

## The *Défilement* Into the Look . . .

### Bertrand Augst

Thierry Kuntzel's<sup>1</sup> close scrutiny of the effect produced by the *défilement* of a series of still images passing through the gates of a projector, and Raymond Bellour's<sup>2</sup> analysis of the inflection of the film-text resulting from the director's intervention in the dialectics of the look in the diegesis of the film, and between the characters and the spectators, delineate a new space of investigation for film theory. Both studies deal with what is perhaps the most inaccessible, 'unattainable' among the numerous operations which interact in the production of the cinema-effect, what Kuntzel also calls, 'the filmic': that delicate balance between stillness and movement, whereby 'the film-projection is generated by the film-strip in the denial of this same film-strip by the film-projection, in the rubbing out of the work of signification.' A text which also is unattainable, in the sense first used by Bellour of 'introuvable,' by being literally and figuratively unquotable, everlastingly slipping through in the instance of being identified, seized for closer scrutiny. 'Between the space of the film-strip and the time of the projection, the film is rubbed out: movement erases its signifying process, and eventually, conceals some of the images which pass too rapidly to be 'seen' without nevertheless producing a subliminal effect . . .' In both instances, their analysis reveals the intrinsic duplicity of the cinematographic apparatus, at once stimulating and repressing the spectator's desire for that which must be denied to him in order to manifest itself. The 'film-strip' can only turn into 'film-projection' where the 'unreal' of the image is materialized if, in the instant that the film-strip begins to file past the projector's gate, someone intervenes in the filmic operation in order to inscribe in it the position of an enunciator.

The merit of Kuntzel's article is to combine a precise and detailed analysis of a film-text, 'a view in close-up,'<sup>3</sup> and the broad theoretical implications that it supports. Slowing down the progression of the film-strip, as if viewed on the screen of an editing bench, Kuntzel strips bare the elaborate film-work which conceals the machination of the apparatus.

Pursuing his study of the cinematographic apparatus undertaken in several other studies with reference to the Freudian model, this analysis of the signifying process in Foldes' *Appetite of a Bird* reveals one of the most important effects of the *défilement* in the elaboration of the film-

94 work. Kuntzel calls this effect, *l'émouvoir*, a word untranslatable in English, but which condenses very happily in French, the idea of movement, that of the film's (as film-strip into film-projection), and that of the spectator's, moved visually, psychologically and unconsciously; in *émouvoir*, to move and to *be* moved are uniquely fused to render that startling effect produced by the perception of images which must be repressed in order to be seen. *L'émouvoir* is indeed a key concept which, very astutely, Kuntzel articulates on the mutation of the film-strip into film-projection. The fact that *Appetite of a Bird* is an animated film and not a photographic film, and that, on the plane of content, it displays the spectator's 'repressed archaic phantasies,' provides Kuntzel with a highly exceptional instance of what he called *l'émouvoir* because in photographic films, the *défilement* conceals even more completely the complex operations of the film-work which it sustains. In *Appetite of a Bird*, the effect of *l'émouvoir* is double: it combines the 'calligraphic and chromatic delirium' of animation with the 'uncanny', by means of which the adult spectator accedes to infantile fears, desires or beliefs, repressed at a primitive stage of his development. All films, and many of their multiple cinematographic operations depend directly on the *défilement*, from the impression of reality to vast operations of the narrative systems. In photographic films however, and Kuntzel emphasizes the importance of this difference at the beginning of his article, it is the camera which takes charge of the codes of movement. In animated films, movement is not the result of a re-production of a pseudo-real; both the iconic representation and movement are conceived as a production. The effect produced by the *défilement* in photographic films is therefore, and by definition, different from *l'émouvoir*.

While it is difficult to duplicate Kuntzel's analysis with the same clarity and simplicity applied to a photographic film, the implications of his demonstration are far reaching because the effect of *l'émouvoir* is not confined to *Appetite of a Bird* or to animated films; it is the very base of the cinematographic apparatus. So much so that without the *défilement* there cannot be a cinema-effect, if we understand by that the effect produced by the passing of the film through the gate of the projector at 24 frames per second, i.e. under the *ideal* conditions of the operation of the basic cinematographic apparatus. This is not to say that the *défilement* does not produce an effect when the film projection is running slower or faster than 24 frames per second; from the early days of cinema to the most radical films of contemporary experimental cinema, the history of cinema shows precisely the opposite. But the effect produced is different. As the projection speed is altered, slower or faster, the presence of the apparatus and its specific operations intrude with greater or lesser insis-

tence in the work of *défilement*. A speed variation of a few frames per second is enough to reveal the ever threatening presence of machination in cinema. 95

In the course of his discussion of special effects and cinema, Christian Metz remarked, several years ago, that cinema was nothing more than a vast system of deception.<sup>4</sup> The duplicity of the filmic process is nowhere more in evidence than in the way special effects are used, sometimes aggressively displayed as special effects, and sometimes so completely invisible that the spectator is truly deceived. Or, yet still, they are invisible but perceptible, teasing the credulity of the spectator, who is always too eager to play along with the filmmaker's attempt to seduce him by performing 'magical tricks' for him.

Special effects are only a small part of the many devices which constitute the basic cinematographic apparatus. In the film-work, these special effects combine with the many invisible markers of enunciation which regulate the production of the film-text. Perpetually oscillating between visibility and invisibility, special effects, from the doubling of an actor, to the editor's splices, not to mention lighting effects or corny atmospheric musical scores, conspire to reinforce the machination of cinema. It is the artfulness with which this machination is managed which will determine the quality of the spectator's identification, and which may be used to titillate even the analyst's curiosity, pulling him away from his fetishistic desire into the regressive pleasure shared by the rest of the 'naive' spectators.

Cinematographic 'tricks' which are used to produce special effects may be explicit or so finely tuned that they become invisible and imperceptible. The coarser they are, as in the case of superimpressions or demarcation signifiers (fades and lap-dissolves), the more the enunciation apparatus will be in evidence. In the broader context of special effects which are used to prop up the spectator's belief, and to maintain the precarious balance necessary for his disavowal, there is precisely the effect of the film-strip passing through the projector gate. The *défilement* is also one of those 'special effects'—and if one goes back far enough in the history of cinematographic codes, all were at some point perceived as such before they came to be stabilized in the socialization of the cinematographic institution. As Kuntzel's article shows, the *défilement* is at the very center of the filmic machine. It is the operation which sutures the two bodies of the film (the film-strip and the film-projection) into a film-text. By definition, *l'émouvoir* can only be produced if the *défilement* operation retains its optimal conditions of invisibility, so that the differences registered in the material support are effaced (rubbed out) in the projection which creates the illusion of continuous movement. *Défilement*, as we

96 have seen, is also, above all, the effect which, bolstered by iconicity, sutures the basic cinematographic apparatus and the psychical apparatus.

It is evident that the apparatus produces an effect which is different in photographic films from that produced by animated films. What needs to be emphasized is not so much the radical difference in the signifying processes of these two types of films as their similarity. Describing the process whereby some of the photograms in *Appetite of a Bird* dissimulate themselves (literally in French, 'se défilent'), so that only some of the bird's movements are seen, those which denote female sexuality, Kuntzel quotes a passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which Freud calls attention to the transfer of psychic energy in the process of condensation: '... every psychical interconnection is transformed into an *intensification* of its ideational content.' Kuntzel's hypothesis is that the photograms which are not seen in the sub-phases a-a' and b-b'—the images which show the bird's wings forming into the shape of a penis—produce an effect which is unconscious. The effect is all the stronger for the fact that 1. it "obeys" one of the essential modes [of operation] of the unconscious, ... condensation,' and 2. the 'belief that these elements "set the stage" '; thus, in this particular instance, it is 'the phallic woman' which is hallucinated. Kuntzel is making an analogy between the cleavage of the film-strip ('where the woman is phallic') and the film-projection ('where the woman appears deprived of a penis') and the ego of the psychotic who hallucinates the penis, or that of the fetishist 'who maintains his original belief by transferring it to another part of the body.' It is however, this same mechanism of 'disavowal' which controls multiple operations of the cinematographic process. At this point, we rejoin the larger problems of the metapsychology of cinema which have been discussed extensively by Christian Metz.<sup>5</sup> There is therefore no need to insist on the importance of this mechanism in cinema, or in the theater for that matter, as Octave Mannoni<sup>6</sup> has shown. I want only to underline the fact that it is the same mechanism which supports the effect of *l'émouvoir* as described by Kuntzel, and the many operations of cinema from the primary disavowal which sustains the spectator's perception of the moving image—the series of still images are no more visible than the penis hidden in the bird's wings—to the complex structuring operations of disavowal inscribed in the 'imaginary signifier.'

It is understood that the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it "knows" that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected (or else the fiction film is declared 'poorly made'), that everything is set to work to make the deception effective and to give it an air of truth (this is the problem of *verisim-*

*alitude*). Any spectator will tell you that he 'doesn't believe in it', but everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really will 'believe in it'. (I shall say that behind any fiction there is a second fiction: the diegetic events are fictional, that is the first; but everyone pretends to believe they are true, and that is the second). In other words, asks Mannoni, since it is 'accepted' that the audience is incredulous, who is it who is credulous and must be maintained in his credulousness by the perfect organization of the machine (of the machination)? This credulous person is, of course, another part of ourselves, he is still seated *beneath* the incredulous one, or in his heart, it is he who continues to believe, who disavows what he knows (he for whom all human beings are still endowed with penises). By a symmetrical and simultaneous movement, the incredulous disavows the credulous: no one will admit that he is duped by the 'plot'.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the *défilement* is but one of the various sub-codes whereby disavowal is inscribed in the film apparatus. As Metz indicates in the same essay, there are many others situated at different points in the signifying process. *L'érouvoir* too is inscribed in the regime of disavowal, and in a sense, doubly so since it is ordered by the basic apparatus but also re-duplicated, so to speak, through the work of condensation at the level of the production of the text. In a larger sense too, the effect of the *défilement* is double. On one level, it transforms the filmstrip into film-projection by concealing the work of the cinematographic machination. In the same process however, it redoubles its power over the spectator in order to secure the belief of that other spectator 'seated *beneath* the incredulous one.' 'What is concealed in the manifest text of the dream is primarily the work of dissimulation, the aim of which is to make the dream appear as superfluous, useless and unreadable.' In the same way, the film-projection dissimulates the work of the *défilement* in order to make the filmstrip appear 'superfluous, useless and unreadable.'

There is another aspect of Kuntzel's analysis of *Appetite of a Bird* which deserves mention. In several of his papers, he has used the concept of condensation and displacement to describe various complex operations in the figuration of the film-text. However, condensation as used to describe the work of dissimulation in the film-text provides yet another instance of the usefulness of this concept applied to textual analysis. By placing himself firmly on the side of the production of meaning, and not on the side of the 'meaning produced', Kuntzel points out a new approach to the analysis of the film-text. At the end of his study of 'the imaginary referent',<sup>8</sup> Metz argues that there are instances when the relationship between units of the signified and units of the signifier is such that when 'there are changes in the referent which cannot be assimilated

98 by the code, these changes can no longer make it evolve and thus subvert a small part of its domain', and therefore distort it. This occurs when the forms of displacement and condensation are so strong that 'they directly affect the signifier.' Traditionally, metaphor and metonymy have been conceived as referential operations. Thus, while obviously, any such operation does 'affect' the signifier, it is mostly in terms of the referents mobilized by the trope that they have been studied. According to Metz, Jakobson's more recent reformulation of the theory of metaphor does not alter this attitude since he relies essentially on semantic similarity and contiguity to describe the mechanism of metaphor, saying very little about the signifier. Metz points out that traditional rhetoric was not totally unaware of the possibility for the metaphorical process 'to engage the signifier directly,' but these devices, like alliteration and apophony, have never been directly related to metaphor and metonymy because they 'remained indifferent' to the referent while metaphor and metonymy are defined directly in relation to it. Thus, the more condensation and displacement demark themselves from metaphor and metonymy, the more they intervene directly upon the signifier. This does not mean that the manifestations which directly affect the signifier do not continue to relate to the signified; they extend the range of metaphor and metonymy, '*elles le déborde*' in Metz's words. He points out that in cinematographic texts, too, such movements of displacement and condensation extend their action to coded units. For instance, experimental cinema offers many examples of such action since one of its aims is 'to subvert and enrich perception to make it communicate more extensively with the unconscious, to de-censor it to the maximum.' Metz mentions Kuntzel's article as an analysis of one such instance when 'the action of condensation and displacement bears on the identity of the objects represented and on the manner in which the codes of iconic designation are affected.'<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, the referent is affected in *Appetite of a Bird*, but perhaps, what is most significant in Kuntzel's analysis, is that it also illustrates how the signifier is made to actualize the direct 'distortion' brought to bear upon it by the primary process. In this specific instance, the basic apparatus conspires to produce the effect which actually distorts the signifier by means of the *défilement*. The *défilement* which actualizes the distortion of the material of expression is itself inseparable from it. Can there be any better argument to demonstrate the need for the textual analysis of film-texts to incorporate semio-psychoanalysis? Kuntzel's analysis, demonstrates graphically, literally speaking, that neither the linguistic nor the rhetorical model offers a critical and methodological apparatus which is powerful enough to be of much value for the study of the more complex figurations of the film-text. This is also the implication of Metz's recent

important study of metaphor and metonymy.

There is finally another dimension of Kuntzel's essay which should be briefly considered. As the juxtaposition of Kuntzel and Bellour's articles perhaps suggests, there is yet another way in which the *défilement* can be perceived as the central operation in the cinematographic process if we relate it to that instant when sight, glance, turns into *fascinum*. Asked to clarify the nature of the 'suture, the pseudo-identification' effected in the articulation between 'the end point of a gesture' and 'the dialectics of identificatory haste,' Lacan stated that they did overlap, but that in no way was it to be construed that they should be considered identical, since the one did precede the other. Lacan's text is important, and since Bellour refers to it in his essay on *Marnie*, I believe that it is useful to quote it fully.

'This moment of the look which ends a gesture, I link very closely to what I have said about the evil eye. By itself, the look not only tends to terminate movement, but it freezes it. Look at these dances I was talking about a moment ago / dances in the Peking Opera / ; they are always punctuated by a series of pauses / literally, dead moments / in which the actors stop moving in an attitude which is blocked. What is the stumbling point, this moment in which movement is stopped? It is nothing more than the fascinating effect in the necessity there is to exorcize the evil eye. It is that which results from stopping movement and which literally kills life. At the instant when the subject suspends his gestures, he is mortified. The anti-life function, the anti-movement, of this end point, this is the *fascinum*, and it is precisely one of the dimensions where the look exorcizes its power directly. The instant in which one sees can only intervene as a suture, a junction between the imaginary and the symbolic, repeated in a dialectic, the kind of temporal progression which is called haste, the forward movement, which ends with the *fascinum*.

What I want to emphasize is the absolute separation between the scopic register in relation to the invoking field, vocatory, vocational. In the scopic field, on the contrary, the subject is not essentially undetermined. The subject is actually determined by the very separation which determines the split of the *a*, i.e. the fascinating part in what the look introduces.'<sup>10</sup>

It would seem that one of the most important consequences of the effect produced by the *défilement* is to duplicate this suture, another instance of the uncanny affinities between the cinematographic and psychological apparatuses. If the economy of the look regulates the operations of the narrative in the classical cinema, as Bellour argues in his paper, it is

100 only because in cinema, the *défilement* sutures the glance and the evil eye to reinstate the domination of the look, its fascination but also its seduction. *L'émouvoir* thus sustains the displacement of the glance into the look.

Bellour's careful examination of the dialectics of the look as it operates in the beginning of Hitchcock's *Marnie* complements, and in a sense, continues Kuntzel's analysis of *L'émouvoir*. The moment in which the film-strip turns into film-projection, when the real of an unreal is materialized in the form of an image, a circuit is turned on, another link in 'the series of mirror-effects organised in a chain,' which constitute the signifier in cinema.

The import of Bellour's contribution is perhaps best perceived when it is placed in the context of the theory of enunciation in cinema. Within the theoretical framework defined by Metz in 'History/Discourse' and in 'The Imaginary Signifier,' Bellour succeeds in demonstrating with great precision just how one of the most elusive modes of operation of enunciation actually functions in a specific text. His argument, as much as his methodology, have far reaching implications for future research in film criticism because, for the first time, it provides a clear model for the study of an area in film studies which has heretofore remained practically untouched. To date, the study of enunciation in cinema has been almost completely dominated by the linguistic and the literary models inspired by the work of Benveniste, Barthes, Todorov and Genette. What renders the study of enunciation in cinema so problematic is the fact that, as in so many other instances in the constitution of the signifier in cinema, the film-text dissimulates the work of enunciation. At the risk of oversimplifying this complex problem, the work of enunciation in cinema might be defined as a discourse which displays itself as 'language', i.e. precisely the opposite of what it is. What distinguishes filmic discourse from other types of discourse is that it constitutes itself as a type of discourse in which the markers of the subject of enunciation have been suppressed or concealed. It is a discourse which presents itself as history.

Bellour pursues the implication of this theoretical sketch by separating one of the central enunciative functions from the other operations embedded in the articulation of the film-work. This enunciation function is the look, not just any look, but that look which the American cinema has best inscribed in the body of the classic narrative films, the look determined by the double edged fascination of the image of woman. In order to unravel that specific enunciative function with sufficient clarity, Bellour ingeniously centers his demonstration on what at first sight might seem paradoxical, if not the very opposite of what he is trying to isolate: Hitchcock's intervention in the filmic apparatus. However, it is only to



the extent that this intervention is perceptible that it becomes possible to assess the degree to which this intervention dialectically affects the spectator's identification with the image. By pointing to Hitchcock's own 'perverse' participation in this process, and the intensification which results from the insertion of his own look within the diegesis of the film, Bellour also reveals the complex interplays between the spectator's and the character's look, and of course, Hitchcock's doubling back to the spectator through the intermediary of the same characters. Hitchcock's films are not only a perfectly controlled economy of pleasure in the process of generating the 'artificial psychosis' which is the necessary condition of the cinema-effect, he also has best succeeded in articulating the textual systems of a great many of his films around the dialectics of pleasure as ordered by the look. What differentiates his films from those of other directors is not that the look plays an important role in them, but that it represents the limit-point whereby pleasure and desire are inscribed in the machination of cinema. Thus, for Bellour, it is 'the body' of the film which is itself the subject and the means through which the director's and the spectator's pleasure—their first and foremost *raison d'être*—are magnified. For Bellour, 'a certain cinema of representation' accentuates 'the image value of the apparatus' by creating 'the extreme condensation of sexuality in the woman's body image' which 'intensifies man's awareness of the irreducible difference of woman's sexuality, and in the same process it diminishes it by means of the representation as a mirror image of woman's sexuality.' It is the intensified image which further increases the fascination 'so as to intensify this same fascination.' Bellour's analysis of the beginning of *Marnie* provides us with a new theoretical operator which not only illuminates Hitchcock's strategies in his appropriation of the cinematographic apparatus in order to assert his position as enunciator but it also delineates the operational model of the enunciative apparatus as constituted by the regime of the look. The work of enunciation exemplified by Hitchcock's inscription of his own desire through the intermediary of his 'fictional delegates' in the diegesis of the film is perhaps unusually refined, but it is also why it reveals more clearly than in other films the intricate structure of this apparatus which, consciously or not, each director must assume, the central demand of fiction in the film-work.<sup>11</sup>

However, for the enunciative function described by Bellour to be fully operative, and for Hitchcock to experience the full gratification he expects from his management of pleasure, it is also essential that other enunciative functions affecting different levels of the filmic discourse also contribute to produce and reinforce the fascination of the image value generated by the film-text. Among these, as we have seen, the

102 *défilement* plays a major role in insuring the effect of *l'émouvoir* which *beneath* the look is displaced from one space to the next, from one character to the next. Only then will the full array of enunciative functions be fully operative. Thus, one might say that the *défilement* is that operation which, in sustaining the cinema-effect, does, in the most invisible and imperceptible way, support the work of enunciation. In fact, it is the necessary condition of enunciation. It is therefore not surprising that when it is exposed, as in the films of Vertov or those of contemporary experimental film-makers, the enunciation is displaced from the regime of the scopic drive (look) to that of the film-object, a displacement of the object of desire which results from the partial jamming of the *défilement*.

## NOTES

1. Thierry Kuntzel is also the author of 'Le travail du film,' *Communications*, no. 19, 1972, 25-39, a study of the first segment of Fritz Lang's *M*; 'Le travail du film, 2,' *Communications*, no.23, 1975, 136-189, a study of the film-work in *The Most Dangerous Game*; 'Savoir, pouvoir, voir,' *Ça*, no. 7/8, May 1975, 85-97, a study of 29 shots of the hunt in *The Most Dangerous Game*. Several unpublished studies (*La Jetée*, *The Man with A Movie Camera*, *King Kong*) will be added to these in a forthcoming book. 'A Note Upon the Filmic Apparatus,' was published in the *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol.1, no. 3, August 1976, 266-275.

2. Raymond Bellour has written extensively on cinema over the last fifteen years, especially on Lang, Hitchcock and on the American cinema. He has edited numerous film periodicals and books on cinema. Among these, *Le Western* (Paris, 10/18, 1966, new printing 1976), *Dictionnaire du cinéma* (Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1966) and *Le Cinéma américain* (Paris, Flammarion, forthcoming). Among his most recent articles on the American cinema: 'Les Oiseaux: analyse d'une séquence,' *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 217, Sept. 1968, available in an English translation from the BFI in London; 'L'Evidence et le code,' *La Revue d'esthétique*, no. 2-3-4, 1973; an analysis of 12 shots from *The Big Sleep*, published in *Screen*, vol, 15, no. 4, 1974; 'Le Blocage symbolique,' *Communications*, no.23, 1975, 235-350, a close analysis of segment 14 in *North by Northwest*; 'To Analyze / to Segment,' *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol.1, no.3, August 1976, 331-353, a study of the segmen-

tation system in *Gigi*; 'Le Texte introuvable,' *Ça*, no. 7/8, May 1975, 77-84, published in *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, 1975. Of special interest also are his interview with Christian Metz, *Semiotica*, 1971, reprinted in his book *Le Livre des Autres* (Paris, l'Herne, 1971), and a chronology of cinema, published in *l'Année 1913* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1971), which also includes an essay entitled: '1913: pourquoi écrire, poète?' Raymond Bellour has also done extensive work on the Brontë sisters, and he has edited collections of essays on Henri Michaux, Jules Verne and Claude Lévi-Straus.

3. This expression is borrowed from an essay by Eisenstein (see the end of Kuntzel's article). The article title in French did not include 'A view in close up.' The addition of this expression to the English translation is intended to call attention to Kuntzel's methodology which constitutes an important part of the article. Just as there are two kinds of spectators, there are two kinds of film critics, and if anything, Kuntzel's article shows that, by definition, one cannot analyze the film-work from the position of the 'naive' spectator.

4. Christian Metz, 'Trucage et cinéma,' in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. II, Paris, Klincksieck, 1972; to be reprinted by the Éditions Albatros.

5. Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier,' *Screen*, vol.16, no.2, 1975, 14-75; 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator,' *New Literary History*, Autumn, 1976, 75-105.

6. Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1969. See in particular 'Je sais bien, mais quand même...', 9-33, and 'L'Illusion comique ou le théâtre du point de vue de l'imaginaire,' 161-183.

7. 'The Imaginary Signifier,' *op.cit.*, p. 70.

8. 'Métaphore / Métonymie, ou le référent imaginaire,' in *Le Signifiant imaginaire: Cinéma et Psychanalyse* Paris, 10/18, 1977, see especially ch. XIV.

9. For an interesting discussion of such an instance of the 'perturbation of the iconic signifier by the trajectories of the primary process,' see Jacques Dubois et al., 'La chafetière est sur la table,' *Communication et langages*, no. 29, 1976, 36-49.

10. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, XI, *Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Paris, Le Seuil, p.107f.

11. Christian Metz, 'History/Discourse,' *Edinburgh 1976 Magazine*, no. 1, 21-25.