafted and trim. Each stick is placed and tied purposefully together (FIGURES 5 AND 6).



The difference is equally as significant as the circling point of comparison. An act of influential arrangement is begun by Alvin with the grabber, and concluded by the hitchhiker. The act of forming the sticks into a bundle during this particular encounter can be seen as an act of

advancement, in the sense of ‘moving on’ as well as ‘putting things in order’. As such, it too coincides with the greater purpose of Alvin’s journey.⁶

Within one sequence, the film weaves interlacing designs of like images. In the ordering of long views and close-up shots, of dramatic sunsets and the minutiae of Alvin’s journey, the significance of clusters of images can be seen to slowly spiral. In all of the above examples, the meaning of small, complete cycles of images echoes with, and contributes to, the more profound meanings of Alvin’s pilgrimage.



The Bridges of Madison County

Frames and Boxes

Akin to *The Straight Story*, *The Bridges of Madison County* is set in the rural heartland of North America, in the cornfields and brush-hills of Iowa. In both films, the views of the landscape are charged with meaning. Though equally sensitive to the features of the shared rural setting, the films work in opposing ways. Whereas *The Straight Story* charts and explores Alvin’s progress across an ever-changing landscape, *The Bridges of Madison County* focuses on a small number of fixed locations. Lynch’s film examines the act of journeying, concentrating on a sustained movement across the breadth of the landscape. In contrast, *The Bridges of Madison County* explores aspects of stillness and immovability. The film fixes its attention on its characters’ crossing and re-crossing of the same spaces, across time. In the matching setting of the Iowan landscape, a sense of exposure is replaced by that of containment.

The emphasis on fixity and containment is in keeping with the film’s story. Living a life of ‘quiet suffocation’, farmer’s wife Francesca Johnson (Meryl Streep) is offered a means of escape, in the guise of travelling photographer Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood). As her family leaves town for the State Fair, Francesca spends “just four days” with Robert. The brief encounter ends when the family returns from the trip, and Francesca returns to her life of little, repeated errands and duties. The affair is concealed from the family, only to be discovered many years later and after Francesca’s death, as the (grown) children return home.

⁶ This little design becomes even more intricate with the telling of Alvin’s family fable. Alvin recounts the tragic history of his daughter’s mental disability, and the subsequent removal of her children by the State due to their endangerment in an accidental house-fire. This story, or ‘set of circumstances’ is returned to in Chapter 4: “Music.” The moving description of the “strength of sticks” adds a further inflection to the like images of twigs marbling this sequence. Simultaneously, it refers outwards to the greater union, of Alvin’s reconciliation with his brother. Indeed, the fable is explicitly concerned with the way composite, little parts contribute to the strength and unity of a bigger whole.

As well as concentrating its attention on a few fixed settings – the family home, the kitchen, the bridges of Madison County – the film devotes itself to the discovery and unfurling of the four-day affair. Rather than working on a grand linear scale (the long roads and journey of *The Straight Story*), the film achieves a sense of expansiveness through the density of its exploration. It *contains* the affair in a series of frames and boxes, and gradually unpacks the details of the four-day relationship with meticulous attention. Richard Combs draws together these concerns, noting how, “This “simple” love story is two hours fifteen in the telling, mainly because the film sets up so many frames, spatial and temporal, around the love interest: comings and goings to the domestic scene, a farm; the discovery of the story by the next generation.”⁷ The children’s unearthing of the affair in ‘the present’ allows the film to shuttle back and forth across time, just as the characters carry across the same spaces. The effect is both elaborate and thickening. The film’s use of the framing device can be traced to the source novel (by Robert James Waller), and yet marks an improvement, as Combs notes:

[C]onsider how carefully Eastwood and screenwriter Richard LaGravenese have built around the original novel. This is itself an elaborately buttressed fiction, beginning in self-conscious mode with the author “looking at the blinking cursor on the computer screen before me” when “the telephone rings”, and Francesca’s grown children appear with her story after her death in 1989. The affair (which happened in 1965) is then unfolded in the present tense, with various digressions to Francesca recollecting it in the future, through letters, diaries, and Robert’s last bequest (he dies in 1982). All this to-ing and fro-ing is not so much self-conscious as just rather precious and slippery. But the filmmakers have turned it into solid dramatic boxing by creating a framing story out of the children’s discovery of the affair through the letters, their shock and slowly dawning appreciation of what their mother found, then renounced for their sakes.⁸

The “dramatic boxing” of temporal tenses is met with spatial “comings and goings”, as the film explores the delicate variations and developments coming from repeated visits to the same places. Within the confines of the farm, under the bridges, and the frame of “just four days” Robert, Francesca and the film develop patterns of activity, short-lived routines that rise above the conventions of the housewife’s habitual life. Each gradual development adds to the slowly building erotic charge that carries across the four days and the entire film.

⁷ Richard Combs, “The Bridges of Madison County”, *Film Comment*, May/June 1996, p.26

⁸ *Ibid*: p. 27.

Fixed Positions and Open Possibilities

As *The Bridges of Madison County* holds its attention on a cluster of settings, it promotes a sense of their fixity and solidity. For Francesca, the rigid hold of the settings becomes, at turns, a point of grievance, reassurance and resignation. As she laments to Robert in the dying moments of their four-day affair, “You get caught ... and you just stop, and stay steady ... you just stop so your children can move.” Initially, this sense of grounding is expressed in approaches towards the Johnson house. In the opening moment of the film, the camera holds on the family’s rusty mailbox, as a silver truck rolls up the driveway in a spray of dust (FIGURE 7).



Only when the truck draws adjacent to the mailbox does the camera arc, with the vehicle, towards the house. The mailbox acts as fulcrum and sentry, supporting the turn into the grounds of the family home. It marks the edge of the homestead. The titles fade in; we have entered the film in the first of many movements by trucks towards and away from this house.

Combs notes the film’s attention to the approaches of trucks, stating that, “It takes three of these vehicles to carry us properly into the story, and the repeated coming and going, this patient crossing of space and time, is another way of setting up a framework, of making the narrative approaches, as it were, concrete.”⁹ The first truck brings Francesca’s son Michael (Victor Slezak) back to the family home, to join his sister Carolyn (Annie Corley) in sorting out their mother’s estate. The second carries the family away from Francesca in 1965, to go to the State Fair. The sense of strain being taken from Francesca in this moment is held in the heavy freight of the truck, lumbering with the cargo of the cattle-box up the drive. The third truck brings Robert Kincaid. In all three instances, the weight of the trucks is expressed in their bulky design and the sound of their movement. With the engine’s thrum, the wheels crunch down on the grit of the track. In stressing the heaviness of these vehicles, and in patiently holding on their slow movements towards and away from the house, the film suggests how the track to the farm becomes engraved through time, scored

⁹ Ibid.

through passage. In this way, the flat landscape, of Iowan fields and long straight tracks, is made dense, thickened by the act of arriving and departing from one fixed setting. In turn, the grooves of passage to the house point up Francesca's sense of being 'stuck' in one place.

Correspondingly, attention is paid to the characters' crossing and re-crossing of compact spaces within and around the house, on the porch and in the kitchen. Each movement across these spaces is seen as a negotiation, as part of the taut choreography of the characters' relationships. The repetition of movement, back and forth, charges these domestic spaces with emotion and eroticism. The film is equally sensitive to variations within repetitions, turning its perspective on place and movement to express the changing atmosphere within the circumscribed settings.

As the mailbox marks the edge of the Johnson estate, the porch-front stands as a border to the house itself. The film declares its interest in this boundary space in the opening moments, moving directly from the long shot of Michael's approaching truck to a tight view of Carolyn and the family lawyer standing on the porch. As Carolyn watches the truck roll up, the porch is used as a promontory, offering a clear vantage point from which to view the surrounding landscape. It offers a space for discovery, of the arrival of visitors; it also allows one to be discovered, to be seen and found. It is a space for waiting, greeting, or contemplation. As a promontory, it creates a sense of detachment from the interior of the house and the surrounding fields, whilst retaining a link with both. Standing on the porch, the characters stand upon a threshold between two settings. Simultaneously, the space offers the close security of the house, and the possibilities of the open countryside. These intertwining aspects are explored in a series of moments, and through the character of Francesca, over the course of the film.

The aspect of discovery is addressed in the first view of Robert Kincaid, from the edge of the porch. As the photographer's truck approaches the house, Francesca stands on the porch, completing a chore, beating the dust from a rug against one of the vertical wooden supports. It is a gesture of everyday duty, allowing for a little release of pressure, in each swing and beat of the rug. It is crucial to note that the task is performed against the posts of the porch; these struts support the roof, and at points throughout the film, bear the weight of the characters' bodies and actions. Here, the pressure of the task is borne by the post; Francesca does not "lash out" against the hard structures of the house, but uses their density and strength to brace her action. The approach of the truck distracts the housewife from the task, and the rug is allowed to slip to the floor. Francesca makes tentative steps to the edge of the porch, smoothing down her dress, straightening her posture, readying herself for a meeting. The vantage point offered by the platform of the porch allows small and crucial advantages, of declaring her presence before the approaching visitor, and of using the act of waiting to prepare for the moment of arrival.

As a routine chore is placed under suspension, the unexpected appearance of a stranger creates a sense of possibility. Francesca's relationship with her immediate surroundings develops the sense of measured expectation. Eyeing the oncoming truck, she comes to lean on the last post of the porch. Francesca's position expresses not only the openness of the situation, but also the character's watchfulness, or mindfulness of the unknown visitor. In moving tight to the post, Francesca aligns herself with the house. Her stance suggests a need to draw support from her surroundings in face of a stranger, and a reassuring claim of territory. Her bind to the house offers, in this instance, a source of fortitude, and supports a moment of uncertainty.

Upon the point of Robert's arrival, the film develops its interest in position and possibility, exploring the negotiations of the two characters on and around the porch. As the truck draws to a stop, Robert declares he is lost. In response, Francesca shuffles once to adjust her stance, lifting her arm to press closer to the post. The knowledge that the visitor has called to ask for directions is both a matter of quiet relief and regret. As the meaning of the meeting reveals itself, the suspense of irresolution falls away. The mix of emotions is felt in the move and drop of the shoulder, as a gentle adjustment. Further, the move (closer now to the supporting strut) and Robert's declaration, of being adrift in his surroundings, point up the fixity and familiarity of Francesca's position on the farm.

At the same time, Francesca's familiarity with her surroundings creates a fresh sense of possibility, expressed in the act of giving and receiving directions. Again, the film explores a stimulation coming within a circumscribed scenario, achieved through the handling of physical and conversational positions. As Robert asks for more information on the whereabouts of Roseman Bridge, Francesca's guarded friendliness gradually shifts into a more open willingness to help, to enter into the contract of the conversation. Robert's continuing request for more information becomes an invitation to sustain the meeting. The film marks Francesca's acceptance of the invitation in the character's movement off the porch, stepping down onto the verge, and level with Robert. As Francesca moves down and off the porch, her responses become more fluid and playful. She describes the Cutter farm with its "big mean yellow dog", arching her hands into clawed paws. The move off the porch is another incremental adjustment, a little commitment and step into the situation. The film attunes to the development of the moment, drawing tighter to the characters with each cut. As Francesca relaxes into her new role as guide, so too does Robert, moving to lean on the hood of the truck, feeding the exchange ("And then where, after the fork?") Both characters use structures that are most familiar to them – Francesca with the house, Robert with the truck – to find useful positions in an unfamiliar scenario.

The change of both character's stances and positions develops the flirtation of the moment. At the same time, Robert's questions court Francesca's engagement whilst working towards a conclusion to the meeting (learning the location of the bridge). The outcome of this brief encounter is momentarily held at bay. As Adam Phillips notes, "In flirtation you never know whether the beginning of the story – the story of the relationship – will be the end."¹⁰ Francesca joins the flirtation with an invitation of her own, and a joke. She could show Robert the location of the bridge – "I can take you or tell you; either way; it's up to you; I don't care" – instead of using the afternoon to "split the atom." The joke releases a little tension and develops the sense of play. The quip gracefully lightens the boldness of Francesca's offer to accompany Robert, marks the end of their first exchange as a gentle punch line, and softens the impact of their mutual decision, to go to the bridge together. First, though, Francesca must get her shoes. The line encapsulates Francesca's attitude towards her surroundings, whilst hinting at an underlying spirit. It marks the fixity of her position; as there is no need to leave the house, there is no need for shoes. At the same time though, it suggests a pleasure in open appreciation of her environment, of 'feeling the soil beneath one's feet'.

At the close of the moment, a final gesture on the porch underlines the film's attention to this compact space. With the decision to accompany Robert having been made, Francesca moves back towards the house, to collect her shoes. Turning to the porch, she reaches for the post, pushing against it for support. With a bend of the knee and a tilting roll of her round hips, Francesca lifts herself up onto the promontory. Again, as she leans against the strut, the house takes the weight of her action. At the same time, it is a determined movement *against* the fixed ballast of the house, marking a spirited decision to accompany the photographer, to place the possibilities of the afternoon under suspension. Raised and separated from Robert on the platform of the porch, Francesca steals a glance back.

Two consecutive moments centering on the tight space of the porch capture the tentative freedoms of Francesca's relationship with Robert. Both follow the pair's trip to Roseman Bridge and their impromptu dinner at the house. Worrying the easy charm of the evening, Robert asks Francesca if she wants to leave her husband. As the question unsettles the mood, Robert, quietly embarrassed, takes his leave. Watching him go, Francesca stands in the open doorway to the porch, resting her hands on the frame, arms braced. On first sight, the image may be considered as melodramatically assertive, pointing to Francesca's 'entrapment' in and by the familiar domain of the house (FIGURE 8).

¹⁰ Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 16.

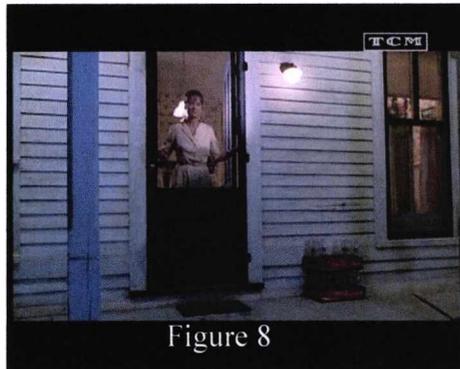


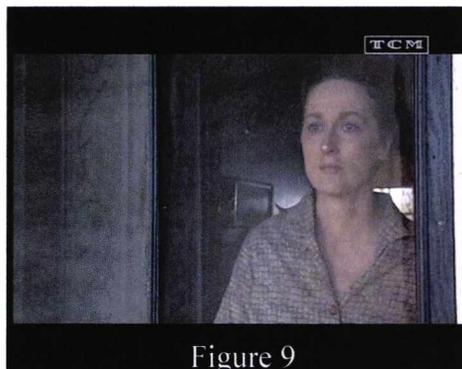
Figure 8

The housewife stands by the *stay* of the doorframe. Such an understanding is reinforced by the declamatory clap of thunder heard on the soundtrack, on the cusp of Robert's departure. At the same time, when seen in relation to earlier movements on and around the struts of the porch, Francesca's position is made complex. In an instant of uneasiness, the character is momentarily bolstered by the solid brace of the doorframe. Francesca uses the frame to steady herself through a hesitation, as she wavers on the threshold. A cry to Robert is caught in her throat as the telephone rings; she retreats inside the house.

The meeting with Robert encourages a tentative change in Francesca's relationship with familiar settings. Following the stranger's departure, Francesca sits on the porch to read. A gentle restlessness is felt in the rhythmic pitch of the rocking chair, suggesting a quiet distraction from the words on the page. The intermediary space of the porch encourages the sense of uncommitted contemplation. Possibilities are in the air. Moving from the chair, she crosses to the edge of the porch, loosening her gown, letting the night breeze push and billow the cotton folds. Francesca uses the space of the porch to open herself to her surroundings in a particular way; the place is at once private and exposed. Standing on the edge of the promontory, she allows the wind to tease at her hair and clothes. Yet, the wind blows with insects that nip at Francesca's naked body, causing her to cover up again, to return indoors. The spontaneous moment of stimulation and release is short-lived, encapsulating the essence of the four-day affair.

The resonance of these moments reverberates in the film's final view of the porch. The four days have passed; Francesca has made the heartbreaking decision to stay with her family, rather than leave with Robert. A fade to black gives way to a long shot of the family truck, as it pulls up the drive to the farmhouse. The moment is shaped to echo Robert's initial arrival in the same space. The half rhyme points up tensions between the occasions, and emphasizes the impact of Robert's sudden absence. The crunch of gravel on the track alerts Francesca to her family's arrival. She

stands in the doorway to the porch, watching through the gauze screen of the door. The camera looks in at Francesca, through the gauze veil (FIGURE 9).



The veil gives the shot a grey pallor; the arrival of the family is first greeted in mute tones. Francesca edges towards the door; the thin veil of the screen offers a slight guard, standing between the empty retreat of the house and a transparent moment of greeting. Echoing her reaction to Robert's arrival, Francesca readies herself for the reception. Here, she pushes down the pain of Robert's departure, finding a smile to fit the occasion. Her position behind the screen expresses a need for concealment, a veiling of emotion. Moving onto the exposed platform of the porch, Francesca musters a little display of welcome, clapping her hands together. She leans on the post, this time in a performance of relaxed and happy relief. The film hints at the true undercurrent of feeling in two views of the dusty track. First, it matches the angle of the family truck pulling to a stop with the earlier shot of Robert's arrival. The exactness of the rhyme captures a pang of yearning. Secondly, a stolen glance to the open track by camera and character conveys a sense of longing for Robert's return, and a fleeting wish for flight.

Finally, the film envelops the weight of the moment, of the family's return, in particular trappings. The load of a suitcase accompanies each member of the family. The willed joy of the reception is weighted with the burden of the cases. At the same time, the composition of the moment draws in a view of swing-chairs set on the lawn. The sense of weight introduced with the cluster of suitcases is encouraged in the view of the chairs, each with a seat hanging down, suspended by rods and ropes. Weight is met by a sense of tightness, as the camera moves with the family towards the house, across the porch. The angle of the shot highlights the close constriction of the family, held between the porch struts and the door (FIGURE 10).



Whereas the porch once seemed the perfect place to survey possibilities, to breathe in and toy with the night air, it now appears a narrow space, restricted and restricting, as a *curb* to passage. The sense of tightness is amplified in the sound of the porch door being opened, its rusty springs rasping and stretching taut. Sound and setting combine to capture the tension of the moment, of Francesca's emotions tightly coiled. As the family pack into the house, the door snaps shut.

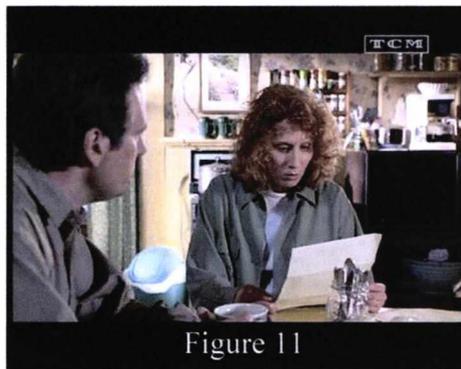
Within the house, emotional resonance gradually gathers around the kitchen, through a careful repetition of the room. This domestic location is gently animated by a developing significance. The film forms patterns in returning views of the kitchen and in the traffic of characters across its space. The repetition of views and moves meets the rhythms of repetitive behaviour, in the preparation and taking of food by the Johnson family. Equally, the consistent returns to the kitchen connect with the establishment of a new rhythm and routine, in the meetings and dinners of Robert and Francesca. Above all, the accrual of views allows the film to develop variations. The particular placement of camera and cut shifts the aspect of the space, and of the characters' situation, moment to moment.

As in many households, the space of the kitchen becomes the nucleus of the family. The Johnson family gathers here to eat, though not to speak. Francesca's close association with the space is declared in the first view of the character, stooping in plumes of steam over the stove, preparing the family's dinner. The film's repeated focus on the place, and of Francesca's position within it, reinforces the sense of the character's fixity. As all the actions of the household pivot around the kitchen, Francesca is held in place. Yet, there are also expressions of flexibility in order. Most of Francesca's time with Robert is spent in the kitchen, drinking tea, preparing food, eating dinner, dancing. The space forms the heart of the affair, and the kitchen as nucleus becomes a centre of growth for the housewife. Equally, the informality and familiarity of the location allow the couple to adjust in their fledgling relationship, to try out different stances. The crux of the house becomes a space for development. As the affair draws to a close, it is crucial to note that the couple

chooses to change routine and setting, to eat the last meal together in the dining room. This room is laden with the rituals and ceremony of dining, of lighting candles and setting places. The formality of the setting chimes with the stiffness of the last meeting; there is no *give* in this space.

The film expresses how the characters adapt to different situations within the kitchen by exploring the plasticity of the setting. By degrees and in repeated views, the space is shaped in distinct measures of flatness and depth, openness and compactness. Careful variations and compositions of these four aspects are presented across the film, turning the views of the kitchen to bear incremental changes in the characters' relationship with the domestic locale, and each other.

The stiffness of the scenes in "the present" carries into the handling of Michael and Carolyn in the kitchen. The camera fixes on the two figures hunkered tight at the kitchen table, as they read their mother's letter of revelation. The kitchen table acts as an axis to the camera's few measured tilts and turns, following the succinct moves of the characters to the coffee pot and into their seats. The moves are awkwardly confined. Correspondingly, the low angle and closeness of the shot present a compact space, filled with the clutter of kitchen utensils and cooking bric-a-brac crowded on surfaces and shelves (FIGURE 11).



For these characters, in this particular space and time, the sense of "being cramped" is expressive of two connected conditions. First, the film quietly conveys the feeling arising from a return to a childhood place. The setting and décor, once so familiar, seem to have shrunk. The relationship between body and setting becomes awkward, in an awareness of growth and a change in status. At the same time, the sense of encumbrance is also expressive of the particular circumstances of the moment. The letter is an uncomfortable find, a matter of pressure.

The film points up connections and distinctions of the present and past through the first view of Francesca, in the kitchen. Again, the handling of the room conveys a sense of pressure, yet this is now expressed in the openness of the space. The film highlights the aspect of openness by creating an initial counterpoint, first suggesting the confines of the kitchen. The sequence opens on

a close shot of Francesca working at the stove, and the tightness of the connection between setting and character is immediately noted. Akin to the use of the porch, the sense of tightness expresses both restriction and rigour. Francesca is bound to this space; at the same time, she finds solace in the closeness of her ties with a familiar setting. In moments of uncertainty, Francesca presses herself tight to the rigid structures of her surroundings, on the struts of the porch, under the arch of the bridges, in the farmhouse. Later in the film, returning to the house with her husband after the final silent farewell to Robert, Francesca tucks herself into the nook of the kitchen pantry, hiding as if seeking to meld with the structures of the house (FIGURE 12). Whilst acknowledging the inflexibility of her life, Francesca draws strength from the solidity of surrounding structures.

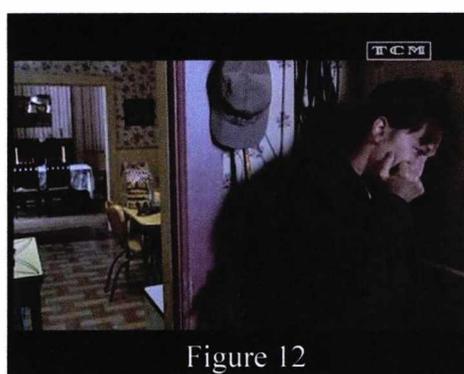


Figure 12

The bounds of the kitchen are disclosed through the movements of the housewife. As Francesca crosses the room to turn up the radio, the camera pans with her, left to right, from and to the stove. The action of crossing the room is repeated throughout the sequence, as plates and dinnertime paraphernalia are taken to the table. The repetition draws attention to the routine nature of this event, to the untold number of times Francesca has performed these habitual actions and moves. The connection of camera and character also marks out the kitchen as *Francesca's* place. Her moves authorize the disclosure of the setting. The sense of authority is furthered in Francesca's act of turning up the radio. It is a measured move, a trim adjustment to her controlled environment.

Yet, the swell of the music points up the emptiness of the setting. The notes of the aria fall into space like dabs of paint on a blank canvas. The sense of emptiness is declared in a cut, as the camera reframes to a long view of the kitchen's limits (FIGURE 13). The declamatory nature of the cut meets the pronounced positioning of the kitchen table, set square in the middle of the room.



Francesca's refined appreciation of the music is held in tension with the starkness of the setting. Her calls for the family to come to the table for dinner are also, at first, met with a blank lack of acknowledgment. As husband, son and daughter finally gather around the table with a scrape of chairs on the tiled floor, and a clatter of cutlery on the Formica surface, space and scenario appear brittle and functional, rather than convivial.

In contrast, the possibilities of the kitchen as a place for casual cordiality are brought out in Francesca's first meeting with Robert. Returning from photographing Roseman Bridge, Francesca invites Robert to stay for dinner. To prevent the camera film spoiling in the heat of the evening, Robert places the boxes in the fridge. The gesture is one of necessity, but also marks Robert's immediate ease with the setting, finding a place for his belongings. Equally, it forms a counterpoint with a later gesture, as Francesca's busybody neighbour comes to call. Filling the kitchen with noisy bluster, the neighbour swings open the refrigerator, rooting out the contents. A previous gesture of naturalness becomes one of intrusion and presumption.

The act of preparing dinner in the kitchen becomes a shared pursuit, quickly established as a comfortable ritual for the couple. Simultaneously, the meals are casual and charged. The preparations allow for a common and neutral point of focus; Robert falls easily in step with Francesca's domestic tasks. The sense of easy accommodation, of placing the camera stock in the fridge and helping to chop the vegetables, is developed in Robert's quiet move through the porch door, as he retrieves a case of beer from the truck. In earlier moments, Francesca's son and husband stride through the door, letting it swing and bang on the jamb. Readying herself for this customary jolt, Francesca arches her back. Uncharacteristically, her heedfulness is smoothed away as Robert gently shuts the door without a sound. The way Robert adapts with ease and consideration to the spaces of the house allows Francesca to take pleasure in the act of adjusting to his company. At the same time, an apparently casual brush of the shoulders, as Robert reaches across Francesca to pick up a handful of vegetables, causes a frisson to linger.

The film sustains this complex combination of accommodation and stimulation in the changing aspect of the kitchen space, as the evening develops. A dissolve moves to a moment of

giddy conversation after the meal, as Robert describes an encounter in Africa with an overly amorous orangutan. The camera is positioned in the corner of the darkened dining room, looking through an alcove into the glow of the kitchen (FIGURE 14).



Figure 14

The effect of the framing is multiple. First, the new position opens up the space seen within the frame, suggestive of borders being pushed back. Simultaneously, it pulls the characters together, as the alcove is seen to close in the space around them. The angle draws attention to the couple's proximity as they laugh and talk around the kitchen table. Further, the withdrawal of the camera, and encroachment of frames in space, creates a sense of intimacy as left with these two characters at this moment. Placing the camera at a distance, the film leaves the characters together, to adapt to a new position of closeness. At the same time, the contrast between the darkness of the empty dining room and the compact glow of the kitchen through the alcove highlights both the concentration and unfamiliarity of this mood of tipsy warmth, in this setting. Lastly, the sight of the vacant dining table offers a pre-echo of the couple's final, awkward dinner together; the film contains the end of the relationship within its beginning.

After the giddiness of Robert's story, camera and character settle in closer, around the kitchen table. The couple sits one next to the other now, instead of on opposite sides. The smoke from the couple's cigarettes fills the close space; holding the cigarettes out, their hands, tantalizingly, almost touch. The closer positioning meets an increasing sense of confidence within the conversation. Francesca asks Robert whether he is ever lonely, "loving everyone but no-one in particular." As the conversation unfurls and Robert responds, the camera reframes, showing that the kitchen door remains open between them (FIGURE 15). There are tensions in the image. The position of the camera and door promotes the aspect of exposure sensed in the candour of the couple's discussion, yet it also divides the space between them.



Equally, the open door hints at the possibility of retreat from the house by Francesca, alongside the risk of Robert's imminent withdrawal. Through the framing and features of the domestic setting, the film expresses a moment of cautiously increasing familiarity, gently removed from commitment.



The Insider

Impersonal Spaces and Neutral Locations

If, as Adam Phillips also declares, “intimacy is privileged information,”¹¹ then the greatest achievement of *The Insider* (Michael Mann, 1999) is its handling of the way two men forge a close relationship around a concealed truth. Television producer Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino) first approaches Jeffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe) as a scientific consultant on a story for the news programme *60 Minutes*. As the former head of development at the tobacco company Brown and Williamson, Wigand possesses information proving not only that nicotine is addictive, but also that additives are being used to make it more so. However, Wigand has signed an, “onerous, lifelong confidentiality agreement so stringent that he could be in violation if he discussed anything about the corporation.”¹² Bergman has to find a way to get around the bind of the agreement, to uncover and broadcast Wigand's information. Although the two men cannot discuss certain facts, they shape their discussions to circumnavigate the agreement, dancing around disclosure.

As the two men work to consolidate their relationship, the city spaces they inhabit accommodate and reflect their efforts. A careful handling of vast city architecture allows the film to convey particular nuances of trust and restraint. Throughout *The Insider*, impersonal spaces and neutral locations – a city street, hotel suite, telephone booth, and parking lot – are charged with expressions of intimacy and detachment. Equally, in exploring the association between the protagonists and their locations, the film blurs the boundaries between the personal and public. Through the consideration of three key moments, this section shows how *The Insider* expresses the

¹¹ Ibid: p. 40.

¹² Marie Bremner, “The Man Who Knew Too Much”, *Vanity Fair* (May 1996), p.4.

hesitant forging of commitment between two men in publicly charged arenas. On the level of the film's plot, the moments discussed are of crucial importance. In the first sequence, the film sets up the suspense of whether or not Wigand will respond to Bergman's initial attempts to contact him. In the second, the two men meet for the first time, in a lavish city hotel. In the third moment, and in the protective confines of a car parked on the edge of town, the characters talk around the confidentiality agreement. As the characters' negotiations grow incrementally out of these significant moments, the cityscape shapes and conveys their pursuits.

Whilst not attempting to relate the achievements of *The Insider* to other films by Michael Mann, the analysis is illuminated by particular remarks made by the critic Jean-Baptiste Thoret, on the collected works of the director. In "The Aquarium Syndrome," Thoret asserts that,

Mann is one of those rare filmmakers ... whose films succeed in delivering a vision of modern, urban America: those impersonal places, the freeways, suburbs, uninterrupted traffic, the America that Baudrillard calls magnificent and sidereal. This is a world of railway yards, neon signs that flicker day and night, a world that seems resigned to the omnipresence of glass and concrete ... Predominant here is the transformation of spaces into "no-places": hospitals, hotel rooms, roadside cafes, vacant lots, airports, warehouses, empty apartments.¹³

Whilst in accord with Thoret's claims for the film's interest in the architectural fabric of city spaces, my interpretation does not recognize the reduction of all locations into uniform "no-places"; rather, it claims that each locale is handled differently, to express particular grades of closeness and distance, anonymity and intimacy. The first of these locales is the city street. Intrigued by the anonymous delivery of a parcel containing sensitive information on Phillip Morris cigarettes, Bergman seeks the assistance of a specialist, to 'translate' the documents. He is advised to call Jeff Wigand. Stepping outside a main-street coffee shop, Bergman moves to a street 'phone, calling Wigand's home.

Immediately, *The Insider* combines views of public and private places, setting Bergman's position on the street against the insular architecture of the Wigand household. Through the city setting, the journalist is associated with the busy open landscape of the 'outside world', of the public domain. The exposure of this street setting is amplified by Bergman's use of a particular type of 'phone. Whereas in England and elsewhere the cramped confines of a public telephone box afford the user a marginal sense of privacy, this street 'phone keeps Bergman exposed to the open air, and his wider surroundings (FIGURE 16).

¹³ Jean-Baptiste Thoret, "The Aquarium Syndrome: On the films of Michael Mann", *Senses of Cinema*, 01, 019, pp. 7-8.

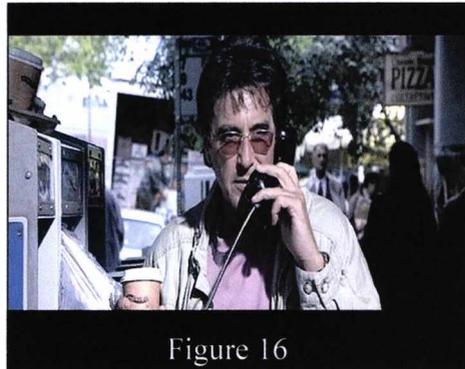


Figure 16

His side of a private conversation is conducted from an expansive, communal location. Although this position of exposure contrasts with the privacy offered by the Wigand's living room, the telephone call serves to bridge the two locations. The link has a twofold effect. First, the film shows how the bustle of outside interference will disturb the relative composure of the Wigand household. Secondly, the connection is suggestive of how Wigand's position is increasingly placed into context with the public sphere, hinting at the eventual release and exposure of his confidential information. The film also uses location and décor to draw attention to pre-existing circumstances in the Wigand's home. The living room is shown as a staid space. Rusty browns in the fabric and furnishings blend together to create an insipid environment: this *living* room is unsettling in its lack of vivacity, and in its impersonality (FIGURE 17).

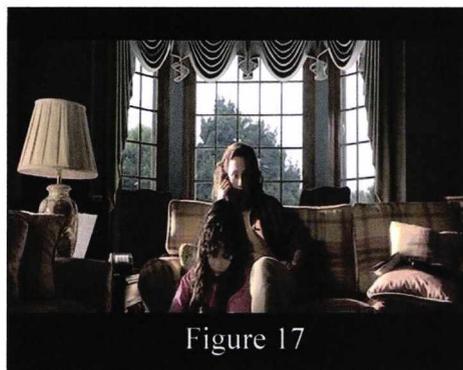


Figure 17

The room's lack of life connects to the impassive state of Wigand's marriage, and his seemingly blank attitude to the dangerous information he possesses. Bergman's 'phone call from the street troubles this state, penetrating the muted home space with insistent tones. It is a rude awakening, marking the beginning of Wigand's radicalization, and of the two men's relationship.

This tentative union develops as Bergman's insistence raises Wigand's interest, persuading him to move out of the home, into the open. In their first physical encounter, the two men meet in a city-centre hotel. The film's decision to set the meeting in a hotel affords the encounter a

combination of conflicting associations: of the intimate and impersonal, of privacy and exposure. The public nature of the setting encourages a sense of the impersonal, existing as an intermediary space, removing Bergman and Wigand from their everyday locales and offering ‘neutral ground’ on which to develop their negotiations. The change of environment, from domestic to public, opens up a sense of possibility. The transient nature of the hotel, as a place for short-lived occupancy, matches and promotes the transitory relationship of the two characters. The conclusion of their time together is, at this moment, undetermined. Equally, the decision to remove to a hotel is in concert with Bergman’s appeal for Wigand to open up, to tell the truth. As Alain de Botton notes in *The Art of Travel*, “It is not necessarily at home that we encounter our true selves. The furniture insists that we cannot change because it does not; the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, but who may not be who we essentially are.”¹⁴ The hotel unshackles Wigand from the trappings of the home; in this transient holiday space, there may be room for manoeuvre, and discovery.

In the film’s handling of this space, there are also tensions of exposure. The scene opens with a high-angle shot, as the camera looks down on Bergman sitting in the stately foyer below (FIGURE 18).

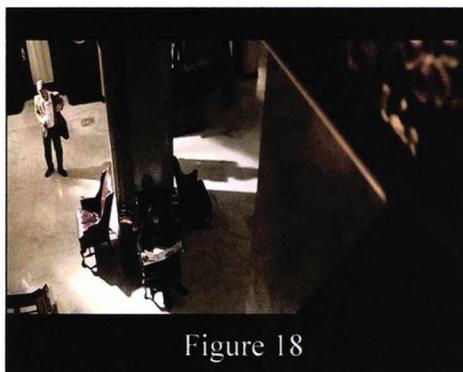


Figure 18

Conventionally, this type of shot encourages a suggestion of surveillance, of someone watching surreptitiously, from a distance, undetected. The film embraces the suggestion, and expands on it. Coming immediately after Bergman’s assured handling of his first moment of verbal contact with Wigand, the shot introduces a sense of uncertainty into the scenario, marking an uneasy shift to the anticipated, physical meeting between the men. The feeling that Bergman is being watched threatens the confidentiality of their encounter. The sense of potential exposure is heightened by the architecture of this particular hotel space. At first, the locale appears ideal for a private meeting. The quiet, sumptuous space of the entrance hall marks a distinction from the bluster and scrabble of the city crowds outside, and a sense of exclusive retreat. Yet, at the same time, the elaborate marble

¹⁴ Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 59.

designs and grandeur of the enclave are at once imposing and exposing. The hotel's ornate hallway places its residents on display even as it promises austere discretion. Furthermore, despite its suggestions of privilege and privacy, the hotel foyer remains a communal site for meeting and waiting. Concomitant with the contemporary obsession for celebrity, the entrance to an exclusive urban retreat offers the salacious possibility of spotting and being spotted.

As the threat of exposure looms, Bergman and Wigand move quickly and quietly towards the more private zone of the hotel suite. The passage to a more intimate space is sealed as the mirrored glass doors of the elevator slide silently shut, locking the men together (FIGURE 19).

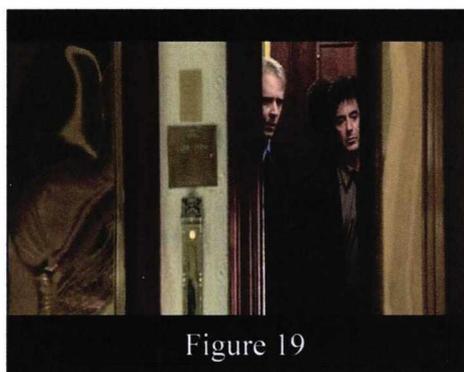


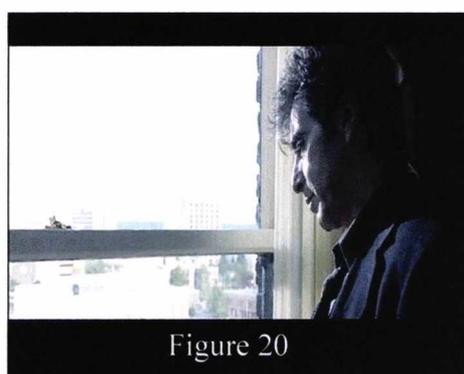
Figure 19

The design of the mirrored door both masks the memory of the characters' presence in the foyer and points up the anonymity and inscrutability of the space that remains, with a final, reflected view of the gleaming marble walls. The shimmering surfaces express an absence of perspective, a vast emptiness. The city hotel contains its secrets in its surroundings. With the impression of a lack of depth, all is façade.

The film moves on to explore the suggestions of intimacy carried by hotel rooms, as enclosed spaces suited to secret meetings and private celebrations. The meeting of Wigand and Bergman, in this particular setting, exists as a desexualized version of a clandestine rendezvous. Within the middle of the crowded city, and away from the grand gathering ground of the foyer, the hotel suite offers a pocket of privacy. Again, the film is alert to the particular textures of this grandiloquent retreat. There is a hermetic quality to the room, caught in the weighty thump of the door closing shut, the thick and heavy fabric of the curtains, and the solid quality of the surrounding clutter. Bergman uses the sense of airtight security and the reassurance of quality to coax Wigand's confidence. In his movements and gestures, the journalist authorizes the space of the room. In a series of fluid moves, Bergman opens his travel-bag, arranges his clothing over the furniture, sets down the documents, and signs for coffee. As he centralizes his position in the room, he creates spaces of implication from which to speak. His gestures exude confidence and assertion, and mark an encouragement for Wigand to follow suit, to open up. Initially however, the scientist presses

himself tight to the confines of the room, watching nervously through the window at the streets below, withdrawing into the shadows as room service knocks to enter. The sequence turns on Bergman's attempts to draw Wigand away from the exposure of the window, away from external anxieties, even as he places the scientist in a position of greater vulnerability.

The final shots of the two men return us to a contemplation of Wigand's exposure to the outside world. As the scientist retreats from the room, he is caught in the glaring red lights of the corridor. Moving away from the airtight confines of the hotel, he returns to the collective contact of the street. The final shot of Bergman rhymes with an earlier image of Wigand, moving to look through the window at the urban skyline and streets below (FIGURE 20).



The rhyme suggests the developing union between the men, as they share a stance and a viewpoint. In a moment of reflection through the glass divide, Bergman is associated with Wigand as both exposed to the outside world, to the demands of the city, and as separated from it. Here as elsewhere in the film, the glass surfaces of the hotel set up a place of confrontation between a feeling of enclosure, and that of an infinite openness.

In a third and final sequence, *The Insider* develops the idea of Wigand and Bergman being held together, as both separated from yet vulnerable to the presence of the outer world. Again, their position in relation to the city landscape conveys this state of flux, of being both inside and outside of a situation. Echoing the earlier two moments, the sequence marks a move from personal to public settings. Responding to Wigand's hotheaded attempts to sever ties, Bergman goes to the family home to defend his position. Immediately, the sequence presents a domestic scenario quietly infused with an underlying sense of contention. It develops the way Wigand's everyday activities are inflected and disturbed by Bergman's entreaties. Under duress, Wigand agrees for the journalist to accompany him in the car, to drive out of town.

The geography and geometry of the location express the way Wigand and Bergman reach and test the limits of their discussions. Just as the characters' circuitous conversations are bound by

the confidentiality agreement, physical barriers and borders frame them. An ellipse takes us to Wigand's car, now stationed on the fringe of town, and on the water's edge (FIGURE 21).

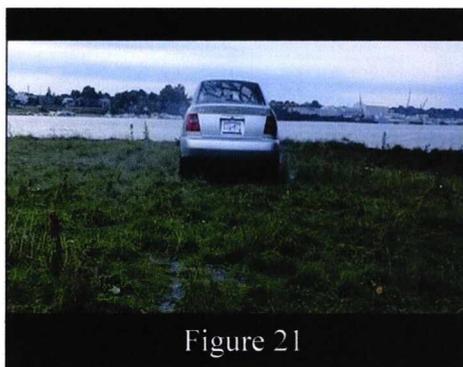


Figure 21

Both of these borderlines convey the changing circumstances of the two men, positioned on the verge of disclosure. In the hotel meeting, the characters attempt to find a situation of privacy within the city. As the relationship of the two men progresses, the gravity of their shared situation leads to a withdrawal from the insistent glare of the city centre, towards and under the anonymous shadows of an empty warehouse. Yet, crucially, their position remains linked with the city. As the characters sit together in the car, the wider landscape is seen through the closed windows, demarked by the taut lines of the river and the freeway bridge (FIGURE 22).

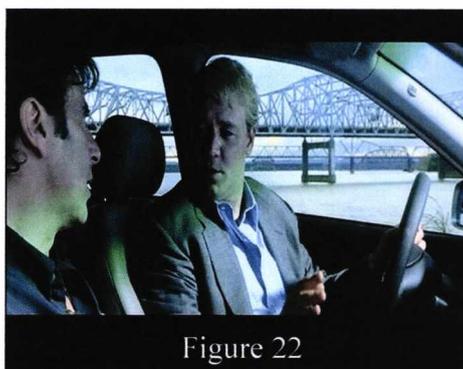


Figure 22

The presence of the freeway reminds us of the incessant transit of urban life. On the fringe of the city, even as the two men appear to find a space suited to private dialogue, they are never fully released from mainlines of human traffic. Equally, the rigid straightness of the freeway bridge, and its promise of direct exchange and transfer, forms a taunting visual counterpoint to the roundabout routes of the conversation.

The film develops this suggestion in its coupling of manmade and natural structures. The rigid juts and slats of the bridge hint at the concrete absolutes of the confidentiality agreement. In contrast, the shimmering surface of the water conveys a sense of fluid indeterminacy in Wigand's position. Ultimately, the glass divide of the car window holds the men from both spaces, just as it

exposes. The border of the glass acts as the final barrier of being inside and outside of a situation, separating as much as it connects. As Thoret suggests, “In Mann’s films, glass functions as a plastic extension of the solitude of individuals. The transparency upholds the illusion of communication, but in the end what is evident is the impermeability of spaces.”¹⁵

The image encapsulates the characters’ condition. As the men draw towards a confidence, they are separated from other people, whilst being exposed to public scrutiny. Through their relationship, both men are cut off from their colleagues, and, in distinct ways, from their families. When they finally go “on the record” and tape Wigand’s interview, their efforts are denied acknowledgment, kept from transmission. The film’s handling of urban settings forms the foundations of its expression of two men caught together in states of transition.



¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 9.

Chapter Two

Gesture

As the films focus on the characters' situation and movements within the grand dimensions of setting and locale, attention is also given to the performance of gesture in a wider scenario. Seemingly a more diminutive element of a film's architecture, gesture can carry and accrue great significance. As seen in the introduction, concentration on a single gesture can open up a better understanding of the film as a whole. Equally, individual gestures can encapsulate wider concerns, carrying aspects of significance that are patterned throughout the film. In the films addressed below, the handling of gesture plays a crucial part in their modulations of scale. Meaning is conveyed in the integration, counterpoint, emphasis and concealment of gesture through moments and with other points of style. In certain instances, a dominant assertion of weight and significance – of vast or elaborate settings, dramatic moments or climactic events – is complemented by a declamatory gesture or magnified performance. Conversely, the grand scale of particular moments is held in counterpoint with an austerity or slightness of physical performance. In some instances, the fluent course and delivery of many interconnected gestures thread throughout a moment, sequence and film, gathering meaning. In others, significance is conveyed as the weight of a sustained passage of stillness is punctuated with singular gestures, or moves performed in an interrupted or interrupting rhythm.

The films below all achieve a *concentration* of gesture. Rarely, however, do the works recourse to an easy amplification of gesture, through the use of close-up. The weight and significance of gestures stem from their integration and adjustment within the surrounding dramatic environment. In *The Insider*, the amplified dramatic pitch of the men's meetings, as the pressures of media and 'Big Tobacco' mount, is refined by the pattern of gestures accruing within and through the scenarios. The men's cautious relationship develops in displays of concealment and disclosure, watchfulness, rigidity and flexibility. Moving from professional to personal negotiations, *The Bridges of Madison County* is equally attentive to the *composure* of gestures. The film is alert to incremental adjustments in patterns of behaviour and attitude, caught and conveyed in each gesture. The charge of the lovers' affair is formed in an intricate synthesis of these gestures, accruing over the four days, and carrying in resonance across the years. In *The Age of Innocence*, a secret relationship, formed of brief meetings and seized opportunities, is held together by a bond of gestures. The two lovers pattern their gestures across months and years to form an intense, private language, concealed under and through public displays of declaration and address.



The Insider

Dancing Around Disclosure

Throughout *The Insider*, the legal weight of the “confidentiality agreement” prevents Wigand and Bergman from directly discussing hugely consequential information. Locked in intense discussion, the men are held apart by the document. As the confidentiality agreement hems and defines the characters’ negotiations, their gestures express a negotiation of obstacles (legal, linguistic, physical and emotional). As they are unable to ask certain questions or provide certain answers, the two men *gesture towards* the truth. The characters clarify or obscure their standpoint and greater implications in their poise, stance and posture, in each narrowing of the eyes or fidget of hands. As well as conveying a shifting relationship to surrounding barriers, the two men’s gestures express the gradual development of their friendship. Through gesture, the film conveys particular levels of engagement coming within, as a consequence of the confidentiality agreement, an enforced state of inaction.

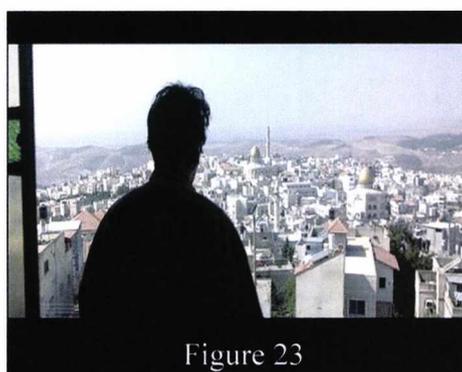
Restriction and Control: Forms of Composure

In the separate, opening views of Bergman and Wigand, *The Insider* introduces the characters’ forms of composure in imposing situations. The film first concentrates on Bergman, as he travels under guard to interview the leader of the Hezbollah, Sheikh Fadlallah. Bergman’s position – blindfolded, sat in the back of a car, in an undisclosed location – places him in a position of restriction, submission and dependence. On entering the gloomy confines of the rendezvous, Bergman is guided into his chair, to face his awaiting interviewee. The film’s introduction of Bergman appears to contrast with its subsequent presentation of a character in control: a high-profile television producer, a creator of scenarios. The movements of this “mover and shaker” are, initially, heavily restricted. Yet, in a careful composure of hand gestures, the character conveys his ability to *manage* a situation from a position of constraint. An apparently atypical scenario encapsulates and introduces central tenets of Bergman’s character. His handling of the situation, through a controlled series of gestures, forms a prelude to his later management of heavily constrained negotiations with Wigand. In both instances, Bergman directs and *produces* a scenario from a position of containment.

To secure a recorded interview with the leader of the Hezbollah, Bergman handles his situation of restriction to achieve concentrated gestures of persuasion. Any visual entreaty that

would be encouraged by facial expression is denied by the hood over his head. The force of his appeal is carried in clipped phrases and three slight moves of the hand. As Bergman speaks of the “integrity and objectivity” of *60 Minutes*, his left hand moves to rest on his leg. Ever so slightly, the producer leans his weight forwards, without overly pressing a point. As he moves, his right hand taps down in the air, lightly accentuating the words “highly rated, most respected.” Awaiting an answer, Bergman then rests his hands together in his lap. The gesture of calm composure is only troubled by a passing coil and tug of fingers to thumb. A fleeting gesture of ‘tightening up’ gathers and contains the tension in the room.

With the interview quietly, suddenly agreed, the sense of containment is met by two gestures of release and exposure. Perceiving the Sheikh’s silent exit, Bergman removes his blindfold. The effect of ‘seeing clearly’ is complemented and developed by the character’s move to cast open the gloomy room’s shrouding curtains, suddenly exposing a majestic cityscape below (FIGURE 23).



Bergman’s gestures express the act of a figure decisively revealing the world to himself (rather than having it revealed to him). In turn, the gestures suggest a further level of control. Bergman’s restrained position in front of the Hezbollah gives way to a more assertive and pronounced form of composure. The bright city vista, now concealed, now revealed from behind the curtain, appears as a carefully timed climactic tableau to Bergman’s little play of persuasion. As the curtains open, sunlight and street sounds spill into the room like validating applause for the television producer’s efforts. As Bergman moves onto the balcony (as if to take a bow), he sweeps his hair from his eyes, and presses a mobile ‘phone to his ear, connecting with and reasserting his place in the wider world.

As Bergman’s initial gestures in the film convey a confident capacity for control under constraint, Wigand’s introduction reveals a man awkwardly struggling to contain his ranging emotions. Equally, as the film ends the first sequence with an assertion of Bergman’s connection to the world (surveying the city, on the ‘phone), its opening views of Wigand show the scientist as held from his

wider surroundings, contained and sealed off. First, Wigand is framed in the sound-proof window of his office at Brown and Williamson, divided from the other workers. Relieved of his duties, and as he moves out of the building into his car, the sheen of the glass windscreen stresses Wigand's sense of enclosure. Throughout the film, Wigand is bound by restricting structures.

Returning home however, Wigand initially performs a move of control and fluency. Passing swiftly through the lounge, with a cursory greeting to his daughter, he arcs around the drinks bar, tipping just the right amount of ice into a glass, pouring a moderate measure of whisky. The precision and fluidity of the move suggests that pouring a drink after work is a routine occurrence, performed at the close of each day. As this particular day is far from routine, the fluent move also acts as a gesture of solace, of preparation for coming worries. The effortless route to the bar smooths away the ruffles of anxiety. While all else is uncertain, the drink is *fixed*. The controlled composure of this fluent move is held in tension with a developing strain, of indirect glances and gestures. As the whisky allows Wigand a welcome point of focus, he casts only brief glances at his daughter, before returning to his glass. His words – “Little early for cartoons isn't it?” – are spoken with a quickly disappearing half-smile. As Wigand conceals his anger at his professional situation, he pockets the rage into a mild remonstrance. In gestures patterned throughout the film, Wigand searches for composure, stroking down his tie and pushing his glasses up on his nose. The bulk of his body sits uneasily with these pernickety moves. Restrained from any demonstrative action by the powers of the tobacco corporation, and in the face of his family, Wigand is reduced to little *redundant* measures of fussiness and correction.

The first exchange between the two men is performed in a series of gestures, each unseen by the other person. As his entreaties for attention by telephone are ignored, Bergman returns to his office, to attempt to contact Wigand by fax. Thus, the momentous point of communication is precisely measured and quietly performed, whilst the spatial distance between the characters conveys the tentative nature of their initial connection. Bergman's manner, in composing the first fax, speaks of an edgy determination to engage with Wigand. His writing is fast and unhesitant, the imperativeness of his action underlined by his brusquely tossing the pen aside, hurrying to place the page in the machine. As a response finally arrives, silently sliding out of the fax machine, Bergman reaches out his fingers to tug at the paper in anticipation, expressing his urgent interest. In the exchange of faxes, both men reply almost immediately. The fact displays the vigour of Bergman's curiosity, and the potential fervour of Wigand's reaction.

After a further exchange of messages, a series of demonstrative gestures show Bergman moving from indecision to determination in his actions. Having read the fax, he pinches and slowly

slides his fingers together along the edge of the paper, before abruptly tossing it aside, moving to grab the relevant 'phone book from the shelf. The measured, precise nature of his first gesture suggest that he is ruminating on the form his next action will take whilst, combined with the abrupt discarding of the paper, show that he is now eager to move to a further level of contact with Wigand. His quick choice of the correct book reveals a *familiarity* with his materials at hand. Assuredness combines with a sense of Bergman's commitment to the specific actions at this moment: opening the book, reaching the right page for hotels, scanning down the list to make an immediate choice. In turn, the actions point up Bergman's confidence that his meeting with Wigand will take place, operating as a consummate creator of scenarios.

Further, Bergman's posture reveals him readying himself for the performance of leaving a telephone message for Wigand, with the proposal of a meeting at the hotel. The producer composes himself before composing his lines, sitting back in the chair, adjusting his jumper. A further gesture crystallizes the complexity of Bergman's position in relation to Wigand, at just this point. Placing his glasses down on the desk, his hand suddenly returns to the object, darting out towards, yet not quite touching, the fragile lenses (FIGURE 24).

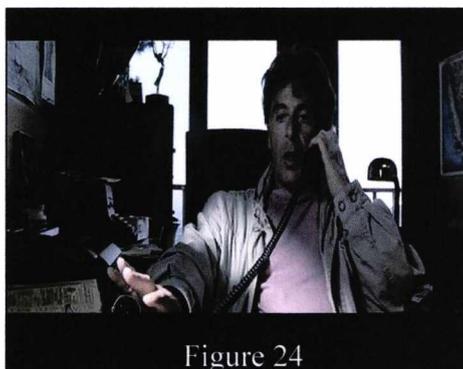


Figure 24

It is a move of reassurance, at once affirming that the glasses will not fall, whilst betraying a necessary preparation, just in case they do. At the same time, it is a startled act, quickly redressed into a display of control. Turning alarm to a useful state of alertness, Bergman applies an exact measure of readiness to a matter of fragility.

Moving to the hotel room, a series of gestures creates a sense of fleetingness, of distraction, around the central, weighty focus of the meeting. Bergman opens his travel-bag, arranges his clothing over the furniture, sets down the documents, signs for coffee, pours the coffee. The fluidity of his answer to Wigand's question ("why here?") is a smooth flourish of papers as he brings them out of the bag. Bergman conjures with the trappings to hand. Objects are handled with swagger and confidence: a

pen appears to sign the tab (another flourish), the door is opened the moment room service knocks to enter. Through sleight of hand, Bergman attempts to draw out the more profound levels of interest, the true purpose of the meeting, in acts of diversion. In contrast with the range and display of the producer's moves, Wigand first draws tight to the confines of the room. His sturdy build is stilled, pressed firm against the shadowy, reassuringly solid structure of the wall. Gradually, Bergman's conceit of confidence inspires cautious assurance, and Wigand is drawn into the centre of the room. Sitting with Bergman, the two discuss the documents from Phillip Morris, and share coffee.

The commonplace ritual act of sharing coffee creates an intermediary, normalizing focal point, allowing the men to concentrate on, and negotiate through, an everyday activity. It offers the characters a defensive position from behind which to consider the position of the other. As the men exchange comments, they take sips of the coffee, each sip punctuating (and so underscoring) the weight of their remarks. Equally, within the exchange, Bergman uses his sipping at the cup to conceal an upward turn of his head, focusing his inquisitive gaze on Wigand. At the same time, the lack of a rattling saucer stands as testimony to his calm nature, whilst Wigand abandons his cup, sitting upright with hands clasped together, in a defensive posture.

Throughout the sequence, the shaping and positioning of Wigand's body is expressive of how his uncertain stance unfolds and shifts, within the film as a whole. Whilst prone to little, betraying twitches of his hands and face (as room service enters, after rebutting Bergman's attempts at small-talk), the solidness of his physique creates a seemingly contrasting sense of strength and force. Yet, within this, Wigand's sitting posture – in front of his computer, in front of Bergman – speaks of an anxious temperament. He perches uncomfortably on the chair, his bulky frame caught in awkward angles. His posture conveys of a lack of commitment to, and shades of distractedness from (and within) each specific situation. In slight shifts and adjustments, the posture of Wigand's body expresses the struggle between his reticence and eagerness to disclose his knowledge, to settle on a position.

Wigand's attempts at control and composure inspire scrutiny; as Adam Phillips remarks, "Composure, like a dare, sustains and challenges the idea of accurate recognition."¹ As Wigand studies the Phillip Morris documents, Bergman is invited, dared, to study him with equal intensity. A supposedly final, finalizing gesture further "sustains and challenges the idea of accurate recognition." Closing the book of documents, Wigand announces "that's as far as I go." He drops the book onto the table, patting and smoothing his hand on his leg. The gesture is complex. At once, it appears as a touch of decisiveness and finality, a 'brushing off' of business. At the same time, the

¹ Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation*, p. 45.

gesture echoes Wigand's stroke of his tie, as a little defence against recrimination. Equally, it hints at a need to keep things in place. Declaring he will go no further suggests there is further to go. Open to interpretation, Wigand's hand gesture combines with the inference of the remark. An apparent conclusion encourages further attention, and keeps matters in play.



The Bridges of Madison County

From Present to Past

As the dramatic pitch of *The Insider* is refined by gesture, the low-key affair of *The Bridges of Madison County* is intensified with an intricate texture of physical moves. The film emphasizes the richness and density of the four-day affair as the scenes taking place in 'the present' work in counterpoint to the views of Francesca and Robert in 1965. There is a flatness and crudeness to the handling of the present scenarios, playing against and underscoring the textural depth of the scenes set in the past. Consider the way the film handles the (grown) children's discovery of Francesca's secret mementos of the affair. The camera peers down on a wooden chest lid, filling the frame, creaking open to reveal the neatly packed contents. The choices, of angle and framing, point up the flatness and woodenness of the lid. In turn, the film leads into the moment of discovery with a sense of stiffness. This stiffness is furthered in aspects of composition and performance. The film moves to a low-angle shot of Carolyn hunkering down, warily unpacking items from the box. Adjacent, Michael stands rigid, arms folded, eyes fixed front. As more details of Francesca's affair are revealed, the rigidity of the son's posture increases. The film emboldens the sense of austerity, as the stiff frame of Michael's upright body stands firm against a series of corresponding vertical lines: the lid of the chest, the bed-frame, and the struts of the bedroom window (FIGURE 25).



Figure 25

Critics have previously bemoaned the “wooden” nature of the children’s performances;² here though, the film successfully uses the inflexibility of Slezak, matching the brittle nature of his presence with hard lines and frames, to create a declamatory expression of flatness and stiffness.

Equally, the scene, which could easily give itself over to wide-eyed wonderment of Francesca’s colourful past, boldly sustains a sense of neutrality. Again, this is felt in the presence of the children, of these two performers. Just as the film is alert to the weight of Eastwood and Streep’s personas, it acknowledges and makes use of Slezak and Corley’s anonymity. They appear as ciphers, hollow signifiers of an empty time. The sense is carried in the matching neutral shades of the children’s khaki clothing, bleeding into the muted greens and greys of the bedroom. There is paleness to the children’s presence in this room, in their pallid complexions and strained reactions to their discoveries. The sounds of the scenecomplement the colours; the pair’s voices are dulled in the air. The occasional, lone twitter of a bird from the fields points up the stillness of the setting. The only other tone of life in the scene comes as Carolyn unpacks Francesca’s copy of the *National Geographic* magazine. The famous yellow stripes of the cover add a brief glow, announcing the first sight of Robert Kincaid, pictured inside the edition. Retaining the stark lifelessness of the moment, the film quietly introduces a colouring of the past. As the scene moves to the first moments from the past, and an introduction of Francesca, the brief flash and density of colour carries into a concentration of gesture.

Concentrations of Gesture: Containment and Release

[Francesca Johnson]

The Bridges of Madison County explores the concentrated containment of feeling expressed in each of Francesca Johnson’s (Meryl Streep’s) gestures. The impact of our first view of the character stems from the concentration on small gestures, as Francesca completes her tasks in the kitchen. Although each gesture is meaningful in itself, the film also achieves a greater density of expression through the amount of movements. Each tilt of the head and brush of the hand forms a richly textured ‘micro-melodrama’ of movement and comportment, of restraint and release. Each of Francesca’s tasks allows for a little, limited release of frustration.

In the very first view of Francesca, as she prepares dinner for the family, sliding the fried food from pan to plate, the film hints at the pressures of her place in the world. The air is thick with the hiss and spit of the frying pan, and the incessant chirrup of crickets outside. Resting the pan

² Richard Alleva represents this camp most succinctly when he writes, in *Commonweal*, “the dialogue is ludicrous, the rummaging in trunks and chit-chat with lawyers tedious, and the acting of Victor Slezak as Francesca’s son risible...” (July 14, 1995, vol. 122, no. 13), p. 17.

solidly on the hob, Francesca makes a move away from the stove and towards the radio. Her physical response to the music marks a momentary and measured release of pressure. The aria seems to beckon her, pulling her briefly away from preparing the dinner. Turning up the volume, Francesca lightly closes her eyes and tips her head in a gentle dip. With a gesture to be seen again in the film, she smoothly strokes at the air with her hand, as if putting the final touch to an unseen signature. The move expresses her appreciation of the absolute rightness of the music, at this particular moment, as her own silent marker of its soothing qualities. The lightness of her movements and the aria contrast with the prior heavy clunk of the cooking pans. Having drawn breath with the music, Francesca returns to the steam of the stove.

The passing composure of Francesca's response to the aria contrasts with her edgy reaction to three further sounds, which announce the arrival of the family. In the jolt of each noise and gesture, the film shows how the coming together of the family unsettles the restless housewife further. At the same time, her reactions to each noise are carefully measured. Her son's arrival is gruffly announced in the bang of the porch door against the jamb. Already tense, Francesca's shoulders jerk at the sound. She is agitated by the shock of the slam, and the recurrence of the act. (She rebukes her son with the words, "Michael, what've I told you about that door?") Yet, her gestures also convey a greater containment of feeling. Before scolding her son, Francesca lifts her eyes to the wall and leans down to scoop up a bowl of food, turning to set it squarely on the dinner table. In the dip of her body, Francesca pushes down her frustration. A little task, of putting the bowl solidly in its place, carries the weight of her disturbance. This sense of containment is emphasized in her reaction to a further crash of the door, as her husband enters. Francesca jolts again, hands darting towards her face. Checking herself, she smoothes away the urge to react, patting at the air with her hand as if pressing things down, setting things in place. Lastly, her daughter Carolyn enters the room and strides towards the radio, changing the channel. Already punctuated by the loud bangs of the door, the graceful aria now crackles away to pop. Initially opening her mouth to react, Francesca instead busies herself with setting down the cutlery. The quick fizz of white noise between radio channels encapsulates her agitation.

Whilst the family silently sets to work on the dinner, with the heavy chunk and clink of crockery replacing mealtime conversation, Francesca springs to her feet, to collect a forgotten jug from the refrigerator. Her body is set, here and at points through the film, against solid, bulky objects: the tall white refrigerator, the chest of drawers, the covered bridges, the bridges of Madison County. Most immediately, the film contrasts the restlessness of the character with the fixedness of the objects or markers of her world. Yet, whilst expressive of the *weight* of Francesca's world, the objects are placed in a more complex relationship with the character through gesture. Consider the

way Francesca closes the refrigerator door with her foot, clipping it with just the right amount of pressure in a spirited turn of the heel. Equally, in the closing moments of the sequence, as she eases out the stuck drawer of the dresser, Francesca crucially informs her husband that, “you can’t get mad at it.” Rather than fighting against the fixed, weighty trappings of her world, Francesca finds a way to work with them, letting them push down her feelings whilst allowing herself little, measured releases of tension, in each swing of the fridge door and slide of the drawer.

These are gestures of necessity but also more. Setting the jug on the table, Francesca nimbly raises her hands to flick a fly away from her face. One imagines that in the humid setting of the Midwest, such a gesture is oft repeated, instinctive. A gesture of necessity is touched with mysterious charm. The path taken by her hands in the air echoes her tracing of the sign of the cross, moments before. At the same time, the move is expressive of how Francesca constantly has to brush away at disturbance.

Throughout the sequence, the character’s hands are employed in fidgety action: fetching and carrying food, dabbing at the air, brushing away the fly. With the final, forgotten item now placed on the dinner table, Francesca anxiously tries to settle down to the meal. Her hands search for a place to rest, fluttering hesitantly about her face as she tilts and turns her head. Her hands seek an appropriate position, just as the character wavers in the various settings of the film, quietly uncertain of how to place herself. In the closing moments, Francesca bridges her hands under her chin, ready to dip her head. However, rather than sink down, she seeks refuge in the song on the radio. With a quiet smile, Francesca lifts and turns her head to the side, as her fingers reach up to tease at the bun of her hair (FIGURE 26). As well as offering comfort, the gesture and music mark a momentary withdrawal. Releasing her attention from the family for a second, Francesca loosens her hair, but only slightly.



Figure 26

In the final moments of the sequence, Francesca’s anxieties remain checked, held in a measured gesture. Moving to follow her husband out of the bedroom, she pauses for a beat, tapping once on the top of the dresser with the tips of her fingers (FIGURE 27). As Francesca pats the

dresser, it answers with a thick tone. The sound offers comfort in its solidity, whilst also expressing the density and permanence of the trappings that surround the character.



The action is performed nimbly. It marks the end of Francesca's preparations for her family's visit to the State Fair, as a "job well done." The gesture is also indicative of a need to touch base. With a gentle tap to the solid wooden object, Francesca is keeping things in check, reassuring herself that everything is held firmly and fixedly in place. Again, she works *with* the heavy trappings of her world to get through the day. She contains the burden of her chores in a compact gesture, lightly released against the weight of the dresser.

Concentrations of Gesture: Solidity and Ethereality

[Robert Kincaid]

As Francesca finds ways to contain and release her anxieties against the solid trappings of her world, (Eastwood as) Robert searches, in gestures, to gain a sense of grounding in uncertain situations. Primarily, there is an ethereal quality to Robert's presence and moves, as he drifts into and out of Madison County. His *appearance* is amorphous, unfixed.³ The transience of the photographer attests to his status as a professional traveller. His unfamiliarity in and of the Iowan

³ In suggesting the elusive aspects of a lone drifter, Eastwood as director addresses the screen persona of Eastwood as star and "Stranger". Richard Combs sees *The Bridges of Madison County* as a "fascinating experiment", in its handling of the established persona: "It's the glamorous photographer, of course, who comes from nowhere, preceded by all the men with no name, high plains drifters, and pale riders. Eastwood has consistently treated these figures as spectres appearing to answer to need, then disappearing because nothing real could hold them. Their ghostliness also testifies to the sense of the absurd that a reasonable, realistic man has about his glamorous profession. But *Bridges* is a fascinating experiment in taking this will o' the wisp out of genre mythology and putting him in a psychologically realistic scenario, where the supernatural agent, the spiritual liberator, also looks like a spiritual raider ... Francesca at one point mocks him as that, when she speculates how he is free to move on to his next four-day liaison: 'the world citizen ... who experiences everything and nothing at the same time ... someone who doesn't need meaning, he just goes with the mystery.'" Richard Combs, "The Bridges of Madison County", *Film Comment*, p. 30. For further inquiry into the ethereal qualities of Eastwood as 'Stranger', see Edward Gallafent, *Clint Eastwood: Actor and Director*; in particular, see pages 7-11; 112-119; 130-137. Alert to the 'glamour' and 'mythology' surrounding the persona, *The Bridges of Madison County* tempers these qualities into wisps of rarity and curiosity.

town promotes suggestions of his unknowable nature. Moreover, the surrounding sense of Robert's lack of grounding expresses and informs the evanescence of the four-day affair. As Francesca attempts to make sense of the attractive stranger, she is quietly beguiled. All of these aspects accrue in a passing instance, as the couple converse in the kitchen. As they talk, the smoke from Francesca's cigarette drifts across her view of the photographer. The passing waft of pearly smoke hints at the delicate, drifting aspect of this man's presence before her, in this town, in this room. Equally, the glide and curlicue of smoke is as gently bewitching as the magical fact of Robert's apparition, and as easily broken. If the mood were to alter by the smallest *touch*, the stranger might disappear 'in a puff of smoke'.

Yet, in the form and economy of his gestures, Robert searches for ways to secure a hold, however temporary, on and in a passing situation. Whereas each of Francesca's light, fidgety gestures develops into a dense 'micro-melodrama' of movement, each of Robert's moves is performed as singularly significant, carrying its own weight. Eastwood-as-Robert achieves an austerity of action. His gestures are both spare in frequency and accomplishment. Each move is a small step in an unfamiliar environment, performed without hesitancy. Robert's gestures are firm, in the sense of being sustained with an assuredness of purpose. At the same time, they are controlled, as exercising just the right amount of energy to perform a particular task.

Throughout the film, the majority of Robert's gestures are task-driven: functionally conceived, measured and performed. Consider his initial moves outside the truck, on reaching Roseman Bridge with Francesca. Dipping into the hold of the truck, Robert flips open his work-bag and lifts out the camera tripod. The equipment is found and readied without *fuss*: without rummaging through or upsetting the container, or tackling the long, heavy legs of the tripod in effortful ways. A workaday move is achieved without appearing laboured. The practical task is approached with a sure touch, performed with easy economy. Further, as the tripod is lifted out of the truck, Robert snaps the metal legs together in a neat "clack". Gesture and sound form a punctuation mark, noting the end of the task, and the beginning of Robert's wider charge, of photographing the bridge. Moreover, the gesture marks his move away from Francesca at this point, with his attention apparently channelled towards his task. Moving the camera tripod, Robert 'clicks' into gear, motivated by his work. In turn, Francesca is cast adrift, without useful purpose, wandering across and along the bridge. A momentary task, decisively performed, directs the manner of the characters' broader negotiations.

The gesture echoes and develops the effect of an instance occurring moments earlier, as the couple sit together in the truck *en route* to the bridge. In a pause of the conversation, and in search

of his cigarettes, Robert reaches his arm across the housewife's lap, stretching towards the glove box (FIGURE 28).

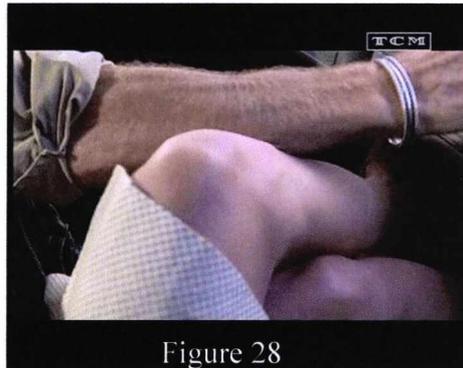


Figure 28

Through and within the task of retrieving the cigarettes, Robert's arm presses lightly against Francesca's leg ("Excuse me"). Francesca responds by lifting her hands, in a gesture of politely proclaimed withdrawal. The particular weight of Robert's gesture is carried in the film's decision to move to a sudden close-up. The momentary assertion of the close view matches the sudden assuredness of Robert's move across Francesca. In turn, the assertive view (and gesture) leads to a little intensification of the moment, and to Francesca's reaction. The gentle conviction of the close gesture unsettles the housewife, causing a slight waver.

Further, the significance of Robert's practical and purposeful gestures accrues in a patterning of moves. The stretch across Francesca's lap is marked by the move, but also by the glint of Robert's wrist bracelet. The metal band adds a grade of weight and substance to the gesture. Moreover, in subsequent gestures of arm and hand, the bracelet delicately encourages attention. After Robert's death, the return of the bracelet alongside other personal items to Francesca carries the resonance of the man's presence. The bracelet gathers and clasps the memories of each of Robert's passing gestures. It is a lasting marker to his ephemeral company. In other instances, the lighting of a cigarette marks the introduction or passing of a particular moment shared by the couple. As their first evening draws to a close, Robert's flick and snap of his thumb to the lifting flame punctuates the drowsy quiet. At the same time, it marks a shift back to the past, after a passage of the film is devoted to the children's 'present' discoveries of and commentaries on their mother's actions. The clipped gesture marks time, as it passes, but also memorialises the moment.

As the significance of Robert's singular, spare gestures accrues across the film, a charge carries around the character's stillness. To return to the first moves on Roseman Bridge, as Robert readies his camera and tripod, he steps purposefully down the slope of a hill, finding a good position from which to 'capture' the view. The movement is capped by a sense of immobility: of setting down the tripod, and pivoting the camera from a fixed position. Whereas in some

circumstances inactivity suggests apathy (as forms of “doing nothing” or “going nowhere”), in this instance the stillness of Robert forms a charged centre of gravity, drawing the attention of Francesca’s glimpses and glances (as addressed in Chapter 6). Again, the film is attentive to the existing charge of Eastwood’s persona and the authority of his austerity. As Dennis Bingham notes, “[Eastwood’s] hero is ... so immobile that motionlessness becomes equated with strength.”⁴ A crucial tension arises, of the surrounding, gliding quality of Robert’s ethereal presence, and the solidity sensed in moments of stillness. The tension encapsulates the couple’s fleeting encounter. As their time together slips away, the incandescence of the relationship is inextricably linked to its ephemeral essence; at the same time, the depth and density of the experience gives it permanent substance and resonance, carrying Francesca through the emptiness of years.

The film gathers all of these aspects in the final view of Robert, standing silent in the rain. As Francesca and Robert glimpse each other for the last time across a rain-soaked street, the photographer presents a final vision of himself, before disappearing, beyond the limits of Winterset town. This climactic sequence is shaped in a series of small, measured moves, taut and delicate. The bearing of the sequence turns on the sparseness and simplicity of Robert’s gestures. As Francesca returns from the convenience store, tipping with the heavy grocery bag into the truck, she gradually becomes aware of Robert’s presence across the street. Held first in the opacity of the truck’s wet window, the foggy vision becomes a little clearer as she tilts her head, peering at Robert through the swirling wash of the rain (FIGURE 29).

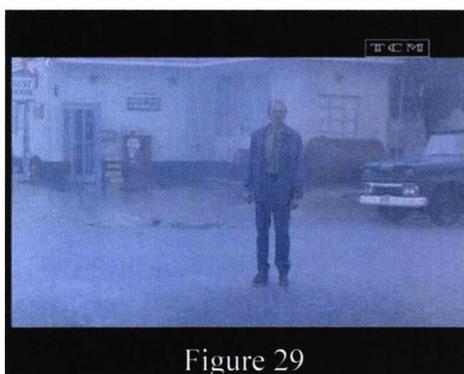


Figure 29

The liquid mist of the water accentuates the spectral aspect of this lone figure. Caught in the grey, murky wash, Robert appears as a remembrance of things past. He is cast in a thinned, translucent vision, flimsy in the film of the rain. As the cigarette smoke of their first meeting threatened to carry Robert away, here he disappears in the vapours of the downpour.

⁴ Dennis Bingham, *Acting Male: Masculinity in the Films of James Stewart, John Wayne and Clint Eastwood* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 223.

On the edge of town, the passing encounter is marked by boundaries of restricted gestures. Robert stands stiff by his truck. As his rigid presence is finally acknowledged, Robert takes four, short, focused steps towards Francesca. The succinct measure of the moves expresses his stance and understanding of the moment; he is determined, yet not pressing. Stepping to stand still again, Robert appears steadfast. Yet, in this instance, the charge and “strength” of his immobility, carried in earlier moments, dissolves with the rain. He stands transparent. Yet, his gestures carry hesitations of meaning for Francesca. She manages a slight smile; he smiles and turns to go. Almost imperceptibly, she shakes her head. Robert does not falter in his moves, yet the moment carries suspension. The wavering of Francesca’s half-smile and slight shake of the head conveys a greater vacillation: a faltering between states, between staying firm and moving on.

Two further, final gestures seal the moment and carry the weight of the film. As Francesca’s husband returns to the truck, they wait at the traffic lights, drawing close behind Robert’s own vehicle. Through the frame of the back window, Robert slowly winds a fine silver chain around the rear-view mirror (FIGURE 30).



Focusing in, Francesca recognizes the chain as her necklace, given to Robert on their final day together. The chain holds a cross, now dangling from the mirror, swinging to count down the changing of the traffic light, from red, to green. Again, a personal marker or trapping carries the resonance of the affair. The conclusion of the relationship remains, in this instance, suspended, with the silver cross. Further, in Robert’s gesture, of threading the chain around the mirror, the film gently coils all the expectation of the moment. The suggestion is matched with Francesca’s responding move; gradually her hand curls tight around the door handle. The coiled tension of the handle’s spring is tested at breaking point; ultimately, heartbreakingly, Francesca yields, and the trucks separate. The film marks the stark fact and pain of the separation in its wider views. As Robert moves beyond the limits of the city, the gentle inference of his gestures is replaced with the

harsh assertion of mechanical pointers: the traffic light switches from red to green; the indicator blinks and flares, solidly, insistently signalling Robert's direction away from Francesca.



The Age of Innocence

Catching at Moments

Set in the 1870s, *The Age of Innocence* charts the affairs of New York aristocracy. It tells the story of Newland Archer (Daniel Day Lewis), who is to be married to May Welland (Winona Ryder), of the powerful Mingott clan. On the eve of the engagement being announced, the Wellands re-introduce a disgraced member of their family to Society: Countess Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer). Beguiled by the new arrival, Archer is increasingly torn between his love for the Countess and the commitments of his pre-ordained life with May.

Although the intense relationship between Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska undulates through every frame of *The Age of Innocence*, it is not presented as a continuous thread of action, coursing from scene to consecutive scene. Rather, the film traces the daily histories of the grand families of New York. The meetings between Archer and Ellen are momentary happenings within a greater set of circumstances. Their encounters punctuate the narrative, rather than dictate it. Yet, the significance of each fragmentary meeting is felt. Each moment of shared time is set as a sequin in the fabric of the film. One of the greatest achievements of *The Age of Innocence* is the way it uses the brevity of each meeting to express a particular sense of momentousness. Initially, the shortness of the encounters suggests how momentous effects may span from momentary experiences. As the lovers' relationship develops, this notion absorbs further meaning. By necessity, the later meetings must be brief, and in public, they must appear as innocuous, for fear of the couple being discovered. The possibility of discovery impresses itself on each instant, just as the desire to prolong the moment becomes ever more intense.

The film is sensitive to these changes, expressing the distinct variations present within each fleeting moment of shared time. One of the key ways the film details the particular grades of connection and variation, in each momentary episode, is through the handling of gesture. Two meetings between Archer and Ellen are addressed below. The two moments are seen as distinct fragments, contained within different social occasions. Yet, at the same time, the moments are also seen as bound by a fine line of continuity, expressed through patterns of the characters' gestures and behaviour. In both

instances, each gesture is performed in a public arena. The characters shape each socially asserted and assertive move to conceal an offering of intimacy.

A Momentary Suspension

In our first views of Countess Olenska, Michelle Pfeiffer performs two gestures that are at once declamatory and intimate. Prior to the sequence, we have only seen Olenska in two, fleeting long shots, through the inquisitive lens of Larry Lefferts' lorgnettes. Larry Lefferts (Richard E. Grant) devotes himself to training his eye on the conduct of New York Society. With an icy intake of breath, he catches a glimpse of Olenska as she enters the opera box, dipping down into her seat. Alerted to Olenska's presence by Lefferts' biting commentary, Newland Archer ascends the stairs to the box, paying his respects to his fiancé, her mother, and the returned Countess.

Rather than convey the moment of first acquaintance as a gentle prelude to a new relationship, the film suggests how Archer is immediately held by Ellen's presence. The introduction takes the form of a momentary enchantment. The camera gradually carries towards the Countess, and a blurred background of the opera audience washes into view. The movement sets her blue dress against a sea of black suits punctuated with white breastplates. At once, the view contrasts Ellen's singular presence with that of the crowds.

Through two brief gestures, the film creates a magical suspension of time, and expresses the momentousness of the instant. Time stretches with the extension of Ellen's arm, first to Archer in greeting, then over the crowds below. When the Countess raises her hand to be kissed, she is unprepared for an awkward reaction, and causes a moment of embarrassment. Through a clipped series of cuts, her hand hangs in the air, waiting to be embraced. As Archer finally decides to shake hands instead, the film moves out to a long shot, showing Ellen's arm remaining aloft, uncertain (FIGURE 31).

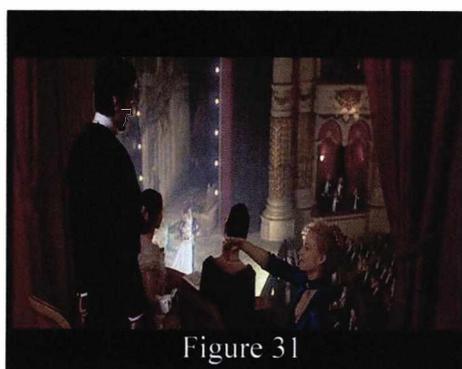


Figure 31

The movement through different views elongates the moment, emphasizing its awkwardness. At the same time, the treatment of the moment suggests Archer's immediate enrapture. Ellen's gesture is

somewhat forceful. It fixes Archer, holding him in the instant. The flitting movement through the shots conveys the sense of a moment caught up in a quickly shifting mix of embarrassment and fascination.

Ellen's second gesture slows the moment more emphatically. Expressing delight to Archer of her return to New York's high society, she gracefully passes her fan over the spectators below. It appears at once as a gesture of fondness for her environment, and of dominion. With a single wave of the fan, Ellen casts a spell over the galleries. As well as enchanting Archer, the gesture is seen to momentarily inflect the entire, grand scene of the opera. As the fan passes over the blurred wash of black and white outfits, it vivifies the sight of the crowd, drawing it to our attention. Equally, the gesture expresses Ellen's wish to subdue the opera audience, to send it to sleep, to bewitch it as she bewitches Archer.

Moving out to long shot, the film gently releases the hold of the spell over the galleries. In turn, the movement opens up a view that conveys the gesture's continuing hold over Archer. A single trace of blue light cuts through the background of suited spectators towards the stage (FIGURE 32).

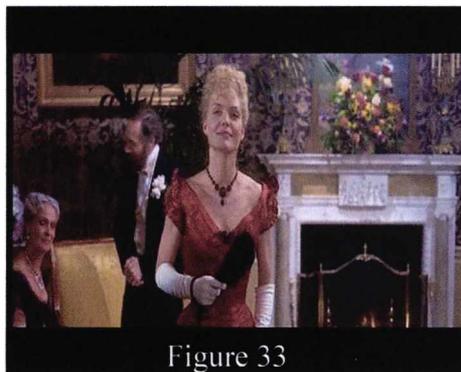


Figure 32

The origin of the blue light is ambiguous. On one level, it appears as the bright beam of a stage spotlight. Equally though, it appears as a vestige of Ellen's spell, tracing the waft of her fan, and the iridescent blue of her dress. The intensity of the moment hangs in the air. The effects of a declamatory gesture are subtly conveyed: showing the lingering impact of a passing instant. After a beat, the camera withdraws, gliding down into the orchestra pit. The film re-focuses its attention on the stage. It chooses not to show the separation of Archer and Ellen at the end of the opera. Through these choices, the film encapsulates their first meeting. It embeds the image of Archer and Ellen as a flawless gem in the narrative. Caught in time, the moment is free from the discomposure of the couple taking their leave and bidding farewell.

Directions of Attention

The tension, of a passing encounter appearing at once inconsequential and profoundly significant, lies at the heart of the couple's relationship. It reaches its apogee in the moment of Ellen's move towards Archer, at the Duke of St. Austrey Dinner. Following an informal 'passing through' at Mrs. Mingott's house, the Duke's Dinner returns the lovers to the oppressive environs of a grand occasion. The unspoken purpose of the Dinner is to re-assert Ellen's position within the aristocracy of New York society. Consequently, she becomes the centre of attention. This palpable sense of concentration heightens the effect of her move across the room (FIGURE 33).



As the film's narrator (Joanne Woodward) observes, "It was not the custom in New York Society for a woman to leave one man and cross the room for another." Rather, the woman should "wait, immovable as an idol, while the men who wished to converse with her succeeded each other at her side."⁵ Yet as Joy L. Davis remarks, "Ellen ... not comprehending the concept of passive 'angel', audaciously solicits an interview with Archer."⁶

This transitory movement and moment form the nucleus of the entire film. It holds within it the instant of New York society's awakening to the attraction between the two lovers. Equally, Ellen's move advances the relationship, intensifying the possibilities of shared time. Echoing the effect of the opera-box meeting, the act forms a momentary enchantment. Here, a brief passage of slowed movement contains the beguiling hold of the moment. The decision to use the declarative, protracting technique of slow motion, at this point, is well judged. It registers the momentous impact that Ellen's daring gesture has on the amassed elite, like a collectively drawn breath. The film achieves this sensation without having to recourse to close-up shots of shocked faces or muttering cliques. The collective effect is felt through the suggestive use of a single stylistic device. First, Ellen rises from her seat into the flow of slow motion, as if stepping serenely into a gale. The

⁵ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: Appleton Century, 1948), p. 60.

⁶ Joy L. Davis, "The Rituals of Dining in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*", *Midwest Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1993, pp. 471-472.

effect is of graceful calm, whilst expressing the overwhelming significance of her gesture. As Ellen draws near to Archer, the film alters the speed of the moment to convey the quickening of emotion. The camera arcs around to Archer. The fluid movement speeds up the moment, without breaking its continuity. It is a final rush, conveying at once the guests' quietly scandalized realization that Ellen means to speak to Archer, and a quickening of pulses for the two characters on the cusp of a greeting.

Having brought us to the point of this crucial, public meeting with meticulous measure, the film composes the brief exchange with equal acuity. Responding to the change in pace, the camera now holds still on the couple as they sit together. Through its composition, the moment appears suspended in private time. In focusing closely on just these two characters, the position of the camera pockets them away from the greater activity of the Dinner. As Leslie Stern remarks, "The Countess Ellen Olenska moves across the room in a trajectory that erases the vastness of space and simultaneously opens up an aporia."⁷ Shaping the moment with senses of suspension and enclosure, it is as if the film creates a bubble, affording the characters short-lived sanctuary.

At the same time, the fact of the greater community's presence is implicitly apparent. Although the camera fixes the couple tight into their private corner, the angle of this view shows the characters looking out intermittently onto the room (FIGURE 34).



Again, the film expresses the full impact of the couple's rendezvous without adopting a forceful stance. All the piercing glances and twittering of the crowds are distilled and conveyed in the exact positioning of the camera: shooting a side-ways look at the couple. Echoing the form of the opera-box encounter, the meeting is held in a tension of public scrutiny and private sanctuary. For the characters, the delicate balancing of the situation is impossible to sustain. The bubble has to burst.

The exclusivity of the moment is pierced with devastating fineness, just as the conversation reaches a quiet climax:

⁷ Leslie Stern, 'Time's Covetousness', p. 225.

Archer: You know, you're amongst friends here.
Ellen: Yes, I know, that's why I came home.

As the camera absorbs Ellen's purposeful response, fixing on her smile, a soft trip of footsteps bleeds into the soundtrack. May's entrance into the room is introduced as whisperingly, devastatingly intrusive. The sounds of her footsteps and the rustle of her gown scuffle into the muted chamber, across the rhythm of the piano interlude. The patter is heard before May is seen, whilst the camera's gaze lingers on Ellen. In an instant, the film delicately binds the two women together, whilst puncturing the suspended moment on the couch. Ellen hurriedly arranges a further rendezvous with Archer, proposing a firm date ("tomorrow afternoon.") Despite his prior ignorance of any such arrangement, Archer quickly accedes, in step with Ellen's game. Standing to bid Ellen farewell, Archer rises to the occasion. The substance of each meeting tapers into the hope of securing another. The couple use each shared moment as a springboard into the next. Caught in these "trajectories of desire" Archer and Ellen are unable to appreciate each instant as it presents itself, as it passes. From moment to moment, they create for themselves a virtual relationship of prognostication. Although each fragmentary meeting connects in a course of subtle continuity, of meaningful moves and gestures, each is hollowed out in anticipation of future occasions.

Motions of Fixity

After Archer's wedding to May, the sense of the hollowness of his time with Ellen increases. Before the marriage, the lovers are bound on a path of forward planning, wistfully disregarding each moment in anticipation of the next. Now the film shows Archer endeavouring to create a sense of intransigence. He tries to immerse himself in each stolen moment with Ellen. Yet, the attempt comes too late. Instead of sharing a current of continuity, the brief meetings are linked by a common sense of futility, of Archer's efforts to gather the disparate moments as they ebb away. Two instants convey the paradox of the lovers' situation most distinctly. Again, the film's attention to gesture carries the paradox and complexity of the couple's relationship. First, Archer's desire to gather moments with Ellen is explicitly expressed in his decision to "save" an afternoon in Boston: ("Oh, I think for a change I'll just save it, instead of spending it.") Then, the sense of shared time slipping away reaches a pinnacle in the New York Museum.

The idea of a saved afternoon combines the desire to savour the passing moment, with a wish to preserve it. Taking his leave from May and his family, Archer searches for Ellen in Boston, to capture some time with her. The film infuses the scene of their meeting with Archer's desire for fixedness. As the couple sits side by side on the park bench, he bargains with Ellen ("Just give me

the day.”) Acceding, Ellen is encouraged to write a note to cancel her appointment with Monsieur Rivière (Jonathan Pryce). As Archer presents her with his “new stylographic” pen to write the note, a slight gesture encapsulates the desperate intensity of the occasion. As the camera looms over the bench, Archer stabs the pen in the air, loosening the ink (FIGURE 35).



After recoiling from the action, Ellen scratches Rivière’s name on the card. There is a sense of alarm contained in the giddiness of the moment.

Moreover, the act is charged with a sense of Archer’s quietly frenzied purpose. It is performed as an entreaty, of Ellen signing a contract to spend the afternoon with him. As well as providing a sense of assuredness, the deed allows Archer to believe he is able to somehow preserve or own this brief time. However, as the afternoon progresses, the idea of a fixed bond with any passing moment is shown to be hopelessly misconceived. The film expresses the sense of time slipping away as the couple sits on the veranda. Here, in the dying moments of the day, “all human presence and vitality is faded out...” In two dissolves, the characters slowly disappear from the setting.

In the couple’s final private meeting at the New York Museum, this sense of futility encompasses each beat of the encounter. The chosen setting of a museum emphasizes Archer’s desire to preserve his time with Ellen. However, beside the mummies and vacuum jars, the lovers pass like ghosts. The substance of a brief rendezvous passes from ephemeral to ethereal. Their time together seems not to merely slip away, but as already spent. The final encounter exists as an impalpable trace of their relationship, a diaphanous remembrance of things past. The meeting is formed of tiny, gossamer fragments. The characters are repeatedly glimpsed in fluid, passing dissolves (with Archer separated from Ellen in the rhythm of the fades. As one appears, the other disappears). The couple converse in disconnected echoes. Their words are formed as wisps of sound, fading in time with their images. As a whole, the moment acquires a gauze-like texture, woven out of translucent glimpses, near-touches and whispered voices. Whereas the characters once

appeared to be able to create momentary suspensions of time, each gesture and utterance is now stripped of substance, borne into the past.



Chapter Three

Voice and Conversation

Moving from physical to verbal forms of expression, the following chapter addresses the handling of dialogue. It considers the way the films and characters articulate their concerns through voice and conversation. The use of dialogue is approached elsewhere in the thesis, in terms of its integration with other points of style in particular moments, in examples of a union or counterpoint of words and image. This chapter focuses more intently on the precise ways that three of the films shape the stream and flow of their course of words. It addresses the placement, arrangement, and aural specifics of dialogue, in sustained passages and momentary concentrations. Forms of vocal expression are seen to shape the dramatic pitch of the films, in graded measures of assertion and delicacy. Attention is paid to the *range* of vocal registers, across the films. The *scale* of dialogue is measured in terms of tone, inflection, volume, accentuation, and intensity.

The Age of Innocence presents a world filled with words. The gathered characters chatter across the film, gossiping in cliques, immersed in cascades of gracious conversation, streaming from group to group. At the same time, while awash with words, the world of the aristocracy is exquisitely sensitive to precise turns of phrase. Each remark, greeting or response stands as testimony and spoken commitment to social 'Form'. Each utterance is measured as such; each spoken misstep is taken as a blow against the speaker. The denizens of this world are attuned to the devastating power of nuanced expression. The film forms intricate layers of precise articulation, as the characters speak in public and private, at declamatory pitch or *sotto voce*, and in the arrangements of the narrator's voice.¹ The section on *The Age of Innocence* focuses on the weight and turn of the lovers' words, on Archer and Ellen. It highlights how the film shows the couple striving to develop a relationship from stolen moments and brief encounters. Akin to the handling of gesture addressed in the previous chapter, the film explores the couple's attempt to build and sustain a dialogue from snippets of dialogue, to create a coherence of fragments. At the same time, the lovers' hurried words form compressions of conversation, in distillations of private meaning.

¹ The intricacies and achievements of the use of the narrator's voice (Joanne Woodward) in *The Age of Innocence* have been considered elsewhere, in detail, by Deborah Thomas. In her article 'The Age of Innocence', Thomas explores the way the narrator's voice enhances the film's expressions of closeness and distance. Thomas details the precise arrangements of the voice, in terms of its appearance and absence at particular points and in relation to particular characters, its complications of irony and compassion, and notions of the narrator's "reliability". Cf. Deborah Thomas, 'The Age of Innocence', *CineAction*, (October 2003, no. 62), p. 22-33.

The Insider also explores the way its characters shape their words to overcome surrounding restrictions. Although restrained by the confidentiality agreement, Bergman and Wigand find ways around the bind, directing the stream of their words accordingly. The film is alert to the precise arrangement of each discussion, to how and when particular pieces of information are revealed, and the shifting dynamic of control to be gained through conversation. A further achievement of the film is the way it shapes lengthy tracts of urgently phrased dialogue to avoid a sense of portentousness. Rather than being tonally burdened as a “weighty” or “heavy” drama, *The Insider* retains a sense of gravitas, whilst it refines its characters’ intense conversations in modulations of register, volume and pitch. The dialogue is rich in depth and density, without appearing onerous or leaden. Free from strain, the words of *The Insider* are still *pressing*. The film pays equal attention to the means of its characters’ conversations. In particular, it explores the form and effect of electronic means of communication. As the apparatus of the answer ‘phone, fax, and mobile telephone are used by Bergman and Wigand to communicate over great distance, the equipment shapes their moments of exchange in precise grades of closeness. Alert to aspects of mediation, *The Insider* expresses the way telecommunications provide a gap to converse, bridging the remoteness of destination and situation.

Whereas the first two films grade their garrulity, *The Bridges of Madison County* is notable for its paced concentrations of dialogue. Before Robert’s arrival, Francesca’s life of ‘quiet desperation’ is marked by attention to duty rather than words. The housewife’s few utterances take the form of concise, practical instructions or entreaties: “Michael, Carolyn, Richard: dinner”; “Michael, what’ve I told you about that door?”; “Would you like to say Grace?” Routine direction takes the place of conversation. However, with the family’s removal and Robert’s appearance, Francesca finds her voice. The chapter closes with a moment of ‘opening up’, attending to the significance developing in the first sustained passage of words to and from the lovers, as they leave the trappings of the home behind.

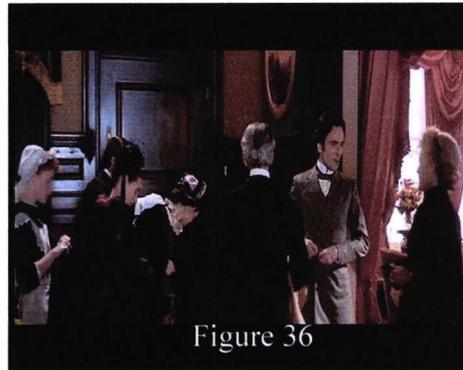


The Age of Innocence

Passing Remarks

Whereas the first, bewitching encounter at the opera between Archer and Ellen appears perfectly composed, unbroken by leave-taking, the second occurs on the cusp of a departure. The meeting takes the form of a passing exchange, as Archer and May bid farewell to Mrs. Mingott (Miriam Margoyles), just as Ellen enters with Julius Beaufort (Stuart Wilson). The seemingly chance

encounter comes after the prestigious Beaufort Ball (an event marked, for Archer, by Ellen's absence). Taking place on the threshold of the Mingott vestibule, this moment of shared time is seized amidst the chattering 'comings and goings' of the characters (FIGURE 36).



Whilst the setting of the opera box held the characters still, caught in a suspended moment, the second meeting shows the couple caught up in a flurry of activity. Ellen and Archer must steal their time together, to create a moment of intimacy within the flow of a social visit. However, within these distinctions, the two separate meetings adhere. The characters find ways to create a sense of continuity through their spells of shared time. They attempt to build up a cohesive relationship through the fragments of their meetings. Such a connection occurs in the form of their conversations.

Each passing encounter only affords the characters the opportunity for a brief exchange. On the Mingott threshold, they deliver a single sentence apiece:

- Archer:** Of course, you already know about May and me. She scolded me for not telling you at the opera.
- Ellen:** Of course I know, and I'm so glad. One doesn't tell such news first in a crowd.

Alone, the sentences exist as passing snippets of dialogue. Yet, the form of the characters' words reveals an assertion of continuity, binding this exchange with the moment of their last meeting. The exchange contains no superfluous pleasantries. That the characters get straight to the point reveals an awareness of the restraint constantly placed on their time together. They use each passing encounter to convey their feelings quickly and implicitly. The short lines are compressions of conversation, standing in for lengthier exchanges (denied the couple by circumstance and convention). The stripping away of introductory niceties also gives the lines the sense of Archer

immediately ‘taking up’ the conversation where it left off at the opera. His nonchalant use of “Of course” reinforces this sense. The sentence sounds like an additional observation, an extra ‘aside’ to a preceding line. Past and present exchanges connect as parts of a single discussion. This compelling connection takes place within a breezy, passing instant, of coats being put on, and people waving good-bye. It is an achievement of the film that this moment appears both casual and deeply consequential. The intensities at play in the brief scene do not announce themselves. The camera seems to catch the instant, rather than charge its focus on significant details. The moment is infused with a palpable sense of the intensity of the occasion, as it passes.

Tones of Speech and Illumination

In a later moment, the film conveys a sense of the charge carried in a transitory moment of dialogue, as well as highlighting the fragile intimacy of a more private conversation. The instance occurs as Archer and Ellen steal a moment together, again at the opera, at ‘The Shaughraun’.² As a momentary meeting of two guests, the encounter is another event happening ‘on the periphery’ of a grand social occasion. A sensitive use and combination of dialogue and lighting conveys the intense mix of emotions forming and fading in the brief moment. As the curtain drops on Act 1 of ‘The Shaughraun’, the film focuses on the activity in the Welland’s opera box, as Archer enters (beckoned by Mrs. Welland from his seat below). The box contains all the leading figures of this world: the Wellands, Sillerton Jackson, Larry Lefferts, Julius Beaufort, and Countess Olenska. As Archer crosses the box to sit with Ellen, the source of light illuminating the small cluster of figures gradually contracts. It encircles the couple in a compact beam, whilst simultaneously shrouding the other characters in darkness (FIGURE 37).

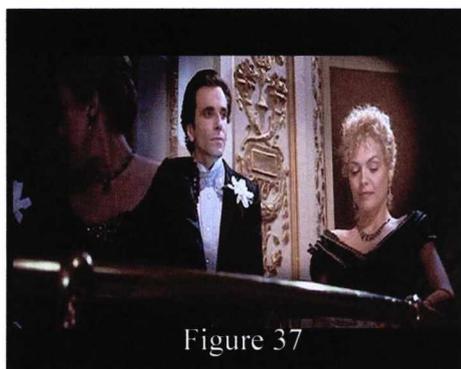


Figure 37

Meeting the concentration of lighting, the film tapers the soundtrack. Initially, on Archer’s entry, the sound of chatter from the opera box forms an intricate web of voices: Beaufort

² *The Shaughraun*: an operatic play by Dion Boucicault (1874).

exchanging ‘pleasantries’ with Archer, Mrs. Welland gossiping with Sillerton Jackson. As Archer shifts his attention to Ellen, the light condenses, and so too does the soundtrack. All other voices fade away, leaving only the sound of the couple’s exchange. The turn of each word is magnified, each note of inflection amplified. Other critics have marked the intense use of light and sound in this brief moment. Dessun Howe notes how the iris effect leaves “the two aspiring lovers in an isolated circle of intimacy.”³ Equally, Amy Taubin reflects on the precise tapering of voices, with the film “rising in on the lovers and then dropping out the sound, so it seems that for each of them nothing else exists for the other.”⁴ Yet, previous critical attention does not address the way *The Age of Innocence* sustains a sense of the couple’s exposure, alongside that of their intense connection. The framing of Archer’s move to Ellen keeps Mrs. Welland in sight, on the far left of ‘their’ corner of the box. Further, although the spotlighting of Archer and Ellen casts the other characters into darkness, Mrs. Welland remains, present in the shadows.

Ellen addresses Archer and breaks the tapered silence; the film cuts to a closer two-shot of the couple. Only then does the camera focus in on the lovers completely, as removed from all the other guests. The precise timing of the cut, coinciding with Ellen’s first words to Archer, conveys the total absorption of the lovers in each other. Yet, it is crucial to note that the film first, subtly, marks out the presence of another character alongside the couple. Each exclusive moment is qualified by a suspicion of discovery. In turn, this idea can reorient the interpretation of the moment. The film’s use of narrowed light and sound can be seen to express the intensity of the lovers’ feelings for each other. Yet, it can also be viewed as an expression of the intense interest of the surrounding figures, seemingly busy in their own conversations, yet straining after every word passing between Archer and Ellen. It is an achievement of the film to convey both senses simultaneously, with equal intensity. Moreover, in suggesting both aspects together, the film expresses the fragility of each ‘private’ moment, forever threatened by the presence of others.

As such, the seal of this “isolated circle of intimacy” is ultimately broken. At first, the exchange brings the lovers closer together. A “gift of yellow roses” – on-stage, and by Archer – is discussed, as a cipher of their affection. Yet, the ‘bubble bursts’, as Archer blunders a response to Ellen’s finely weighted question:

Ellen: And what do you do while May is away?
Archer: I do my work.

³ Dessun Howe, ‘The Age of Innocence’, *The Washington Post*, (September 17, 1993). The citation is sourced online at www.washingtonpost.com.

⁴ Amy Taubin, ‘Dread and Desire’, *Sight and Sound*, (December 1999, vol. 3, no. 12), p. 9.

An awareness of the presence of the neighbouring characters, though unseen, appears to shape Archer's flat response. In turn, the impersonal remark shifts the tone of the moment. Ellen is crestfallen. The film conveys the change in Ellen's demeanour and the shape of words through subtle shifts in the circle of lighting. Moreover, it reaches the nuances of the transitory moment through a deft handling of the event's *diegetic* lighting effects. That is to say, it balances the emotional course of the lovers' encounter with the rise and fall of the stage-lights (of a theatrical production). In turn, the grades of the theatre's lighting precisely match the changing situation in the box.

Thus, the transition in the 'periphery event' of Archer's meeting is matched by developments in the 'Event', of the operatic play. As Archer responds to Ellen, the audience lights are dimmed, and spotlights stream down onto the stage for Act 2. The change removes the circle of light from around the couple, as Archer's reprimand is heard. Further, the move forms a searing arc of white light behind Ellen alone (FIGURE 38).



This flare of light heralds a new tone, and a distinct, intense moment of implicit reproach: "I do want you to know what you advised me was right. Things can be *so* difficult sometimes, and I'm *so* grateful." With these whispered words, Ellen reaches for the lorgnettes, and gazes intently down on the activity on-stage, away from Archer. In turn, the focus on their meeting is eradicated. The play's orchestral score soars up once more, engulfing the scene. The meeting between the lovers has formed an intense interlude. Acts of the play form bookends of the private dialogue. In fixing the words under the lights, the film draws into focus a deeply personal moment entirely inflected by surrounding circumstances.

◆◆◆

The Insider

Skirting the Issue

Finding correspondence with Archer and Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*, Bergman and Wigand cannot move openly and directly to the heart of the matter that binds them. Akin to the form and expression of their gestures, the two men turn, arch and twist their words to circumnavigate the legal restrictions. Talking around the issue, in gatherings of hint, paraphrase, tangential chatter, small talk and *non-sequiturs*, they gradually move towards the truth. Alert to the modulations and adjustments in the ongoing course of the men's exchanges, the film reveals the process of disclosure to be as crucial as the act of discovery.

Invitations and Limitations of Disclosure

Across the course of its conversations, *The Insider* is alert to the particular manner and order in which information is requested or revealed. To revisit the men's first meeting at the Seelbach hotel, a strategy makes itself manifest in the characters' conversation, as they offer particular forms of invitation, ways to exchange information. First, as Bergman authorizes the spaces of the room with his movements across the floor, he appears to cast wide the parameters of his invitation to discussion, opening with small-talk: "Have you always lived in Louisville?"; "How do you like your coffee, black?"; "Is there anything you want to know about me?" Yet, the suggestion of polite generality, an encouragement to openness, is tapered as all the three phrases form precise questions. Bergman's opening chatter comprises carefully tailored entreaties, moving increasingly from broad to particular, public to personal (how long have you lived in the city, what is your preference for coffee, what do you want to know about me?). Initiating the meeting, Bergman conducts a careful tuning of polite conversation, offering an open invitation for close expressions of confidence. In his reply, Wigand appears to seal the conversation, even as he opens it up. Matching Bergman's articulate acuity, Wigand offers a question in return. With a sketch of a smirk, he asks, "How does a radical journalist of *Rampart* magazine end up working for CBS News?" Phrased and delivered as an affront, the question appears as an attempt to block further calls for friendly disclosure. Yet at the same time, Wigand's quip declares his interest in Bergman. Through the defence of sarcasm, Wigand seeks assurance of Lowell's professional integrity, as a necessary test, before further disclosure.

Wigand's subsequent words form an invitation of their own, and a call for a particular procedure of disclosure to be set in motion. Scouring the proffered documents, Wigand initially strips his language of any personal colour or signature, hiding behind scientific jargon: "This is a fire and safety study for Phillip Morris; burn rates, ignition propensity, things of this nature." The

technical clarification almost obfuscates a crucial turn of phrase: “That’s as far as I go.” Despite a declaration of finality, Wigand is quick to respond to Bergman’s question (“As far as you go where?”) with more details, elucidating and advancing his situation: “This issue is a drop in the bucket ... I can talk to you about the issues in this document but I can’t talk to you about anything else. I signed a confidentiality agreement. I honour agreements.” In the measure of his remarks, Wigand invites Bergman to seek the truth via a particular, circuitous route of call and response. The scientist discloses particular pieces of information, in a particular order: his knowledge of the field (using jargon); his circumstances (the confidentiality agreement); his strength of pride (“I honour agreements”); the importance and situation of his professional status (“Head of Development at Brown and Williamson”). In a careful and exact order of disclosure, Wigand tests his boundaries of involvement and implication, as Bergman will test the limits of the legal bind.

Voice and Position

In a brief and seemingly trivial moment, and in a single stream of words, the film encapsulates the dynamic of the men’s professional relationship. The moment occurs as Bergman and Wigand meet in a Japanese restaurant. Immediately, the location suggests a precise combination of formality and closeness, felt in the men’s relationship at this point. The formal ceremony of Japanese dining is coupled with the intimate arrangement of a table for two (FIGURE 39).

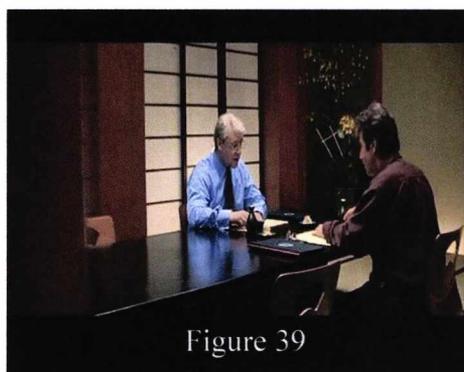


Figure 39

The men sit closely to share food, yet are shackled apart by the confidentiality agreement. Equally, as Bergman learns of the potential impact of the scientist’s incendiary findings, his professional interest qualifies the intimacy of his conversation. At the same time, as the danger of the findings becomes apparent, his concern for Wigand’s safety, as a friend, grows stronger.

A subsequent, quietly eloquent passage of dialogue speaks of equally substantial concerns. Turning away from Bergman, Wigand directs his attention toward the waitress, to order their meals. He addresses the waitress in confident, fluid Japanese. The discussion draws attention to Wigand’s linguistic ability and articulacy, adding poignancy to his later explanation of his dismissal from

Brown and Williamson as being due to “poor communication skills” and, more pointedly, to his inability to air his findings. As Bergman is excluded from the discussions, he watches from the other side of the table, with an air of amused appraisal. Through his grasp of language, Wigand directs the scenario, *placing orders*. The moment stands in contrast to other, more dramatically prominent scenes in the film, in which Bergman, rather than Wigand, is presented as a powerful controller of serious scenarios (with the Hezbollah, covering the moves of the Unabomber). This seemingly minor moment, of ordering food, captures the workings of the partnership, testifying to Bergman’s wider reliance on Wigand as the carrier of information. As Wigand orders, Bergman must wait patiently to hear what he will receive.

Pitch and Tone

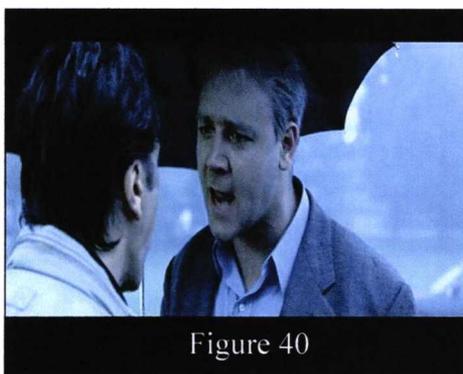
As well as creating precise arrangements of dialogue in degrees of disclosure and measures of control, the film is equally alert to the significance of adjustments in pitch and tone, moment to moment. Two consecutive sequences are considered. First, the two men’s verbal confrontation in front of Wigand’s home is seen to bleed together degrees of harshness and softness. Secondly, as the men agree to ride together in the car, to the edge of town, a moment of humour inflects and develops a sustained, serious discussion. In fluent modulations of delivery and approach, *The Insider* refines the dramatic density of its dialogue.

Harshness and Softness

Before the verbal tirade of the men’s confrontation at the Wigands’ residence, the film points up an absence of words. The sparse exchanges between Wigand and his wife are designed to speed their separate departures; sheets of rain divide them further as they stoop under separate umbrellas. The sense of unspoken antagonism heightens, as Bergman appears, silently, in front of the house. Initially circumnavigating a direct dispute, Bergman first approaches Wigand’s wife. The move expresses Bergman’s skill at negotiating difficult circumstances, of working around a problem. The direction of the greeting allows Bergman to bypass Wigand, and appears to encourage an immediate diffusion of temper. Yet, suddenly, the politely formal nature of his address to Liane as “Mrs. Wigand” is placed in quick counterpoint with a gruff aside to Wigand: “C’mere, I wanna talk to you.” An expression of curtness is both heightened and shielded by a moment of politeness. At the same time, in marking a shift from formal to bold terms, the curt words presuppose an acute sense of familiarity. It is precisely the brusque quality of the expression that hints at a more profound bond existing between the two men. The frankness of the words promotes an understanding of the intensity of their connection. At this point in the film, the men have met only once before. However,

their relationship has already passed beyond the superficial niceties and restraints of polite conversation. It encourages its own candour.

Concurrently, and as part of a pattern developing in the film as a whole, the ensuing clash displays the shifting form of the men's discussions and debates. Bergman's words form a call for confrontation. They are spoken as he struts towards Wigand, complimented by a sharply beckoning flick of the hand. Equally, Wigand's reply of "Good, because I wanna speak to you too," comes as he strides over to Bergman. The argument is held in close shot, as both men bend beneath a shared umbrella, each yelling over the other, fighting to be heard (FIGURE 40).



Initially caught in the blustering 'white noise' of a dispute, their words and voices find a qualified sense of clarity and direction. Through their words, the men gradually move from a stance of blind assertion, towards one of reception. The noisy quarrel distils into an even exchange. The angry honesty of the first, yelled words is crucial to the possible formation of such a shift. It is used by the men as a necessary starting point, through which to negotiate, and move into, a more tempered position of accordance. Beginning with frankness, the men subsequently dilute the bluster of their arguments, whilst retaining the drive to say what they mean.

Lightness in Gravity

As the force of an angry pitch becomes a useful passion, a note of humour encourages the characters' more serious appraisal of their situation. As the men move to Wigand's car, to the edge of town, a moment of humour loosens the tension. In the midst of sombre discussion, Wigand promotes his own interrogation, expressing a cautious wish to reveal more, while recalling the boundaries: "What else [do you want to know], outside the zone?" After a beat, Bergman replies: "I don't know. Do you think the Nicks are going make it to the semi-finals?" The moment serves as a turning point, in and of the meeting. It develops the film's wider concern with the fleeting appearance of playful moments inside sustained passages of serious debate.

Delivering the wry line, Bergman interrupts the taut game of disclosure. As he adopts a jocular tone, Bergman risks breaking both the sense of shared conviction, and Wigand's withdrawal. Yet, simultaneously, the use of humour promotes a deepening of the men's affiliation. It serves to bring them together through their mutual appreciation of the joke, of pleasure afforded by the line being spoken in these particular circumstances, at this particular time. The film captures this tension in Wigand's facial expression, as he reacts to the remark. Tilting his head away from Bergman, he is seen to smile tersely at the words. Yet, the smile quickly turns, his lips shifting into a purse. Within this glimpse of an expression, Wigand appears to appreciate the humour and timing of the remark, to welcome the release it brings, whilst showing his eagerness to turn again to the seriousness of his situation. The joke offers release, but contains gravity. Whilst creating a momentary diversion from weightier matters, the note of humour emphasizes the ludicrousness of the men's position: of having to constantly skirt the matter in hand, to find a 'way in' through tangential topics, to play a prolonged guessing-game. Highlighting the absurd form of their discussions, a moment of lightness and slightness reminds the characters of the magnitude of their predicament.

Electronic Forms of Communication

Alongside attention to the arrangement, pitch and scale of dialogue, *The Insider* concentrates on the characters' means of communication. More precisely, it explores the particular grades of intimacy afforded by electronic forms of contact, connection and exchange. Throughout, the film uses the features of various electronic means of communication to reveal nuances of the central characters' relationship. It examines how the use of universally recognizable devices creates and expresses incremental grades of emotional change. The film announces the use of each modern machine in turn: telephone, answer-phone, fax, mobile phone. A movement through this chain of equipment could quite easily have been realized in a banal and uninteresting fashion, done solely to advance the plot. The particular achievement of *The Insider* here stems from its intelligent understanding and careful ordering of these objects. The film's handling of the machines, one after another, allows for the impersonal, anonymous characteristics of the devices to form and reveal measures of human closeness, achieved over distance.

In the first moment of contact, as his call is ignored, Bergman leaves Wigand an answer-phone message. As Wigand sits in his office, Bergman's voice sounds through the machine, momentarily breathing life into the room. The journalist offers a redemptive reach for Wigand, to take him out of his solitary position as the hushed insider. Yet, the use of the answer-phone mediates this

proposition. It ensures that the first words passing between the two men are indirectly exchanged. The film draws on the functional nature of this impersonal message-taking machine to negotiate a moment of closeness. Crucially, Wigand is shown listening to Bergman's words fall into space, whilst he sits alone. As the machine suspends the possibility of an immediate conversation, the moment is rich with the potential of contact.

The use and characteristics of the fax machine further diffuse and filter the attempt at a personal discussion. A tension is manifest as the use of the fax in the film combines seemingly opposing implications. A fax machine appears most frequently in the workplace of an office, being used as a business tool. In turn, its placement affords the machine a sense of the perfunctory, as a device for transporting impersonal messages. Yet *The Insider* shades this association with the suggestion of personal involvement. The faxed pages here are hand-written, and urgently insistent. In this way, the film's use of the machine plays with a shifting balance of formality and familiarity. In its handling of answer-phone and fax machine, the film creates a hesitant moment of attempted attraction across distinct locations. Crucially, the order of the objects' use leads the characters away from spoken conversation. This movement is acutely expressive of the critical distance existing between the men at this point.

In a later, climactic sequence, the film expresses precise measures of closeness and distance afforded by a mobile 'phone. When his television interview is suspended from broadcast, all his efforts apparently wasted, Wigand returns to his hotel room. Caught in the confines of the room, restricted from seeing his family, Wigand turns inward. In the peaking intensity of the instant, Wigand's fevered mind projects images of his children, melding and morphing across the expanse of the hotel room wall. To channel Wigand's attention away from the beguilement of delirium, to make him *see clearly*, Bergman offers a life-line. In 'Delirious Enchantment', Adrian Martin provides an insightful commentary of the scene:

In ... *The Insider* ... there is a passage so powerful it is almost unbearable. [As] the music is reaching an incredible peak of intensity, the editing gets more frantic as we see the *60 Minutes* reporter Bergman on his mobile phone, trying to reach [Wigand] – because we, like Bergman, suspect he might be about to kill himself – and then we see the hapless hotel concierge at the end of that conversation on another mobile phone, just outside Wigand's door. The concierge, prompted, tries to get Wigand's attention: no response. "Tell him to get on the phone", Bergman says. "I can't do that", says the concierge. Bergman gets louder: "Tell him to get on the fucking phone!" Finally, the concierge snaps, yelling like a good lad: "Sir, he says to ... get on the fucking phone!" And then, after all this, Wigand finally moves: he grabs the concierge's mobile,

the music stops completely dead on the soundtrack at that instant of contact, and he slams the door. The cinema does not get much more magnificent than this.⁵

Crucially, the magnificence of the scene hangs on the invisible, breaking thread of a phone line. The little, hand-held gadget of the mobile bridges the oppressive trappings of Wigand's hotel room with the distant, vast, shimmering wash of the ocean, by Bergman's beach house. Further, the film uses the particular possibilities of the gadget to express the men's circumstances. The portable (and so transferable) aspect of the mobile allows for a moment in which the 'phone is grabbed from the concierge's hands, to be snatched inside Wigand's hotel room, with the door slammed shut. The mobile momentarily releases the user from a circumscribed location. It grants the creation of an exclusive space within larger, impersonal surroundings. From within this pocketed space, the characters can speak freely, with the semblance of privacy. At the same time, the mobile 'phone allows the user to roam, to move as freely as his surroundings permit. The film shows Wigand as he paces around the corners of his hotel room, while Bergman wanders, walking and talking with the mobile. The film is alert to the way people often drift around when they speak on a mobile 'phone, seemingly without direction. Expressed through the suddenness of an edit, the film shows Bergman moving from the sandy beach to stride ankle-deep in the ocean (FIGURE 41).

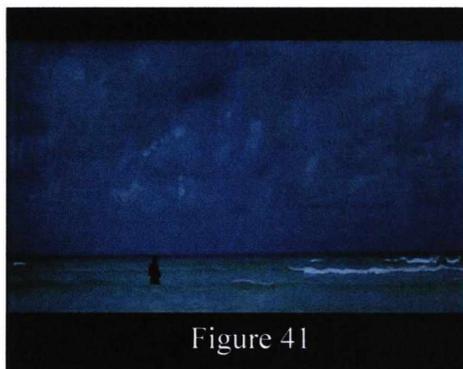


Figure 41

Talking on the 'phone, he has attempted to bring Wigand back from a profound state of dissolution. In so doing, he is shown to lose track of his own direction, of his own personal coordinates. Together, the use of the shapeless sea-scape and remote 'phone-link relate, and draw attention to, the state of the men's personal affairs. Bergman is belittled by the magnitude of his surroundings and circumstances. In the first moment of contact with Wigand, he was seen connected to other people on the streets of Chicago, using the public 'phone. In the final shot, cancelling the connection on his private 'phone, he stands alone, lost to Wigand's cause, engulfed by the bureaucracies of the media.

⁵ Adrian Martin, 'Delirious Enchantment', pp. 2-3.



The Bridges of Madison County

Opening Up

In contrast to *The Insider*, in *The Bridges of Madison County*, an opening of the environment encourages a release of words and a possibility for greater intimacy. Francesca's decision to accompany Robert to Roseman Bridge marks a glimpse of a wider world. The retreat from the house opens up a brief holiday from domestic spaces and commitments. Free from familiar trappings, Francesca airs her thoughts, re-discovering the pleasures and refreshment of new, untravelled routes of conversation. The film first expresses the lightening of a load in two touches. As Robert's truck heads down the track, the photographer asks for directions. Francesca responds, succinctly, "Out, then right." The three words, lightly delivered, contain a weight of meaning. For Francesca, once she is out, away from the farm, all will be, may be, right. Heightening the suggestion, Francesca's words are quickly accompanied by a glance to the mailbox at the end of the drive. A hefty stone is set atop the box, weighting it into position (FIGURE 42). Crucially, the view of the load is released just as the truck pulls away, onto the open road.

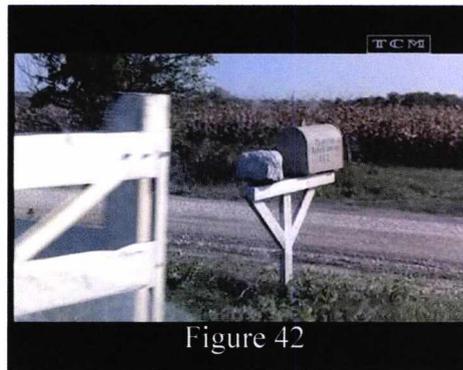


Figure 42

The film develops the sense of a slow acclimatization to a more open situation in its handling of the truck's journey towards the bridge, and the faltering conversations of the couple *en route*. The act of 'setting off' is marked by a long shot, through the truck's muddy windshield, of the road stretching vertically ahead. Conversation opens up with the road. Surveying the scenery, Robert sets off the conversation speculatively, with the breadth of the landscape matching the measure of his remarks:

Robert: Wonderful smell to Iowa, kind of particular to this part of the country, know what I mean?

Francesca: No.

Robert: It's kind of hard to explain...I guess it's in the loam of the soil: rich, earthy, alive...well maybe not alive. Anyway, you don't smell it?

Francesca: No, maybe it's because I'm from around here.

Robert: Yeah, I guess so. Smells great though.

The lines introduce Robert's sensitivity to the unfamiliar landscape, and Francesca's dulled familiarity with the same space, a tension to be made complex in the couple's negotiation of the bridges. Moreover, as Francesca's succinct replies appear to close Robert's initiating remarks, the camera reframes to an extreme long shot of the truck set amidst the surrounding fields, as it bumps over a stumpy bridge. Although the scenario is less circumscribed, away from the confines of the farmhouse, there is an uncertainty to the characters' handling of their new situation. The wider shot of the landscape expresses both the capacity for more open discussion, and the lacuna within the first faltering attempt. In the silence, the passing thud of the truck bumping onto and off the squat bridge is equally expressive. It marks the gap in the conversation; at the same time it marks a move forwards, an incremental step of progression. The sound is a gentle reminder of the act of passage away from the house, and of the fact that the characters' progress towards the bridge, towards each other, is being made in stages.

On the journey, the characters' chosen lines of conversation are expressive of their relationship to their environment. Just as Robert's remarks encourage an open appreciation of the surroundings, Francesca's question marks an attempt to fix a person to a particular place. She asks Robert whether he is "from Washington originally", a question that leads to the revelation of his divorce, and so to another adjustment. The couple share memories of Francesca's hometown in Italy, of Bari. The particular development of the conversation on the open country road again recalls words of Alain de Botton, on journeying:

There is an almost quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new places. Introspective reflections which are liable to stall are helped along by the flow of the landscape...the view distracts for a time that nervous, censorious, practical part of the mind which is inclined to shut down when it notices something difficult emerging in consciousness

and which runs scared of memories, longings, introspective or original ideas and prefers instead the administrative and the impersonal.⁶

A coupling of large thoughts and views, and precise, shared experience is noted in the film in a repeated view through the truck's passenger window, bringing together the flowing sight of the fields and the Robert and Francesca held close, now talking, now huddling to light their cigarettes (FIGURE 43).

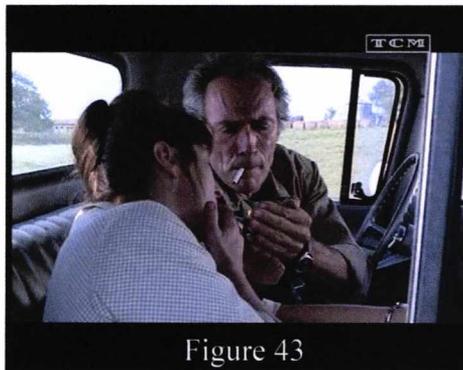


Figure 43

The act of journeying allows the conversation to broaden, and gives room to introspection; in turn, the characters find particular points of shared appreciation.



⁶ Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, p. 57.

Chapter Four

Music

Sustaining attention on aural specifics, the following chapter focuses on arrangements of music. Contemporary Hollywood's predominant treatment of the musical score connects with its handling of landscape as, to note King again, "expansive vistas spread out across the big screen." As the most prominent feature of the sonic landscape, music in contemporary Hollywood is made magnificent in the "aural impact of multi-channel sound." The high volume of the score meets with the grandiloquence of the musical register. To match the magnitude of the film's visual scale, the musical score is often formed in bombastic movements. Imposing symphonies of sound swell, surround and overwhelm. Whereas the expansive landscapes are used as magnificent backdrops to the business of the film, the musical score asserts mood and meaning, heightening and drawing attention to narrative 'events'. Each significant dramatic or emotional state is "keyed" by the music, often at a declamatory pitch. In contrast, the two films considered below find ways to grade and balance their musical scores, to carry precise measures of inference and resonance. The scores of the two films are not 'chamber pieces' or works of minimalism; they are symphonic works of extended composition, comprising a multitude of orchestral elements. Yet, the music does not blanket or smother the films, or envelop moments in swathes of asserted emotion. Rather, the films achieve a sophisticated variation of dramatic register, through attention to aspects of musical composition.

There are multiple forms of composition in play, and the films hold them in synthesis. First, the written arrangement of the music is at once bold and intricate in design. Secondly, the films achieve an integration of music with other elements of style. In both forms of composition, the films attend to changing relationships: of key, instrument, rhythm, pace and tone; of image and sound; between the music and other points of style; through moments; and to characters. Again, the close, significant relationships of style are bound to the close commitments of the characters. The films are also alert to the potential significance carried in the placement and distribution of passages of music. They introduce, develop and silence pieces of music at precise points. In cycles of chords and motifs, the films create overarching musical themes, forming in union with particular dramatic themes, and developing in concert. Finally, in the films' delicate weighting of these arrangements, the music achieves a further level of composure: sounded without strain, carrying significance without stress.

In *The Bridges of Madison County*, the arrangement of the music echoes the paced concentration of dialogue. Initially refraining from any musical accompaniment, the film introduces its single theme at exact points and in momentary breaths, sensing measures of release, decisiveness and resignation. Further, the musical score is complimented by a series of Jazz and Blues songs. This collection of voices is heard in harmony and counterpoint with Robert and Francesca's conversations. In *The Straight Story*, multiple musical themes gradually accrue and collect, expanding across the film in precise measure. The points of musical pause and progression echo and express the form of Alvin's journey, and the character's attitude towards his undertaking, in particular periods. A further achievement of the film stems from its handling of the relationship between the development of specific musical themes and motifs, and the changing conditions of individual characters.



The Bridges of Madison County

Refrain, Development and Restraint

The film starts without music, without the annunciation of an imposing overture, or the introduction of an instrumental prelude. Yet, it is not in silence. As the close image of the mailbox fills the frame, the sound of field crickets is equally assertive. The susurrations and rhythms of this natural noise swell and sound across the film, adding to the sense of density developing throughout. Whereas in other aspects the film achieves a tone of distinction between the 'past' and 'present' scenes, the blanket of whispered chirrups envelops both periods, sounding a note of correspondence between mother, daughter and son. In the 'past' sequences, the thick zither of wings adds to the air of 'quiet suffocation', bleeding together with the hiss of steam from cooking pans. Yet, as the volume of chirruping rises at particular points, a more promising quality is noted. The sound accompanies Francesca and Robert on their trips to the covered bridges, and surrounds them as they stroll in the gardens of the Johnson home, after their first dinner together. A tension arises as the sound wraps around the characters. The noise is softly stifling; at the same time, the quiver of wings expresses a nervous awareness of possibility, a flicker of opportunity, to delicately explore unforeseen circumstances.

Around and within the cover of natural noise, the film develops a single musical theme.¹ The increasingly grand theme builds in increments of development and variation, as the film progresses. The decision to limit the musical score to a singular theme is akin to the film's handling

¹ The theme is listed and named as "Doe Eyes" on the CD soundtrack of the film, and is composed by Clint Eastwood, "Music from the Motion Picture *The Bridges of Madison County*", Warner Music, 1995.

of space, place and time. A concentration on a tightly defined arrangement – of settings, days, and musical notes – gains a sense of density through patterned returns to the same point. In its crossings and re-crossings, the film develops and deepens a charge around the same space, time or melody. In depth and density, *The Bridges of Madison County* achieves a sense of expansiveness. Through repeated returns to the music, in sounding and re-sounding the same arrangement of notes, the film suffuses the single theme with developing significance. It *scores* the characters' situations. Equally, around the core of the central refrain, the film develops the music by degrees. It introduces, pauses, reprises and extends the musical theme at particular points. The theme also builds in density in the gradual accrual of instrumentation: from piano, to strings, to full orchestration. The music develops *in tune* with the nuances of the four-day affair, and the lovers' relationship: in graded shifts, adjustments and measures of growth and intensification.

As *The Bridges of Madison County* opens without musical overture, it withholds the score in its entirety for a substantial period of the narrative. Only when Robert and Francesca huddle together to collect the fallen bouquet of flowers on Roseman Bridge, does the film bring in its musical theme for the first time (FIGURE 44).



Figure 44

By introducing the music at just this point, the film underscores the significance of the moment. An initial step, of 'loosening up' and coming together is marked in the release of the first notes of the musical theme. It is a convention of narrative cinema to mark particular moments with music, to signal their importance in the development of the plot. In this sense, it is not surprising that *The Bridges of Madison County* chooses this moment to introduce its musical theme. It is an achievement of the film that it refines the convention in its handling of the moment. In the delicacy of the score's introduction, the music recognizes the import of the instant whilst expressing more nuanced forms of development in the characters' relationship. As the trip to the bridge draws to a close, Robert picks Francesca the bunch of wild flowers. Teasingly declaring the flowers poisonous, Francesca causes Robert to drop the bouquet. All of the surrounding tension, of this unexpected trip

and meeting, is released in the little joke, in the falling spray of flowers and Francesca's giddy laughter. Sharing the joke, collecting the fallen flowers, the couple crouches closely together. The introduction of the theme achieves the same lightness as the flowers drifting to the ground. Four piano notes chime. The notes softly build into the key refrain of the musical theme, to be repeated, adjusted and developed throughout the film. A slight and happy moment is quietly marked as the beginning of something bigger. Further, the final repetition of the refrain stops in a minor key. In the sound, the film hints at the tension at the heart of the couple's brief affair. In this early event, and even in the minor key of the music, there is the suggestion and promise of continuation, as the refrain ends without completing its full cycle of notes. Yet, the hope of continuation contains within it the move towards completion, of concluding the composition of music and shared moments.

Little developments in the musical theme express crucial shifts in the couple's relationship. The first instance occurs as Robert is invited to dinner. To spruce up, the photographer showers in the backyard. From the bedroom window and behind the gauze of the curtain, Francesca cautiously sneaks tentative peeks at the figure below. Initially moving away from the window into the middle of the room, reproaching herself, Francesca is drawn back, to look again. The film notes the small, pivotal moment of decisiveness in the first repetition of the musical theme. The repeated movement of music and character carries a sense of progression. As the piano notes fade away, strings are introduced, separately playing the same refrain. The shift to strings complements Francesca's more confident return to the window and the manner of her gaze; both moves appear a little more pronounced, sustained for a beat longer.

Gradually developing the arrangements and advancements of refrain and affair, *The Bridge of Madison County* declares a single point of musical assertion. The moment occurs at the close of the lovers' last shared evening. When his entreaty for Francesca to leave with him is finally denied, Robert turns to leave. As his truck draws away down the drive, Francesca rushes out of the kitchen into the yard. The devastating effect of her decision to stay, and of Robert's departure, is conveyed in the heightened pitch and volume of the musical score, sounded in full orchestration. The only declamatory camera movement of the film intensifies the moment further still. The camera carries with Francesca out of the front door, bumping and jostling speedily down the steps, into the yard. The instant is amplified not only by pronounced aural and visual points of style, but also by the uniqueness of its fleetingly bombastic rhetoric, within the film as a whole. The heightened register of the moment captures the extent of Francesca's silent, climactic sense of hopelessness. For once, tones of disquiet or dissatisfaction inflame into despair.

In the final 'chance' meeting between the lovers (as addressed in Chapter 2), the arrangement of the musical theme carries the resonance of all previous expressions, whilst marking

a moment of irrevocable change. As Francesca notices Robert's presence across the street, piano notes chime to mark the realization, and a final moment of connection. However, in this instance, the musical theme develops around a new variation of the central melody. The notes are the same, yet they are played in a different order. In the variation, the film hints at the possibility of change, of Francesca moving to join Robert in the rain. At the same time, as the refrain alters, the film expresses a sense of completion. The four days are accompanied by a single refrain; as the refrain changes and disappears, the completion of the affair is sounded in its absence.

A Collection of Voices

Alongside the slow-build of the score, the film textures the soundtrack with a series of radio songs. Jazz and Blues numbers filter into the world of the characters on radios, in Francesca's kitchen and Robert's truck. Again, the film is alert to both the intricacies of each song's musical arrangement, and its situation in the narrative. Particular musical voices accompany the lovers' affair as it begins, develops and draws to an end.

The tuning of a radio expresses the characters' attempts to adjust to their surroundings. In the opening sequence of the 'past', Francesca searches for solace in the calm of an aria, before the harmony is broken by the family's entrance and a turn of the radio dial. At the close of the trip to Roseman Bridge, in Robert's truck, Francesca is quick to assist the photographer in his search for "a station out of Chicago that plays some good Blues." The shared taste develops the bond of the trip, a gift of flowers, and the savouring of a joke. Further, the instrumental arrangement, rhythm and pace of the song capture the timbre of the moment. As radio and film pick up the song, piano keys are pressed in a bouncing rhythm, hit with a skit of skimmed drums and the low blow of a saxophone. The springing pace is met by the bound of the "mean yellow dog" from a neighbouring farm, as it runs alongside the rolling truck. In music and motion, the film builds an energetic sense of momentum. The giddiness inspired by the joke on the bridge spirals into a flighty trip in the truck. Yet, the pace of the song also points up the fleeting nature of the visit. As the couple drives back to the house, the spell may soon break, as the humdrum routine returns. The song is taken in like a deep breath of air, as Francesca waits to exhale.

Whilst not selecting and placing the radio songs to demonstratively declare the feelings of the characters, or 'speak' for them, the film allows for particular lyrics to be heard at particular points, developing the sense of a moment. As Francesca extends the meeting with the invitation of iced tea, Robert turns the dial of the kitchen radio, finding more Jazz. A potentially intrusive and impolite act is 'earned' by the fresh confidence of a common interest. The step is *forward* without being overassertive, part of a shared pursuit. As Robert sits at the table and Francesca prepares a jug



of tea, the radio voice sings, “Now I’m alone with you”.² The lines of a romantic standard add resonance to an everyday activity; at the same time, the lyrics give voice to Francesca’s unspoken, hovering doubt that time spent with this man, alone, is “wrong”. As the subsequent lyrics are covered by the noise of Francesca’s preparations and words to Robert, there is a sense of the doubt being damped down, tuned out.

Whilst the song acts as a ‘backdrop’ to the couple’s meeting, playing in the background, the film is alert to the particular qualities and intricacies of the music. It combines the variations and improvisations of a piece of Jazz with those of the couple’s conversation. The radio song gives way to an instrumental break, and the couple sits at the kitchen table, offering polite opening points of conversation, discussing the family. As they talk, the form of their words echoes the shifting phrases of the music, and vice versa. Developing around a central theme, words and music build in changing tones and a staccato flow. Sometimes tentatively, sometimes assertively, sometimes surprisingly, the delivery of the flow loops and grows:

Robert: Where’s your family?
Francesca: My husband took them to the Illinois State Fair; my daughter is entering a prize steer.
Robert: How old?
Francesca: Ah, about a year and a half.
Robert: No, I meant the kids.
Francesca: Oh, Michael is seventeen, and Carolyn is sixteen.
Robert: Well, that’s nice, having kids.
Francesca: Yes, well, they’re not kids anymore.

... // ...

Francesca: Of course, being with Richard, so...
Robert: What’s he like?
Francesca: He’s very clean.
Robert: Clean?
Francesca: Yes; no, I mean, yes and no. He’s other things too. He’s very hard working, very caring, honest, gentle, a good father.
Robert: And clean.

² Dinah Washington, “Blue Gardenia” (written by Bob Russell and Lester Lee), as listed on the CD soundtrack album of the film.

Words and music come together. In their misunderstandings, corrections and additions, the couple search to fall in step with each other's tone and direction of conversation. At the same time, on the radio, guitar and trumpet leave and return to the main melody of the song, finding each other's rhythm and harmony.

Two further moments convey the way song marks the culmination and final faltering of the characters' relationship. In the first instance, in the evening glow of the kitchen, Francesca and Robert dance to the radio as its song billows through the room (FIGURE 45).



Figure 45

This is a crucial moment, holding the first touch and kiss of the couple. The significance of the moment is emphasized as the pace is slowed, the camera stilled in sustained long shot, and the soundtrack held under the drowsy spell of Johnny Hartman's voice.³ The complexity of the moment is expressed in the film's control of volume and pitch. First, the sound of the song moves from the confines of the tinny kitchen radio to bloom in the full expanse of the film's sonic landscape. The shift in sound captures the elation of the moment, and the all-embracing rapture of the dance. Bewitched, the couple slowly circles the room. Further, the 'dreamy' quality of the moment is advanced by the sonorous surge of Hartman's low tones. Yet, as the depth of bass hypnotizes, the quality of the sound also brings out the treble with crystalline clarity. Through its handling of both elements, the film expresses how, whilst casting a spell, the moment heightens the characters' alertness to their actions. Burning with a smoulder, the moment also sears, carrying the possibilities of consequence.

The film develops a corresponding tension through its handling of sound and music in "the Jazz Joint". Keen to escape the whispering rumours and gossip of the townsfolk, Francesca and Robert head out to a Jazz club (FIGURE 46). Tucked in the corner of the smoky room, the couple appears to find a pocketed space in which they can talk without disturbance. Further, the insistent presence of Jazz music points up an attempt to move away from convention and the 'rules' of order.

³ Johnny Hartman, "I See Your Face Before Me", written by Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz.

Yet, in keeping with earlier soundings of Jazz, the tripping, looping variations of the saxophone hints at the dangers inherent in the couple's own improvisations.



In answer to Francesca's questions of his past and parents, Robert answers, "I don't know if I can do this you know ... to try and cram in a whole lifetime between now and Friday." As he speaks, the film hollows the sound of the words into an echo, to be carried away in the smoke of the bar and the wash of the music. The bearing of the moment chimes with Robert's earlier, happier declaration, as he and Francesca drink to "ancient evenings and distant music." The ethereality of the photographer catches up with him, and bears the moment, and the affair into the past.



The Straight Story

Rolling Melodies

Whereas *The Bridges of Madison County* develops a single musical refrain into the expansiveness of a full score, *The Straight Story* arranges and combines multiple themes. Within *The Straight Story*, each melodic strand of each musical theme is finely detailed to connect with specific moments of advancement. The precise composition of each musical theme intertwines with the development of certain characters, and of Alvin's journey. At the same time, it is an achievement of the film that these themes gradually grow to assume wider associations without loosening their intimate connection with a particular character or event. Three main musical themes emerge within the score. The score's composer, Angelo Badalamenti, names them as "Laurens, Iowa"; "Alvin's Theme"; and "Rose's Theme".⁴ The analysis moves through the themes as they are heard in the

⁴ As listed on the soundtrack album of *The Straight Story* (1999: produced by David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti, released by Windham Hill). Badalamenti recognizes a fourth theme, as the "Country Theme".

film. Accordingly, “Laurens, Iowa” is examined first, as the opening and closing music of the film. Next, “Alvin’s Theme” is explored in terms of its interrupted flow throughout *The Straight Story*. Finally, the ‘snow-balling’ effect of “Rose’s Theme” is addressed. Collectively, the significance of each theme is seen and heard to accumulate, with each subsequent sounding.

The film begins with “Laurens, Iowa”. There is a sense of distinction, of prestige, contained in the progressively deepening harmonies of this theme. In using the sweeping sounds of orchestral music at the beginning and end, the film emboldens its presence. The style of the music helps the film immediately introduce a sense of significance. Moreover, the film reinforces this sense by using the same piece of music at its furthest points. As well as grandly announcing the beginning and end of *The Straight Story*, the twinned music does so identically. As such, the theme forms two parallel designs, bolstering the film. The closing return to the impelling music of the opening moments firmly seals the film into a tight, single form. The film strengthens the effect further still, in reserving the theme of “Laurens, Iowa” exclusively for these two far points. To have heard the theme at repeated points throughout *The Straight Story* would have somewhat diluted its effect, and thus its contribution to the film’s strong sense of completeness.

Ultimately, the twinned appearance of the theme encourages the idea of Alvin’s journey taking up a small though significant place in a much greater scheme. In this sense, the visual images of these two points of the film perfectly complement the effect of the music, and vice versa. Through the opening and closing shots, the story of the pilgrimage is pressed between corresponding views of infinite space. The film pockets the prospect of Alvin’s journey into more immense vistas. The musical theme fosters the sense of the film folding its story into this great expanse. The grandiose layering of synthesized chords complements the shot of a cosmic, starry sky. The soaring swirls of notes promote the sensation of a single tale being elevated to greater heights.

As well as being alert to the expressive significance of a theme at the beginning and end of the narrative, the film weaves equally affective musical arrangements from one side to the other. Throughout the body of *The Straight Story*, musical themes and visual events evolve simultaneously. The film uses the gradual development of “Alvin’s Theme” to reflect the incremental advancement of Alvin to Lyle. The theme can be seen to develop in two ways. On one level, the music develops in terms of its compositional arrangement. On another, it builds through repeat playing, at particular points of the film. Both aspects deserve close attention. In terms of its

My own interpretation and grouping of the different melodies sees this theme as a development of “Alvin’s Theme”.

compositional development, “Alvin’s Theme” introduces a group of instruments and melodies in a precise order. Each melody is expressive of a particular aspect or characteristic of Alvin’s movements.

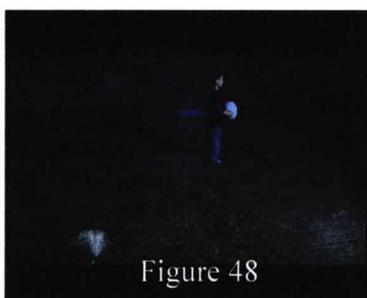
The theme is first heard at the moment of Alvin’s initial departure from Laurens. Much to the consternation of his busybody neighbours, Alvin starts his roll down the high street out of Laurens, onto the road. As he moves, his theme begins. First, a single guitar insistently plucks out a signature series of ten notes. As soon as it reaches its end, the phrase repeats itself, playing in consistent loops. The repeating phrase forms a bass-line to the music, in each individual sounding of the theme. Thus Alvin’s long journey is measured out in little, uniform loops of sound. The entire theme then starts to develop, as the sound of a yowling violin joins the dabs of guitar. The entry of the violin marks the introduction of a more sustained series of held notes. These prolonged tracts of sound are reinforced with the wail of a harmonica. The move from a tentative introduction of tones into the central guitar melody of the theme is precisely timed to mark Alvin’s own shift, from the street out onto the main road. The assertion of the strong, repeated riff matches the character’s own determination of movement. Equally, the development sets a series of lengthy tones alongside the short, clipped loops of the guitar strum. In this way, the film establishes an aural equivalent of the long stretch of road carrying consistently spaced short dashed markings. Thus, individual musical and visual details work together to evoke the incremental passage of a long, sustained journey. From this moment on, the upbeat folksy twang and chug of “Alvin’s Theme” is bound to points of physical progress. The steady momentum of the musical piece matches the measured progression of the mower on the road.

The theme shares not only the same pace as the character’s moves, but also progresses in the same piecemeal fashion as Alvin. The film repeatedly sounds “Alvin’s Theme” at moments when the character rejoins the main road from a break or pause in the journey. As Alvin recommences, so too does the music. Further, if one pays close attention to the exact points at which the film repeats the theme, it can be seen to restrict its sounding even more precisely. The theme is reserved for a small number of specific instances of ‘re-starting’. It is heard when Alvin returns to Laurens to buy the replacement mower, and as he sets off from his prolonged stay in the Riordan’s yard. In delimiting the use of the music to these instances, the film subtly expresses their bearing for Alvin. The purchase of a new mower marks the recommencement of the journey from square one. The closeness of Alvin’s new friendship with Danny means that departure from the Riordan’s home is hard to perform. In marking the culmination of these delays and hesitations, the music sounds out a little moment of straining, of Alvin having to pull away from homely surroundings back onto the road. At one and the same time, the music can also be heard in these

instances as a small fanfare for Alvin, quietly celebrating his determination to continue on with his attempt.

The film is equally meticulous in its attention to the continuity of the theme through the various points of replay. Each consecutive return of the music starts precisely where it previously ‘left off’. The first play of the theme is cut abruptly short as a speeding lorry passes Alvin’s mower on the highway. As the dash of the truck causes Alvin’s hat to blow off and the rig to seize up, the musical theme is also left suspended. Alvin is forced to return home. On the point of recuperation, as he climbs aboard his replacement mower several days later, the musical theme is finally heard again and completed. The first notes follow tunefully on from the last notes of the theme’s previous airing. The broken development of the theme precisely expresses Alvin’s attitude towards his pilgrimage. The music returns as if ‘paused’ through an interruption. In the pause and resumption of the music, the film conveys a sense of Alvin’s resilience, of calmly ‘waiting out’ the various suspensions of his journey, before continuing on at the point where he last left off. In marking the various pauses and continuations of the journey, the development of the music expresses the composure of Alvin’s underlying determination to carry on.

In “Rose’s Theme”, the film adds a further layer of development, as the significance of the music accrues at each of its various points of sounding. The film uses the development of “Rose’s Theme” to reflect the growth of greater meaning from within a momentary and seemingly insignificant episode. As the musical theme is gradually established, from collections and repetitions of certain sounds, the full meaning of the corresponding groups of images becomes gradually clearer. The theme is first heard as Rose is seen sitting at home in the evening, gazing out of the window. From her optical point of view, the film focuses on a lawn sprinkler. In the same view, a small boy chases after a runaway ball. The film repeatedly cuts back to Rose, watching her watching the boy. At this point, the profound meaning of this incident for Rose is left unclear. The moment appears a passing fancy, an incidental amusement. Yet, Rose’s expression is mute (FIGURES 47-49).



The arrangement of the music develops the curious nature of this fleeting moment. Gradually, the sound of slowly plucked guitar strings is joined by that of a languorously bowed violin. The sounds hesitantly develop into a melody. The guitar picks up pace, leading into Latin flourishes, before relinquishing the momentum once again. The tremulous sounds of the violin strings are held in plaintive waves, rising before fading, disappearing without climax. The tempo of the music appears tentative, searching. Ultimately, it fades away without resolution.

The tensions in the music reflect the ambivalence of the moment. The way minor tones give way to major; slow cadences to quick; and joyful sounds to melancholy express the quietly conflicting mix of emotions contained in the scene. At this point, the music and the moment coincide to form a niggling question, as to the significance of this brief episode, both to Rose, and in relation to the rest of the film. *The Straight Story* answers by replaying “Rose’s Theme” at particular points of Alvin’s journey. The music is heard on a number of separate occasions, within distinct episodes of the pilgrimage. As the music inflects the meaning of each particular scenario, the particular events and outcome of each scenario inflect the music. Thus, each time the music is heard, it carries with it the resonance of all previous scenes in which it appeared. In this way, meaning gradually clusters around the sound of the “Rose’s Theme”. The theme is first revisited during Alvin’s campfire conversation with the hitch-hiker. As Alvin settles down to tell the tale of Rose’s unfortunate past to his campfire companion, the musical theme begins. Simultaneously, the film moves to a flashback of Rose watching the boy with the ball. In the aural and visual returns, the music begins to establish itself as a substantial theme, to be associated with Rose. At the same time, the deep meaning of the fleeting instant of ‘the boy with the ball’ clarifies. As the film flashes back, Alvin’s revelation of the death of Rose’s son colours the view of her watching the boy at play. The news changes our relationship with the fleeting moment. It no longer appears curiously peripheral. This new interpretation of the momentary scene carries the weight of all Rose’s sadness, and of Alvin’s compassionate understanding of his daughter.

Furthermore, the significance of “Rose’s Theme” and the story it accompanies grows from the particular (Rose’s story) to assume wider connotations. Thus, in the instance above, the theme gains greater resonance as it is inflected with the telling of the hitchhiker’s own familial problems. The tensions in the music befit the specificity of this new set of circumstances equally as well as those of Rose’s own story. Just as it expresses how Rose’s painful memory is tinged with the delight of having the brief opportunity to watch a child at play again, here the music evokes the way the hitchhiker’s sadness becomes tinged with hope. Alvin’s words inspire the girl to return home to her own family. The music slowly grows in meaning and resonance. Associations ripple outwards each time it is heard, each time it accompanies the activities of another character or characters. This

effect occurs as the theme is heard again, as Alvin chastises the Olsen twins Harold (Kevin Farley) and Thorvald (John Farley), for bickering whilst mending his mower. He instructs them that, after all, “a brother’s a brother.” Increasingly, in its placement, “Rose’s Theme” absorbs many inflections of meaning. It becomes associated with all moments of family trouble presented in the film. It reflects the dual senses of discord and harmony found in each particular instance.

Ultimately, this kindred theme reflects Alvin’s own concerns about the state of his past, present and future relationship with his brother. The repetition and development of the theme act as a bridge. The theme connects the different scenarios together as parts of one greater search for familial reconciliation. As Alvin finally meets with Lyle, the musical theme is heard again. In this final moment, all the previous connotations of the theme wash together, expressing the eddy of emotions that turns at the point of reconciliation. In its associations and melodies, the theme captures the happiness and regret of the final meeting between the estranged brothers.



Chapter Five

Dissolve and Ellipsis

Dissolves allow for a breaking up and passing through of images in film; ellipses enact omissions. In narrative cinema, the devices are used to truncate measures of time and space, eradicating 'dead moments' and connecting disparate events, periods or locations. The handling of the two elements in *The Straight Story* and *The Age of Innocence* holds true to these principles of compression; yet equally, in these two films, the use of dissolves and ellipses provides more than a means of truncation and transition from point 'a' to point 'b'. In the films, dissolves and ellipses are the visual methods of conveying shifts in the characters' moods, circumstances and relationships, in the face of surrounding dramatic events.

In *The Straight Story* and *The Age of Innocence*, dissolves and ellipses create condensations of substantial tracts of time and space. In the first film, an extensive period of traveling is compacted; in the second, lifetimes are surveyed in abridged form. The flow of these longer, dramatic courses is precisely measured. In some instances, by dissolve and ellipsis, an apparently minor happening is heightened in dramatic intensity; in others, the act of compression conceals or reduces its bearing. Elsewhere, momentary events encapsulate the characters' wider circumstances. The films pay particular attention to patterns emerging in compressions, of colour, texture and shape. Equally, in both films, the process of measurement is keyed closely to expressions of the characters' attitude and experience, of particular events. Dissolves and ellipses convey particular grades of weariness, sorrow, or pleasure that suddenly emerge, or accrue over time.

In *The Straight Story*, dissolves and ellipsis compress passages of traveling and waiting, expressing the pleasures of process and progress. Through Alvin's journey, spontaneous and passing events are experienced and appreciated as momentary. Conversely, *The Age of Innocence* is alert to the way the New York aristocracy constructs each 'Event' as a significant happening. As each Dinner and Ball is shaped through meticulous attention and adherence to 'Form' and detail, any intrusive element of 'unpleasantness' is instantly elided or closed over. Further, through dissolves and ellipsis, the film measures the impact of each 'ceremony' on Archer and Ellen. Passing instances gain in private measures of intensity for the couple; prolonged periods apart become empty, hollowed out.



The Straight Story

Compressions of Travelling

In *The Straight Story*, a journey of months is compacted into an hour and a half of travelling. As the film shows the road in long-shots at precise times, it shortens the way through ellipses. It creates a condensation of Alvin's pilgrimage. Akin to the particular form and effect of the long-shots, the film uses the techniques to bypass the idea of an onerous voyage over great lands. It chooses not to stress or measure the toll of each step of the journey. Rather, the careful elision and bridging of points express the even restraint and discipline of Alvin's efforts. Equally, the tight presentation of the journey, and of experiences along the way, increases the sense of closeness between the individual traveller and the road travelled.

Through a truncation of Alvin's various pauses and turns, *The Straight Story* draws attention to the fleeting nature of each instant. At points, the film cuts to the heart of an episode (in the passage of the cyclists, crossing the bridge over the Mississippi, and the interval in the graveyard). This concentration draws into focus the individual essence or spirit of each moment. In emphasizing the brevity of passing instances, the film highlights their ephemeral nature. In turn, it encapsulates a sense of the moments' uniqueness. At other points, the film chooses to remove the core of an incident, concentrating on the moments surrounding the little event (passing the benchmark of the Grotto, and in the final meeting with Lyle). It removes or minimizes the consummation of an 'Incident'. In doing so, the film reorients our attention towards the significance of seemingly negligible moments of passing. It points to the pleasures found in the act and process of journeying as equivalent to those of arriving. The two forms of ellipses vivify Alvin's experiences on the road. Each short-lived happening is filled with vitality. The same richness is felt in the neighbouring moments of movement. The film compacts and marries all scenes – those remarkable and those accompanying times – as they arise and pass. In turn, the moments seem to accrue naturally, as part of one distinctive experience.

In the course of the journey, two related patterns of such moments can be seen to emerge. As Alvin turns off the road, pausing the pilgrimage, the film uses ellipses and dissolves to compress moments of waiting. Equally, in moments of Alvin's progress, the film creates miniature expressions of distance travelled. The following analysis addresses instances from the two groups in turn. One striking instance of 'waiting' occurs as Alvin shelters in the barn from the storm. Through Alvin's waiting in the barn, we see how the passing of the storm is carefully compressed. Further, we see how the compression is steadily revealed. The film first lingers on the rain-soaked fields, seen in a khaki wash of browns, greens and greys. The camera pans inchmeal across the turf, over to the road. As it reaches the near side of the highway a cut moves to a close shot of Alvin. He is

seen settled under the arches, set to watch and patiently wait out the rain. The film slowly dissolves from Alvin's serene expression into a sweeping view of the revived landscape. Picking up the road at the precise point of the last long-shot's departure, the camera continues the pan, now crossing the muddy green grassland into fresh yellow crop-fields (FIGURES 50-52).

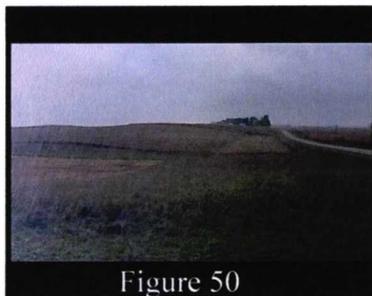


Figure 50

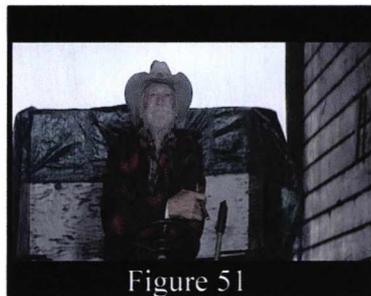


Figure 51



Figure 52

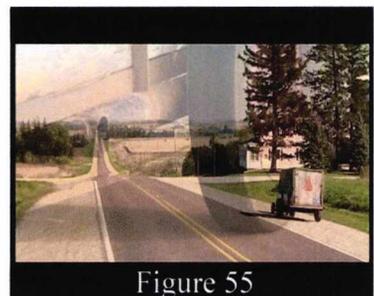
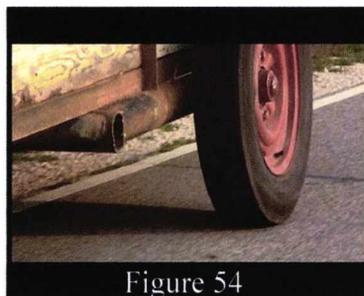
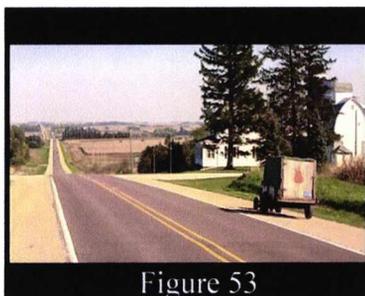
The slow bleed of the dissolve allows for a subtle transition of the time, the weather conditions, and the appearance of the terrain. At the same time, it provides a quiet elision of Alvin's prolonged period of rest. Different palettes of colour form bookends to the move. In turn, the film captures the mood of the same place seen in two contrasting states. The shift from weatherworn to sunny is mediated through the close-up of Alvin. The changing states connect with and through Alvin. As the shots of the landscape are filtered through his image, the relation between man and land is tighter entwined. Further, the colours of the close shot integrate those of the two landscape views during and after the storm. The dirty greens of the trailer's tarpaulin tone with those of the sodden grass. At the same time, the burnt crimson of Alvin's jacket corresponds with the glowing amber of the wheat. The combination of colours closely associates character and landscape. Moreover, it smoothes the transition of different views of the land. In both instances, the single, intermediary shot of the traveller is crucial to the presentation of the broader vista.

The diffusion of colour can also be seen to echo the way the shades of the landscape would alter naturally and gradually alter in 'real time'. That is to say, the passage through the three shots creates a subtle, scaled-down version of the storm's overall effects on the appearance of the countryside. Congruently, the camera movement echoes the measure of Alvin's journey. The film takes up the image of the road precisely where it 'left off', moving to Alvin's close-up. The camera returns to the road, directly after the mediation of a short break. Passing back to the same place on the roadside after the gap of a pause, the sequence is a little model of Alvin's actions. Through the ellipsis and dissolve, the film forms a new, miniature version of an occurrence. It is an achievement of the film that although it is shortened, the moment seems in some way complete, in and of itself. Similarly, the film balances sameness and difference in the use of colour and camera angles to carry

the moment on. It creates a unique, concise experience whilst preserving the organic cohesion of the journey.

As with the compression of the pause, the film also carefully joins points of physical progress. The condensation of lengthy periods of travel is achieved incrementally in the delicate ellipse and bleed of dissolves. Two examples show how the film develops the effect through the journey. The examples move from the film's treatment of Alvin's passage along the main road, to connections of disparate locations across the journey. First, the film can be seen to abridge the mower's progress along the guiding track of the road. As well as abbreviating the mower's slow crawl over long distances, the film also captures particular rhythms of travel within the ellipses.

In one such instance, occurring just prior to the appearance of the sheltering barn, a tight series of shots conveys the mower's continuing passage over the hilly contours of the highway. Rather than repeatedly show the mower rising and falling with the road, the film encapsulates a sense of the passage with a single dissolve (FIGURES 53-55).



In the tight series of views, the film expresses Alvin's movements over, as the character later declares, "[that] hill and two hundred just like it." In the opening shot, the camera gradually withdraws from the side of the mower as Alvin drives up the road. As the lens moves from right to left, it slowly discloses broader views of the highway, seen stretching into the distance. In this particular expanse, the form of the road is seen to follow the ridges of the landscape, dipping and rising in a series of slopes. The road stretches diagonally across the frame, from bottom right to top left. In a cut, the film brings in a close-up shot of the mower's wheel. The wheel is shown as set diagonally down the frame, rolling from top right to bottom left. The angle of the close-up indicates the mower's move downhill. Moreover, the strong diagonal line within the shot directionally opposes that of the road stretching across the frame in the previous shot. The film bleeds together the contrasting lines through a dissolve. The shape of the wheel's trajectory cuts through the line of the road. In the dissolve, through a careful arrangement of angles and shapes, the film encapsulates the mower's ongoing negotiations of the contours of the road. The dissolve conveys not only

Alvin's repeated passes downhill, but also carries a sense of toil, of the mower's 'cutting across' substantial tracts of land. It expresses the mower's and character's achievement of a little goal, of tackling the hillock. The crosshatch of contrasting diagonal lines expresses a point and measure of transition, of the performance of one 'stroke' of the journey. Single, fleeting images stand in place of the mower's repeated rise and fall along the expanse of the route.

As well as expressing the manner of the mower's passage along the road, the film also uses ellipses and dissolves in moments of travel to combine disparate locations. At points, the film shifts its focus from the road to occurrences elsewhere. After a glimpse of other events, the focus returns to the highway. As such, the brief connection with a separate place inflects the experience of Alvin's ongoing journey. Such an instance occurs on the point of Alvin's initial departure from Laurens. The mower is first shown rolling heavily up the road, tight to the right hand side of track and frame. In a dissolve, the long shot merges with a close view of two farm machines at work in the field (FIGURE 56).

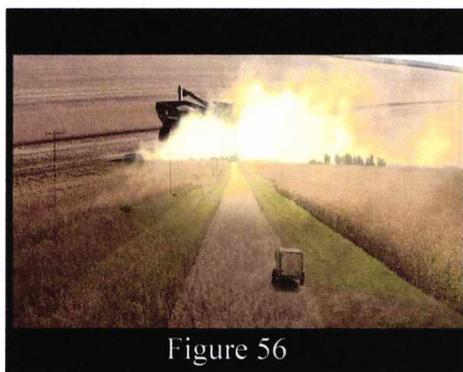


Figure 56

The camera slowly moves around the rigs. A further dissolve returns the focus to the road. Alvin is seen to have made some progress. A previous scattering of houses and waving on-lookers has been replaced by stretches of open land. In the dissolve from road to field, the film merges two different locations with smoothness and softness. The slow bleed creates a cushioned transition. The gritty texture of the road melts into the cushioning reeds of crops. A smoky waft of crop-dust adds a further filter to the fusion of the dissolve. Within the dissolve and a semi-circular turn, the camera briefly shows the harvesters rolling vertically up a straight track of furrowed land. The composition chimes with that of the long shot, of Alvin's own pathway. Both harvesters and mower are shown to move forward amidst surrounding expanses of upright crops.

In the shapes, textures and dissolve of two long shots, the film points up affinities found in Alvin's journey and the harvesters' range. Both locations harbour two mechanical rigs moving people across the land. Alvin's trailer is coupled to the mower. The harvesting machines are linked

by a metal arm, stretching from truck to tractor, feeding seed from one to the other. As the wheels of Alvin's rig move in tandem, the harvesters work together to keep snugly adjacent, sharing pace. In turn, the connection between both sets of apparatus and activities suggests that they too are part of a greater whole. In both settings, each piece of equipment performs a different role. The trailer carries Alvin's belongings. The arm shucks the crop. At the same time, they form integral parts of a single, larger task. Alvin's rig pulls him to Lyle while the harvesters yield the crop. The film shows that Alvin and the farm hands share common ground. Alvin is not a superficial tourist of the countryside, merely 'passing through'. Like the harvesters, he uses the land. Like them, he is dependent upon it, relying on it to provide support. The suggestion promotes a sense of organic integrity. Instead of producing divisions and fragmentation, the film's move between different locations and events creates cohesion. Alvin is seen as one of many parts, deeply connected to the composite landscape.

Further, in moving momentarily to the image of the harvesters, the film does more than bind the places and actions together. It continues a sense of Alvin's slow progress within the harvesters' own rotations. The film enhances the sensation in the camera's continuous cycle around the machines. Shot and wheels turn together. Thus, through the dissolves, the film establishes a rhythm of movement that is not only shared by harvesters and mower, but also wholly created within the moment of their juxtaposition. The passage between the two subjects shows how, in the slow progression of his journey, Alvin assumes the patient pace of the farmer, tracing over the land. The film suggests how Alvin is reverting to the natural cadence of a cycle of movements, passing over the land with the harvesters, progressively reaping his own rewards.

One final example shows how the film also uses ellipses and dissolves to explore particular, defining moments of travel. In the following instance, as per the previous example, the film combines two disparate locations in a dissolve. In this instance, it expresses the complexity of Alvin's feelings about the pilgrimage by pairing moments of departure.

When Alvin's mower breaks down on the road, he is forced to return to Laurens, and start his journey again. A dissolve joins the scene of Alvin collecting his replacement mower from Tom 'the John Deere dealer' (Everett McGill), to a view of Rose waving him goodbye. In the dissolve, the film elides Alvin's return to the house. It passes over any discussions between Rose and Alvin. It chooses not to show the old man's preparations to leave his daughter once more. On the surface, both the ellipse and Alvin's movements appear to be easily achieved. As with the combined sight of mower and harvester, the film is sensitive to the similarities existing between two disparate events.

In presenting likenesses, it unites the occasions. Yet, at the same time, it simultaneously comments on their individual qualities.

The film merges the two events on the point of their conclusion. The mower salesman stands watching Alvin pull out of his yard, and the film bleeds in the later sight of Rose marking her father's departure from their yard. In the mower park, Alvin's leave-taking is achieved in a clipped fashion. The balanced composition of the long shot shows him moving away in neat, straight lines: from right to left of the frame and yard, up and out. An upright window strut in the middle of the frame bolsters the sense of a straightforward transaction and departure: straight lines, decent dealings, direct exit. However, a sense of reticence marks Alvin's subsequent removal from his daughter. The camera slowly withdraws from Rose, arcing around her in a lingering curl.

The film creates a further pang of upset in the dissolve between events. As with the view of Alvin moving 'against the grain' of the landscape, the sensation only lasts within the space of the dissolve. As the film bleeds together the spaces, the dividing window bar of the mower salesman's office is seen to separate Alvin from Rose (FIGURES 57-59).



Figure 57



Figure 58



Figure 59

The father, in one place, is simultaneously connected with and divided from his daughter in another. The film creates a subtle, fleeting expression of how Alvin will miss his daughter, whilst out on the road. Moreover, the wrench of their prolonged separation (the length of Alvin's pilgrimage), is expressed in a momentary fusion of two unconnected places. The effect comes only from and within the convergence of two seemingly separate moments. The film expresses the complexity of the sensation of 'missing someone' in the connection of distinct moments of departure. The twinge of feeling created in the passing of the dissolve captures Alvin's sense of the necessary sorrow of leaving Rose, of enduring the absence of his daughter to complete the journey to his brother.



The Age of Innocence

Elisions of a Lifetime

The scattered, passionate meetings of Archer and Ellen are encompassed by the broader circumstances of Society life. Yet, the surrounding affairs of New York share particular aspects with the lovers' brief rendezvous. Each encompassing scenario is presented in a particular form of compression. At points, extensive periods are condensed into passing moments. At others, the film trims and bridges individual happenings in a 'Society Event', compressing even the slightest occurrences of the elite world. As a result, all events surrounding the lovers' meetings take the form of compact vignettes.

The film condenses each episode with ellipses and dissolves. Akin to the strategies of *The Straight Story*, *The Age of Innocence* deftly uses ellipses to compress time. As the ellipses of *The Straight Story* compact an extensive journey, those of *The Age of Innocence* mark and concentrate specific stages of the characters' lives. Yet, there is also a significant distinction. *The Straight Story* is particularly interested in the transitory images that form in the middle of an eliding dissolve between two moments. In contrast, the attention of *The Age of Innocence* is focused on the moments surrounding the ellipses. These peripheral points, of passing words and gestures, 'stand in' for the details absented in the elision. They do duty for the 'unsaid' and 'unseen'. At the same time, they draw attention to the omissions, emphasizing what is left out of the aristocracy's colourful histories.

Following this distinction, there are two different, though interrelated ways in which *The Age of Innocence* creates ellipses of events: as those within, and those acting for the events. As a basic distinction, the ellipses within events are expressed visually – in dissolves and camera movements – whereas the ellipses around events are marked verbally, in passages of dialogue. (Yet, as is shown, the differences in the designs of both strands are more fine-grained than this primary division allows). Through ellipses within events, the film presents distinct episodes and occasions in varying measures of extensiveness. That is to say, although all Society occasions are compressed into individual vignettes, some occupy a greater part of the narrative than others do. Thus, the Beaufort Ball is detailed in meticulous measure. Conversely, the wedding of Archer and May is encapsulated in a few, brief dissolves. The film alters the magnitude of its ellipses within events to grade the significance of certain occasions for the members of this society, and for individual characters.

At other times, the film removes the 'core' of an event entirely. The fact of a particular happening is marked by its elision. Further, the missing detail of the event is replaced with inference and suggestion. That is to say, instead of witnessing a set of circumstances, characters and viewer alike hear about it in passing snippets of dialogue. Thus, although the philandering Beaufort

is rarely seen, whispered accounts of his affairs (past and present) marble the film. Equally, both Archer and viewer are denied direct intelligence of the true tone of May's "wonderful talks" with Ellen. Instead, the content of these crucial little meetings is trimmed into May's 'innocuous' recounting to Archer.¹ The details of Ellen's own personal history are scattered through the film. Yet, they come piecemeal as snatches of gossip, and from disparate sources. Likewise, the shifting particulars of her divorce seep into the narrative, through a fragmented series of meetings between the barrister Letterblair, Archer, and the Countess herself. The true measure of her relationship with the Count's secretary (Monsieur Rivière) is never ascertained, remaining instead as a confusion of rumours and glances.

In creating ellipses of and around the core of particular affairs, the film shows how the characters' lives are filled with intimation, circumscribed by murmurs of suspicion. As the film's narrator marks, the characters belong to a society in which, "the real thing was never said or done or even thought," a world "balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper." Indeed, it is precisely the fragility of the society that promotes a desire to keep all potentially damaging 'un-pleasantries' hidden, denied, or better still, completely eradicated. As Ellen plaintively demands of Archer as they sit together in her apartment, "Does no-one here want to know the truth...?" Altogether, through ellipses around events, the film shows how this insular society preserves itself by maintaining a vacuum at the centre of its affairs.

The focus of this study, however, will be on the first strand of ellipses, on those composing and compressing the body of an event. The form of the ellipses within events can be seen to vary significantly. In each case, the film encapsulates an individual episode or period. It maintains a sense of the whole of each event (each Dinner, Concert and Ball), whilst abridging the time taken for the occasion to pass. At the same time, the particular meaning of each event is expressed through a particular use of ellipses. Three key grades of compression can be noted, together with corresponding instances to be analyzed further. Firstly, at certain points, the film creates tiny compressions of time, eliding mere minutes or seconds of a passing action. It chooses to present the 'Duke of St. Austrey Dinner' in this way. Secondly, on other occasions, the film uses ellipses to convey the evanescence of a single, extended event. Both the wedding and honeymoon of Archer and May are presented accordingly. Finally, in its penultimate sequence, the film compacts many

¹ After a number of 'incidental' *tête-à-têtes* (at Mrs. Mingotts' house, at dinner), the seemingly ingenuous May dispatches a letter to Ellen, announcing her hastened wedding date. The announcement appears to come before Archer is informed himself. (Wryly, Archer discovers the news during one of his own private meetings with Ellen). Later, May hints at the most influential of her "wonderful talks" with Ellen in a couple of passing asides to her husband. Unbeknownst to Archer, May has revealed her certainty that she is pregnant, to Ellen. *How* she chooses to declare this excoriating confidence to Ellen remains occluded. The announcement leads to the removal of the Countess from New York Society, away from Archer.

years of Archer's life into a single, unbroken movement of dissolves. Thus, differences in the amount of time compressed (seconds, minutes, days, years) are coupled with correspondingly distinct styles of compression.

To mark the occasion of the Duke of St. Austrey Dinner, the film marries repeated ellipses of tiny increments of time with a focus on minutiae. The course of the Dinner itself is shaped by multiple, dissolving views of ornate articles, set out for the guests to admire. Throughout the event, the attention of the camera is on the *objets* and paraphernalia of 'grand entertaining', not on the guests themselves. In turn, the significance of the occasion, for the characters, is refracted through this close study of trappings. Primarily, the steady focus and magnification of little, delicate objects makes a prominent point to guests and viewer alike. As Joy L. Davis remarks of this scenario, "Crystal, china, centrepieces, silverware advertise their [the Van der Luydens'] affluence, their cultural heritage, and their aesthetic taste."² Further, the scrutiny allows the camera to obsess over the objects, as the people of this world would do. (Equally, it permits our own close inspection of the trappings).

The film deepens the effect through the style of its movements through the views. As well as magnifying the articles, the camera pans slowly over them, as if traversing a meticulously crafted landscape. Moreover, whilst maintaining a fluid pan over the objects, the film condenses its perusal into a series of dissolves. A graceful, passing view of one decorative plate or bowl bleeds into another. Through the dissolving moves, the film captures a particular manner of scrutiny. In abstract form, it conveys the way the guests of this elite event might survey the scene. Thus, in the smoothness of its close passes over the ornate pieces, the camera performs an intense, yet apparently casual inspection of the items. Further, in bleeding together views of small clusters of articles, the film captures the sense of someone 'taking it all in, all at once', whilst noting, in passing, individual details.

At the same time, the design of the camera's moves highlights the careful arrangement of the objects themselves. The passing views follow a precise rhythm, with the camera repeatedly moving from right to left over one piece, then left to right over the next. Each move is synchronized with the passing of each dissolve. A remark by V. F. Perkins, on the precise rhythms of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, is particularly pertinent here. Perkins observes that, "[the camera movement's] unhurried fluidity enhances the sumptuousness of the display."³ The observation is

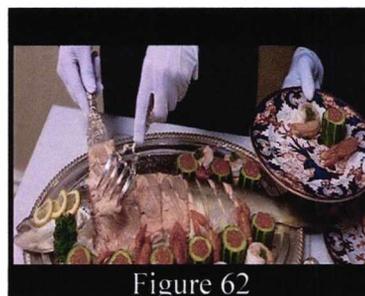
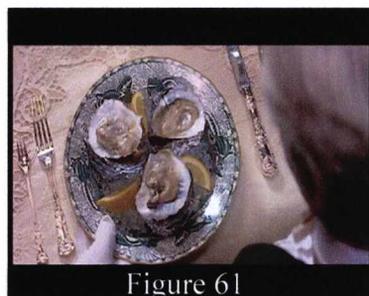
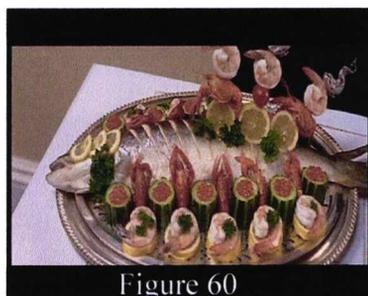
² Joy L. Davis, 'The Rituals of Dining in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*', p. 466.

³ V. F. Perkins, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (London: BFI, 1990), p.46

equally applicable here, as the refinement of each edit and move matches the elegance of the pieces exhibited, and the form of their exhibition.

Furthermore, in *The Age of Innocence*, the careful patterning of views suggests an all-encompassing sense of order. The regular pace of each dissolve to the next piece matches the symmetry of each move. The film measures out the entire Dinner in this fashion, passing through close dissolves of crystal and china to flowers and food. The rigid structure of the moves is held in tension with their easy grace. As such, there is a mechanical elegance to the movements. With each dissolve, the film shows how, for the aristocracy, each movement is bound by a strict ordinance of rituals and routines.

Even the slightest act is imbued with this governing sense of ceremony. As dinner is served, the camera continues its fluent appraisal of the event. It attends to the fine detail of the food. Each dish has the same, ornate elegance as the trinkets on display. The camera focuses momentarily on a meticulously presented platter of whole salmon. Through a series of dissolves, the film traces the serving of the dish, from platter to individual plate (FIGURES 60-62).



The action takes the form of a “momentary ceremonial.”⁴ It is a fleeting moment, fluidly presented in the continuous glide of the camera, and through the bleed of the dissolves. Yet, this trifling act is performed with great procedure. The food is served with fastidious care by the serving staff. The camera's trace matches the precise, dignified moves of the waiter. It continues the symmetrical patterning of moves across the objects, passing right to left, left to right. In turn, the rhythms of this minor act, of the serving of one dish, feed into the flow of the event of the Dinner as a whole.

Moreover, the mechanical grace of the act conceals a crucial omission. Through a dissolve, the act of the waiter skinning the fish before serving is elided. In its place, the film bleeds in an

⁴ In ‘Time’s Covetousness’, Leslie Stern describes another scene in the film thus, as Archer delicately removes Ellen’s glove in a stolen moment ‘in carriage’: “Through a series of dissolves he takes one of his gloves off and touches a pearl button on her wrist. The buttons are undone. Prising apart the glove’s opening he sinks his face into the inside of her wrist. A momentary ceremonial.” p. 225.

intermediary view of another dish, of a plate of prepared oysters. It offers a momentary diversion before dissolving back to the dressed fish. The miniscule, seemingly inconsequential elision carries a significant resonance. In the dissolve and ellipsis, the film removes the ‘vulgar’ sight of the fish being skinned. At the same time, the elision is barely noticeable, as the moment is carried through in a rhythmic flow of moves and views. Thus, an ‘unsightly moment’ goes unseen. For the members of this aristocratic elite, all activities they consider to be unsightly are elided, however trivial or momentous. Through the ellipsis of a passing moment, the film shows how the mechanical grace of their rituals and routines absorbs such ‘un-pleasantries’ with absolute ease.

The occasion of Archer’s marriage to May is presented with similar, mechanical grace. Again, the film uses a careful patterning of dissolves and ellipses to compress a grand Society event, and to measure the ceremonious form of the affair. Yet, in this instance, the compact views are individually inflected. The precise use of dissolves and ellipses expresses Archer’s personal overview of the occasion. Whereas each moment spent with Ellen appears enchantingly prolonged, his wedding to May is quickly passed over, marked in a matter of minutes. The film’s brief treatment of the event makes it appear more as a glancing disturbance in the order of things, than a benchmark occasion. As such, the elliptical views form more of a contraction, than a concentration, of events.

Both wedding and honeymoon are presented as lifeless occasions. They are marked in a dissolving flow through fixed tableaux. The film bleeds together views of the wedding gifts – glasses, silverware – as the narrator recounts the bare-bones facts of the day. In turn, the honeymoon – an extended trip to Europe – is compressed into a passing series of painted vistas. In both instances, fleeting images of *objet d’art* replace views of the newlyweds themselves. Equally, the presence of the guests and well-wishers remains invisible, or rather, is represented by the gifts. For the honeymoon, all human activity is sketched onto canvas, as static illustrations. Throughout the sequence, people are substituted by ‘things’, by a series of tokens. Whilst noting the overwhelming importance of such trappings for this society, the film appears to strip the wedding of human involvement. The only activity of the inert scene comes from the camera’s movement over the fixed compositions, and the passing dissolves through the views. Thus, the procedure of the social ceremony – the wedding day, the honeymoon – is marked by, reduced to even, the mechanical process of the film’s own movements.

Yet at the same time, the particular nature of each mechanical movement can be seen to express a form of human influence. Primarily, the influence of the aristocracy as a collective can be detected, as guiding the form of the couple’s matrimonial affairs. Marking ‘the honeymoon’, the

camera's rhythmic tracing of painted scenes (from top to bottom, left to right) recalls its strictly ordered moves at the Duke's Dinner. In this instance, the patterned movements are carried out as the narrator dictates the details of the occasion, of how the couple travels to "all the expected places." Accordingly, the film skips through a series of impersonal, painted 'snap-shots' of London and Paris: Westminster, the National Gallery, the Tuilleries Gardens. Thus, the tight order of camera moves matches the brisk 'stepping through' of the "expected" vistas. Altogether, there is a sense of the pre-ordained, of Society's government of the couple's every move. Their honeymoon is prescribed by 'Form'. Convention and tradition strip the occasion of individual personality, reducing it to a series of required moves.⁵ The use of dissolves heightens the sense of the couple being effortlessly guided through the event.

At the same time, if we are to understand the sequence as infused with Archer's own sensibility, then these mechanical rhythms of compression can also be seen as particularly expressive of his passage through the event. In this brief sequence, the film marries a sense of Archer being 'carried through' the wedding (by prescribed procedure), with a sense of his personal, emotional detachment from the event. On one level, the camera's course over the surface of things, of gifts and canvas, conveys the superficial nature of Archer's involvement in the occasion. Equally, the tight order of the moves expresses, in abstract form, a sense of Archer 'going through the motions.' Camera and character move in step and with pliancy through a set pattern of events.

In the closing moments of the sequence, the film uses a final ellipsis to suggest how Archer also sleepwalks through an extended period of his marriage, after the wedding. The couple is shown in close-up, in the honeymoon carriage. Gradually, from the far sides of the frame, the film blacks out the image, pushing inwards (FIGURE 63).

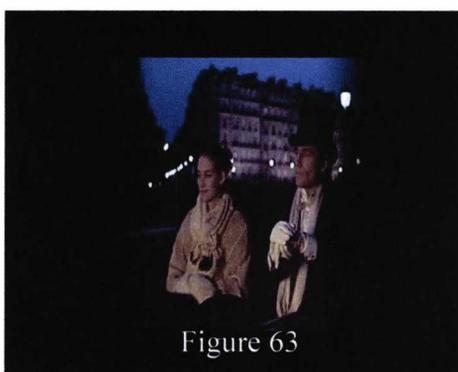


Figure 63

The movement (together with the narrator's elegiac phrasing) gives the scene a sense of closure. Shutters are being softly drawn on the honeymoon. Archer's tentative hold on events loosens

⁵ In the same vein, Mrs. Mingott presses upon May the necessity to have her hands sculpted by "the great Rochet." This May dutifully performs, on the honeymoon trip.

entirely. It is as if both Archer and the film are drifting into sleep. Yet, the sense of closure is short-lived, the sleep interrupted. After a moment's pause, the scene re-awakens. The black shutters of the fade open again. The characters are once more seen sitting side by side in carriage. However, within this brief, sleepy wink of a fade (and following the narrator's commentary), the film compresses the first six months of Archer's marriage to May. Compared to the iridescence of moments spent with Ellen, this period is so vapid for Archer that it disappears, in the fug of a doze. Through the sequence, to the last ellipsis, the film expresses Archer's indifference to the passage of his life with May. Ultimately, he submits himself to eddying turns of the social 'Season', allowing procedure to carry him. (A further, white fade engulfs the scene, carrying the couple forward in time, to May's triumphant performance at the Archery Club). The hollowness of his experience is as much marked by the eclipsed moments between events, as it is by the evanescence of the occasions themselves.

Towards the end of the film however, one moment with May is made piercingly alive for Archer. Any remaining hope of his to rekindle a relationship with Ellen is definitively snuffed out, as May announces her pregnancy. In an instant, Archer is locked into his life in New York. His vision of the world, previously filled with images of Japan and plans to travel, suddenly contracts. You feel he can see the remaining years of his life spanning in front of him, heretofore complete.⁶ The film combines all of these sensations in one fluid movement. Even before the news is allowed time to 'sink in', the camera arcs away from Archer, around the room. Again, Archer's life is being carried along in eddies of governing circumstance. This time, with all prospects of seeing Ellen again now gone, his submission is absolute. Eddies collect into a single, slow swirl of passing time. Decades of Archer's life now quickly dissolve in the unbroken arc of the circling camera. The portrait of his personal history is reduced to a single vignette of a single room. As the camera continually traces around the chamber, the sense of entrapment, of 'going nowhere, going round in circles' is starkly expressed.

The affairs of Archer's family life also appear to contract into this one small space; as the narrator observes, "It was the room in which most of the real things of his life had happened." Through ellipses, significant events are compressed together: the christening of Archer's eldest son Ted, the announcement of his daughter Mary's engagement, her wedding day. Through dissolves,

⁶ Martin Scorsese provides an insightful passage of commentary to further this notion: "Later on I figured out that as she gets up from the chair we should do it in three cuts, three separate close-ups because I think he'll never forget that moment the rest of his life. I think he'll play it back many times. When she gets up I thought we should play it back like a memory. It's a medium shot, then a shot of her coming into the frame, and then a third one – she almost grows in stature. It's just his perception, his memory of what it's going to be like." Taken from 'Street Smart: An Interview with Martin Scorsese', Gavin Smith, *Film Comment* (May/June 1998), p. 72.

the events are reduced to glimpses of defining gestures: the baptism of the child, embraces between May and Mary, Archer and Mary. Each glimpsed event, although significant, appears intangible. The continuous revolution of the camera around the room, and the rhythmic flow of dissolves disallow a prolonged marking of the events individually. As soon as it is witnessed, each event ebbs into the governing flow of motion. Momentous occasions are seen in passing, passed over.

This sense of impalpability extends to the views of the room itself. Through a gradual progression of ellipses, the design of the room alters by slight degrees. From the middle of the room, the camera traces smoothly over the walls and furnishings. Through dissolves, the style of particular objects – table lamps, a desk chair – changes with the period. The changes are moderate, yet collectively transformative. Altogether, the film creates a continuously shifting sketch of the room, re-designing itself through the years. As a result, this solid place, filled with a lifelong collection of personal mementos (the sculpture of May's hands; the photograph of her archery triumph), is presented in a constant state of flux. The established and fixed parts of Archer's life are also insubstantial, uncertain.

The film deepens the sense of displacement through the measure of each dissolve. It inverts the expected relationship between the amount of time elided and the amount of space covered in a dissolve. In this sequence, the more fractional a move, the more extensive the temporal period covered. Thus, instead of an inchmeal movement between two points in the room conveying the ellipsis of a few seconds (as in the 'Duke's Dinner' sequence), here it compresses many years of Archer's history. The dissolve is almost imperceptible. The camera passes slowly across Archer's desk. In the move, the image of the desk chair bleeds into a more modern design. In the space of the bleed, the film seamlessly connects together the moment of Ted's christening with the announcement of Mary's engagement.

Conversely, a more prolonged and discernible dissolve is performed without the elision of any time at all. For Ted's baptism, the camera strokes past the assembled group of Archer, family, and priest. A lap dissolve moves through views of the wetting of the baby's head. Yet, the move does not condense the moment, or connect it immediately with a future event. Instead, the movement chimes with a moment described in the previous section, of Archer watching Ellen across the room at the Duke's Dinner. In both instances, the film momentarily breaks the continuity of a particular view, without interrupting the flow of the sequence. Whereas in the earlier instance the effect conveys the intensity of Archer's gaze, on this occasion it emphasizes his displacement from an event. The dissolve fragments the sight of the baptism as it takes place. In troubling the association between the amount of time and space covered in a dissolve, the film expresses Archer's sense of disconnection from the events of his enclosed world.

Throughout the compact scene, the camera traces the circumference of the room, from a fixed central position. In turn, the “real things” of Archer’s life are performed against a mercurial backdrop of changing surfaces. Events and objects shift together to form a tableau, moving continuously across the walls of the room. The centre of the room remains unseen. From this perspective, the film encapsulates the sense of Archer’s life with May as hollow, as devoid of a core. The absence of Ellen creates a lack at the centre of his being. In this brief moment, Archer’s later life is reduced to a series of ephemeral images, encompassing a void.



Chapter Six

Position and Perspective

Drawing together the concerns of the thesis, this final chapter reaches back to considerations of place and patterning, to extend thoughts on the way that camera and character negotiate their wider environments. As Chapter 1 considers the films' shaping of panoramic vistas and patterning of settings, this section attends to aspects of viewpoint and focus, on the way particular details are brought out across the breadth and width of the surroundings. It concentrates on the films' channels of attention.

The terms 'position' and 'perspective' refer to the distinct, interrelated ways the film's camera and characters are situated in, and make sense of, different environments. The placement of the camera, in distance and angle, offers particular, graded perspectives on the events of the film. The precise and changing position of the characters is equally significant, as they move and look around the landscapes and locales. The form and shifts of the relationship between the two, between camera and character, forms a further level of meaning. At points, they may share a viewpoint, in the film's alignment of angles, patterns of views, or use of optical point of view (POV). At others, the camera's perspective on an event may contrast, in degrees, with the position of the character. In all instances, the grades of spatial proximity and positioning are tightly linked with attitudinal characteristics. That is to say, the particular positions adopted by camera and character express the way the character and the film *stand towards* an event. There is a mutuality of consideration between the camera and characters' stance and point of focus. It is in the organization of positions and perspectives that the films convey their viewpoint.

The Age of Innocence creates an overture of looks, of glimpses, glances and glares. At points, camera and characters catch glances of peripheral views and details in larger events. The details are spatially positioned 'on the edge' or appear non-prominent in temporal terms, in their transient presence. In other instances, the film intensifies the act of 'focusing in', of highlighting and scrutinizing a particular detail or happening. In all cases, in the positioning and perspective of camera and character, *The Age of Innocence* explores the desire to hold onto particular moments, even as they pass. Conversely, *The Straight Story* handles aspects of focus and viewpoint to express the appreciation of passing details in a wider environment. Glanced details are measured and enjoyed as ephemeral, with the jolt, frisson or twinge of intensity registered in the moment of discovery passing into a lasting sense of resonance. In *The Bridges of Madison County*, camera and character piece together a mosaic of stolen glances and restricted views. As Robert and Francesca

seek positions of reassurance, the film explores their shifting perspectives of each other, considering, as they do, where they stand. In all three films, aspects of position and perspective form ongoing, shifting negotiations of standpoints and viewpoints, bringing out the characters' considerations of their world and of each other.



The Age of Innocence

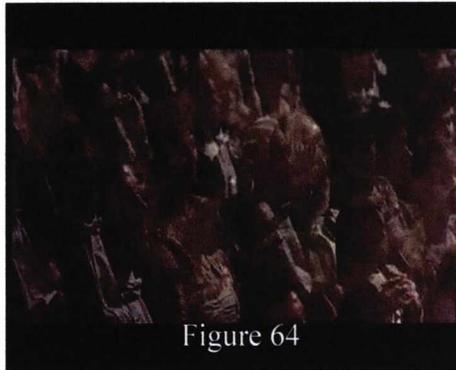
Focusing In

In measuring the evanescence of Archer and Ellen's fragments of shared time in gesture and word, and forming compact ellipses of seemingly momentous events, the film creates an elaborate panorama of the entire New York world through passing glimpses. As each moment flutters by, the camera catches at details in ephemeral views. The film immediately introduces this way of seeing the world, in the opening sequence at the opera. It presents an overture of glances. It composes a series of disparate, fleeting vistas of the setting (the hall) and the assembly of characters (the opera audience). The viewpoint changes constantly, as the film moves from extreme close-up to long-shot, and back again. It combines glimpses of singular details and expansive views. As the camera strokes over passing features, they collect: a yellow chrysanthemum plucked on-stage, Archer's buttonhole white rose, a row of white stage lights, the glimmer of an earring, a chain of uniformly suited men. Altogether, in a shifting flurry of shots, the film creates a kaleidoscopic view of Society 'at leisure'.

This sense is heightened as the camera assumes the viewpoint of "New York's foremost authority on 'Form'" Larry Lefferts.¹ Lefferts and camera scrutinize the assembled crowds through the lens of a pair of opera eyeglasses. The view of the scene is concentrated to that of one discriminating character, through the narrow scope of the lorgnettes. Yet, the film does not immediately present a concentration of images. Instead, as camera and glasses pass over the amassed crowds, the scene remains as a nebulous whole. Particular, passing views of the grand room are fanned together (FIGURE 64). The camera flutters over the scenario, as Lefferts searches for a focal point. Glints and shards of detail appear, yet the whole vista remains in a swirl. Scorsese offers a particularly pertinent observation here:

¹ This description of Lefferts comes from the narrator's collection of passing 'asides' during the Beaufort's Ball.

When you look through binoculars in a place like that, it's almost a kaleidoscope of images that hits you; you see so many things on the periphery of your eyes.²



This sense of “things on the periphery of your eyes” is crucial to the sequence, and to the film. In this instance, the film expresses and combines distinct meanings of ‘the peripheral’. Through the fluttering view offered by the glasses, the entire scenario appears as a fanned collection of opaque slides. Lefferts searches these surfaces for something to focus on. The surrounding event is of little interest to him. The opera is ‘peripheral’ in this sense.

Yet, equally, the film expresses how, for Lefferts, there are features of some interest in the “things on the periphery”. Each glint and gesture caught in the kaleidoscopic view of the glasses offers the promise of salacious gossip. Ultimately, his keen scrutiny is rewarded with the sight of Countess Olenska taking her seat in the Welland’s private box. Her opalescent blue dress and the glint of her lorgnettes in the stage-light draw Lefferts’ hungry attention. He fixes his attention on the new arrival. The film simultaneously captures the fresh fervour of Leffert’s gaze and the potency of the ‘peripheral’ event of Ellen’s entrance. Responding to a sudden concentration of focus, the camera holds still over the image of Ellen settling herself in the box. Furthermore, the irradiance of her appearance matches the intensity of his interest and reaction. Her arrival leaves Lefferts aghast. He gasps at the ‘audacity’ of the gesture, of the Wellands introducing the Countess back into Society through the occasion of the opera. For the members of the elite, the actuality of each grand event is of peripheral interest. Rather, each occasion is seen to contain the kernel of an opportunity, for a scrutiny of other peoples’ behaviour. Thus, in *The Age of Innocence*, certain ‘peripheral’ incidents are surveyed with a sudden intensity of scrutiny. (Accordingly, Archer’s comportment in the company of Ellen and his wife is seen to be of particular interest to the doyens of this community).

² Martin Scorsese, in Gavin Smith, ‘Street Smart: An Interview with Martin Scorsese’, p. 74.

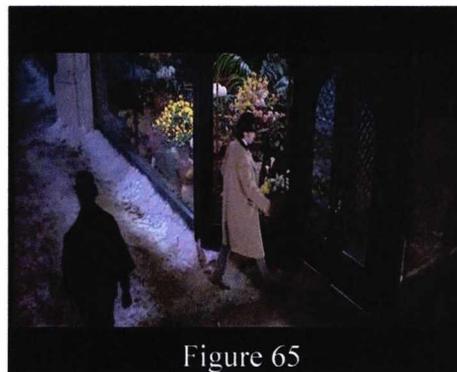
Within a constant flurry of fleeting details and kaleidoscopic scenarios, the film creates moments of fixity, of focusing in. It punctuates the fluid progression of Society events with moments of centrality, of riveting the attention of camera and character to one particular point. In turn, it encapsulates moments of emotional intensity. In creating a fixative hold on a particular point of an event, the film creates a particular sense of concentration, of crystallization. (For Lefferts, the sight of the Countess enlivens his evening with the promise of scandal.³ For the viewer, the first glimpse of Ellen is presented in shimmering intensity. The significance of this character is immediately felt). Distinct states of intensity are expressed in different forms of ‘focusing in’. At points, the film literally ‘spotlights’ particular actions. Grades of light and colour encircle a certain gesture, in turn forming individual grades of emphasis. In other instances, the film focuses on the direction of the characters’ own looks. At specific times, the characters directly fix the camera with their gaze. At others, they only appear to do so. Ultimately, all aspects of the film’s ‘focusing in’ collect together in a final flurry of shots, as Archer concentrates intently on a single, shaped memory of Ellen.

In particular instances, the film creates an ‘iris’ effect of light to circle certain images. It holds a delicate, close spotlight to passing events, as detailed in relation to voice and conversation in Chapter 3, in Archer’s meeting with Ellen at ‘The Shaughraun’, and as considered below, in his visit to the flower shop. By gradually contracting the illuminated circle of light, the film concentrates attention on these individual gestures, whilst retaining a wider view of the surrounding circumstances. The use of light is complimented by precise compositions of shape and colour. All elements work to encompass and shade a ‘peripheral’ action.

On one level, Archer’s impulsive decision to buy Ellen some yellow roses appears as a passing gesture, performed ‘in passing’ or ‘by the way’. Yet in this Society, such small tokens of affection carry great resonance. The fact of his decision, to show particular interest in Ellen, leaves him open to public criticism. Therefore, Archer hesitates, before finally deciding to enter the shop. At the same time, the whim forms the seed of their relationship. The small act contains great personal resonance. In both senses, his impulsive decision is enacted with vibrations of passionate feeling. The use of a spotlight focuses on the instant of Archer’s decision. Moreover, within the instant, the film captures the precarious balance of conflicting feeling through a shifting combination of movement, light, and colour. Primarily, the shifting position of the camera expresses both the public exposure and personal intensity of Archer’s act. Opening the sequence in long-shot, the film presents Archer wavering in front of (and entering) the flower shop ‘in full

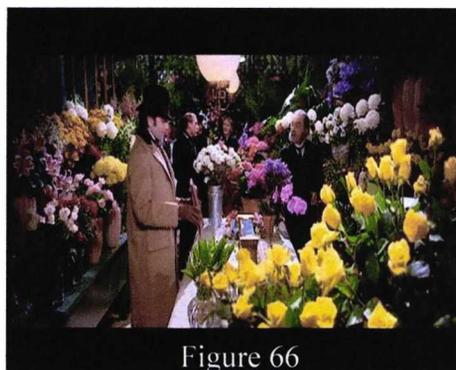
³ The narrator on Lefferts again, “On matters of surreptitious romance, his skills went unquestioned.”

view'. The camera observes the scene from a high, bird's eye position. There is a subtle sense of Archer being watched, from afar. Even the most apparently incidental act is observed, surreptitiously yet studiously, in this community. A warm yellow glow of roses smoulders in the window, in the darkness of the street. Attracted by the dash of bright colour, Archer pauses in front of the shop. As he turns to enter, the camera smoothly arcs around, slowly drawing towards the figure in the doorway. The camera's slight move marks the turn of events. It suggests the shift and growing concentration of Archer's thoughts: 'Might I...?' At the same time, the turn of the camera's wide lens towards Archer suggests a broader interest in the actions of just this man, at this point. Both aspects are delicately accentuated in the appearance of a faint ring of light around the doorway (FIGURE 65).



The circle collects attention on Archer's passage into the shop. Further, the iris of light adds a tinge of intensity to the move. The faint pocket of light suggests Archer's growing absorption in the gesture. As the spotlight gradually tightens, there is a sense of the sway of Archer's impulse guiding him through the door, inwards.

In the shop, the film sustains and develops the effect of the iris through composition of colour. It arranges the brilliant yellow roses around Archer, in the left of the background, and right foreground of the frame (FIGURE 66).



At once, the blooms stand on the margins, as niggling reminders, urging Archer on. At the same time, with the intensity of their colouring, the surrounding flowers can be seen to enclose Archer, as he is absorbed by his impulse. A crescent of light encompasses the scenario, adding to the sense of enclosure. Yet, in doing so, it also hints at the surrounding (yet unseen) presence of ‘other people’. Whilst expressing the glowing intensity of Archer’s little act, the colour and light suggest the overlaying, potentially inflammatory interest of Society. Ultimately, the feeling stifles Archer’s gesture. He sends the flowers, but pockets the inscription.

Throughout, *The Age of Innocence* weaves an intricate crosshatch of glances and looks. Describing the opening sequence, Leslie Stern observes a “choreographing of looks between members of the audience.”⁴ Similarly, and using the moment to remark on the mechanisms of New York Society as a whole, A. Robert Lee notes:

This, indelibly, as, alongside, we see through the binoculars to Ellen and her Mingott-Archer clan, is a world of gaze and predatory watchfulness, and in which any deviation from the norm implies not only risk, gossip, but, at worst, removal from sight, or, as in Ellen’s case, seemingly complete erasure.⁵

Thus, this network of looks feeds into the film’s texture of flurrying activity and glimpsed detail. Lee describes the elite as constantly surveying each event for the slightest inconsistency. Finding such a glint of interest, ‘Society’ is seen to fix quickly upon it. In a corresponding fashion, the film sporadically suspends its passing flow over events and occasions to fix upon the gaze of an individual character. Moreover, at points, the character looks directly into the camera, intensifying the sense of an interruption or a ‘puncturing’ of events. These intense momentary connections convey precise states of emotional ardour. They express a desire for fixity. Akin to the use of spotlights, the direct gaze of a character into the camera creates a concentrated centre of attention. Equally, as with the lighting, the film is able to form an acute point of focus whilst retaining sight of the surrounding circumstances.

A striking example occurs at the Beaufort Ball. Initially, the camera weaves surreptitiously amongst the clusters of guests, whilst the narrator provides colourful sketches of each doyen. One by one, each leading figure is glimpsed in passing, as the camera continues its loose waltz around

⁴ Leslie Stern, ‘Time’s Covetousness’, p. 223.

⁵ A. Robert Lee, ‘Watching Manners: Martin Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*’, Robert Gidding and Erica Sheen (eds), *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 171.

the room. Suddenly, narrator and camera present May Welland. May fixes the lens with a crystalline gaze and beaming smile (FIGURE 67).



Instantly, the bearing of the moment alters. Whereas camera and viewer previously enjoy a detached scrutiny of each guest, May's direct gaze immediately exposes the presence of this roaming 'onlooker'. Moreover, as the casual wandering abruptly stops, the attention of the camera is narrowed, 'locked in' to a concentration of and on this one character. A responding shot shows Archer returning a fixed gaze and smile (FIGURE 68).



The sight binds camera and character for this particular moment, as the film 'reveals' the roaming figure as Archer. In turn, Archer's attention is now forcibly fixed on May. The film's use of matching 'direct to camera' looks sharply locks the characters together. Their forthcoming marital union is hinted at in the seal of the two shots. Yet, although expressive of an acute connection, the moment lacks passion. (Whereas, contrastingly, the film's treatment of Archer's fixed gaze across the room to Ellen at the Duke's Dinner suggests intense desire). The terse cut between two clipped shots, of two fixed looks, is performed with clinical precision. There is a steely quality to May's eyes, and to her union with Archer. Above all, the film's decision to fix momentarily on the couple's gaze suggests the inescapability of Archer's 'match' with May. As the narrator wryly

observes, “May Welland represented for Archer all that was best in their world, all that he honoured; and she *anchored* him to it.”

The film develops this suggestion by delimiting its use of ‘direct to camera’ looks to those of Archer, Ellen and May. Moreover, it refines the associations of the effect by establishing a particular stylistic approach. It chooses to fix upon the eyes of the three characters as they ‘narrate’ passages of their letters to and from each other. This sustained approach, of direct looks and ‘direct address’ forms a distinctive stylistic pattern, peppering the film.⁶ These occasional interjections create a complex tension of intimacy and exposure. Looking directly into the lens, the characters confide thoughts and reveal personal decisions: to marry, to travel. Through these private missives, they can disclose intimate feelings and intentions, away from the “world of gaze and predatory watchfulness.” Yet equally, the particular pieces of news contained in the letters are meant to be interpreted not only as personal confidences but also as public statements of intent. (Ellen’s decision to ‘remove’ to Europe is meant as a declaration of her withdrawal from Archer, due to May’s pregnancy). Thus, as the characters ‘air’ their written thoughts, there is a declarative edge to the delivery.

The film marks the particular meaning of each delivery through a particular handling of its chosen stylistic trait, of direct looks and address. Three distinct examples can be considered. First, a crucial moment of physical intimacy between Archer and Ellen is interrupted by a message from May. In Ellen’s private apartment, the lovers break their embrace (through a dissolve) as a servant enters, carrying a letter on a silver salver. After reading the letter, Ellen passes it to Archer. As she does so, the film moves to a sight of May, chirruping with delight at her news:

Ellen,

Granny’s telegram was successful!! Grandma and Mama agreed to marriage after Easter! Only a month!! I will telegraph Newland. I’m too happy for words and love you dearly! Your grateful cousin,

May.

⁶ Although the device allows the film to momentarily suspend its mercurial flow of scenes (and so to intensify the effect of a particular narrative ‘point’), the characters do not ‘step out’ of the diegesis, to address the viewer, or to offer an objective commentary on the action. (Possible examples of this type of ‘direct address’ include Woody Allen’s asides in *Annie Hall* [Woody Allen, 1977], and Michael Caine’s confessions in *Alfie* [Lewis Gilbert, 1966]), *The Age of Innocence* does not use this type of ‘direct address’. Rather, I mean the phrase to convey how the characters deliver their epistolary remarks directly to camera, addressing the subject (the ‘addressee’) of the letter.

As well as interrupting the consummation of the moment, the news has wider implications for the lovers, rupturing their relationship. The sense of the letter acting as a fissure to the situation is intensified through the immediate contrast in colour, between the two scenarios. Ellen's quarters are set in dark, warm tones, offering close shelter. Conversely, May 'delivers' her message in the open air, against a backdrop spray of bright flowers, matching her dainty pink bonnet and the fizz of her words. Her giddy brightness sears into Ellen's shaded retreat (FIGURE 69).



Figure 69

Furthermore, as the film holds back the bright vision until Archer reads the message, it emphasizes the impact of May's news on her husband-to-be. Yet equally, in doing so, it replaces a view of Archer's reaction with one of May gazing directly into the camera. As the sight of Archer's future wife subsumes his recoil, the gesture is rendered meaningless. Again, May's eyes express the unavoidability of the 'set' marriage. As the camera slowly draws into her fixed stare, the look engulfs everything else.

In a further instance, the film omits the precursory view of a character receiving and reading a letter. It moves straight to the sight and sound of the writers themselves, as the message is being read. This occurs as Ellen 'delivers' a letter to Archer from the Van der Luyden's country retreat. In focusing directly on Ellen, the film conveys the immediate impact on Archer. It expresses the unexpectedness and force of the letter. (The message instantly re-orientates Archer's plans, as he rushes to meet Ellen at the Skuytercliff house). At the same time, the film shapes the moment to explore how Archer's reading of the letter infuses the vision of Ellen as she 'delivers' it. That is to say, his emotional reaction to the words can be seen to inflect the way she speaks the letter aloud. Her delivery takes the form of spoken verse, as the words trip by in a skipping meter:

Newland, I
Ran away,
The day after I saw you at the play.

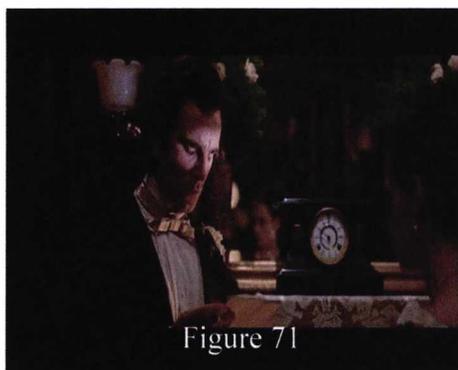
These kind people have taken me in; I
Wanted to be quiet and
Think things over.

In Ellen's lyrical performance of her words, the film suggests how, for Archer, the message forms a tantalizing flirtation. Once again, he is bewitched by Ellen, and infuses her brief message with poetic seductiveness. He perceives it as an incantatory invitation. Accordingly, he sets off for the Skuytercliff. Crucially however, the film shapes the moment, using Ellen's 'direct to camera' gaze, to trouble the association with Archer. Initially and in long-shot, Ellen appears to be looking directly into the lens, as she recites her words for Archer. However, as the camera draws ever nearer to her, it becomes apparent that Ellen's eyes are fixed marginally aside, into the distance (FIGURE 70).



Her gaze does not 'quite' meet the camera. The match is fractionally misaligned. In an instant, the misalignment offsets the intense personality of her words to Archer. The moment of intimacy is subtly worried by the film's precisely discordant use of a fixed look.

In a final instance, the film draws together aspects of its use of spotlighting with those of 'direct looks and address'. In turn, it creates a point of excoriating intensity for Archer. On the cusp of confessing his relationship with Ellen, Archer is silenced by May's own hand, as she presents him with news of the Countess' imminent departure to Europe. (The letter comes after May's "wonderful talk" with Ellen, announcing her pregnancy). Immediately, the film marks the particular momentousness of this (utterly unexpected) letter for Archer. It does so by creating a distinct variation of its previous approach to similar points. Thus, the focus in this instance is on the reader (Archer), not the sender (Ellen). Further, whilst fixing the camera on Archer's face as he reads, the film tapers the lighting of the scene to an intense beam on his eyes (FIGURE 71).



Whilst recalling the previous, close moment between the lovers at ‘The Shaughraun’, the light also conveys the fierceness of Archer’s concentration on the letter in front of him. Each word burns into his eyes. Further, and as corresponding with the earlier instances of spotlighting, the effect balances two opposing aspects. On one level, the spotlight expresses the intensity of Archer’s focus, and the anguish the news creates. However, at the same time, the light could also convey May’s (unseen) scrutiny of Archer at this point. It suggests how intently she watches his eyes, reading his face to gauge his reaction, looking for a betrayal of emotion. Lastly, again rhyming the moment with the meeting at ‘The Shaughraun’, the film distils the soundtrack to the lovers’ voices. Crucially, Archer’s voice ‘book-ends’ the delivery of Ellen’s words. Before her plaintive tones are heard, Archer ‘speaks’ her words as he reads. The film momentarily folds their voices together. Thus, as with the poetic incantation of the previous example, a message from Ellen is infused with Archer’s own perception of the occasion. This sensation reaches its melancholy conclusion in his final, chimerical vision of Ellen.

In the closing moments, the film concentrates all that has gone before into a final act of ‘focusing in’. All of Archer’s shards of time with Ellen are condensed, reduced to one shaped memory. In a fleeting moment, the film expresses Archer’s desire to “deal all at once with the packed regrets and stifled memories of an inarticulate lifetime.”⁷ It occurs as Archer stands in front of Ellen’s Paris apartment, as he withdraws from the present into his acute vision of the past. Spatially, the film narrows the scenario to the corner of a small square, off a busy boulevard. It keeps the camera close to Archer, looking down on the now elderly figure, or up to the high windows of the apartment building, searching wistfully for Ellen’s quarters. Both camera and character finally focus their attention on a single balcony window. As Archer’s son Ted decides, Ellen’s “must be the one with awnings.” Archer dispatches his son up to the Countess with a

⁷ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 360.

message explaining his own nonappearance (“Just tell her I’m old fashioned; that should be enough.”)

Again, the film trains a single beam of light on the character’s eyes, to suggest the intense concentration of the man and the moment. Archer settles on the bench, fixing his gaze on the window above. As he does so, a glint of sunlight refracts off the window’s edge. The rays fill the screen, sending Archer into his reverie of Ellen (FIGURE 72).



As the window is shut, sunlight and vision fade away. Archer stands to leave the square. The musical score and a flock of birds soar up together, forming a brief crescendo, before settling again. In the reverie, Archer fixes on one particular memory of Ellen, as she stands at the water’s edge in Newport. Adrian Martin describes the vision as a “theatre of memory.” He continues:

Newland gets to replay, in his mind, and at last put right, the moment that once upon a time stymied him for the rest of his long and uneventful life. He wished for the Countess Olenska...to turn around before that Murnau-like boat passed and, if so, all would be well with the world, and between them as lovers. It didn’t happen then, and now it happens with tremendous yearning but no joy...⁸

The singular, exquisite vision is a *revision*. It is composed of all of Archer’s “tremendous yearning” not only to immerse himself again in this small yet all-encompassing part of his life, but also to re-shape it according to his desires. Suggesting aspects raised in the previous sections, of the opaque void of the majority of Archer’s life being set against the brilliance of his few brief moments with Ellen, A. Robert Lee describes the vision as the encapsulation of ‘another world’:

⁸ Adrian Martin, ‘Delirious Enchantment’, p. 12.

The film, here, too, acts scrupulously on the novel's suggestion of Ellen's life and its passage as enclosed in another world, "this rich atmosphere", but which, for Archer, finally remains best to be seen only in imagination.⁹

Lee raises a crucial point, observing that Archer would prefer to retreat into a fantastical reverie, than see Ellen 'in the flesh' and in the present. The film emphasizes this choice, showing Archer turning away from the window with the force of the light, squeezing his eyes shut to fix on the image in his mind. (Further, Archer's gesture is matched by the viewer's own reaction, as the intense light fills the screen, encouraging fleeting recoil away). The act also echoes Archer's previous declaration to Ellen at 'The Shaughraun'. Having watched the curtain fall on the electrifying end to Act 1, he confesses to Ellen, "I normally leave the theatre at this point in order to take the picture away with me."¹⁰

Yet, despite the intensity of Archer's purpose and desire, to revive and re-shape a memory as the "composite vision of all he had missed,"¹¹ the attempt is hopelessly futile. As Martin notes, "it happens with tremendous yearning *but no joy*." There is no sense of elation found in the attempt. Archer's past relationship is irredeemable, and certainly, in a flight of fantasy, irreparable. The film conveys the pathos and emptiness of Archer's last vision in a number of ways. Most immediately, the image is shown as a fantasy. The deep pink of the sky and the shimmering blue of the sea suggest a heightened state of perception, with the image filtering through as part of an intoxicated dream. Equally, the scenario is reminiscent of an impressionist painting. Ellen stands as a pointillist fleck in a swirling seascape. In a fusion of delirious and painterly aspects, the vision emphasizes its own unreality.

At the same time, the vision can be seen as the final thin fragment of all Archer's fragmentary moments with Ellen. It forms a flimsy compression of all the diaphanous wisps of shared time. Again, and for the last time, Archer attempts to fix their moments together with a sense of intransigence. The translucence of his final, concentrated vision only highlights the impotence of the attempt. Further, it stands as testimony to the 'virtual' nature of Archer's entire relationship with Ellen. The film heightens the sense of the 'virtuality' of the vision, by revealing the image *as* an image. That is to say, in foregrounding the 'filmed-ness' of the image, the film heightens the fancifulness of Archer's vision. The imagined moment of Ellen's turn is presented as a projection, playing only for Archer, irrupting into the 'actual' world of a Paris street. As V. F. Perkins notes,

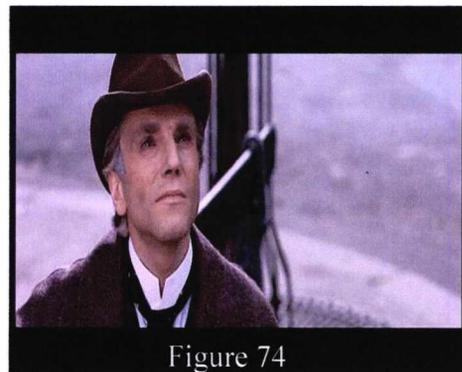
⁹ A. Robert Lee, 'Watching Manners', p. 166. The internal citation comes from Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: Signet Classics, 1952), pp. 284-5.

¹⁰ At the end of Act 1 of *The Shaughraun*, the sister of an Irish wanderer (the Shaughraun) discovers the man she loves is an English officer, sent to kill her brother.

¹¹ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 360.

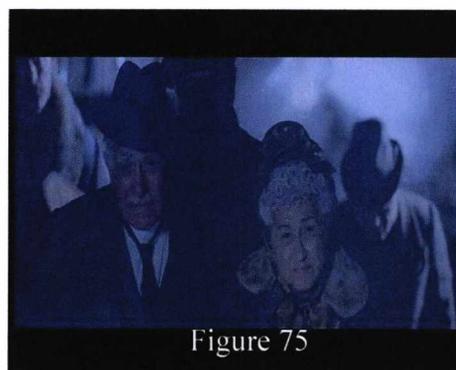
“Movements through time and space that are not absorbed into the ‘and-next-ness’ of storytelling will necessarily draw attention to constructedness, to artifice and the artificer.”¹² *The Age of Innocence* promotes this sense of “artifice” by laying bare the surface textures of Archer’s filmic reverie. The image is seen as a series of superficial layers, of matte backgrounds and plastic details. It is overtly presented as a photographic trace, a flimsy film of a memory. The blatancy of the expression exposes the emptiness of Archer’s vision. It reveals a lack of true substance.

In the final frames of the fantasy, the film recalls the mismatched ‘direct look’ of Ellen’s address to Archer at the Skuytercliff. In this instance, the eyes of the dreamed and the dreamer fail to meet; the eye-lines do not match (FIGURES 73 AND 74).



Again, the desired intimacy of the connection is lost, and the hopelessness of Archer’s attempt to join with Ellen, in this way, is compounded.

Perhaps the true heart of *The Age of Innocence* lies elsewhere. In a passing glimpse, quickly subsumed by the more colourful affairs of Society life, the film provides an image of complete kinship, of the sort Archer desperately attempts to find in his reverie. As Archer collects Ellen from the train station, an elderly couple emerges from the swirls of platform smoke (FIGURE 75).



¹² V. F. Perkins, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, p. 41.

For a beat, they fix the camera with a self-possessed stare, arm in arm, before the fog gathers around them again, and the film's attention moves to Archer's awaiting carriage. In a glancing moment, the film presents a vision of the unattainable future for Archer and Ellen. The old couple passes as ghosts, but the fixity of their gaze impresses itself as the memory of an impossible prospect.



The Straight Story

Events Momentary and Momentous

The Straight Story's handling of aspects of focus, in particular moments, allows it to combine two significant characteristics. The film displays instances that are fleeting, that last only shortly. At the same time, certain passing experiences appear as momentous, as holding an enduring sense of importance for its participants. Throughout Alvin's journey, the film repeatedly presents individual moments in this tension. In doing so, it builds up a series of sequences that explores the short-lived but long-felt sensations co-existing in particular moments of life. If certain parts of prior analysis are revisited with this idea in mind, then three separate (though interrelated) groupings are seen to emerge. The three are: (a) extensive periods of waiting or travelling compressed by the film into momentary spells; (b) long-awaited moments fleetingly dealt with by the film as passing events; and finally (c), seemingly incidental moments gradually expressed as greatly significant.

As noted in the previous chapter, the most extensive case in point for group (a) is that of the condensation of a month-long journey into a two hour film. In dissolves and ellipses, the great significance of the whole journey is contained within each momentary part. In group (b), the film appears to trouble this sense of importance, in quickly passing over incidents of apparent significance. For example, the locale of the Grotto is referred to repeatedly by many of the characters, at different points of Alvin's journey. It is seen as something of a local benchmark, as a significant place that divides different parts of the region ('you must live north of the Grotto'). As such, it is set up as a momentous marker along Alvin's route to Lyle. His passing the Grotto suggests the crossing of a certain point, the reaching of a milestone. Yet, it receives nothing more than a passing glance by the film. As Alvin reaches the Grotto, the camera remains tight to the side of the mower. Neither camera nor character lingers by the monument. Rather, the film notes the fact of its presence and Alvin continues down the road. However, far from existing as a denial of the importance of the monument, the fluid move past the Grotto allows the film to mark its significance

unobtrusively. That is to say, the meaning of the moment is expressed precisely by the way the film retains a sense of its momentary nature. In showing the brevity of the passing instance, the film captures a sense of the moment's uniqueness. It does so without a sense of dramatic assertion. True to the nature of the central protagonist, a moment of importance is accepted quickly and quietly. Further, as the monument is passed without the mower stopping, the significance of this fleeting instant rolls into the greater meaning of Alvin's journey as a whole.

Contrastingly, in group (c), the film also pays attention to the meaning of seemingly insignificant moments. There are two strands to this point. First, individual images that are shown only fleetingly in the film can be seen to convey enduring feelings. The most acute examples of this are also noted in Chapter 5, in the analysis of images found in the passing moment of a dissolve between two shots. Transitory moments and movements from one frame to the next provide glimpses of more sustained feelings of disquiet. Secondly, the film is equally attentive to this idea across the full expanse of Alvin's journey, developing more comprehensive patterns of seemingly inconsequential moments. A steady accrual of local, fleeting instances develops (and develops into) the greater significances of the film.

Two further examples can be included, as moments that combine elements of all the above. As such, the examples stand out as the film's most distinctive studies of the momentousness contained within passing instants. The following analysis will address these two instances, looking first at Alvin's crossing of the bridge over the Mississippi, then at his encounter with the group of cyclists on the road. In the first instance, the importance of the river crossing is seen as unobtrusively noted. In the second, the significance of an incidental happening is gradually felt. The two examples are bound together as they both express Alvin's appreciation of an individual moment. Through a careful handling of each passing occurrence, the film creates a sense of Alvin's surprise, pleasure and perturbation. The sensations are conveyed as both momentary, 'of the moment', and as deeply affective. In the film's expression of each moment, the meaning of a transient event reflects the more momentous implications of Alvin's journey. The effect is achieved through the film's use of different viewpoints through each episode. In both moments, the film combines POV shots matching Alvin's gaze, return shots of Alvin's face, and long-shots of the setting. In moving between the three viewpoints, the film is able to alter the perspective of each moment. In turn, the pace of each happening is also transformed.

In the first instance of the bridge, the film introduces its approach through its introduction of the location. As detailed in Chapter 1, in 'Circles and Straight Lines', the film first completes a cycle over the road to the bridge. It then cuts swiftly to a signpost affixed to the gateway of the

bridge, bearing the name of North America's largest river, the Mississippi. Thus, the film chooses not to show the capaciousness of the Mississippi directly. (It chooses not to focus on the vast breadth of the waters). Instead, the camera alights on a small sign, emblematic of the whole river. Further, the film not only channels its focus of the river onto a single detail, but it also individualizes the view. The sight of the sign comes from Alvin's perspective, as a POV shot. It is a passing glance, angling up to move across the letters of the sign (FIGURE 76).

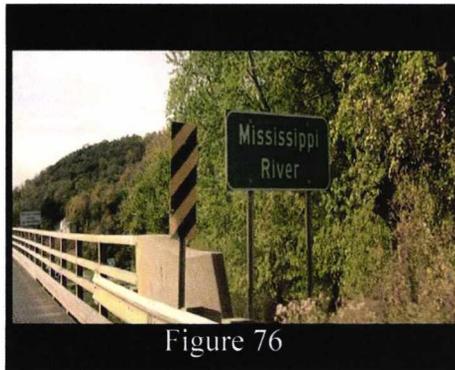


Figure 76

The impact of the scenario is immediately channelled through Alvin's gaze. Thus, not only is the presence of this monumental expanse of water introduced in an extremely slight manner, it is also tightly entwined with Alvin's passing occupancy of it.

The film details the full experience of the crossing through a repeated use of POV shots from Alvin's perspective. Moving onto the bridge, character and camera look up to see the towering metal struts of the bridge set against a marbled blue sky. This shot connects with a later sight of the base of the bridge, again shown from Alvin's viewpoint. The grid-like surface skims under the rolling wheels of the mower. A further view, of a glance rightwards, reveals a small town on the far bank of the river. In displaying all of these features of the setting from Alvin's perspective, the film locks the viewer into a personally oriented experience of the moment (FIGURES 77-79).

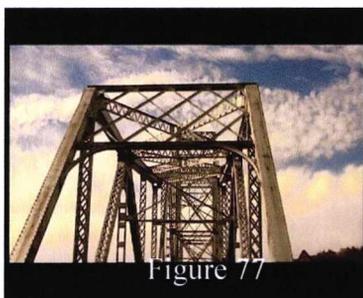


Figure 77

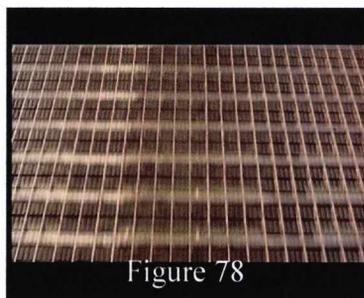


Figure 78

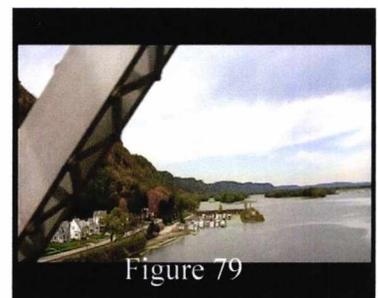


Figure 79

The sense of a tightly focused experience is reinforced by the camera's consistent return to Alvin. Following each POV shot of an individual feature of the bridge, the film fixes its attention back on the character's facial expression. In this way, Alvin's reaction to each particular sight is

marked. Subtle expressions of pleasure shift across his face. The consistent rhythm of shots from a point on the bridge to a close-up of Alvin increases the sense of a personal encounter between this man and this place. The association between the individual and his surroundings is made closer. With Alvin's point of view, the crossing is experienced as a series of glimpses, rather than as a sustained act of scrutiny. The mower moves consistently forwards, disallowing the character a fixed study of individual details. In one shot, Alvin is shown curtailing with reluctance his survey of the bridge, having to steer the mower. Thus, he is only able to focus momentarily on passing features. As the camera adopts his point of view, it too conveys only fragments of views: the high struts of the bridge top, the blurring squares of the floor grate, and the cluster of shoreline roofs seen through the diagonal slats of the bridge's side. Thus, the film's use of POV creates a series of impressions, rather than a detailed illustration of the event. As camera and character pass along the bridge, the impressions collect. The collected fragments create an overall impression of Alvin's unique experience of the moment.

The film's more distanced views of the bridge are also inflected with Alvin's individual experience of the crossing. Between the views of the top and bottom of the bridge, the film cuts to a wider shot of Alvin astride the mower. (As the shot is of Alvin, it shows that the film breaks momentarily from the character's optical point of view). The shot shows Alvin as one part of a broader scenario: of bridge, sky and land. Thus, the film opens out into a wider vista in between circumscribed POV shots. The expansive sight is pocketed into personal views of the crossing. A lesser film might easily have introduced the scenario through immediate recourse to an extreme long shot of the bridge stretching horizontally across the extents of the frame. However, *The Straight Story* refrains from starting the sequence with such an overtly dramatic move. Instead, it moves precisely through a careful arrangement of views of the bridge, all linked to Alvin's position atop the structure. When the film finally presents the bridge in extreme (horizontal) long shot, as the last image of the sequence, the view marks a turning point in Alvin's own experience of the moment. In ultimately releasing the viewer from Alvin's perspective, the film hints at how the instance of the crossing has passed, how it is now a past experience. All that is left is a bridge, seen from afar.

In the closing moments of the crossing, the film suggests how Alvin's appreciation of the experience turns slightly, filtering in a sense of unease. As character and camera look down the length of the bridge to the other side, the musical soundtrack breaks from the rhythmic harmonies of "Alvin's Theme" into one low held chord. The sinister rumble of the chord matches the change in Alvin's eyes, as harmonious feelings appear to give way to a hint of apprehension. He blinks, refocuses, and furrows his brow. There is a sense of Alvin 'coming to' from the distractions offered

by the elevated viewpoint of the bridge. As he fixes his eyes onto the gradually encroaching bank, the wider implications of the crossing seem to crystallize. Crossing the river means that his journey is almost complete. Through dissolves, the film widens the inference of this hint of worry, carrying it into Alvin's next encounter. A dissolve moves through Alvin's slightly troubled expression to the wider view of the bridge. Through a further bleed, the film connects both man and place to another setting, to the graveyard. Moving through the images, the film softly suggests the reason behind Alvin's moment of perturbation. Is he too late? It is an achievement of the film that the moment of worry is not expressed as a 'daunting revelation', but as a frisson. Thus, a passing sense of unease is contained within a transitory crossing, over the bridge. A sense of the greater implication of Alvin's trip is contained within both.

Throughout Alvin's moves across the bridge, the film explores aspects of suspension. The final sense of apprehension, of the harmonious flow of the crossing momentarily jarred, completes this exploration. Primarily, the scenario contains a literal sense of suspension, of a bridge carrying Alvin over the depths of the Mississippi. In itself, this fact adds a slight sense of precariousness to the event. (Alvin is shown redressing the swerves of the mower, constantly having to 'right' himself). Further, as the use of POV isolates particular features of the bridge, there is a suggestion that Alvin is trying to savour the moment. As the mower rolls on, Alvin's attention is drawn to certain characteristics of the bridge as they pass him by. The length of the POV shots and the return views of Alvin's face express a sense of delight in detail, of the character 'drinking in' different views.

In focusing on different aspects of the structure individually, the film not only fragments the sight of the scene, but also creates a sense of distension. In moving from one feature to the next, the appreciation of the moment is more keenly felt. At the same time, the fragmentary focus pulls the moment apart. The crossing is still shown as a brief episode in the course of Alvin's journey. Yet, the measure and number of different views simultaneously appear to extend the moment. Thus, within the sequence as a whole, *The Straight Story* expresses the tension at the heart of the momentary experience. Alvin attempts to dwell on particular aspects of the bridge, to appreciate fully his moment of contact with this place. However, he is unable to dwell on the features for any substantial length of time, as he is constantly moving forwards. Further, his gaze is repeatedly broken as he attends to steering the mower. Crucially though, it is precisely the 'fleetingness' of the views – their fragmentary, ephemeral nature – that sustains Alvin's sense of pleasure.

The film intensifies this effect in Alvin's encounter with the cyclists. Again, it shapes the moment to express Alvin's appreciation of a passing experience. It uses similar designs to those described above, shuttling between perspectives within the moment. Yet, whereas Alvin potentially

anticipated the pass over the bridge, a sudden surge of cyclists is completely unexpected. Thus, as well as expressing the momentary nature of the experience, *The Straight Story* uses the juxtaposition of different perspectives to explore the effects of this ‘unexpectedness’.

Initially, the film shapes the moment to express Alvin’s surprise. The instance occurs after Alvin’s sedate stop-over in the barn. It is preceded by a leisurely set of movements over the regular curves of the landscape. As the camera accompanies the slow progression of the mower along the road, a blurry man-sized shape suddenly flits past. Others follow in quick succession. Alvin’s surprise stems from the speed of the unexpected appearance (and disappearance) of the cyclists as they dart past him. Further, the sudden arrival of a group of cyclists on a farmland track has an incongruity that increases the sense of surprise. Equally, the fact of the vast number of cyclists passing together at the same time adds even more to the wonder of the moment.

Through its choice of focus at this particular moment, the film ensures that the passage of the cyclists is as surprising for the viewer as it for Alvin. It keeps the camera trained on the mower in static close shot. The angle prevents the viewer from any previous sight of the cyclists, approaching Alvin from the distance. The initial flit past the mower, and across the frame, constitutes our first sight of the riders. At the same time, in focusing the camera on the mower as the cyclists begin to pass by, the film asserts Alvin’s position within the moment, as it happens. The film uses its focus on Alvin’s position to express the initial stage of the character’s surprise. As the first cyclist rushes by, the film cuts. The position of the camera barely, though noticeably alters. The camera is withdrawn ever so slightly from Alvin, allowing a little more of the eastwards span of the road to be seen. The jump cut creates a slight jolt. The minor relocation of the camera creates a minor shift on screen. Further, as the cut occurs in the middle of the cyclist’s pass by the mower, it forms a ‘crease’ in the continuity of the rider’s movement. In turn, the cut conveys Alvin’s initial moment of shock, as he blanches slightly at the surge of the cyclists. Camera and character are taken back apace.

As with the Mississippi crossing, the film channels the expression of a single moment through Alvin’s personal experience, and tightens the bind by moving into POV shots. In this instance, the move to POV is also used to convey a crucial change in the form of Alvin’s experience. The move reflects a subtle though pivotal alteration in his attitude towards the moment, as it takes place. For Alvin, shock quickly turns to pleasure. In a tight series of views, the camera whips to follow the darting motion of individual cycles as they pass by the mower. The swift turn is that of Alvin’s head, pivoting in pace with the cyclists’ passing (FIGURES 80-82).

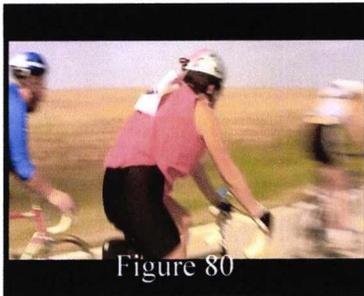


Figure 80



Figure 81



Figure 82

In the shots, the film provides an acute expression of how Alvin finds pleasure in the fleetingness of the experience. As his head flits around with the moving rider, Alvin is heard to give out a short gasp, 'ah'. He is using the particular features of this unexpected event for his own pleasure. Further, as each turn of the head matches each 'whoosh' of movement, Alvin develops his involvement in the moment.

As with the bridge, *The Straight Story* moves from close POV to wider shots of the moment to develop this sense of Alvin's involvement in the experience. Following the series of close views of the cyclist rushing past the mower, the film opens into a view of cyclists further down the road. Having passed Alvin, the riders now stretch down the vertically framed track, heading into the distance. As the shot is still of a POV from Alvin, the broader view remains personalized. As the film releases increasingly wide views of the cyclists within this particular setting, it retains a sense of the centrality of Alvin's experience. In the film's order of views, both character and camera focus first on the particular, before looking further afield to witness the full extent of the situation. The shift from pleasure in specifics to a look at the overall picture expresses the development of Alvin's appreciation of the moment. The progression of different views of the cyclists shows how the character is 'getting to grips' with the unexpected event. First, he involves himself in the moment, catching at views of individual cyclists. Next, he allows himself to reflect on the scope of the situation, broadening his outlook. The shots express how Alvin gradually makes sense of the incident. The film increases this sense by widening its views of the moment even further. Unlocking itself from Alvin's POV shots, the camera lifts from the side of the mower in a fluid rise. Finally settling high above the road, the camera tilts down on Alvin and cyclists below. A cut takes us higher, to a bird's eye view of the road. Stretching horizontally across the frame, the white strip of road is peppered with a line of tiny figures. The cyclists move ant-like from right to left in smooth progression. The mower appears as a stationary smudge in the middle of the vista (FIGURE 83)



As well as physically belittling the image of the individuals on the road, the camera's slow rise gradually introduces a different sensation of the fleeting moment. The languorous pace of the camera's arc is matched by the apparent slowness of the cyclists' progress, as seen from high above. The distant perspective on the event creates a sense of the moment slowing down. As with the bridge crossing, the film appears to distend the moment. In this instance, the film intensifies the effect by contrasting the pace created by the different views. The film first stresses the speed of the cyclists. It then shifts into an image of slow movement. Further, the distension is more keenly felt here (than in the instance of the bridge) as the film chooses to 'suspend' only a fraction of the moment. The camera hangs briefly above the moving bikes. Crucially, although giving an impression of slowness, the moment itself is not lengthened. The change of perspective gives only the sensation of momentary distension. (The effect is completely distinct from the use of slow-motion, in which time itself is elongated). In choosing to create this particular sensation, the film expresses something particular about the passing of the cyclists. Again, it focuses on the specific feeling created in Alvin.

Through its arrangement of views, the film ensures that the close POV rush of the moment is inextricably linked with the broader sight of slow moving riders. First, the longer, slower shots come after the established pattern of close views from Alvin's perspective. Thus, the broader views are inflected with the more personal experiences of the moment. Further, as the camera moves up across the mower, Alvin acts as a fulcrum to the rising view. The camera's rise is directed by the physical position of the character. Each step of the way, the film's gradual broadening of the sight of the scenario is touched by Alvin. As such, the film penetrates and personalizes the form of a fleeting moment. It shows that Alvin is locked into the rush of the instant, enjoying the fleetingness of the event. Then, a sense of Alvin's understanding and appreciation of the moment develops through broadening views. Finally, the film expresses a sense of the momentousness of the incident, at once appearing to slow down the experience, whilst continuing the moment on.

Alvin is presented as caught in this tension, as finding longstanding meaning in the passing of a moment. The old man is momentarily invigorated and profoundly moved by the sudden passing of the riders. Ultimately, the film reveals the sensation as bittersweet. In the following sequence, Alvin tells one of the cyclists how “the worst part of being old is remembering when you were young.” The film’s expression of Alvin’s momentary involvement in the giddy rush of the cyclists chimes with this statement.

In both instances, of the bridge and the cyclists, the film accrues distinct views of a single experience to develop a particular sense of the whole event. The collection of fleeting, fragmentary sights builds into an impression of the meaning of the moment. As such, the moments exist as compact versions of the film’s use of “Rose’s Theme” and the disparate, local scenarios that the music accompanies. Greater meaning is gradually formed through an amalgamation of local sights. To apply this idea across the whole film, each of Alvin’s individual meetings, momentary experiences, and passing encounters can be seen to form memorable fragments of one long journey. As the significance of each brief event accrues, our appreciation of the importance of Alvin’s vast trek across country deepens.



The Bridges of Madison County

On and Around the Bridges

Drawing together concerns of the other two films addressed in this chapter, *The Bridges of Madison County* uses a patterning of perspectives to explore the positions adopted by its characters, in relation to locale and each other. Akin to *The Straight Story*, the film focuses on the setting of the bridge to convey the developing charge and resonance of this particular place. The transient nature of the setting, as an intermediary place between places, matches and promotes the transitory relationship of Robert and Francesca. The conclusion of their time together is undetermined, *up in the air*. In the trips to the bridges, Robert and Francesca are held between points, between progressing together and saying goodbye. Equally, echoing *The Age of Innocence*, the film explores a couple’s attempts to fix images of each other in a series of meetings, to make them fast. Sensitive to the possibilities of movement within and across settings, *The Bridges of Madison County* patterns its views of camera and character. Moving between viewpoints, and with each fresh perspective, the film explores the shifting negotiations developing between place and person.

The film follows the way both *The Straight Story* and *The Age of Innocence* explore their characters' appreciation of place and instant, concentrating on the way they catch at details, collecting glimpses and fragments of views. Yet, whereas the other two films express the joy and pain to be found in acknowledging the ephemeral nature of a passing instant, *The Bridges of Madison County* explores the stimulation possible in repetition, in crossing and re-crossing, viewing and reviewing the same setting. In its handling of Francesca and Robert's visits to the bridges of Madison County, the film details the gradually developing erotic charge of setting and scenario, slowly building and burning in a series of looks and touches. Here as elsewhere, the film is alert to the significance of variations within repetitions. The two characters visit the bridges together twice, over the course of the four day affair. Francesca's accompaniment of Robert on the first trip, to Roseman Bridge, is a spontaneous decision, breathlessly performed. Her second visit, to Holliwel Bridge, is in answer to Robert's invitation, thus marked by readiness and anticipation. The film marks the distinction in the changing manner of the characters' negotiations of the bridges, and so of each other.

An unfamiliar approach to a fixed, familiar setting allows for the possibility of change. As a stranger to the landscape, Robert comes afresh to the presence of the bridges. The bridges are familiar to Francesca, existing for her as established landmarks; yet the accompaniment of a stranger to these fixed structures encourages the housewife to see them anew. That Robert is unfamiliar to both the setting and to Francesca is crucial to the housewife's appreciation of the moment. Robert's unfamiliarity allows space for curiosity, suspending expectations and permitting Francesca's observation of the bridge and the photographer. Moreover, as a photographer, Robert seeks to find the most evocative and striking angle from which to capture the image of the setting. He tries out a series of perspectives, looking to appreciate and convey the essence of the structure. In turn, this process encourages Francesca to look afresh at the bridge, whilst at the same time developing her interest in understanding the presence of the man before her. Robert's painstaking and alert way of seeing the locale contributes to Francesca's enthusiasm and guides her to be more conscious of feelings – of both bridge and man – that she might otherwise have experienced only tentatively or hurriedly. Both characters search for the most appropriate positions to view the bridges, and from which to be viewed. They look to find positions of assurance, moving apart to come together.

Before the characters move apart, the film details a shared approach to the first, covered bridge. As discussed in the opening chapter, the film points up the fixity of a particular locale – the Johnson house – by presenting a series of approaches towards and away from the setting. A similar strategy informs the opening moments of the trip to Roseman Bridge. First and in long shot, the

camera tracks horizontally with Robert's truck along a flat, concrete bridge, carrying the couple across a waterway. The crossing marks another stroke or groove of passage, an incremental step of progression towards their destination. Moreover, the crossing of the waterway exists as a momentary precursor to their time on the covered bridge; it heralds a more prolonged sense of suspension.

The act of reaching an anticipated destination is marked as the horizontal tracking shot gives way to a close vertical view held above the truck, of the path stretching and curling towards Roseman Bridge (FIGURE 84).

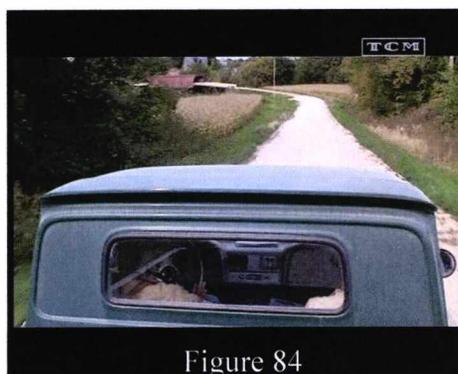


Figure 84

The sense of arrival is expressed in a tightening of focus and a lock of attention. Equally, the move from tracking shot to static view highlights the rigidity of the setting: the fixed hold of attention from character and camera meets the fixed nature of the bridge's structure. One further, horizontal tracking shot of the truck completes the pattern of approaches towards the bridge. In the series of views, the bridge is presented as a set place to be approached, ready to be explored and appreciated. The concentration of attention is also expressed in the tight framing of the characters' heads through the rear window of the truck. In their initial sight of the bridge, Robert and Francesca share a viewpoint.

The close, shared perspective is short-lived; as the couple leaves the truck they become physically separated, with their outlook divided. The sense of separateness develops from an initial hint, sounded as a neighbour's car crosses the bridge on the couple's arrival. A car horn toot of friendly recognition fractures the couple's shared appreciation of the view, alerting Francesca to an alternative perspective of the situation, of how she may be viewed by others. As her hands flit to her face, they mark Francesca's desire to be held from view; in turn, the gesture momentarily draws her away from Robert. A shift in position is promoted as the film cuts in opposing angles of the now stationary vehicle. The intrusion of the neighbour's greeting has altered the bearing of the moment.

A shift in position and viewpoint is further explored as the characters move outside. Stepping from the confines of the cabin, they are held apart by the open container of the truck's

hold. Against the hold, their sense of the situation is marked as separate. For Robert, the spirit of the moment has turned from anticipation and open conversation to purposeful activity, as he prepares to photograph the bridge. Clutching his camera, his movement out of the truck is marked with nimble business (as addressed in Chapter 2). Dipping in the container, he flips open his work-bag and lifts out the tripod. In contrast, for Francesca, the arrival to the bridge continues a sense of irresolution, of open possibility. The film suggests senses of exposure and a lack of grounding in the sounds accompanying Francesca's removal from the truck. As she steps outside, the air is thick with the chirruping of crickets. There is restlessness in the sound, and a sense of fragility, of slight, delicate movement. In contrast, Robert's assured sense of the moment is noted in a quick snap of the tripod legs, as he clicks them together, marking his move away from Francesca, towards the bridge.

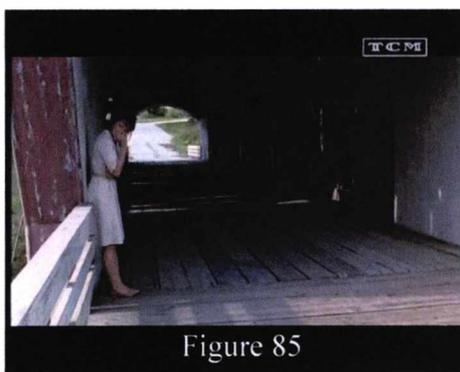
The film adds to the suggestions of distance and separateness with an exploration of levels and angles, placing the characters on different planes. Searching for the right angle from which to capture his view of the bridge, Robert heads purposefully down the slant of an adjacent hillock. The move allows him to gain a fresh sense of perspective, to experiment with angles, to hone his vision. The new position sets him apart from Francesca, who lingers uncertainly at the top of the mound, by the mouth of the bridge. As the distinct positions break the characters' shared aspect and perspective, they express Francesca's sense of removal, from Robert's involved and precise negotiation of the bridge. At the same time, the different standpoints and distance between them affords Francesca the opportunity to study Robert, unobserved, for the first time. Francesca's position atop the bridge offers her a vantage point, whilst also setting her at the periphery of Robert's trained gaze. As the photographer negotiates different views of the bridge, Francesca tries out a range of positions from which to view the man below. Both search for the best perspective, to find and capture the essence of their subject.

The distinction of the characters' standpoints also highlights their contrasting levels of direction. Robert's assured course is held in tension with Francesca's own fretful experience of the situation. There is fluency to Robert's stride and motions; he is at ease in this environment, a state hinted at in the way his khaki shirt melds with the tawny hues of the scrubland. Equally, although the photographer experiments with different angles, there is a sense of sureness and conviction in his steady placement of the tripod, setting it down on the grass, affixing the camera, training his eye to the lens. Placed at the base of the mound, Robert shows a willingness to immerse himself in the landscape, to approach his subject at ground level. Contrastingly, Francesca struggles to find her feet, making tentative, circling steps atop the hill and bridge. She is uncertain of how to place herself in this setting; the situation and locale inspire a sense of dislocation. As the dusky colour of Robert's shirt blends easily with the setting, the starched whiteness of Francesca's dress is set

against the yellows and greens of the cornfields. At the same time, the white of the dress matches that of the fences abutting the bridge. There is a suggestion that through her negotiations, Francesca may find a position of support within this setting.

The film develops the tentative growth of closeness between character and setting as Francesca seeks the sanctuary of the covered bridge. The open mouth of the bridge invites entry into its dark spaces, investing a period of waiting with a sense of purpose. Walking hesitantly towards the covered arch, Francesca allows herself to steal glimpses back at the photographer, emboldened by the promise of refuge and retreat. At the same time, whilst moving under the cover of the sheltering arches, Francesca places herself in Robert's sightline. A move towards concealment contains an act of declaration. As the progression inside the bridge gives a meandering moment a sense of direction, Francesca is now *in step* with Robert's view.

The sense of repositioning is promoted in Francesca's moves and views under the arches. Whilst placing herself in the picture, Francesca tucks her frame against the side of the bridge (FIGURE 85).



Again, the character draws strength from the solid support of a fixed structure. Her body is held snug against the wooden divider, with her white dress matching the wash of the wall. In a moment of repositioning, of moving into the bridge, Francesca *aligns* herself with the setting. Her shift in position also affords a new perspective; from a secure site of cover, she can peep out at Robert. The mystery of this unfamiliar man, for this woman, is marked out in the odd, angular composition of Francesca's view of Robert from the bridge's divide. Peeking out and down, the film's camera and character catch a glimpse of the photographer below, held in long shot amidst the scrub of the land. The view of Robert is framed on either side by the white, diagonal slats and struts of the bridge's barriers, forming a fractured triangular arrangement of slanting lines (FIGURE 86).

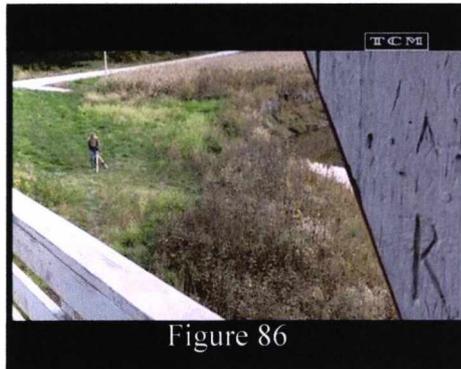


Figure 86

The oblique aspect of the view captures Francesca's sense of the peculiarity of the instant, of being at odds with herself, of finding herself in the presence of a stranger. Whilst marking Francesca's wish to scrutinize and become more familiar with her unforeseen circumstances, the attempt produces only a restricted view of Robert. The film develops a suggestion of Robert's essential mystery in privileging Francesca's viewpoint. The lack of disclosure of Robert's perspective, in this sequence and throughout the film, keeps the character a step removed from Francesca and viewer alike.

Whilst being marked by a sense of constraint, the angular architecture of the view also conveys a measure of heightened sensitivity, of Francesca's involvement in the moment becoming more acute. This notion is bolstered by the sight of the bridge's struts, framing Francesca's sight of Robert. Just as the photographer fixes images of the bridge, Francesca's uncertain sense of the man and instant is gradually becoming more assured, set. Senses of concentration and appreciation increase as the film cuts to a closer view of Robert from Francesca's perspective. The former, jarring composition of slanting lines gives way to a closer, conventional framing of the character below. Holding Robert at a distance, and from a position of refuge, Francesca becomes more secure in her appreciation of the stranger.

Yet, as in *The Age of Innocence*, the film conveys how holding and judging a fixed image of another person can only be an ephemeral achievement, shifting and reshaping with the passing moment. The secure hold of Francesca's gaze is troubled and released by the distracting flutter of a bird's wings, sounding from the shadows of the bridge. The flap and flurry of wings points up Francesca's nervousness, but also an increasing hint of excitement, of the character opening up to distractions and diversions. All fixed resolutions are placed on hold, suspended on the bridge. One distraction from daily duties, of Robert's unforeseen arrival, leads to other, smaller interludes. Whilst drawing her attention shortly from the man below, the noise of the bird stirs Francesca to a further appreciation of her surroundings. With a flutter of wings and heart, Francesca is moved to

touch and explore the lines and textures of the bridge walls, to draw further into its dark enclaves. In the shadowy hollow of this place, the nature of things remains uncertain, unclear. Moving further into the bridge and the afternoon, Francesca is charmed by the promise of possibility.

The structure of the bridge further compliments Francesca's designs, as she finds ways to negotiate her looks to Robert. Tracing her hands along the slats and struts, Francesca comes to the middle of the bridge. An involved arrangement of crisscrossing timbers forms chinks and peep-holes, allowing the character to continue her pattern of stolen glances below. As the film cuts quickly between two close shots of Francesca stooping to sneak a peek, it captures the stealthy breathlessness of the gesture. The closeness and brevity of the shots is held in contrast with a long, lingering view of the photographer, in an expanse of grassland. The close, constricted views of Francesca stealing a glance "under cover" give way to an image of openness. The declarative nature of the shot befits the moment, as Robert calls up to Francesca: "Always this hot around here?" In the declaration of voice and view, the film confirms Robert's acknowledgment of Francesca's presence. Within an act of open announcement, there is the further, suggested recognition of her clandestine attempts at watching him. The sense of exposure develops and transfers to Francesca in a further shift of perspective, as the film cuts to the first, and only, shot of the housewife on the bridge from Robert's point of view (FIGURE 87).



The singularity of the view emphasizes the sense of revelation. Fixed in long shot, framed in a peep-hole, Francesca has been caught out. For the first time, both characters turn their attention to each other, and acknowledge their efforts.

Both the sequence and the characters' relationship progress in measures of distraction and attention, restraint and release. Having been "caught out", Francesca looks to recover her composure. With a quick answer to Robert's query, she turns away from the barrier, withdrawing into the shadows of the bridge. A further flutter of wings accentuates the note of agitation, and matches Francesca's fretful dabs of her hands to her face. Suddenly, her silent questioning of an uncertain moment is answered in a further call from Robert. The photographer invites Francesca to

take a soda from the truck. For the housewife, this familiar call for provision releases her from the suspension and charge of the moment. She seizes the invitation, fixing her attention on this routine offering, moving away from the more exotic, unknown possibilities gathering in the space of the enclave. With a raised hand and a flick of the waist, Francesca turns back to the truck, redirecting the course of the moment. Running to the truck and reaching for the soda, Francesca cools the mounting heat of the instant, quenching her thirst. An opportunity for release is contained within a moment of control.

The retreat inspires a further turnaround and fresh perspectives. Drawing deeply on the soda bottle, Francesca swings round, back in the direction of the bridge. The loosening of tension, afforded by the trip to the truck and the coolness of the drink, is troubled in a moment of disorientation. Robert's presence is suddenly marked by his absence, and by the new positioning of his camera and tripod in the mouth of the bridge (FIGURE 88).

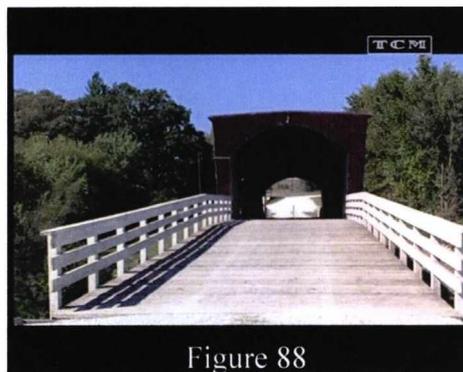


Figure 88

Again, Francesca is caught off guard; just as her perspective becomes more composed and consistent, the view shifts. The measure of dislocation is expressed in the use of an ellipsis; as the film elides the passage of Robert's movement from one side of the bridge to the other, it points up the way the character's sudden absence jars.

In this instant, the film delicately develops Francesca's "hide and seek" glances at Robert on and around the bridge into a tacit pattern of moves. This notion is hinted at in Francesca's shifting reaction to the photographer's absence. A touch of apprehension gives way to a quiet smile as she sets off across the bridge once again, to find Robert. The film develops the idea in the composition of a long shot of the bridge, on the cusp of Francesca's discovery of the errant photographer. Again, the long view calls attention to the distinction of the characters' positions, as they stand on different planes: Francesca on the top of the bridge pathway, Robert in the scrubland underneath. At the same time, Robert's posture, stooping to pick a handful of flowers, now offers a point of connection with Francesca's earlier stance, as she crouched by a gap in the enclave, spying

below. In their negotiations of different perspectives, the characters take pleasure and come together in the act of ‘catching’ each other.

True to the rules of “hide and seek”, the act of moving apart prompts not only the pleasure in finding and the relief of being found, but also the thrill of experiencing the outcome of the pursuit together. In the closing moments of the sequence, Robert is ‘caught’ by Francesca as he composes the gift of the bouquet. The point of discovery, of being found, is captured from Francesca’s point of view (FIGURE 89).

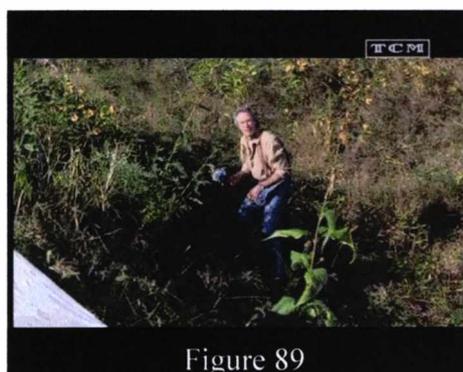


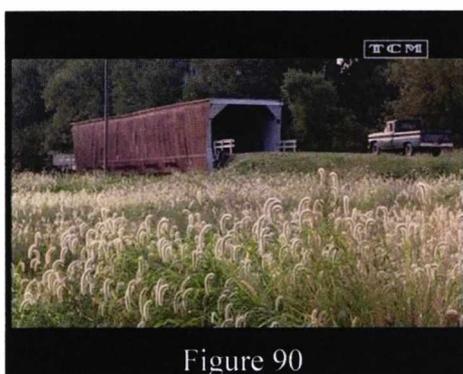
Figure 89

For the first time, as the camera tilts down to reveal the photographer below, there is the suggestion that Francesca has the advantage over Robert. This position is upheld as the game of “hide and seek” gives way to her teasing suggestion that the flowers are poisonous. Yet, just as quickly, the position of advantage is yielded, to give way to a position of equality. With the release of the bouquet and a peel of laughter, the characters crouch closely together to collect the fallen spray of flowers. In this final moment of release, the couple finds common ground, sustain their shared perspective, and give their attention keenly to one another.

Sensitive to the possibilities of variation within repetition, the film handles the second trip, to Hollowell Bridge, to express crucial adjustments in the characters’ fledgling relationship. Whilst both the film and the characters recognize points of correspondence between the two trips, they are equally alert to senses of development and intensification. Again, the film expresses the permutations of familiarity and possibility in its attention to position and perspective. The second trip affords the characters the opportunity to revisit their shared experience of Roseman Bridge and to move the relationship on, to *cover new ground*. As the bridges of Madison County become a meeting place for the couple, they take on aspects of familiarity. Akin to the repeated returns to the Johnson’s kitchen, the trips to the bridges become central to the development of the couple’s transitory routines. Repetition inspires a reassuring sense of familiarity; in turn, there is an

increasing sense of ease, of Robert and Francesca taking pleasure in their private routine. At the same time, the moves to the bridges release Francesca from the more established everyday tasks of the family farmhouse. The couple's developing familiarity, of the setting of the bridge and of each other, does not lead to a blasé approach to place and person; rather, it inspires a more intense sense of awareness, of the open possibilities of time shared.

The position and perspective of the camera conveys grades of development and a rhyme of recognition. The opening shot of the second trip encapsulates a fresh sense of readiness and resolve, whilst echoing the first encounter. Holliwell Bridge is set square in the frame, amidst high peaks of corn (FIGURE 90).



The size and form of the covered structure correspond closely with those of Roseman Bridge. The framing of the shot and distance of the camera from the structure recall the opening views of the earlier sequence. Yet, the film also notes a crucial distinction in its introduction of the new setting. Unlike the first trip, there is to be no gradual approach to the bridge. The structure is presented in a single declamatory view. Also, rather than approaching the bridge with the characters, from the view of their vehicle, the film sets Robert's truck in the shot, already stationed by the mouth of the bridge. The immediacy and arrangement of the view suggest a sense of assertion, of a closer connection between character and setting. This sense is reinforced as the film cuts directly to Robert, in close shot, striding up the embankment of the bridge. His position echoes that of the first trip, in his immediate move down the slope to photograph Roseman Bridge from ground level. Here though, the direction is reversed. In this instant, Robert moves from the field below towards the mouth of the bridge, ready to greet and photograph Francesca as she approaches in her truck. Whilst adopting similar positions to the first meeting, camera and character move in.

The momentum of the second trip is driven by the direction and directness of the characters' moves towards one another. The drive is emphasized as Francesca's truck rolls promptly through the tunnel of the bridge. The tentative, circling steps of the housewife in the earlier sequence are replaced by a clean, straight passage to Robert. Whereas the characters' earlier

alighting from the truck inspired a current of separation, here Francesca steps out of and around the vehicle to shake hands with the waiting photographer. In the first meeting, the characters positioned themselves at a remove from one another, to see and be seen with the reassurance of distance. The second trip is marked by a desire for immediate closeness, and for shared perspectives. An increasing sense of familiarity between the characters develops alongside their closer relationship with the setting. As they greet, Robert gestures towards the shaded enclave of the bridge, inviting Francesca to “make [herself] at home.” This neutral space, this place of transition has begun to assume, for these two people, qualities and characteristics of a familiar, shared retreat.

The sense of a closer, more overt connection is promoted in the direction of the camera’s attention. At particular points, the film draws together the subject of Robert’s lens with that of its own point of focus. The sequence begins and ends with repeated, close shots of Robert photographing Francesca, positioning her as the true point of focus, rather than the bridge. The perspective marks a change from the first meeting on Roseman Bridge, as previously the film privileges Francesca’s point of view, holding Robert at a distance. The shift in focus conveys Robert’s readiness to declare and sustain his interest in Francesca, as well as the housewife’s pleasure of being made the subject of his scrutiny.

At other points, the film returns to focus on Francesca’s perspective. In turn, and before returning “home” to the shade of the tunnel, Francesca pauses to watch Robert as he photographs the bridge. Rather than stealing broken glances, Francesca holds her gaze in a sustained gesture of open appreciation. The film marks the moment in an extensive, fluid shot, as the camera slowly pans from the housewife, to the man below, and back again. The film commits to the view as Francesca commits to her act of viewing. At the same time, it is important to note that the film does not align the view with Francesca’s POV. Rather, the camera is placed a step away from the character, panning right to note the direction of Francesca’s gaze, before following it left to Robert. The decision to refrain from locking together view and character allows the film to convey a gentler act of scrutiny. The film notes the moment as one of affectionate interest rather than intrusive surveillance, whilst retaining the sense of significant connection.

A line of dialogue draws attention to the direction of the characters’ perspectives. Nearing the edge of the bridge, Francesca calls to Robert to “look at that butterfly”, floating her hand up towards a point behind the photographer. The words form a call to direct Robert’s attention to meet hers, to share a perspective and a point of appreciation. Simultaneously, the call expresses a desire to note her attention as focused elsewhere, to justify her sustained gaze in the direction of the photographer. At the same time, Francesca calls for a shared view, whilst drawing attention away from the true bearing of her outlook.

A moment of open appreciation marks a progression, yet also necessitates retreat. Francesca returns to her more furtive game of “hide and seek”, in the body of the bridge. The film charts her passage through the tunnel with a series of looks, of peeps and glimpses of the photographer below. There is comfort to be found in the clandestine nature of the glances, and in the act of repetition. At the same time, the act of *re-playing* marks a wish to capture again the frisson and thrill of the first stolen views of Robert, on Roseman Bridge.

In the meetings on the bridges, the couple seeks to find and complicate senses of familiarity, to draw together and charge their shared time with the stimulation of surprise. This idea reaches its peak in the closing moments of the sequence. Coming to the far edge of the bridge, Francesca leans precariously around the divide to catch a final glimpse of Robert, only to be caught in the act by the photographer, springing from the opposite corner, camera in hand. Again, the characters come closer together by catching each other unawares. The act of surprising and being surprised engenders a moment of shared delight; the film notes the heightening of the mood in a brisk series of tightly framed portrait shots and the giddy laughter of the startled Francesca. Robert’s playful act marks a response to Francesca’s earlier tease of the “poisonous” bouquet of flowers. The joke forms a coda to the two trips, and binds the separate meetings together.

At the same time, the rhyme marks a crucial point of development in the couple’s relationship. There is the sense that the practical joke, and the trained focus of Robert’s camera that serves as the “punch line”, have been earned, worked for and won in the couple’s commitment to spend time together, in their negotiations of the bridges of Madison County. Having composed precise patterns of perspectives, of the characters’ viewing and reviewing of the same settings, the film moves the couple to a position of closeness and confidence, in which both figures acknowledge and enjoy the direct attention of the other.



Conclusion: Achievements on a Grand Scale

This thesis aims to show that the expansiveness of contemporary Hollywood cinema does not lead, by design, to distance and remoteness. Rather, it is a possibility of contemporary Hollywood to organize its “widescreen largesse” and “aural amplification” to render expressions of human closeness. The thesis considers four films that operate on the grand-scale, that are sensitive to matters of intimacy, and that express the relationships of their characters through the organization of their elaborate designs. In the four films, expressions of intimacy stem, for example, from sweeping long-shots of fields, a mobile ‘phone connection across vast distance, the surging sound of a song on the radio, and an array of exquisite *objets d’art*. Each film composes a broad canvas of precise patterns, arrangements and concentrations of detail. The integration and refinement of potentially “bloated” points of style expresses the closeness of the characters’ relationships. Further, the study claims that certain expressions of intimacy may be best revealed within an environment of amplitude. For instance, in *The Straight Story*, the connection of Alvin to the land, and the urge and toil of his journey are encapsulated in a dissolve moving mower across swathes of wheat. In *The Age of Innocence*, the fragile creation of a private, pocketed space is achieved and threatened by its place in the grandiloquent surroundings of a Society Dinner. In the expansive worlds of the films, the balance and measure of each scenario express the characters’ own adjustments, arrangements and situation. Alert to the pitfalls and possibilities of magnification in the medium of film, the four works conceive sensitive understandings of human affairs.

A close concentration on moments from the four films, through the six chapters, enables me to break down the elements of organization into individual points of style. In turn, the act of disassembly reveals the different constituents of the films’ “big architecture”. At the same time, the concentration on singular elements shows how different techniques reveal distinct aspects of intimate expression. Moving through the chapters, the thesis explores the most assertive and prominent features of the films’ visual and aural designs, as well as less demonstrative and more abstract elements. In all cases, from the sweep and majesty of a vista or musical score, to the flick of the hand or turn of phrase, to the design of a dissolve, the elements of style are shaped to convey precise measures and aspects of intimacy.

The study begins, in Chapter 1, with the most immediately striking element of a grand-scale film: its arrangement of the landscape, its “expansive vistas”. Tracts of land and rolling hills carry Alvin to his brother in *The Straight Story*; settings of the Iowan landscape house the affair between Robert and Francesca in *The Bridges of Madison County*; skyscrapers and grand hotels define the limits of the relationships in *The Insider*; the sumptuous designs of Opera Houses and Ballrooms

allow for meetings between lovers in *The Age of Innocence*. The films shape their landscapes to achieve close and complex levels of integration between character and setting. They are alert to the characters' *situations* in wider environments. At points, the aspect of an expansive space or setting is seen to connect and alter alongside that of the character. The films achieve precise measures of modulation; the landscapes bear and inflect the characters' changing circumstances, and vice versa. The precise intonation of the expressions is distinct across the films. In *The Straight Story*, neither Alvin nor the plight of his personal pilgrimage is 'dwarfed' by the imposing views of the Iowan countryside. Rather, the film arranges the shifting aspect of the natural landscape to express the moods and meanings of one man's journey. The stretch and undulation of the terrain, whilst conveying the size of Alvin's task, express the way the character yields and bends to his situation, patiently moving on. The changing light and colour of the landscape, as Alvin waits for the rain to cease, capture a swell of enthusiasm to restart the journey. In contrast, rather than conveying closeness in long-shots of its open country spaces, *The Bridges of Madison County* expresses precise grades of enclosure and release in a small number of fixed settings. The porch to the family farmhouse presents Francesca with the openness of the land; at the same time, it draws the family tightly together, away from the inviting prospects of the open road. The more impersonal city settings of *The Insider* demand a particular route of the characters' increasingly intimate negotiations. The prescribed associations of grandeur and exclusivity attached to a high-class hotel contain the measures of aloof formality and clandestine disclosure that inform the first meeting of Wigand and Bergman.

Whilst distinct in their designs, the three films are bound by their attention to a patterning of locale. Each return to a particular setting – hillside, porch, or hotel – carries the resonance afforded by repetition and variation into an understanding of the characters' relationships. Across the extent of the films, patterns form in cycles: in visual motions of spirals and circles in *The Straight Story*, marking the rhythm and cohesion of the character's pilgrimage; in each returning view of the spaces of Madison County expanding and contracting to match the characters' senses of open possibility and restriction; to convey Wigand's ongoing and increasing restriction by the surrounding, enclosing structures of his world, as an "insider".

The films achieve a balance between the encompassing designs of their landscapes, and the punctuation of the characters' gestures within the locales. Without "blatantly point-making" or announcing the significance of individual movements, the films attend to the impact of a seemingly more diminutive point of style. To recall thoughts from the introduction, the use of gesture is a good example of how the films discriminate differently in their handling of aspects of grandeur. This consideration forms the focus of Chapter 2. In some instances, the dramatic grandeur of a particular

scenario is seen to be tempered by the austerity of the characters' physical movements. Such is the case in *The Insider*, as the intensity of the men's meetings is contained and measured in their gestures. A sense of containment and control carries in *The Bridges of Madison County*, as Francesca uses the *weight* and solidity of her surroundings to accommodate little releases of anxiety. The film develops a sense of austerity in Robert's spare gestures. In this instance, the sparseness of gesture creates a sense of strength and gravity. In all cases, the films are alert to the dramatic weight of composure, varying the pitch of a moment in the measure of the characters' moves. At other points, the apparently slight suggestion of a move of hand, head or body carries the weight of the film. A gesture, when sensitively placed and performed, can encapsulate the mood and meaning of the moment, and the wider concerns of the film as a whole, without appearing mannered or momentous. A tug of Bergman's thumb in *The Insider*, and the tease of a frond of hair in *The Bridges of Madison County* coil and contain a multitude of tensions. In contrast, the films also conceive declamatory gestures that seek intimacy through their bombast. In *The Age of Innocence*, the passing wave of Ellen's fan over throngs of opera-goers forms a personal bewitchment. In the same film, Ellen's audacious move across the room at the Duke of St. Austrey Dinner is publicly demonstrative yet personally weighted, performed to seal her connection with Archer as tightly as the wink of an eye. Across *The Age of Innocence*, public gestures both conceal and allow for concentrations of intimate display. In *The Insider*, Bergman's effusive moves are performed to encourage open commitment, to get Wigand to 'open up'. The producer seeks to *sway* the scientist, tempting and taunting in braggadocio moves. Occasionally, the intense assertion of a gesture demands intimacy and risks recoil. As Archer stabs his pen in the air, claiming the afternoon, Ellen shrinks back. In *The Bridges of Madison County*, Robert stands in the rain, wordlessly, hopelessly, declaring his presence to Francesca. In these instances, the films express the possibilities and risks of obtrusive gestures, without appearing overbearing in their own designs.

The films are equally attentive to the rhetoric of the characters' words. Again recalling remarks from the introduction, of V. F. Perkins, the films offer "bold statements" that are "refined by the patterns of detail built over and around them."¹ The handling of voice and conversation, as addressed in Chapter 3, is indicative of the way bold statements, thematic and verbal, are refined through arrangements of nuanced expression. Intricate layers of precise articulation shape the dramatic pitch of the films, and carry delicate negotiations between the characters. On the periphery of pronounced public occasions, the lovers in *The Age of Innocence* form private patterns of interrupted conversation. Their relationship achieves a sense of coherence and development through the gradual growth of a chain of words, across disparate spaces and times. In stolen moments,

¹ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 119.

Archer and Ellen compress meaning in brief exchanges, in the precise phrasing of shared words. At other times, the film expresses the intensity of the lovers' conversations by balancing the volume of a grand social scenario. The film tapers the soundtrack and changes tones of lighting to measure the resonance and penetration of the lovers' words. In all instances, *The Age of Innocence* explores and achieves a concentration of spoken meaning, in capacious surroundings. In contrast, *The Insider* is shown to explore and measure the development of ongoing discussions. Awash with words, the film is sensitive to the length and process of its characters' negotiations. Each exchange is shaped into a crucial stage of passage – from hector to whisper, from joke to caution – forming a verbal equivalent of Alvin's extensive journey in *The Straight Story*. Yet, whereas Alvin is bound by the purpose of his travels yet free to the possibilities of the open landscape, Wigand and Bergman are tightly restricted in their garrulous meetings. The confidentiality agreement forms an invisible, all-encompassing scaffold to their conversations, at once acting as barrier and support. The two characters find ways to *raise* the issue, on the platform of "public concern". The chapter shows how *The Insider* is equally concerned with the physical trappings of conversation, with the precise grades of distance and closeness afforded by communication technology. In its handling of the ways and means of talking, the film explores how, in a web of media attention and legal wrangling, it is easy to lose touch and difficult to say what you mean. Open forms of speculation are addressed in *The Bridges of Madison County*. Akin to *The Insider*, the film explores the route through ongoing conversations, as expressions move from polite to familiar. The ceremony of polite formality and generality is seen to inspire a quickening of connection between the lovers, as they set off to explore the bridges. In all three films, the wider environment dictates the measure of shared words, and the limitations and possibilities for closeness.

The films take advantage of the resources offered by contemporary technology, without indulging in the easy impact of heightened effects. One crucial example is the use of the range and volume of "multi-channel sound", in the arrangements of the musical score. Chapter 4 addresses aspects of musical composition in *The Bridges of Madison County* and *The Straight Story*. The former film is shown to shape a single, imposing musical theme in increments and graded variations. Each sounding of the theme marks slight yet crucial shifts in the lovers' relationship. Further, in one particular instance, a moment is transformed by the richness and volume of a song. As Francesca and Robert dance in the kitchen, the film calls upon the scope and scale of its acoustics to fill the screen with the sound of a song. The hypnotic enchantment of the moment is expressed in the low hum of the bass, whilst stimulation stems from the crispness of the treble. *The Straight Story* broadens the musical range to explore the expanding inferences of multiple themes. In the sounding of "Rose's Theme", the sight of Rose watching the boy with the ball initially

appears peripheral to the greater significances of the film. However, in repetition, the film uses the music of “Rose’s Theme” to bind together thematically local moments. As it does so, the momentousness of such a seemingly trivial moment of play emerges. Through the music, in patterns of sound and scenarios, *The Straight Story* creates a gradual deepening of Rose’s circumstances. In turn, the significance of these scenarios develops our understanding of Alvin’s relationships, from brief encounters with passers-by, to his committed movements to meet with Lyle.

It is a particular achievement of the films that they handle more abstract or “non-figurative” points of style to express precise measures of human closeness. In Chapter 5, the use of two devices of editing – dissolves and ellipses – is addressed in relation to *The Straight Story* and *The Age of Innocence*. In many narrative films, dissolves and ellipses are employed to ‘move the story on’, baldly shaving away ‘dead’ moments of time to sustain the pace and momentum of a plot’s designs. The two films considered make use of the devices’ capacities of transition and truncation, not only to compress their narratives, but also to measure the bearing and involvement of individual characters in a particular set of circumstances. In *The Straight Story*, through the repeated use of dissolves and ellipses, a prolonged period of travelling is delicately compacted into a much shorter running time. The film is careful to retain a sense of the momentousness of the full journey within the abridged version of events. Each concise moment on screen is created as a scaled-down model of a grander set of circumstances. In this way, the film pockets extensive stretches of time into sequences lasting minutes. Within each sequence (in, for example, Alvin’s meeting with the hitchhiker, and the stopover in the barn), the film uses colour, rhythm and the recurrence of visual motifs to create a miniature account of a longer period. At the same time, particular condensations carry the full resonance of the character’s commitment to a wider set of circumstances. For example, the passage of a dissolve from the mower store to Rose at home expresses a pang of feeling, of Alvin missing his daughter. It strikes a chord, conveying the larger burden of Alvin’s prolonged absence from home. In a corresponding manner, *The Age of Innocence* uses dissolves and ellipses to express the impression that each happening makes on Archer. The film traces across the length and breadth of the world of New York aristocracy, marking time as a series of fashionable and extravagant ‘Events’. At the same time, it charts Archer’s relationship with Ellen, through the ‘Events’ and more private rendezvous, and across the years. Through dissolves and ellipses, the film brings both sets of circumstances together. At first, stolen moments of shared time are richly textured, to be savoured as they pass. Ultimately, the expansive world of Society is measured out as a vast, hollow experience for Archer, when he is detached from Ellen. Events and objects shift and slide together as empty tableaux.

A more conventional way of expressing the bearing of the world on a film's character is through the use of optical point of view ("POV"). Whilst being alert to the immediacy of connection offered by the use of this technique, the films create more graded senses of intimacy by widening their considerations of 'perspective'. Chapter 6 explores the position and perspective of camera and character in the wider world of the films. In a meticulous organization of viewpoints, the films express the way the characters "stand towards" a particular event. In all of the films considered, POV is used sparingly and at precise points, to convey the immediacy and intensity of a connection. At the same time, the films trouble and complicate the conventional associations of POV to express tensions in the characters' negotiations of events and each other. In *The Age of Innocence*, POV shots anchor Archer to May, arresting him in her gaze, fixing his 'wandering eye' on his betrothed. At other points, the use of the device expresses a crucial margin of distance, of Ellen to Archer, as she "just" misses the eye of the camera, and their eye-lines fail to meet. As *The Age of Innocence* channels the viewpoint of the camera to connect character to character, *The Straight Story* uses POV to taper one man's experience of an expansive situation. The pivotal moment of crossing a monumental stretch of water, on reaching the Mississippi, is measured in a series of fragmentary glances from Alvin's perspective. Correspondingly, a charging cascade of cyclists is marked as a pleasurable, personal surprise for Alvin.

The Age of Innocence and *The Straight Story* are equally alert to the development of meaning coming from the release of the camera from optical POV. In the films, a physical broadening of views can retain the signature of a character's personal involvement, whilst developing the resonance of the moment. In *The Straight Story*, as the camera unlocks from Alvin's perspective to move to a bird's eye view of the cyclists on the road, it develops a sense of the momentousness of the instant for this one man. It expresses the *longstanding* aspect of the fleeting moment. In *The Age of Innocence*, the glances passing between lovers are forever at the risk of being intercepted by the flurrying, piercing looks of the collected aristocracy. In both examples, events 'on the periphery' are surveyed with a sudden intensity of scrutiny. As Alvin 'catches' at the details of the passing cyclists, the assemblies of guests in *The Age of Innocence* seek glimpses of scandal and intrigue amongst the gathered throngs. Similarly, Francesca risks being 'discovered' in her stolen glances at Robert. Across the width and breadth of the bridges of Madison County, the characters take pleasure and come together in the act of 'catching' each other, playing an unspoken game of "hide and seek" with their gazes. In the assertive connection of a POV shot, to more suggestive glimpses of details at the corners of wider environments, the films' channels of attention convey the characters' shifting commitments.

Focusing each chapter on a particular point of style allows me to channel my attention on particular achievements of the films. At the same time, in revisiting moments through the chapters, the study aims to draw attention to the synthesis of elements within the films. To recall Perkins, “The specifically filmic qualities derive from the *complex*, not from any one of its components. What distinguishes film from other media, and the fiction movie from other forms, is none of the elements but their combination, interaction, fusion.”² In *The Insider*, as Bergman wades into the sea, mobile ‘phone in hand, the resonance of the moment comes from the film’s integration of points of style: patterning views of the ocean and hotel, rhyming gestures of the two men as they touch their phones to their faces, pacing the rhythm and trajectory of the characters’ words, cutting between shots to suggest Wigand’s splintering thoughts, moving the camera tight to the characters, then at a remove, leaving Bergman detached in the distant shimmer of the water. “The cinema”, as Martin exclaims, “does not get much more magnificent than this.”³ In the close relationship of points of style, a moment of magnificence expresses the precise measure of intimacy achieved, and lost, between the two men.

As well as shaping the complex of their grand designs to convey nuances of the characters’ relationships, the films are also alert to tensions and suspensions of meaning. It is a central aim of this thesis to follow Klevan’s suggestion, as voiced in the introduction, to be “responsive to the overlaps, [to] keep in play the balance of meanings.”⁴ Thus, the chapters explore the balance of association in particular moments of the films. A prominent example is Francesca’s trip to Holliwel Bridge, rich in matters of suspension: “The transient nature of the setting, as an intermediary place between places, matches and promotes the transitory relationship of Robert and Francesca. The conclusion of their time together is undetermined, *up in the air*.” In *The Age of Innocence*, a meeting of Archer and Ellen occurs under the glare of the gathered crowds and the opera spotlight: “The film’s use of narrowed light ... can be seen to express the intensity of the lovers’ feelings for each other. Yet, it can also be viewed as an expression of the intense interest of the surrounding figures ... It is an achievement of the film to convey both senses simultaneously.” In a handling of expansive features, the films create a delicate weighting of suggestion, balancing tensions and complexities of meaning, overlapping concerns.

A concentration on details of the films has allowed for an appreciation of the films’ concentrations *of* details. In each interpretation and discrimination, the thesis seeks, again following Klevan’s proposition, to “do justice to the visual and aural specifics of a film’s expressive

² Ibid: p. 117.

³ Adrian Martin, “Delirious Enchantment”, p. 3.

⁴ Andrew Klevan, “Notes on teaching film style”, p. 215.

personality”.⁵ In doing so, the study brings to light a shared trait of the films’ personalities, of their explorations and expressions of ‘magnificent intimacy’. These are films of fine-grain control and sensitivity, working in the stylistic register of amplitude characteristic of contemporary Hollywood. The thesis advances a vocabulary of criticism to match the rhetoric of the films, to understand and appreciate the works’ handling of their register. The encompassing strength of the films is to unfold with the full sweep and scale of prestigious production, without submitting to the possible impersonality or crudeness of amplification. Detailed consideration of this achievement allows for a greater understanding of the designs and possibilities of contemporary Hollywood cinema.



⁵ Klevan, “The mysterious disappearance of style: some critical notes about the writing on *Dead Ringers*”, pp. 163-164.

Filmography

The following abbreviations have been used:

<i>d</i>	director	<i>ed</i>	editor
<i>m</i>	music	<i>n</i>	novel
<i>p</i>	producer	<i>pd</i>	production design
<i>ph</i>	cinematographer	<i>s</i>	story
<i>sc</i>	scriptwriter		

The Age of Innocence

1993 United States colour 139 minutes

p Barbara De Fina *d* Martin Scorsese *sc* Jay Cocks, Martin Scorsese *n* Edith Wharton *ph* Michael Ballhaus *ed* Thelma Schoonmaker *pd* Dante Ferretti *m* Elmer Bernstein *cast* Daniel Day-Lewis (*Newland Archer*), Michelle Pfeiffer (*Ellen Olenska*), Winona Ryder (*May Welland*), Alexis Smith (Louise van der Luyden), Geraldine Chaplin (*Mrs. Welland*), Mary Beth Hurt (*Regina Beaufort*), Alec McCowen (*Sillerton Jackson*), Richard E. Grant (*Larry Lefferts*), Miriam Margolyes (*Mrs. Mingott*), Robert Sean Leonard (*Ted Archer*), Sian Phillips (*Mrs. Archer*), Jonathan Pryce (*Rivière*), Michael Gough (*Henry van der Luyden*), Joanne Woodward (*Narrator*).

The Bridges of Madison County

1995 United States colour 135 minutes

p, d, m Clint Eastwood *sc* Richard LaGravenese *n* Robert James Waller *ph* Jack N. Green *ed* Joel Cox *pd* Jeannine Claudia Oppewall *cast* Clint Eastwood (*Robert Kincaid*), Meryl Streep (*Francesca Johnson*), Annie Corley (*Carolyn Johnson*), Victor Slezak (*Michael Johnson*), Jim Haynie (*Richard Johnson*), Sarah Kathryn Schmitt (*Young Carolyn*), Christopher Kroon (*Young Michael*), Phyllis Lyons (*Betty*), Debra Monk (*Madge*), Richard Lage (*Lawyer*), Michelle Benes (*Lucy Redfield*).

The Insider

1999 United States colour 157 minutes

p Pieter Jan Brugge *d* Michael Mann *sc* Eli Roth, Michael Mann *ph* Dante Spinotti *ed* William Goldenberg *pd* Brian Morris *m* Pieter Bourke *cast* Al Pacino (*Lowell Bergman*), Russell Crowe (*Jeff Wigand*), Christopher Plummer (*Mike Wallace*), Diana Venora (*Liane Wigand*), Philip Baker Hall (*Don Hewitt*), Hallie Kate Eisenberg (*Barbara Wigand*).

The Straight Story

1999 United States colour 112 minutes

p Pierre Edelman *d* David Lynch *sc* John Roach, Mary Sweeney *ph* Freddie Francis *ed* Mary Sweeney *pd* Jack Fisk *m* Angelo Badalamenti *cast* Richard Farnsworth (*Alvin Straight*), Sissy Spacek (*Rose Straight*), Jane Galloway Heitz (Dorothy), Joseph A. Carpenter (*Bud*), Dan Flannery (*Doctor Gibbons*), Everett McGill (*Tom*), Anastasia Webb (*Crystal*), James Cada (*Danny Riordan*), Sally Wingert (*Darla Riordan*), Wiley Harker (*Verlyn Heller*), Kevin P. Farley (*Harold Olsen*), John Farley (*Thorvald Olsen*), Harry Dean Stanton (*Lyle Straight*).

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Addendum

(Added March 2006)

Extended Filmography

Further films (referenced in the main body of the thesis):

Heat (Michael Mann, 1995)

It's a Wonderful Life (Frank Capra, 1946)

Jungle Fever (Spike Lee, 1991)

The Magnificent Ambersons (Orson Welles, 1942)

Magnolia (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999)

The Scarlet Empress (Josef von Sternberg, 1934)

Titanic (James Cameron, 1997)

Unforgiven (Clint Eastwood, 1992)

Wall Street (Oliver Stone, 1987)

Wild at Heart (David Lynch, 1990)

