"ALL OF THIS IS SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS"

"ALL OF THIS IS SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS":

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with Robert Coover's <u>A Night at the Movies</u> as an exploration of the construction of fictions in contemporary society through the intersection of writing and cinema, reader and spectator. The role of memory in the retention of these constructions is discussed in the interest of seeing how particular translations of filmic codes into writing operate, and what might be the effect of these translations.

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INTRODUCTION

A starting point, a point of entry, would like to present
itself, if only provisionally, in "Inside the Frame," a
story from A Night at the Movies: in its first few lines,
the text constitutes itself (again, only provisionally) as a
film western:

> Dry weeds tumble across a dusty tarred
> street, lined by low ramshackle wooden
> buildings. A loosely hinged screen door
> bangs repetitiously; nearby a sign creaks in
> the wind. A thin dog passes, sniffing idly
> at the borders of the street. More tum-
> bleweeds. More dull banging. (Coover 1987,
> 76)

While the initial sentence is important, for the moment I am
interested in the second sentence, with its banging screen
door: in the context of the search for an entrance to the
text I come to this door. For while it is a rich image, in,
initially, accommodating the reader's expectations, as well
as in introducing the story's soundtrack -- a banging
familiar enough that the "dull" of its second mention seems
to have been understood in its first, as has the identifica-
tion of the weeds as tumbleweeds -- and in emphasizing the
image's desolation, it also comes to stand as a tease to the
reader: constantly opening and closing, and in doing so
making itself known, the screen door seems to offer en-

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trance, while, equally, denying that entrance. We stand in the street, or, at least, we <u>see</u> from the street (remember that street): a door, banging: a promise of access, constantly, continually, offered and withheld.

Access to what, at the narrative level, we aren't told: the text refuses to tell us where the door might lead (just as it refuses to tell us what the creaking sign says -- a sign not silent, yet not saying anything either). But we <u>see</u> the door, we see its possibility. Working within a code of the visual, the text urges us to construct the image of that door, to construct the frame around it -- the door has to bang <u>against</u> something -- but refuses to take us further, to construct the context for the frame. Having given us the possibility of entrance, it denies us interior (we never see inside the door) and exterior (beyond one of any number of "low ramshackle wooden buildings") views, denies us any clue as to where we might be going. Hence, a multitude of possible entrances, none of them holding any particular promise.

And there are other doors, there are windows, yet it is always the same: we never really get inside. The most we get is a glimpse through any one passage, invariably a glimpse affording no information, no clues, only, perhaps, a reference to a code, or a memory. We see, for instance -- although, curiously, we're not shown -- a hotel lobby: "Is there laughter in the brightly lit hotel lobby? Perhaps

it's only the rain beating on tin roofs" (77). The glimpse
-- a flash of light, a single frame -- holds no force, does
not allow any orientation, cannot even distinguish between
interior and exterior as the source of the sound. That
mysterious sound (or sounds -- are they really that simi-
lar?) signals a problem of identification: any recognition
that might come from the scene of the lobby is immediately
effaced as the discourse fails to allow recognition to
become knowledge, to rest finally, securely, in identifica-
tion.

That identification is a vital and necessary com-
ponent in the creation of a position for the reader as
unified subject, as "the intending and knowing manipulator
of the object, or as the conscious and coherent originator
of meanings and actions" (Smith 1988, xxviii). This
addressing of stable subject positions is the standard
operational mode of classic narrative film and, in litera-
ture, of classic realism, both of which work in the interest
of liberal humanist ideology in representing

> not only...a world of consistent subjects
> who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and
> action, but also in offering the reader, as
> the position from which the text is most
> readily intelligible, the position of
> subject as the origin both of understanding
> and of action in accordance with that
> understanding. (Belsey 1980, 67)

The unified subject of humanism, then, is "fixed and
unchangeable, an element in a given system of differences
which is human nature and the world of human experience..."

(90). The positioning of the reader as fixed "origin of meaning, knowledge and action" presupposes the intelligibility of stable texts, and the maintenance of the illusion that the reader shares in the stable meanings offered by those texts; thus the difficulty in recognition that we see above disrupts that exchange and, consequently, the position from which intelligibility is to take place. In this way the text subverts the reader's desire for intelligibility, coherence and order, a desire for entry into the enunciation, and inside the frame that is the product of an initial identification: "Identification is the hold of the image, from the initial assumption of significance, identifying of, to its ultimate confirmation by narrative order, identifying into and with" (Heath 1981, 170).

The subversion of the first term in this process ("identification of") signals the operational mode of "Inside the Frame": the passage from recognition to identification, from signifier to signified, is constantly blocked, the initial recognition coming to appear as a momentarily opened door, the closing of which (and it is, clearly, in your face) frustrates the desire for entry ("identification into and with"). Those glimpses -- single frames, yes, but _freeze_ frames too -- deny the reader the intelligibility that would allow that entry, deny the desired coherence that would be the running together of the

frames in an undisturbed chain. The banging door -- not so
much the door now as the banging -- punctuates each of those
glimpses as the closing of the camera (projector?) shutter
by a force beyond the reader's control.

I would like to take this story, this story's stra-
tegy, as a (provisional, of course, and also somewhat
arbitrary) point of entry to A Night at the Movies, as
standing in direct relation to the collection itself.
(Where, after all, do we enter a collection of short
stories, which presents any number of possible openings?)
For just as "Inside the Frame" offers a series of (over-
determined) images with which, in which, we might expect to
identify, to find comfort and security, so does the collec-
tion itself offer access through recognition to a no less
familiar series of scenes (or seens). This process of
offering and denying, of giving and taking away, of (re)pre-
senting and unpresenting, becomes the dominant strategy of
the text, working under a code of the cinematic spectacle,
of the already seen. The text necessarily disrupts the
reading process: the reader is addressed as both reader and
spectator, neither position offering the comfort of stable
knowledge, of identification. "All of this is surrounded by
darkness," coming in the middle of the story, signals this
double address, delineating the frame around the movie
screen, positioning the reader as spectator in a viewing
situation. That articulation shifts the reader from a

position as spectator in the street, witnessing events, to a
position as spectator in a cinema, witnessing recorded
events. The text's resistance in isolating and identifying
such things as the source of a sound comes to be seen as the
inability of the spectator to overcome the limitations of
the viewing experience: the sound of laughter or rain could
come from either the hotel lobby or from tin roofs because,
really, it comes from behind the screen, and so doesn't
allow its source to be identified precisely. "Inside the
Frame," then, must be seen as the narrating of a memory of
films, a remembering of prior viewings.

Throughout the collection, the reader is in the
presence of the screen, this screening which he/she remem-
bers: it is impossible to read these stories without
simultaneously rolling remembered film texts. The subject
of the double address is shown to be constructed as a
repository of texts (cinematic or otherwise), memory being
the subject's (proposed) point of access to those texts.
The memory of those texts, the network of discourses that
constitutes the subject, becomes the referent: if these
stories refer to a "reality" it is a reality constructed
through texts, and conspicuously so. Any notion of literary
or cinematic realism is ultimately turned against itself, as
"reality" comes to be seen as its representation, and so, as
its re-presentation in memory. A real existing outside of

cultural texts disappears: if there is to be a real, it is this real, a cinematic real/reel, as good as any other.

In the translation of cinematic representation into writing, the difficulty of representation itself is foregrounded, as the mechanics of cinema (the screen, the frame, the camera, dissolves) impose themselves as an extra set of codes and conventions, both inviting and blocking entry into the fiction. The address to the reader as spectator presents a challenge to intelligibility and coherence, a challenge to the mastery of subject over text(s). The text (as unity) itself comes to occupy a precarious position between writing and cinema, story and film.[1] The appeal to the familiar, through allusion and citation, becomes less an orienting principle ("I know where I am; I've been here before") than a disorienting one, disrupts, finally, the notion of the subject as possessing a unified and stable knowledge, as possessing stable texts providing stable meanings.

This strategy -- the proliferation of codes, the allusion to familiar texts -- conforms to what has been

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[1] The appearance of the book itself helps to establish this tension: the table of contents goes under the title "Program," and is divided into conventions and genres ("Previews of Coming Attractions," "The Weekly Serial," "Musical Interlude"; "ADVENTURE!" "COMEDY!" "ROMANCE!"). The following page carries the message "Ladies and Gentlemen May safely visit this Theatre as no Offensive Films are ever Shown Here" (which proves to be a questionable statement).

identified, by Frank Burke in "Aesthetics and Postmodern

Cinema," as "multiple coding," which

> defeats the fetishism of unitary coding
> (collapsing all codes within a work into a
> master code: the 'meaning of the work') --
> fetishism which locks the consumer of the
> text into the presentation itself. More-
> over, it gives and takes away at the same
> time. The text is there but not there,
> because it is always pointing somewhere
> else. Moreover, the multiply coded text
> does not re-present the 'elsewhere' (the
> original context), it only refers to it.
> Since both the current text and the original
> sources are decontextualized, one is left
> somewhere in between, faced with the chal-
> lenge of creating one's own context or of
> suspending the need for one altogether.
> (71)

We have seen this structure -- of there/not there, give/take

away, offer/deny, open/close -- at work in "Inside the

Frame," and, again, it is a structure that informs A Night

at the Movies as a whole. These stories, by constantly

refering to an "original" source in memory, constantly refer

to the presence of an absent text, or to the (lost) origin

of other codes. In this sense (and this is the sense in

which Burke sees the multiply-coded text), the text works to

un-present, to dismantle previous (re)presentations.

This is what I see happening in the first sentence,

and in the story which follows:. an invitation (to a gun-

fight?) to the reader that is not one, the possibility of

entry both offered and denied. For while we clearly recog-

nize the context for the image of the street, we equally

clearly recognize its flaw. The weeds, the dust, the

buildings, are all consistent with our (remembered) vision
of film westerns; and yet, under that dust, was there ever a
"tarred street"? The presence of that pavement serves as a
disruption, a block, preventing the reader from taking a
(comfortable) position in relation to (in) the narrative, a
position based on the security of the initial recognition,
and on the expectations following on that recognition. What
end up being disrupted, then, are the assumptions upon which
those expectations rest, assumptions of coherence, of gener-
ic consistency, of the stability of discourse; and, more
specifically, assumptions of the correspondence between
fiction (cinema, narrative) and "reality," in this case
between the western and American history. For what is
finally disturbing about that opening sentence is that our
knowledge of the American frontier, the "Old West,"
(learned, it must be admitted, from westerns) does not in-
clude the possibility of tarred street.[2]

In that sentence, then, the giving only to take
away: the street is simultaneously orienting and disori-
enting, point of recognition/identification and point of
disruption; eventually it is lost, as point of the spec-
tator's vision, to be replaced by the seat in the cinema.

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[2] Nor does it include the bus that, in the sentence
following the above quotation, rolls into the scene,
perhaps, but also no less provisionally, announcing another
easily recognized, because familiar, genre, the western
parody. And I say provisionally because there remains the
question as to whether what follows constitutes a parody any
more than it constitutes a western.

It becomes the site of the instability of the reader's position, the site of a shifting of ground which disallows a stability of knowledge, of memory, of identification. What should provide a stable point of entry to the text is thrown into question by an unexpected incongruence, evidence that what has become known cannot necessarily be trusted, whether or not that knowledge has been learned, committed to memory, through repetition of the pattern. Generic models rely on a familiarity with established conventions, codes, and markers in order to create a set of expectations to be satisfied, desire to be fulfilled; "Inside the Frame" skews that initial marker in hopes of skewing the reader's expectations, disallowing a position of knowledge of what will be delivered, disallowing the illusion of narrative plenitude.

Not that what is delivered does not necessarily fit the mold: we do get a small town, a mysterious gunslinger, a (brief) gunfight, a sheriff, a lonely woman, a riderless horse, an Indian, a card game, six music hall dancers and a rich woman with a Negro servant. What we also get is a bus, a marching band, "A tall man...holding a limp woman in his arms..." (76), a singing and dancing couple in white tuxedos, and "a strange looking person [walking] woodenly past...staring straight ahead, his arms held out stiffly before him" (77). Since we have not seen them leave the bus, we are left to assume that these incongruous characters wandered in from other movie sets, or other movies. We get

a western, yes, but also a musical, a gothic horror, a domestic melodrama. The boundaries, it seems, will not hold.

That transgression of generic boundaries, the subversion and the dismantling of generic expectations, leaves, as the title suggests, a frame, or more precisely, a framework. If the boundaries can no longer hold, it is because their erection was based on unstable ground in the first place: any attempt to reconstitute a fiction based on convention must be seen as false, as relying on the assumption of a unitary subject, a stability of meaning, on the illusion of coherence that characterizes classic realism. Genre, in this sense, is an exhausted set of codes designed to offer the leap from recognition to identification, to offer stable memory as a distinct point of reference, as knowledge itself. What is assumed is an agreement between text and receiver, that, yes, we know what this means.

"Inside the Frame," then, dismantles those barriers, leaving, in only one sense of the title, a mere frame. The codes of cinematic representation themselves provide the source of their own destruction. Order and coherence, as the desired effects of narrative, and as requiring the smoothing over of gaps in that narrative, become the elsewhere of the text: those gaps that could always be smoothed over before, in those other texts that provide us with our knowledge of this text, now gape wide, appearring

as holes that defy attempts at being filled. And so the band, the source of the "martial music" that has approached throughout the story, is suddenly found to have only one survivor, who "retrieves his battered trumpet and puts it defiantly to his crushed lips" (77); the dog seen earlier "sniffing idly at the borders of the street" is now seen pinned under the back wheel of the bus. Causality, a coherently ordered chain of events upon which classic narrative depends for its (illusory) unity, is subverted to the point of unintelligibility. There is ultimately no explanation for the musician's defiance, no reason -- and no agent -- for the (apparent) slaughter of his band. These gaps and incongruous details are left to stand unresolved, resisting any attempt by the reader/spectator to make, to force, the connections that must be assumed to exist. As remembered text, the story absorbs a memory of narrative plenitude, ultimately pointing to memory's (false) desire for continuity.

Here, the persistence of vision required for the smoothing over of the gaps on the actual film strip, the blank spaces between the frames, fails, leaving the spectator with a collection of frozen moments, twenty-fourths of seconds, which, if they seem complete, are only so because we have seen them move, continuously, before. And so, "The Indian leaps, a knife between his teeth" (77), but never lands, just kind of hangs there in the air until, nearly a

page later, we learn that "The sheriff has shot the Indian.
Or an Indian" (77); "A boy with a slingshot takes aim at an
old man delivering an unheard graveside soliloquy," yet
never lets go the shot, because the narration-as-memory
slips back, recalling that "Before this, the distant horse
was seen to neigh and shake its mane" (77): in that slip
memory struggles to provide the illusion of continuity it
requires, backtracking to maintain the correct order. Con-
tinuity comes to be seen as a trap, a condition of percep-
tion imposed on a resistant series of events.

And perhaps this points to the other side of that
banging screen door: for just as the door, swinging freely,
both offers and denies entry and identification, so does it
(so must it: one term does not exist without the other)
both offer and deny exit and closure. The story ends with
the same door with which it begins, and, even further, with
a question: "And the banging door? The banging door?"
(78), as if nothing has changed, and nothing been resolved.

Closure demands a resolution and a subsequent
return, as if, once "inside the frame" there will be the
offer of an outside, an exit. But the story seems to
problematize that very possibility, by betraying the
expectations of the reader/spectator, and by showing, in
that betrayal, the impossibility of getting outside of those
expectations. The appeal here is to a reader as subject of
and to film as an inescapable force in organizing experi-

ence, a reader both "inside the frame" as the only pos-
sibility of vision, and outside of it as the object of its
projection: the reader is spectator where "spectators are
not...either in the film text _or_ simply outside the film
text; rather, we might say, they intersect the film as they
are intersected by cinema" (De Lauretis 1984, 44). "All of
this is surrounded by darkness" refers both to a specific
viewing situation _and_ to a general condition of subjec-
tivity: the reader-become-spectator can only ever _be_
spectator because contemporary experience is structured
around the sign of the (cinematic) spectacle. Coover uses
cinema, in this sense, as the only possible referent in a
society projected in and through frames:

> Not America any longer under the old sign-
> form of representational history, but
> American culture, particularly in the remem-
> brance of its founding myths, as coded, in-
> ternally and externally, by the semiological
> language of filmic images. (Kroker 1988,
> 127)

Reality become film, subjectivity become filmic memory,
experience ordered as the illusion of continuous frames:
the unitary subject is lost in dissolves, when historical
reality can no longer be found as support for that unity's
constitution. Cinematic codes can no longer be seen as
unique to the cinema when persistence of vision becomes a
condition of perception, when the subject becomes a passive
screen for the repeated projection of the "real." There is

no question that the Old West existed; there is no question
that it will exist again. And again.

For it seems fair to say that the guarantee of the
"real" that is the code of photographic reproduction, of
photographic/cinematic "realism," has been made good, so
that we can now say, following Baudrillard, that "the real
is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always
already reproduced" (1983, 146). If there is no getting
outside of movies it is in this sense: through the Hol-
lywood strategy of presenting discrete images of the real,
the perception of the real has become as the experience of
film itself, all gaps smoothed over by persistence of
vision, by identification with the camera eye, by acceptance
of the frame, until all these separate frames run together
to form a continuous flow, the moving image of what we all
know. The visual, visibility itself, becomes the ultimate
and only verification of the real.

Coover works against all of this -- or maybe with
it, using it as context, as that which stands to be upset.
If Coover's stories are disruptive or unsettling, it is
because they work to lay bare, to demystify, the ideological
construction of the subject in culture, to show that the
workings of culture are never innocent. If these texts,
these codes, are familiar they are too familiar: the codes
which we accept regularly in film (that we, now, live under)
become conspicuous in their translation into writing, and we

are made to see that the acceptance of these codes carries
with it the acceptance of an order, of the social and
symbolic order, as it has come to be constructed.

> He recognizes in all these dislocations, of
> course, his lonely quest for the impossible
> mating, the crazy embrace of polarities, as
> though the distance between the terror and
> the comedy of the void were somehow erotic
> -- it's a kind of pornography....He overlays
> frenzy with freeze frames, the flight of
> rockets with the staking of the vampire's
> heart, Death's face with thrusting buttocks,
> cheesecake with chaingangs, and all just to
> prove to himself over and over again that
> nothing and everything is true. Slapstick
> is romance, heroism a dance number. Kisses
> kill. Back projections are the last ade-
> quate measure of freedom and great stars are
> clocks: no time like the presence.
> Nothing, like the nun with a switchblade, is
> happening faster and faster, and cause (that
> indefinable something) is a happy ending.
> Or maybe not. (Coover 1987, 25)

When the boundaries no longer hold, we are thrown into a
void of eternal transgression, of "pornography." The "he"
of the above passage is not Coover himself, though it might
be: the mad projectionist, "The Phantom of the Movie
Palace," nostalgia-ridden master of representation, plays
projection as if controlling destiny itself, playing to an
empty house the obsolete evidence of the real. In the ulti-
mate display of mastery over the image, the projectionist
blends individual representations by overlaying one film
strip onto another, altering each in the process, such that,
the boundaries subverted, the original films cease to exist
altogether, replaced by the new construction.

Such control of the image amounts to an autonomy of the subject as source of meaning, and therein lies the transgression: in trying to bridge the "unbridgeable distance between the eye and its object" ("Well, and if I _were_ to bridge it, the projectionist thinks, what then? It would probably be about as definitive an experience as hugging a black hole...") (17) the projectionist imagines himself as controlling texts which, in their status _as_ texts, defy control. What is at stake here is that battle for control: the implications of the projectionist's power, which occur only partially to him -- "He knows there's something corrupt, maybe even dangerous, about this collapsing of boundaries..." (23) -- will become clear later, when the representational space of film wins the battle. The alterability of the object, of texts, presupposes the alterability of the subject, and the introduction of disorder into the one results in a similar disorder in the other. The projectionist's "corruption" is his _disruption_ of an ideology of fixed, unchangeable objects for the consumption of fixed, unchangeable subjects.

So where we might see in the figure of the projectionist the figure of the author himself, the difference might lie in the _expectation_ of disorder: in Coover's altered "original" texts[3], the possibility of effecting the

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[3] Of course, Coover's only previously published collection, _Pricksongs and Descants_, applies here too. In that collection, though, he is concerned more generally with myth

alteration carries with it the possibility of altered consciousness, of altered "reality." In this way these stories can be seen as oppositional, or at least as inter-rogative: they actively question the assumptions of realism and the construction of the subject in ideology in terms of those assumptions.

I will be concerned, then, with the transgression of boundaries, with the construction of alternative spaces for the purpose of the disruption of the subject and its place in ideology. The notion of fixed systems of representation, requiring an illusion of coherence and continuity, of "na-tural" vision, will be the object of considerable scrutiny, toward subverting that naturalness to the point where all we see is the construction, the frame laid bare. To this end will be the transgression of the boundaries of text and textuality: if I refer to Coover's stories as films, it is in this spirit, and with the realization that this becomes a necessary component of the text's address. Similarly, the use of recent film theory in my approach to the text is in the interest of seeing where these two systems -- writing and cinema -- intersect, and how that transgression of boundaries is effected. This I take to be the challenge of

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in literary terms -- the fairy tale, "great" literature -- the alteration of which involves the same disruption of memory/subjectivity, the same demystifying of the relation-ship between representation and ideology. For the moment, though, I am more concerned with the specific use of filmic representation and an ideology of the visible as consti-tuting an image of "reality."

these stories, working under a code of visibility, of expo-
sure, following the model of those "six young women who,
flouncing by, turn their backs in unison and flip their
skirts over their heads as though to suggest in this display
the terrible vulnerability of thresholds" (Coover 1987, 77).

CHAPTER 1

In "Inside the Frame," film genre is used to point to a structure of visual coding, to allude to a memorial network of filmic texts, of the already seen. Generic codes come to stand as an established set of conventional expectations imposed on both the filmic representation and the viewer of that representation, committed to memory through the repetition of a pattern. The inadequacy of those learned codes in containing the viewing of the representation within arbitrary boundaries is exposed in the interest of foregrounding the illusory nature of the film text's coherence, and, by implication, of the coherence of the memorial text.

Throughout A Night at the Movies the allusion to what might be called genre films -- films adhering to an established and recognizable formula -- amounts to a continued reference to the memory of film and to the expectation of recognition held there. That memory comes, then, to persist throughout the reading of the text, to stand as the constant and inescapeable text mediating all reference; following Jean-Louis Leutrat, the presence of generic coding provides the text with a "memorial metatext":

> The only way a genre model or genre rules
> can be said to exist is as...a memorial

> metatext and on that level alone. It is
> because viewers/readers operate with sets of
> expectations and levels of predictability
> that it is possible to perceive instances of
> variation, repetition, rectification and
> modification. In this way, genre can be
> considered as one single continuous text.
> (qtd. in Neale 1980, 51)

This "one single continuous text" will serve as the over-

riding context in which any reading/viewing takes place.

The variations displayed in this text ultimately have

meaning only with reference to the memorial metatext. Any

act of decontextualizing, then, must be seen as a disruption

of memory, and necessarily a disruption of the subject.

As I have indicated, the reader/spectator of A Night

at the Movies is constantly in the presence of this extra

text, the screen memory (or memory screen); for this reason

the collection works constantly at a level of recognition

and misrecognition, providing texts that are at once

familiar and yet unfamiliar. This strategy can take the

form of the rewriting of particular films (Casablanca, Top

Hat, Gilda), but more often works through the presence of a

catalogue of genre films under the more general model of the

already seen. And so in "Lap Dissolves," for instance, one

film is seen dissolving into another, each one recognizable

by its adherence to a genre category: an adventure becomes

a gangster film becomes a mystery becomes a love story and

so on. Similarly, in "The Phantom of the Movie Palace," the

projectionist's "film library" (23) is constructed of a

collection of remembered texts, remembered because he, like

us, has seen them all before. The story presents this collection in familiar terms: the reader not only recognizes the context for the images presented, but, in the movement from the indefinite to the definite article, is addressed as recognizing that context, as the projectionist

> [slides] two or more projected images across each other like brushstrokes, painting each with the other, so to speak, such that a galloping cowboy gets in the way of some slapstick comedians and, as the films separate out, arrives at the shootout with custard on his face; or the dying heroine, emerging from montage with a circus feature, finds herself swinging by her stricken limbs from a trapeze, the arms of her weeping lover now hugging an elephant's leg; or the young soldier, leaping bravely from his foxhole, is creamed by a college football team, while the cheerleaders, caught out in no-man's-land, get their pom-poms shot away. (23)

This collection refers not so much to specific films as to the generic categorization of films, and by implication to the history of cinema as a memorial text; the reader's ability to visualize those events (and the text assumes that ability in its address to a spectator of films) attests to their status as already visualized.

The projectionist's film library, then, is as the reader's own film library, a catalogue of previous viewings and remembered film texts, his manipulation of images carrying with it the illusion of the possession and control of memorial texts (his films). That manipulation takes place within the confines of his expectations, and knowledge of his library, contained by the apparent repeatability of

closed texts; the alteration that each film undergoes
through montage with another amounts, not to a subversion of
his expectations, but to their redefinition: he knows
approximately what will happen each time (barring random
accidents, like "a blown fuse, the keystoning rake of a
tipped projector, <u>a mislabeled film</u>, a fly on the lens" (23,
emphasis mine), because of his familiarity with his texts.

The story's reference to film genre works to evoke
this set of expectations in the same way that genre itself
does, through an appeal to the memory of the reader/spec-
tator as the point of the intersection of previous viewings,
generic expectations held in a learned "set of basic
conventional requirements" (Neale 1980, 54). The appeal to
memory is thus a necessary component in the functioning of
genre: "one of the main functions of genre is the contain-
ment and regulation of cinematic memory: its instances of
repetition, in particular, serve constantly as points of
cinematic recall" (54).

What the projectionist seems to assume is the
stability of memory in the face of the alteration of texts:
his subversion of boundaries -- clearly a subversion of
<u>genre</u> boundaries, among others -- results in the disruption
of his expectation of repeatability. When the possibility
of repetition dissolves -- through the manipulation of the
actual film strip rather than just the projected image, the
physical melting of one strip onto another, an irreversible

process -- so does the containment of that cinematic memory.
Upon "sliding a Broadway girlie show through a barroom
brawl" (25), and then turning the whole thing on its side,
he "loses" the "chorus-girl ingenue":

> He rights the projector to relieve the crick
> in his neck from trying to watch the film
> sideways...wishing he might see once more
> that goofy bug-eyed look on the startled
> ingenue's face as the floor dropped out from
> under her....The swinging door hangs motion-
> less. Jaws gape. Eyes stare. Not much
> moves at all except the grinding projector
> reels behind him. Then slowly the camera
> tracks forward, the doors parting before it.
> The eye is met by a barren expanse of fore-
> ground mud and distant dunes, undisturbed
> and utterly lifeless. The ingenue is gone.
> (26)

In trying to retrieve her, he reverses the films, hoping to
reverse the process. When this fails, he looks for her in
other films in which he knows she is present:

> He shuts both films down, strings up the
> mean gang movie with the little orphan girl
> in it: the water spots are there, but the
> loft ladder is empty! She's not in the
> nunnery either, the priest croons to an
> empty stall, as though confessing to the
> enthroned void -- nor is she in the plum-
> meting plane or the panicking mob or the
> arms, so to speak, of the blob! The train
> runs over a ribbon tied in a bow! The vam-
> pire sucks wind! (27)

The loss of the ingenue amounts to a subversion of his
expectations and desires, and so of the guarantee of generic
consistency. This in turn results in a disruption of
memory, his inability to recall her to the filmic text an
inability to recall her to his memory:

> He heats up cold coffee on his hot plate,
> studies his pinned-up publicity stills. He
> can't find her, but maybe she was never in
> any of them in the first place. He's not
> even sure he would recognize her, a mere
> ingenue, if she were there -- her legs
> maybe, but not her face. But in this
> cannibal picture, for example, wasn't there
> a girl being turned on a spit? He can't
> remember. (27)

The destabilizing of the film text leads to the destabili-

zing of memory, where memory equals convention in creating

expectations and the illusion of a unified position of

knowledge and mastery. The reader/spectator is addressed as

possessing memorial texts, as possessing the knowledge of

those texts that allow the recognition and subsequent play

of their codes within the limits of established expecta-

tions. The subversion of that knowledge amounts to a

relinquishing of control to the texts, as something that

operates beyond the control of memory.

This is what happens in "The Phantom of the Movie

Palace." By subverting the order of the image -- its

conventions, its established boundaries -- the projectionist

dissolves the limits of the filmic representation and the

containment of memorial texts, allowing those texts free

play outside of the limits of the screen itself. What

occurs amounts to a revenge of cinema, the escape of the

mass of previous viewings from the hold of the memory and

into the auditorium: "It's as though his mind has got

outside itself somehow, leaving his skull full of empty room

presence" (31). Those projections with which he took such

liberty, as if he could declare his mastery over them, come

to master him, to <u>project</u> him (we see him chased by the

projector's cone of light as it attempts to project across

his body). The memory of previous viewings no longer allows

a position of knowledge detached from the screen, but

demands his implication:

> He's reminded of a film he once saw about an
> alien conspiracy which held its nefarious
> meetings in an old carnival fun house... The
> hero, trying simply to save the world,
> enters the fun house, only to be subjected
> to everything from death rays and falling
> masonry to iron maidens, time traps, and
> diabolical life-restoring mahines, as though
> to problematize his very identity through
> what the chortling fun-house operators call
> in their otherworldly tongue "the stylistics
> of absence." In such a maze of probable
> improbability, the hero can be sure of
> nothing except his own inconsolable desires
> and his mad faith, as firm as it is bur-
> lesque, in the prevalence of secret pas-
> sages. There is always, somewhere, another
> door. Thus he is not surprised when, knee
> deep in killer lizards and blue Mercurians,
> he spies dimly, far across the columned and
> chandeliered pit into which he's been
> thrown, what appears to be a rustic wooden
> ladder, leaning radiantly against a shadowed
> wall. Only the vicious gnawing at his
> ankles surprises him as he struggles toward
> it, the Mercurians' mildewed breath, the
> glimpse of water-spotted underwear on the
> ladder above him as he starts to climb. Or
> are those holes? He clambers upward,
> reaching for them, devoted as always to this
> passionate seizure of reality, only to have
> them vanish in his grasp, the ladder as
> well: he discovers he's about thirty feet
> up the grand foyer wall, holding nothing but
> a torn ticket stub. (33)

The dissolve from remembrance to reality comes as the shift

from a position of mastery to a position as mastered: the

projectionist's memory as the agent for his identification

with the hero provides a point of reference from which to

act, and allows the construction of a contiguous real. The

slippage of identity required by that identification itself

requires the loss of a stable and self-contained identity, a

subsumption by and a subjection to the cinematic text of

memory. The fun house becomes the movie house by associa-

tion, but clearly that "fun" works only to conceal the

darker implications of the activity contained there, the

entertainment masking the problematization of identity and

the impossibility of return (we are always in movies, always

left holding a torn ticket stub, a conditional pass out of

the cinema), leading, finally, to the death (by execution:

"'It's all in your mind...so we're cutting it off'" (36)) of

the subject. There is, ultimately, no control and no exit:

"If he could just reach the switchboard! Where's the exit

sign? Isn't there always...?" (36). That dissolving of

identity into cinematic memory becomes a condition of

spectatorship, of a construction of viewing subjects devoted

to spectacle as representing the real; the knowledge that is

constructed by film places the spectator as always inside

movies, with no escape, the constant viewer of "one single

continuous text."

The persistence of filmic reality outside of the

theatre, the constant presence of the screen in memory, is

similarly played out in "Intermission," where the very

possibility of the notion of a break between reels ("One Moment While the Operator Changes Reels" reads the title on the page/screen preceding the story (113)) is exposed as at best illusory, at worst life-threatening. The teenaged girl from whose point of view the story takes place -- who might be the ingenue from the projectionist's library -- displays the same kind of film knowledge as the projectionist, her knowledge and experience constructed out of a network of previous viewings: "she knows just what they've always meant when they say in the movies, 'I felt like I was walking on air'" (117). And in a fate similar to the projectionist's, this knowledge is tested by the collapse of boundaries between screen and spectator. When she is captured by the hero of adventure serials -- "a real dream-boat, as they used to say in her favorite musicals..." (116) -- and taken through a number of those adventures herself, she finds herself in a world of the already-seen, including the appearance of that same hero in various guises through-out.

If the serial is the closest film equivalent to "one single continuous text," it is also a genre which does the most to stretch the limits of film-reality correspondence, and the least to subvert audience expectations: the hero is never really in danger, he will come out of it, no doubt miraculously, next week in order to participate in another adventure. Similarly, the girl of "Intermission" is never

really in danger, even though threatened by gangsters, a waterfall, sharks, natives, army invaders, jungle beasts and a mad shiek; she is involved in nothing more dangerous than a trip to the concession stand in the lobby. (Hunger takes her on *that* mission, to "see what she can find with less than six zillion calories in it" (115); desire (for the hero, for inclusion in the filmic enunciation) gets her kidnapped by gangsters.) And so there is little problem in learning to fire a gun (without ever running out of bullets), even less in flying a plane (and bailing out when it *does*, of course, run out of gas); little problem because all gaps in knowledge are overcome by the film's provision of unlikely chance: the inability to swim ("She flounders in the swirling waves, wishing now she hadn't been so self-conscious in a swimming suit..." (120)) is countered by the happy accident of a barrel coming to scoop her up before the brink of the falls. Film knowledge is perfect knowledge, smoothing over any gaps in the knowledge of the spectator through the illusion of coherence.

The implications of the complete and continuous experience of filmic representation are seen at the end of the story, when the girl, torn ticket stub still in hand, returns to the theatre in time for the cartoon: all is as it was when she left, except the audience is now dead (suggesting perhaps the death of any social world outside of movies). Held to the screen's presence by an "icy clawlike

grip," she is faced with the impossibility of <u>not</u> watching

movies:

> The claw twists her around in her seat until
> she's facing the screen again and holds her
> there, peering up in the creepy silence at
> all that hollow tomfoolery and wondering how
> she's going to get out of <u>this</u> one. If how
> is the word. It's like some kind of spell,
> and there's probably a way to break it, but
> right now she can't think of it, she almost
> can't think at all...Anyway, as far as she
> can tell, the claw only wants her to watch
> the movie, and, hey, she's been watching
> movies all her life, so why stop now, right?
> Besides, isn't there always a happy ending?
> Has to be. It comes with the price of the
> ticket... (134)

As we have seen before, there <u>is</u> no getting out of this one.

The expectations of the spectator, and the film's addressing

of those expectations, construct a viewing situation that

demands inclusion, that creates the desire in the spectator

for a position within the narrative, at the same time as it

holds the spectator in place -- as unified vision, point of

knowledge and expectation -- outside of the filmic enuncia-

tion. The significance of the teenage girl's point of view

can be seen as the heightening of the desire for inclusion

through the richness of her fantasies, those fantasies fed

both by movies and by her girlfriend's crude sexual know-

ledge, the two major reference points for her own knowledge.

Genre expectations allow her a frame for the play of her

fantasies, a position for her as subject of the film:

> What we call genres...are...ways in which
> cinema articulates human action, establishes
> meanings in relation to images, and binds
> fantasy at once to images and meanings.

> This binding of fantasy to certain represen-
> tations, certain significant images, affects
> the spectator as a subjective production.
> The spectator, stitched in the film's
> spatiotemporal movement, is constructed as
> the point of intelligibility and origin of
> those representations, as the subject of,
> the 'figure-for,' those images and meanings.
> In these ways cinema effectively, powerful-
> ly, participates in the social production of
> subjectivity... (De Lauretis 1984, 53)

In "Intermission," that "binding" becomes the agent of the slippage of the real into fantasy, to the exclusion of all else, such that the possibility of a subject position removed from those "images and meanings" is thrown into question. The experience of the girl, naive as it is, becomes the only possible experience, given a life of spectatorship, a life of inscription into filmic texts. In the end the girl is inescapably spectator, passive subject of and to film as the only possible reality.

CHAPTER 2

The references in <u>A Night at the Movies</u> to specific films

serve as stops in the memorial text, freeze frames in the

continuous text of memory. Rather than referring to a

general set of conventional expectations, as with his use of

genre, here Coover refers to specific expectations based on

specific previous viewings. In the rewriting of scenes from

<u>Casablanca</u> and <u>Top Hat</u> -- in each case quite famous scenes

-- the reader is addressed as possessing a memory and

reliable knowledge of those scenes, such that their presen-

tation can only be measured against the context that memory

provides. The revision of those scenes subverts the

stability of that knowledge, that memory, that context, such

that the "new" (the Coover text) necessarily becomes the

context for the "original," each taking into itself some-

thing of the other. In this sense, the alteration of the

isolated scene will render an equivalent alteration in the

movie as a whole, such that any subsequent viewing neces-

sarily includes the memory of the revision. The transgres-

sion here involves the notion of identity as fixed and

stable: in Coover's revisions both object <u>and</u> subject

become the site of a sliding of identity, "a dynamic slide

in which one term can't be held separate from the other and always is, in fact, its other" (Burke 1988, 73). We will never again be able to see <u>Casablanca</u> without seeing that which the film doesn't show, and which "You Must Remember This" does.

In "You Must Remember This" (the title represents both a declaration and an imperative), the revision exposes gaps in the original text, allowing the expression of that which might have (necessarily) been censored. The story <u>explicitly</u> crosses the boundaries of the permissible as it has been constructed in the classic Hollywood film, substituting the codes of pornography (where nothing is hidden) for the codes of film romance (which operate under the terms of a certain decorum). That substitution is represented as a slip into the gaps on the film strip itself, into the strip between the frames made invisible according to the principle of persistence of vision. The result is the shift from already seen to unseen, the repression of the original text by the revelation of its repressed text.

This is not so much unlikely as unexpected; Rick and Ilsa are equally surprised when Rick "steps up behind her, clasping her breasts with both hands, nuzzling in her hair" (160-161). That moment disrupts the memorial text, which is represented by the fidelity of the writing, up to this point, to the original film. The written text's addition of a running commentary and shifts in character identification

not only suggests the narration of a previous viewing, but, in the degree of its interpretation, <u>many</u> previous viewings: "needless to say, he will always be lonely -- in fact, this is the confession...only half-concealed in his muttered sub-joinder: Rick Blaine is a loner, born and bred. Pity him" (157). The mobility of the point of view and what that mobility allows to be spoken also carries this familiarity to extremes, as we are given access to instances of inter-iority that are almost too revealing. This knowledge works in excess of the knowledge gained from the film itself, and even goes outside of the film, to become a familiarity, not just with Rick and Ilsa, but with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman (pointing, perhaps, to the sliding of identity within film itself, the acceptance of a single figure in any number of roles). At all times the text seems to know <u>too much</u>, such that the narration takes on (blatantly) voyeuris-tic qualities: the revised text is excessive not only in the gratuitousness of its display, but also in exceeding the boundaries of what it is possible to know.

Yet it becomes clear that, in this text, the boundaries established by the film have failed to hold, and that what is taking place exists precisely -- explicitly -- outside of the film's frame. Rick and Ilsa's sexual history was <u>always</u> that which was, necessarily, unspoken, pushed to the boundaries of the frame: "You Must Remember This" (that title becomes more and more insidious) gives free play to

the action on the margins of the film strip and in the

desire of the spectator, playing as it does so with the

fulfillment of that desire, showing all that we thought we

wanted to see.

The story constitutes itself from absences on the

film strip itself, from the darkness and silence of the

leader strip at the beginning of the reel: "It is dark in

Rick's apartment. Black leader dark, heavy and abstract,

silent but for a faint hoarse crackle like a voiceless

plaint, and brief as sleep" (156). In its display of the

sexual implications of this film romance, the story exposes

what was formerly invisible, the darknesses and silences of

both the film strip and its representation. To this end,

the story includes a theorizing of the space between the

frames, the unseen and silent gap that is unrepresented on

the screen:

> he is...thinking about time as a pulsing
> sequence of film frames, and not so much
> about the frames, their useless dated
> content, as the gaps between: infinitesim-
> ally small when looked at two-dimensionally,
> yet in their third dimension as deep and
> mysterious as the cosmos....and what if he
> were to slip between two of those frames? he
> wonders...where would he be then? (173)

That slippage between frames is precisely what occurs,

stopping time in its illusion of continuity ("Time itself

may be...not a ceaseless flow, but a rapid series of

electrical leaps across tiny gaps between discontinuous

bits" (173)), and allowing the play of repressed images and

desire across the gaps in the text. This stoppage in time
represents a similar stoppage in memory, the "ceaseless
flow" of the memorial text pausing long enough for the
rewriting of that text, for the insertion of this text into
the gaps of the original. In this sense the two texts
intersect at the point of the memory of desire, the point of
the unframing of the filmic text to allow the insertion of
that desire and the possibility if its fulfillment.

The transgression of the boundaries of the (remem-
bered) film clearly subverts the workings of the classic
film text,

> the point [of which] is to gamble simulta-
> neoulsy on the excitation of desire and its
> non-fulfilment...by the infinite variations
> made possible precisely by the studios'
> technique on the exact emplacement of the
> boundary that bars the look, that puts an
> end to the 'seen', that inaugurates the
> downward tilt into the dark, towards the
> unseen, the guessed-at. (Metz 1982, 77)

We have seen how the knowledge in the written text, in
exceeding the knowledge of the film itself, operates on the
level of the "guessed-at"; similarly, the written text works
to exceed the film's "excitation of desire" by placing that
desire within the film itself, by flirting on the boundaries
between seen and unseen, non-fulfilment and fulfilment. The
text clearly offers the possibility of fulfilment only to
expose the emptiness and subsequent impossibility of any
such thing: as with the pornographic film itself, the
endless chain of sexual activity finally holds no place for

desire, finally subverts that desire by exposing the terms

of its fulfilment as not fascinating, but boring. Desire is

seen not as the wish for the fulfilment of erotic pleasure

but for the fulfilment of narrative pleasure, that endless

chain working against any notion of narrative progress. We

wish, finally, that they would return to the original plot

and get on with the issue of the letters of transit.

But again, as we have seen elsewhere, there can be

no return: the end of the story takes the form of a long,

slow fade, one which includes Rick and Ilsa as unwilling

victims of the film's arbitrary close. Stuck in the gap

between frames, all illusion of continuity lost, they can

only wait as the light dies around them, as they are

relegated to the darkness and silence of the blank film

strip. The original text is lost, as is the possibility of

its repetition:

> "Trying to do it all again. It
> wouldn't work. It wouldn't be the same. I
> won't even haff my girdle on."
> "That doesn't matter. Who's gonna
> know? Come on, we can at least --"
> "No, Richard. It is impossible. You
> are different, I am different. You have
> cold cream on your penis--"
> "But--!"
> "My makeup is gone, there are stains on
> the carpet. And I would need the pistol --
> how could we effer find it in the dark? No,
> it's useless, Richard. Belief me. Time
> goes by." (185-186)

In that slip into stop-time, the destabilizing of both text

and identity, the substitution of one for an other such that

neither stands on its own, but can only be known in terms of

that other. No return: the possibility of starting over,
of erasing the substitution and picking up where the
original left off, requires a forgetting and a restoration
of those lost boundaries that amounts to an impossible
refusal of _this_ text. "You Must Remember This" (that title
is, unequivocally, a demand), in making visible the invisi-
ble, forces a contiguity between the "original" and the
"new" such that each becomes the context for the other in
the memory of the reader.

Coover's revision of _Top Hat_ works under the same principle,
providing a new context for an old film through the refer-
ence to a filmic memory. Again, the original ceases to
exist as a stable, repeatable text and takes on elements of
the revision. In this story, though, the stability of the
text has already been upset by its inclusion in a memory of
films, with all the slippages and substitutions that memory
provides. And so, where "You Must Remember This" represents
an alteration of the entire film through the alteration of a
single scene, in "Top Hat" the entire film has already been
altered by the instability of memory: what should be a
single scene is here a vague memory, other scenes from the
film, and other scenes from other films, becoming mixed up
in _this_ scene. Once again, the boundaries do not seem to
hold. The memory of previous viewings that constitutes the

story necessarily includes the memory of films and codes completely outside of the original text.

As in "You Must Remember This," the written text displays a familiarity with the film text that allows it a mobility among points of view: the story shifts from a third person omniscience to Astaire's first person point of view, to Rogers's, and back. And again, the knowledge possessed by the narration exceeds that allowed by the film itself, interpreting events and appearances in an imposition of narrative order on what amounts to sheer spectacle. The dance routine, then, rather than appearing as a (gratuitous) instance of the spectacle of performance, is forced to take part in a memory of narrative plenitude, to become an element in the progress of plot.

To this end, "Top Hat" presents the one scene from the movie that occurs in another representational space: the dance routine that is the story's point of reference takes place on the London stage to which the Fred Astaire character has been brought to perform. And yet, within this scene we find the earlier scene, in the hotel, of Astaire's first encounter with the Ginger Rogers character, some of the dialogue from that scene intact:

> The streetlights had come on. And under
> them, a girl stood. "I suppose," she said,
> staring at my feet, which were, though I had
> little to do with it, still on the move,
> "it's some kind of affliction."
> "Yes, yes," I stammered, "it's -- it's
> an affliction..." (151)

The confusion of scenes -- and there are less direct
references to other scenes from the film elsewhere in the
story -- represents a slippage of memory, an attempt on the
part of memory to construct a coherent text out of a
collection of disparate scenes. The representational
challenge inherent in the dance routine -- what narrative
function does it serve? -- is overcome by reference to
other, more coherent, points in the film's plot.

This desire for the dance's coherence even takes
the form of the imposition of realistic principles. In Top
Hat, when Astaire fires, as in a shooting gallery, upon the
other dancers with his walking stick, they crumple in a line
of stylized heaps, all violence in the scene erased under
the code of the dance; in "Top Hat," when the Astaire figure
finally, as in the movie, "impatiently machine-guns the
lot," they "whirl and writhe, blood jetting from their
bodies like the release of some inner effervescence" (154).
At this point the memory of other films interjects in the
interest of intelligibility, of finding a place within the
memory of the narrative for a moment of pure entertainment.

The explicit violence of this element of Coover's
revision suggests the substitution of a common contemporary
form of filmic spectacle for the "useless dated content" of
the musical. In this sense the memory of previous viewings
that is "Top Hat" appears as a contemporary remembrance:
the metonymic slide from the spectacle of the dance routine

to the violent spectacle characteristic of current cinema is constructed with reference to the evolution of the cinematic spectacular. The narration that remembers Top Hat in "Top Hat," then, is close to the reader of "Top Hat" in the expectation of explicit violence, the dominant code in so much of our cinema.

Both "You Must Remember This" and "Top Hat" refer to classic Hollywood cinema as bound by stricter notions of what can be seen than the cinema of the reader of this text. What this allows is the historicizing of that reader, who, intersected by contradictory instances of the visible, remembers a text unbounded by its original codes of visibility. The revisions, then, take the form of the re-coding of the classic films under the terms of the contemporary spectacle, the memory of these films necessarily including the memory of every film the reader has seen.

CHAPTER 3

Through the translation of cinematic coding into writing,
the written text actively questions the terms of film's
address through the foregrounding of its technical appar-
atus. The problem of identification seen in "Inside the
Frame," where the implication of the spectator inside of the
enunciation is disrupted by the exposure of discontinuities
in the construction of a filmic space, becomes a problem of
the representation, through technical means, of the "natur-
al" perception of human subjects. In this way, the inherent
contradictions in that representation are revealed, and the
stability of its terms upset.

Beginning with the rolling of the opening credits,
"After Lazarus" appears, unmistakeably, as a film: "Titles
and credits fade in and out against a plain white back-
ground, later understood as a bright but overcast sky" (37).
As we saw in "Inside the Frame," the reader is addressed as
a spectator in a specific viewing situation, required to
see (or to already have seen -- there is the problem of that
"later understood as..."), the screen, the frame, the image.
The text itself is fragmented, appearing on the page almost
as frames on a film strip, and includes the articulation of

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edits, zooms, pans, close-ups, the construction of shots.
But in addition to these, "After Lazarus" requires that the
reader/spectator also see -- because it is shown -- the
camera, to be always conscious of the camera as seeing _for_
the spectator, as the agent of imparted knowledge. The
camera here autonomously selects images for the spectator's
vision, possessing its own knowledge, and an ability to
think and select (hence the "Long steady contemplative
takes" (37)). Contrary to the conventions of cinema,
however, _this_ camera is never disavowed as a presence, but
rather is always visible, always present.

That visibility takes the form of both the camera's
presence _and_ the presence of what it sees, so that at the
same time as it acts for us, selecting what we see, we are
aware of the necessity of an agent of selection. (At this
point it is hard to know whether what is presented on the
screen is _only_ what we see, or whether the screen includes
the image of the camera itself: the latter would require
the presence of an additional camera, recording the actions
of the first, an awareness of which would require another,
implicit, camera (our eye, certainly, but under what
principle of selection?) recording _it_, and so on to an
infinite series of cameras receding over the (bright)
horizon.) The problem here is in the degree to which the
camera is _able_ to select. We witness its entrance to the
village and its hesitating quest for an object:

> the camera proceeds deeper into the village,
> occasionally pausing as it pans onto small
> streets or alleyways....Once or twice, the
> camera hesitates before a side street, zooms
> in slightly, pauses, pulls back, pans away,
> continues. Finally, at one side street, no
> different from any of the others, it zooms
> in slightly, hesitates, then continues
> slowly to advance... (38)

What is immediately apparent is the uncertainty of the

camera's vision; we seem to be at one remove from the camera

as representing a purity of vision, such that the camera

seems to employ, in those hesitations, an overtly human

process of selection. Had this sequence been connected to

the point of view of a specific character, it might not seem

so unusual; and certainly, if these images were to appear on

screen without the presence of the camera itself we would

accept their reticence as the reticence of the human agent

that the camera is to represent -- the pans as a head

turning, zooms as a focussing of vision -- and identifica-

tion would come through the presence of that humanity. But

the spectator's identification with the camera occurs

through the camera's position of greater knowledge and

perception, its ability to capture events because it knows

where to look. This knowledge and certainty can then be

transferred to the spectator as the source of that look:

> In so far as it is grounded in the photo-
> graph, cinema...will bring with it mono-
> cular perspective, the positioning of the
> spectator-subject in an identification with
> the camera as the point of a sure and cen-
> trally embracing view... (Heath 1981, 30)

This camera, then, disrupts such an identification and such a view, not only through its visibility, but through its vision, the uncertainty of which leaves the spectator in a precarious position, possessing no sure knowledge because none is imparted.

The disorientation of the camera, then, becomes the reader/spectator's own. And what the camera sees is just as disorienting as how it sees: the landscape may be vaguely recognizable, but the location is never specified. Any "sure and centrally embracing view" that the camera might begin to show in its selection of vision is soon effaced: where at one moment it "pauses briefly from time to time to focus on some small detail or other: a barred door, a shuttered window, a lone dry weed, a small fence, a rock, the texture of a clay wall," as if there were something significant in that sequence, in the next it shows an "Inconsequential view of part of a rooftop" (38). Just as the camera (spectator) seems to be finding its way, the vision betrays itself, and its disorientation.

Part of which is due to the limitation of its mobility. The vision of the camera as an ideal representation for the spectator, as moving and selecting scenes unproblematically, providing a perfect view, is disrupted as the camera is forced to travel over rough road (which also serves to raise the question as to how the camera is able to move in the first place):

> The streets narrow, the surface worsens, and
> so does the jolting movement of the camera,
> until it is almost impossible to keep
> anything in focus. Stop. Inconsequential
> view of part of a rooftop. Brief jolting
> motion. Stop. Inconsequential view of the
> street, the corner of a house. Jolting
> motion. Stop. (38)

The mobility which should allow the camera -- and the

spectator -- a privileged vision, according to the terms of

the camera/spectator identification, now becomes the means

of the disruption of the image, and the loss of both focus

and framing. There is also in the difficulty of movement an

explicit split with the convention of the point of view

shot, as the camera appears unable to keep up with the

walking pace of an old woman: "camera motion is erratic and

the camera has some difficulty keeping her in the range of

the lens...."(40). Where the camera may have seemed

detached from the mechanics of its movement, floating freely

above the ground, it is now certainly grounded, requiring

some sort of apparatus of mobility, no longer privileged, no

longer "the camera as eye...in the sense of the detached,

untroubled eye...free from the body, outside process, purely

looking..." (Heath 1981, 32).

That condition of "purely looking," is already

troubled through its translation into written narrative:

the presentation of the pure look of the camera requires a

corresponding purity of description in the written text, the

sure perception of the camera transferred to the spectator

(reader) as the spectator's own. And yet the text here

imposes a judgemental voice, and it is a voice no more sure than the camera's vision. The same voice that pronounces some images as "inconsequential" displays a certain amount of difficulty in judging other images: and so, "a pale gaunt face is staring out, as though in anger. Or judgement" (39); or: "One woman seems more agitated in her grief than the others, her shoulders shaking; she glances up: she is laughing, silently, or perhaps is about to sneeze. Or weep" (41). There is in the narration the presence of a knowledge that, as quickly as it displays itself, is effaced by its uncertainty. As we come to depend on this vision in order to construct our own knowledge, that construction becomes disrupted by the narration's inability to choose.

In this sense the narration works to exceed the image on the (imagined) screen, providing knowledge -- even though no more sure -- that the camera cannot. The presence of this voice subverts the presence of the image, its all-perceiving look, so that point of view is lost, or at the most takes place beneath the overlay of a different, but not necessarily higher, knowledge. Writing, in this case, renders the position of the image unstable; the image works the same effect on writing. The knowledge -- the knowing -- which each narrational mode represents is thus questioned as a possibility, as is the unproblematic transfer of that knowledge to the reader/spectator (as, perhaps, is the stability of that position).

That overlapping of word and image also foregrounds
a problem of technology: the difference between the filmed
image and the written description is one of technological
means (cinema as a specifically technological development
toward a heightened realism), and the clash of the two
results in a reversal of a human/machine dichotomy. And so
each mode takes into itself something of the other, the
camera as human eye/look, the narration as detached, inhuman
observer of scenes: the narration's inability to discern
the meaning of facial expressions is thus an inability to
identify with those faces, as a lack of sympathetic humani-
ty. Able to judge that with which it can only be concerned
-- the construction of the shots -- the written text fails
when it comes to judging that which is implicitly beyond
itself -- physiognomy -- because it itself is faceless.

That facelessness, the anonymity of both the camera
and the narration, becomes the basis for the reversal, as
all human characters in the story -- the mourners --bear the
same face: "When any of them chances to glance up, he or
she reveals a face identical to that of the priest, the
pallbearers, dead man, etc." (42-43). As the story pro-
ceeds, their numbers increase from hundreds to thousands,
replica upon replica, a machine-produced community of
mourners, reducible to etcetera. The camera, then, is the
human term, identifying with the spectator, driven by its
own curiosity, it alone operating in opposition to mechani-

cal replication, appearing as outsider in a village contain-
ing no life besides a succession of copies; the inhuman as
the term for the camera's objects, those elements supposed
to provide the spectator with the means of identification
within the frame. (The possibility of human identification
is located in the funeral procession itself, which suggests
perhaps a universal human emotion (grief); but in the
absence of any specified emotion, grief becomes generalized
to the point of non-existence, and that possibility is
denied.) Those human figures we see -- stripped of identi-
ty, whose closest analogue would have to be the robot/zombie
of films -- cannot be seen as allowing a place for the
spectator in the film. The filmic enunciation itself is
allowed human qualities: the dominant sound throughout is
"a dull throbbing tympanic music, measured, gloomy, like the
cavernous beating of a sullen but determined heart" (40).
All that is left the spectator, in fact, is the act of
seeing, taking place in his/her absence.[4]

That reversal, the replacement of the (human) spec-
tator by the technology of mechanical reproduction, the
human by the inhuman, signals the disruption of a sub-

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[4] We can now see the camera's search in the opening
scenes as a search for signs of human life, for the means of
identification, and consequently as a lingering presentation
of the "inhuman" in the sense that Christian Metz uses the
term: "(The cinema) often presents us with long sequences
that can (literally) be called 'inhuman'...sequences in
which only inanimate objects, landscapes, etc. appear and
which for minutes at a time offer no human form for spec-
tator identification..." (1982, 47)

ject/object relationship, in which a (human) object stands in for the subject, allowing identification, allowing the subject a place within the space of the frame. In this case, if there is a place for the spectator, it is only in the act of objectification, of perceiving; the spectator is always and only a spectator, both inside (through iden- tification with the camera eye) and outside the frame, his/her curiosity and desire constituted by the cinematic apparatus. The result is a movement of the spectator in relation to the screen, an oscillation between inside and outside, between mobility and immobility; a consciousness of the screen as seeing for the spectator, and a consciousness of the absence of the spectator from the screen: "What moves in film, finally, is the spectator, immobile in front of the screen. Film is the regulation of that movement, the individual as subject held in a shifting and placing of desire, energy, contradiction..." (Heath 1981, 53). The terms of that process are technical terms, the process of the spectator's positioning taking place through technical means:

> In its movement, its framing, its cuts, its
> intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses
> an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly re-
> captured for -- one needs to be able to say
> 'forin' -- the film, that process binding
> the spectator as subject in the realization
> of the film's space. (52)

The foregrounding of the technical apparatus of film in "After Lazarus" serves to open up gaps in this process, to

loosen the terms of that "binding": in its purely mechani-

cal articulation, it posits the (hypothetical) spectator as

a product of the act of looking, while diminishing the

expected identifications that looking suggests. The

spectator, finally, becomes an empty term in the process of

the film's enunciation, required only to see, and only then

passively, because the cinematic apparatus has placed

him/her outside of that enunciation. And in this sense the

terms of camera/spectator identification get reversed: the

camera is the spectator bound within the film, searching for

human objects with which to identify; the spectator, then,

as "outside process, purely looking," the detached act of

perceiving that characterizes the camera eye.

This reversal becomes complete when, among the many

slippages of identity within the film, the camera is seen to

merge with the pallbearer (the pallbearer comes closest to

appearing as a central character, but eventually they are

all pallbearers): "The pallbearer, smiling wrily, hands a

fresh white flower to the camera. The camera moves toward a

mirror on the wall: reflected there is the pallbearer,

adjusting the flower in his lapel" (48). We finally, cer-

tainly, see the camera, but only in its position of iden-

tification with a character, from a specific point of view.

From here -- but only temporarily -- the identity of the

vision slips: the camera as presence disappears from the

narrative, the vision taken over by -- we can only assume --

the voice of the written discourse. When the camera
returns, following behind the pallbearer, it is with an
ambiguity of position, as reflected in the use of the
personal pronoun "he" over the space of a couple of senten-
ces: "When he turns corners, the camera loses him briefly,
bounces hastily ahead, picks him up again. Turning one such
corner, he arrives suddenly and unexpectedly at the steps of
the cathedral" (50). Confusing the source of this vision is
the fact that we have seen it before, but from the camera's
point of view: "Suddenly, upon turning a last corner: the
cathedral steps, looming high over the camera..." (40).

In at least one instance the camera finds its point
of identification, and it is not until very close to the
ending:

> From the cathedral doors, the pallbearer
> gazes down upon the procession, proceeding
> slowly up the main street of the village
> between the files of standing mourners. As
> far as the eye can see: this double row of
> mourners, several persons deep on either
> side, their heads bowed, blurring eventually
> into a single line, leading toward the
> distant grove of cypress trees. (51)

Following this, the written text displays a greater ability
to judge human action than previously, and also identifies
with the pallbearer:

> He struggles forward...and, with difficulty,
> clambers up on the shoulders of the nearest
> pallbearers: yes, the casket is empty. He
> glances about him, at the village, the
> cathedral, the old women, down at the heads
> of the pallbearers, over his shoulder toward
> the cemetary, the road lined with mourners.
> (51)

The point of a central/centring vision, the pallbearer is the point of identification for both the camera and the written narration, finally providing the means for the binding of the reader/spectator into both articulations of the text. This, though, can only be momentary, can only last to the point of his death (he is no longer a pallbearer or a mourner), when "His soft smile stretches into a wide dry-lipped grin, his eyes protrude and film [!] over" (51), the point where reader/spectator identification carries with it a certain terror, and a kind of morbid problematizing of the notion of that identification process.

That identification to the point of death -- the camera is buried with the pallbearer -- points to the implied loss of identity required by the positioning of the spectator inside the enunciation. The exchanges that take place in the story between camera and pallbearer, camera and spectator, are exchanges whereby the terms of each are necessarily relinquished and taken up by the other: the camera's vision becomes our vision, the pallbearer's vision becomes the camera's vision, each identification bringing with it the implication of the other's position. The burial of the camera signals the impossibility of a return to a detached, unified position outside of the text.

CHAPTER 4

>Made of a series of stops in time, the timed
>stops of the discrete frames, film depends
>on that constant stopping for its pos-
>sibility of reconstituting a moving reality
>-- a reality which is thus, in the very
>moment of appearance on screen, as the
>frames succeed one another, perpetually
>flickered by the fading of its present
>presence, filled with the _artifice_ of its
>continuity and coherence. Every film a
>fiction film: at once in this reconstitu-
>tion of the scene of its crime -- the
>practice of division and articulation -- as
>the impression of 'reality itself', the
>scene intact, unviolated; and in the
>distance on which it nevertheless plays for
>its mode of solicitation as spectacle, the
>mode of presence in absence, a real time
>there on film but not that same real time
>which is shown on film gone for ever....
>This is the context of what has been
>described as the cinematic regime of pure
>memory: 'everything is absent, everything
>is _recorded_, as a memory trace which is
>instantaneously so, without previously being
>something else'. Record and reality are
>together as a system of traces present
>always in terms of an absence: film's
>fiction as 'the record of reality', the
>whole imaginary signifier of cinema as
>_memory-spectacle_. (Heath 1981, 114)

Vision as truth, film as the ultimate verification of the

real, "record of reality"; the real allowed to recede, to

leave the scene, replaced by its representation, divided to

be reconstituted, dismembered to be remembered: standing in

for the real: the cinematic spectacle. _A Night at the_

Movies, then, as realism? Referring always to a system of

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"presence in absence," to cinema as "memory-spectacle," the text necessarily finds itself in the perhaps unenviable position of representing representation, of standing in for both the cinematic representation of the real and its (consequent) re-presentation in memory. This places the real at a further remove: that presence of cinema is itself an absence when presented in the written text, substituting for the real as referent. Thus the text "unpresents" reality, both presenting it in the form of its ultimate guarantee, and removing it as no longer required. The real as <u>origin</u> of representation is lost, finally resulting in a crisis of the referent, "referentiality...at the same time used and denied because the referent(s) cannot be recovered" (Burke 1988, 71).

Again, the giving only to take away, the establishing of boundaries only to have them dissolve. And yet what is the status of that "real" in the first place, when we know it to be constructed from (absent) texts, from an accumulation of simulating models? In a discussion of framing, of painting as a model for literary representation, Barthes points to the inadequacy of the notion of "realism" as copying the real:

> the writer...first transforms the 'real'
> into a depicted (framed) object; having done
> this, he can take down this object, <u>remove</u>
> it from his picture: in short: de-depict
> it...Thus, realism (badly named, at any rate
> often badly interpreted) consists not in
> copying the real but in copying a (depicted)
> copy of the real: this famous <u>reality</u>...is

> set farther away, postponed, or at least
> captured through the pictorial matrix in
> which it has been steeped before being put
> into words: code upon code, known as
> realism. (1974, 54-55)

It might be argued that the model of painting that Barthes

sees in classic realism has (necessarily) given way to the

model of the cinema in current literature, the conspicuous

frame of the old model giving way to the there-and-yet-not-

there frame of the new. The visibility/invisibility of the

cinema frame might then be seen to deny that capturing of

reality, to efface the possibility of its prior existence in

a denial of the limits of its presentation: reality no

longer merely postponed, but removed altogether in the face

of that "present presence," that now of the cinematic

spectacle,

> the triumph of an impression of presence,
> the realization of a philosophy of realist
> individuation as the photography of film
> captures characters in all their immediacy
> and specificity. The image shows every-
> thing, and, because it shows everything, it
> can say nothing; it frames a world and ban-
> ishes into nonexistence everything beyond
> that frame. The will-to-spectacle is the
> assertion that a world of foreground is the
> only world that matters or is the only world
> that is. (Polan 1986, 61)

The notion of a visual model as guaranteeing the

authenticity of representation contains a contradiction:

with the real right there before your eyes, what need for

anything behind the representation, or outside of the frame?

We are no longer in the paradigm of classic realism that

Barthes describes -- using a model of visibility -- as a

receding series of copies:

> the 'realistic' artist never places 'real-
> ity' at the origin of his discourse, but
> only and always, as far back as can be
> traced, an already written real, a prospec-
> tive code, along which we can discern, as
> far as the eye can see, only a succession of
> copies. (1974, 167)

Rather, no longer any need for origin, because the possibil-

ity doesn't exist, and doesn't have to: it is the respon-

sibility of the real to catch up with its representation, to

take part in the "truth" that precedes it.[5] Barthes's

"succession of copies," forcing the real to the vanishing

point, conceals the fact that, out there, <u>beyond</u> what the

eye can see, there is nothing at all, or, if anything, more

copies, more discrete images of the real: the acceptance,

the <u>requirement</u>, of the cinematic coding of reality results

in the exponential distancing of reality through its repro-

duction, pushing it beyond the vanishing point.

For Coover, then, the crisis of referentiality requires a

foregrounding of the discursive nature of the real -- of

meaning, of history, of the subject -- not in order to recu-

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[5] Maybe television has taken over the role of pro-
viding evidence that the real still exists; and so, after'
the release and subsequent success of <u>Fatal Attraction</u>, Phil
Donahue rushes in to display those real people who suffered
similar situations, evidence that the real is still there,
behind its representation. But in doing so, television ends
up betraying its own purpose: the situations of those real
people, seen in the context of the film, are already in-
scribed in the codes of the cinematic spectacle.

perate the real, but to (further) abolish any illusion of
its existence. The coding of the written text with the
mechanics of the cinema refers to the construction of the
real, and to "realism" itself as a strategy of imitation and
fidelity. The history of cinema is a history of the adap-
tation of those mechanics to a perception of the world:

> the cinema, in its earliest stages, was de-
> veloped as a means of accurately reproducing
> reality. This means...that an attempt was
> being made by the inventors of the cinema to
> impose the visual codes in the cinema with
> which they had learned to perceive reality
> in the real world. (Willemen 1977, 47-48)

And yet, as Willeman goes on to point out, that mode of per-
ception was one already structured by codes of literary re-
presentation: "the technical apparatus of the cinema had
been designed to function according to the perceptual codes
of the nineteenth century -- the moment of 'realism' in
literature" (48). The development of the cinematic appara-
tus, then, takes place within the terms of realism's specif-
ic reproduction of the real, one of the most significant of
those being the effacing of the text's means of production:
in the search for a "true" representation of reality, the
mechanics of cinema must make themselves inconspicuous, must
become invisible. The screen becomes a window, the camera
an eye, the spectator's eye:

> The camera becomes the mechanism for
> producing an illusion of Renaissance space,
> flowing movements compatible with the human
> eye, an ideology of representation that
> revolves around the perception of the
> subject; the camera's look is disavowed in

> order to create a convincing world in which
> the spectator's surrogate can perform with
> verisimilitude.   (Mulvey 1975, 18)

In a sense that disavowal is much more conspicuous than the effacing of the written text's mechanics, if only in cinema's more complexly constructed articulation: supporting the image is a massive technological battery that dwarfs the material of the book's production (usually reduced to the author's imagination and manipulation of language).   It can only be through the privileging of vision as providing access to truth that cinema achieves its heightened verisimilitude and exclusion of the real.

And so another substitution, following the model of the receding succession of copies: cinema as standing in for the real as the term of its other, such that the identity of each necessarily takes in that other term as defining itself.   No real without its representation, the real as origin lost except as the first term in a filmic dissolve, relegated to memory by the substitution of its cinematic image.

This process is nowhere more evident than in "Cartoon," where the clash of the real and its cinematic representation produces a melding of the two.   When "The cartoon man drives his cartoon car into the cartoon town and runs over a real man" (135), the result is a collision of discourses such that the boundaries between them fall, leaving only the implied adaptation of each to the other.

The cartoon of the story is the memory of every cartoon we
have seen, suggesting the impossibility of relegating that
memory to mere play: the cartoon works in a contiguous
relationship to the real no less than the "realistic" film
text, employing a similar imitation of "flowing movements"
even while exaggerating those movements. The collision and
subsequent adjacency of the cartoon world and the real world
expose the reliance of the one on its other, exposing the
"realism" of what is taken to be caricature, and the
caricature of what is taken to be real.

The real policeman of the story, then, is seen in
terms of his cartoon representation by virtue of this
contiguity: "'You'll have to come with me,' announces the
real policeman severely, collaring the real man...'There are
procedural matters involved here!'" (136). This is no less
a caricature than the cartoon policeman, who "hurries along
about four inches above the pavement, taking five or six
airy steps for every one of [the real man's] own and blowing
his whistle ceaselessly" (135). Both representations are
familiar through their repetition in other texts; both
representations are necessarily evoked in the image of the
policeman. In this way the representation of the real,
regardless of the degree of its fidelity, can be seen as
posing the existence of a contiguity, such that each must
include something of its other.

It comes as no surprise, then, when we find that
"The real policeman is not completely real, after all. He
has cartoon eyes that stretch out of their sockets like
paired erections..." (136). The <u>physical</u> contiguity of the
real policeman and the cartoon policeman, their presence in
the same representational space, results in an exchange of
their physical characteristics, the identity of the one
coming to include something of the identity of the other.

Similarly, the real man's foray into the space of
the cartoon results in a sliding of identity into the terms
of that space:

> With a heavy heart...he goes into the
> bathroom to flush the cartoon car down the
> toilet and discovers, glancing in the
> mirror, that...he seems to have grown a pair
> of cartoon ears. They stick out from the
> sides of his head like butterfly wings.
> (139)

The implication of the real into the cartoon necessarily
results in an exchange between the two. The cartoon, as
removed from the real (and from realism) as it might seem,
can thus be seen as a specific signifying practice with the
same relation to the real as classic cinema itself. By
positing an alternate representational space, the cartoon
refers to the absence of any real outside of that space, of
any specific, singular identity defined in and of itself.

As the dominant (cinematic) mode of representation
of childhood, there are obvious implications for the cartoon
as constituting an early formation of memorial text.

Experience, as mediated by filmic representation, is equally

mediated by the presence, in memory, of the cartoon:

> He is reminded of the time when, as a boy,
> he found himself looking up at his teacher,
> hovering over him with a humorless smile,
> wielding a wooden ruler (he thinks of her in
> retrospect as a cartoon teacher, but he
> could be mistaken about this -- certainly
> the ruler was real), and accusing him,
> somewhat mysteriously, of 'failing his
> interpolations.' 'What?' he'd asked, much
> to his immediate regret, a regret he
> strangely feels again now, as if he were
> suffering some kind of spontaneous reenact-
> ment, and it suddenly occurs to him, as he
> walks his cartoon car miserably down the
> middle of the street through all the roaring
> real ones, that, yes, the teacher was almost
> certainly real -- but her accusation was a
> cartoon. (138)

The presence of the cartoon in the real allows an organizing

of experience around the disjunction between the two; the

memory of childhood necessarily takes in the cartoon as a

specific vision of the world. The possibility of the

dissolve of boundaries between representational sites -- the

real town, the cartoon town -- takes place in the possibil-

ity of a memorial dissolve to an established contiguity. If

this leads to a problem in delineating a boundary between

terms, between the real and its representation, it is only

through the arbitrariness of the original contiguity, which,

once posited, is made to seem natural.

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"Lap Dissolves"[6] shows the implications of the naturalizing
of cinema's technological strategy, where the representation
of reality requires a set of visual codes to provide the
illusion of coherence. In this story, filmic coding takes
control, such that unsuspecting victims find themselves
caught in the slippages of that strategy, and in the
arbitrary relations established there. The (supposedly)
inconspicuous coding of the image disrupts rather than
ensures narrative progress, and is the means for the
destabilizing of identities and the unifying force of a
continuous vision.

The subjects of "Lap Dissolves" are characters
caught in a world of filmic construction. The codes of
cinematic representation are imposed on this world even
though incompatible with its (coherent) perception. The lap
dissolve, figure of fluid, continuous transition in film, is
discontinuous in the world of the story, and provides slips
in reality and identity outside of cinema's specific
conventions. The transgression of temporal and spatial
boundaries that the filmic dissolve works to conceal is
conspicuously displayed in writing[7], the acceptance of that

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[6] The title refers to the transitional device of
fading one scene into another, such that, for a given number
of frames, there is an overlap of images as one fades down
and the other fades up. The dissolve is usually used to
signal a time lapse or a shift in location.

[7] Cf. Metz: "could you imagine the end of paragraph
1 and the beginning of paragraph 2 being printed on the same
lines, the typographical characters overlapping and getting

particular device an acceptance of cinema's illusion of
continuity. Conventionally, the unproblematic transition
from one image to another posits "a stable signified, a
cause/effect, before/after relationship, with a 'time jump',
etc...." (Metz 1982, 277); in "Lap Dissolves," the stability
of those relationships is thrown into question.

The binding of the spectator in the film through
character identification is problematized in the story by
the exposing of the mobility of identity required in that
process; the cumulative effect of spectatorship, then,
becomes the multiplicity of possible positions presented the
spectator. And so one film (one character, one situation)
dissolves, unexpectedly, into another: an adventure flick
becomes a gangster movie (with, maybe, a romance in the
transition), the edge of a cliff becomes a bus:

> Her hand disappears, then reappears,
> snatching deperately for a fresh purchase.
> He staggers to his knees, his feet, plunges
> ahead, the ropes slipping away like a
> discarded newspaper as he hails the ap-
> proaching bus. She lets go, takes the empty
> seat. Their eyes meet. "Hey, ain't I seen
> you somewhere before?" he says. (79)

An uneasy transition takes place in the written text, which
lacks the ability to make the smooth, seamless transitions
that the film dissolve makes. The effect is necessarily
jarring. There is no gradual overlaying of images to signal

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mixed up? And yet that is what happens in every lap-dis-
solve. The device doesn't simply plot out some relationship
between two segments on the level of the signified, it
combines their signifiers physically" (1982, 277).

the shift: the closest the written text can come is to
posit a contiguity between "the ropes slipping away" and "a
discarded newspaper." That metonymic shift (the substitu-
tion of one image for a (supposedly) contiguous image) is
writing's representation of the filmic device, the drift
from one signifier to a second, where each takes in some-
thing of its other[8]. And yet this written approximation in
no way signals the more radical shift to come, where one
film becomes a completely different one. Any side-by-side
relationship that should, conventionally, exist, is a matter
of arbitrariness, the slightest allusion to or evocation of
another text providing the means for the slip.

And it is clearly other texts that determine the
terms of the dissolve, as the story runs through a sequence
of film genres (or genre films), beginning with an adventure
and ending with a western, taking in along the way gang-
sters, pirates, a strangler, zombies, a farm girl and a
middle-American family. As we saw in "Inside the Frame,"
the reference here is not to reality, not even to film, but
to the memory of film, to a whole memorial film library.
Those dissolves, then, represent slippages in the reader's
control of remembered texts; the allusions to other texts

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8 There is, of course, that moment in every dissolve
where both images, the one fading out and the one fading in,
are simultaneously and equally present on the screen. At
that moment, both terms in the dissolve combine as coter-
minous, before the repression of the first by the second is
complete.

results in a disruption of stable memory in a kind of free

association of the already seen.

Where, though, in "Inside the Frame" the collapsing

of generic boundaries takes place in the context of the

opening of gaps in the narrative, and through the absence of

any illusion of causality -- through what amounted to a

series of jump cuts -- "Lap Dissolves" uses one of the most

obvious (and so less visible) devices of filmic continuity

and causality against itself to suggest a similar collapse.

In this case memory is seen as an interlocking network of

texts, those texts accessible through the most arbitrary

substitutions and associations. The result is an unfixing

of the film text as "memory-spectacle," and a disruption of

the notion of memory as a stable possession of stable texts:

the dissolve carries with it the loss and simultaneous

retention of the image on the screen, the substitution of

one image for another becoming a constant receding (into

memory) of a succession of images.

Such a receding succession is exemplified in the

text through the listing of substitutions for a single

image; we see that constant push backwards, until the

original image is lost in the process:

> some things in this world are as hard and
> abiding as the land itself, and nothing more
> so than Bossy's mangy old rump, even its
> stink is like some foul stubborn barrier
> locking her forever out here on this airless
> prairie, a kind of thick muddy wall with
> rubbery teats, a putrid dike holding back
> the real world (of light! she thinks, of

> music!), a barricade of bone, a vast im-
> movable shithouse, doorless and forlorn, an
> unscalable rampart humped up into the
> louring sky, a briary hedgerow, farting
> citadel, trench and fleabitten earthworks
> all in one, a glutinous miasma...a no-man's-
> land, a loathsome impenetrable forest, an
> uncrossable torrent, a bottomless abyss, a
> swamp infested with the living dead, their
> hands clawing blindly at the hovering gloom,
> the air pungent with rot. He staggers
> through them, gasping, terrified... (83)

This particular transition requires a complex of figures of

substitution, working, in this case, as a slow dissolve, a

gradual fading of one film for its replacement by another.

The path from one to the other eventually involves the

substitution of one cliche for another, suggesting a

storehouse constructed by the already seen, a sort of banal

memorial text. The substitutions required for the intel-

ligibility of the farmgirl's situation -- stuck on the

prairie, cut off from the "real world" -- lead only to its

loss and replacement by another only apparently contiguous

situation.

"Lap Dissolves" itself represents the dissolve in

terms of this loss, the sliding from one image to another as

the instability of memory, when the girl on the bus leaves

and is seen, by the gangster, to "slide backwards, past the

bus windows, slipping from frame to frame as though out of

his memory -- or at least out of his grasp" (80). That

"sliding backwards...from frame to frame" is the dissolve,

and the loss of the image produces a consequent loss of

mastery, where memory is the agent of the image's posses-

sion. The substitution of one image for another (con-

tiguous) image becomes linked to a greater scheme of

loss/recovery through the memory of the gangster's mother,

which seems to arrive unexpectedly and somewhat obscurely as

he laments the departure of the girl: "she's like his last

chance (he doesn't know exactly what he means by that, but

he's thinking foggily of his mother, or else of his mother

in the fog), and she's gone!" (80). The loss of the girl

seems to <u>require</u> her substitution by the nearest figure in

the gangster's memory.

Metonymy, then, appears as the perfect literary

equivalent of the filmic dissolve, through its posing of

contiguous relationships, as Metz points out:

> the lap dissolve, though it isn't purely
> metonymic, shows a remarkable <u>capacity to
> metonymise</u>. It tends...to create a pre-
> existing relationship after the event....
> Metonymy brings together two objects which
> stand in a relationship of referential con-
> tiguity; and the force of transitivity which
> characterises the dissolve, as well as the
> textual contiguity which it does actually
> effect (and which it underlines by its
> slowness and its gradual nature) restrict
> the spectator's freedom to think that the
> two elements it associates might <u>not</u> be
> contiguous in some referent. (1982, 279)

In fact, as we see, the dissolve, through the power of

conventional expectations, <u>forces</u> the contiguous relation-

ships which are made to appear natural. And so the written

text works within the limits of this principle, while at the

same time stretching those limits -- and the limits of

reader/spectator expectation -- by forcing more and more
radical and arbitrary contiguities.

In this way "Lap Dissolves," subverts the expected
connections that the metonymy/dissolve conventionally
operates under. Those slips to other genres come, as
indicated, quite unexpectedly, as do many of the substitu-
tions in the text; yet, the slips suggest the availability
-- through memory -- of those supposedly contiguous texts,
while also suggesting the inherent incoherence of that
principle (the evocation of other texts as operating
arbitrarily). The substitutions that take place as, con-
ventionally, providing intelligibility, become the agent of
the subversion of that intelligibility.

All of which, finally, works against a notion of the
stability of an identity constituted through the interweav-
ing of texts: the incoherent nature of that interweaving --
exposed through the arbitrariness of its associations --
loosens the subject's hold on memorial texts and consequent-
ly loosens identity itself. The substitution of one image
for another poses the possibility of the substitution of one
identity for another (which, of course, is the process of
identification). This challenge to stability is seen in the
daughter's description of her dream (which appears much like
the story itself), where "'everything kept changing except
the things that were supposed to change'":

> "Well, it occurred to me that if everything
> else was changing I must be changing, too.

> I looked in a mirror and saw I could flatten
> my nose or pull it out to a point, push my
> chin up to my forehead, stretch my cheeks
> out like wings. Still, I felt like there
> was something that wasn't changing, I
> couldn't put my finger on it exactly, but it
> was something down inside, something I could
> only call me. In fact there had to be this
> something, I thought, or nothing else made
> sense." (85)

That notion of innate me-ness, of the individual as source of meaning and intelligibility, can only be seen as illusory, and it is only a matter of moments before the daughter becomes the sheriff in a film western (who is soon addressed as "Ma'am").

This is seen as a condition of the entrance inside representational space, the totality of filmic experience requiring a multiplicity of possible identities, and a multiplicity of possible positions as spectator. The mirror in the above passage is as the screen, representing the spectator in its capacity to change. What becomes impossible in this text is the return to origin as if no sliding of identity had taken place at all, no dissolve from one to an other. The structure of the dissolve problematizes that return in its posing of a contiguous substitution, the replacement of the original image rendering it unrecoverable except in the terms of that figure, identity and memory taking into themselves the terms of the substitution. Identity, then, recedes with the real, similarly dismantled and replaced by the terms of its representation, and lost as origin of the text.

CONCLUSION

The code of visibility under which Coover's text operates
refers to the production of images of the real in the
absence of the real/reel, for the representation of the
terms of existence in a world of cinematic spectacle.
Throughout, his evocation of the memory of movies by
reference to popular texts -- genre films, Hollywood
classics -- evokes the construction of subject positions in
relation to those texts. The memory of previous viewings is
the memory of those positions, and the alteration of those
memories through the alteration of their object disrupts any
illusion of stability -- of memory, of texts, of reality --
that the (reading/viewing) subject might hold. That
disruption works against the strategy of realistic texts
which construct, for and in ideology, an illusion of fixed
and coherent subjects.

The reference to popular film, while allowing
recognition and the reference to a memorial text, also
evokes a popular consciousness as constructed by the movies,
a common experience of film as representing the real, and as
creating subject positions in relation to that real. These
stories speak, through memory, of the history of the subject

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as a social and cultural construct, of the inscription of
the subject by the _ideological_ terms of filmic representa-
tion. The text suggests that there is no return to a world
outside of representation, indeed, that in being represent-
ed, that world ceases to exist outside of representational
codes. In this sense, the movies function in direct
relation to an Althusserian notion of ideology in positing
the conditions of the social: "Ideology is inescapable
since it is the device which guarantees the cohesion of
social formations of any sort" (Smith 1988, 15).

In suggesting the persistence of cinematic vision in
the operation of the social, _A Night at the Movies_ exposes
the ideological functioning of the movies and its hold on
the spectator. The text, in referring to familiar films and
a common, popular knowledge, refers to the "realistic"
representation of that knowledge:

> If discourses articulate concepts through a
> system of signs which signify by means of
> their relationship to each other rather than
> to entities in the world, and if literature
> is a signifying practice, all it can reflect
> is the order inscribed in particular
> discourses, not the nature of the world.
> Thus, what is intelligible as realism is the
> conventional and therefore familiar,
> "recognizable" articulation and distribution
> of concepts. It is intelligible as "realis-
> tic" precisely because it reproduces what we
> already seem to know. (Belsey 1980, 46-47)

In dealing with "what we already seem to know," these
stories use the terms of realism's operation as a context;
but, in exposing those terms, and in foregrounding the

seeming rather than the knowing, they also disrupt the
unified subject of the realistic text. The reader of A
Night at the Movies is certainly addressed as possessing a
knowledge of and familiarity with the texts presented there,
but that knowledge, through the presentation of disjunctions
and discontinuities, is continually questioned as stable,
and so any stable position as source of meaning is disal-
lowed. In many cases ("The Phantom of the Movie Palace,"
"Intermission," for instance), the subject of film in the
story is implicitly the reader who is the subject of the
text; through the recognition of the filmic texts displayed
in the stories, the reader is placed in a contiguous
relationship to the story's character and its fictionality,
and the terms of that character's subjection to film are
merely an exaggerated version of the reader's own subjection
to film and text.

The result is a fragmentation of the reader as
subject through the multiplicity of subject positions
offered in both this text and in the already seen film
texts. Already fragmented into the simultaneous postions of
reader and spectator, the reader is further shown to have
been the subject of regulated slippages of unified identity
through film's -- and literature's -- demand for identifica-
tion. Throughout, the text problematizes the notion of a
return to stability after identification, positing instead

the metonymic sliding of identity as irreversible, as always
including, if only in memory, both terms in that slide.

What is finally questioned is the stability of those
texts by which the reading/viewing subject is represented to
him/herself: Hollywood cinema represents its spectators in
relation to movies as a set of stable meanings proscribed by
a stable sociality, reserving a position within the film's
enunciation for the subject. Thus it necessarily takes part
in the construction of socially produced subjects, and "is
directly implicated in the production and reproduction of
meanings, values, and ideology in both sociality and subjec-
tivity..." (De Lauretis 1984, 37).

The translation of cinematic codes and conventions
into writing de-naturalizes the naturalizing vision of film
texts, exposing the social and ideological construction
contained there. What A Night at the Movies reproduces is
the process of that reproduction. Outside of movies we are
supposed to find the (our) stable sociality and subjectivity
that is represented on the screen; as A Night at the Movies
tells us, outside of movies there are only other movies.

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