

WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: METAPHOR AND MEANING IN CINEMAS PAST AND
PRESENT

By

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To Stephanie

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The window and the mirror have long served as the dominant metaphors of film theory, both being tied to debates concerning film's ability to a) perfectly replicate the world and b) fabricate lies. This paper charts the evolution of the window and the mirror. The window has forever been tied to filmic transparency, a style meant to disguise the production of the filmic image. Where the window has retained this connotation for decades, however, the treatment of the mirror within film theory has varied widely. This paper merges window theory with three distinct mirror theories: Christian Metz's reworking of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, the mirror as a reflection of culture (John Szarkowski and reflection theory), and the mirror as a multiplier of space (Metz). Merging the window's transparent view with these different kinds of reflections, this paper posits a new metaphor: a window that reflects. This metaphor is then applied to two classically-made films: *Rear Window* (1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock) and *La Notte* (1961, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni) and one digital video "how to fix the world?" (2004, dir. Jacqueline Goss). My point in applying these theories to these films is to show how the newly-fashioned metaphor is capable of both summarizing what we already know of

film and of conceptualizing the changes wrought in cinema as a result of the proliferation of digital technologies in production processes. Specifically, what I find here is that digital cinema constantly straddles a barrier between two worlds: between our world, the one that cinema had previously captured, and another world, defined not by chance or contingency but on the manipulability of the image.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Digital Divide

Near the midpoint of *Chloe* (2009, dir. Atom Egoyan), the title character played by Amanda Seyfried tells another character that she dislikes digital media. She had brought the character a CD that she had recommended to him earlier in the film. On seeing the jewel case in her hands however, he confesses that he has already downloaded the album from the internet. Chloe responds, "But you didn't download the case or the artwork, or the CD that you can keep forever and hold in your hands. I hate the internet. Nothing's private. Nothing is real. Like this, me meeting you here." The film never lingers on this line or its implications. Whereas the protagonists of *Family Viewing* (1987), *Speaking Parts* (1989), *The Adjuster* (1992), and *Adoration* (2008) must actively deal with the place of audiovisual media in their lives, questions of tangibility and physical presence here remain linked to the desire of characters caught in a romantic melodrama. Ultimately, the line initiates a discourse that the film seems uninterested in at the level of narrative and form.

That the film never meets this question of tangibility in a digital age disappoints, particularly because the disappearing materiality of media frequently informs arguments over cinema's integration of digital technologies and that integration's effect on filmic ontology. Cinema's relationship to the world, once defined by the writing of the world in light on a photosensitive surface, now seems in question due to digital technologies' conversion of light values into binary code. This shift in the apparatus has inspired different kinds of concern among film scholars. Dai Vaughan describes the pervasiveness of digital technologies in filmmaking practices as something close "to the

catastrophe model, where a seemingly innocuous curve takes a sudden nosedive, an irreversible switch into another state" (189). In this model, digital technologies spell the death of cinema itself because their mediation between the world and its image negates the indexical inscription of light onto celluloid. Mary Ann Doane and Tom Gunning have complicated this stance by returning to Peirce's definition of the index. As they point out, Peirce not only defines indexicality as a relationship based on physical causality (as found in photographs or fingerprints), but also as anything that focuses attention (such as a pointing finger or linguistic shifters like "this" and "here"). This latter conception of the index can then apply to analog or digital video, and further suggests that a move to digital technologies may not be a catastrophe, but an innocuous change. Even if we believe that this change does not spell the death of cinema, the ramifications of a digital apparatus demands that we review and perhaps update film theories based on photography. Through these theories, we might conceptualize and better understand film aesthetics altered by the automatism engendered by digital effects, nonlinear editing systems, etc.

This thesis attempts to read these changes through the lens of two of film theory's most dominant metaphors: the window and the mirror. These metaphors traditionally relate to questions of film realism, that realism's ideological shortcomings, and the relationship between recording and construction in the cinema. That current discourse on a digital apparatus shares these concerns positions the window and the mirror as productive areas of thinking on the subject. In addition to serving theoretical purposes, these figures' physicality as diegetic objects in film allows a filtering of theory through film aesthetics. These metaphors' ability to function both figuratively and literally

facilitates a methodology capable of accounting for both the theoretical and aesthetic implications of a medium torn between a photographic past and a digital future.

Why Metaphor?

In 1992, Vivian Sobchack designated the picture-frame, the window, and the mirror as the three grand metaphors of film theory (14). Her schema associates the picture-frame with formalist theory (Eisenstein), the window with realist theory (Bazin), and the mirror with apparatus theory (Metz). Sobchack mentions these metaphors in order to juxtapose their supposed disregard for "the dynamic act of viewing that is engaged in by both the film and the spectator" with her phenomenological approach (15). Her treatment of these figures corresponds to a general distrust of grand metaphors in the humanities after poststructuralism. Logic would have it that grand metaphors, like master narratives, encourage ahistorical or essentialist arguments ignoring their own status as discourse.

Sobchack's classification of metaphors follows that laid out by Dudley Andrew in *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984), but while Sobchack sees the metaphors as exemplifying a lack within the discipline, Andrew describes them as a productive hermeneutic that helps film studies work through shifts in thinking. In his schema, grand metaphors and subsequent criticism of them move film theory forward in a kind of call and response: "Thus goes film theory and thus, in my mind, should it go: metaphor and critique, constantly modifying our representation of film in human history" (*Concepts* 13). Of course, these grand metaphors cannot account for film in its diverse manifestations, but Andrew's model acknowledges and accommodates that liability, allowing metaphor a place to explore, conceptualize, and complicate our thinking on the cinema.

In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Jacques Lacan goes further than Andrew and identifies metaphor as language’s essential means to express meaning, whether as poetry or as an expression of the unconscious. He begins his argument by reworking Saussure's algorithm for signification, S/s. For Saussure, the relationship between signifier (S) and signified (s) is one of continual exchange (Evans 183). Even though a word’s meaning is ultimately arbitrary and only decided on by the totality of a language’s users, Saussure insists that there remains a one-to-one relationship between, for example, the signifier "tree" and any mental image we may have of a tree. Lacan, because he considers signification only to be found in the difference between signifiers, conceives of the bar between S and s as “a barrier resisting signification” (415). Lacan denies any direct relationship between the sign and its signified and instead claims that language develops meaning only through a cultural understanding of the difference between signifiers: “What this signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have – precisely insofar as I share its language [*langue*] with other subjects, that is insofar as this language [*langue*] exists – to use it to signify *something altogether different* from what it says” (Lacan 421). Metaphor allows the subject and the subject’s unconscious the ability to play with language, to make its working parts produce a spark of meaning based solely on the relationship between words, syntax, and grammar.

Lacan then modifies Jakobson’s metonymy/metaphor pair in the context of his reading of Saussure in order to produce a theory of signification. In this schema, metonymy, the replacement of signifiers based on a relationship of contiguity (for example, replacing thirty “ships” with thirty “sails”), maintains the bar that denies a

relation between a given signifier and its signification. Lacan writes, “The part taken for the whole – I said to myself, if the thing is supposed to be based on reality [*réel*] – leaves us with hardly any idea what we are to conclude about the size of the fleet these thirty sails are nevertheless supposed to gauge: for a ship to have but one sail is very rare indeed” (421). Because the relationship between ship and sail relies on a relationship between the part and its whole, the signification remains somewhat vague, and the replacement of one signifier for another here reveals nothing. Metaphor, on the other hand, in its exchange of one word for another, produces meaning through difference. It is a “creative spark [that] flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other’s place in the signifying chain” (422). This change, however, based not on contiguity but on variability, creates new relationships between signifiers and allows slippage between registers of signification in order to produce meaning (Lacan 429).

This ability of metaphor to initiate new modes of thinking based on a disjunction between a word and its meaning seems to draw Andrew to it as a methodology for theory. Language conceptualizes and names the world, and, through that classifying, shapes our experience of it. Similarly, theory attempts to conceptualize or to map something that otherwise eludes our grasp or understanding. When we make metaphor a precondition of a theory, we can only increase its chances of opening up new avenues of discovery based on language’s building of concepts. As such, the model I will propose shifts between varying registers, for windows and mirrors appear diegetically in films as well as figuratively in discourse about them. My move essentially recites given theories about the cinema as a window or mirror and then reads them through a

particular film's aesthetic strategies. Thinking these concepts through film style poses essential questions to our theoretical models. Theory very rarely applies to the totality of its object of interest, and filtering theory through film aesthetics can only help to further refine and develop these theoretical models.

Any theory we may propose can only serve its purpose to the extent that it can produce new or fruitful ways of looking at films. Christian Metz notes that “The commentative and the reflexive are the two grand registers of filmic enunciation,” and suggests that we may see these gestures in “the perceptible traces that [they] can leave in the film: marks, figures, etc.” (*L'Énonciation* 71, translation mine). In an attempt to think through these metaphors and how they might relate to film then, I have tried to put both film theory's treatment of these metaphors and their diegetic use in films in dialogue with each other in order to synthesize a theory that both respects the complex history behind dominant lines of thinking on film and that also allows itself to be modified by actual cases of filmic enunciation.

What kind of figure then does this synthesis of window and mirror produce? Just after the opening prologue in *Chloe*, the film cuts from Chloe's seduction of a client to a high-angle shot of the client putting her into a taxi. The shot eventually begins to track backwards, slowly situating the viewer within Catherine's (Julianne Moore) medical office. For a moment, however, the setting remains unclear. The camera's view from the office window, several stories above street level, distances our view from the scene of prostitution. It is a safe distance, and because of this safety, we might say that the view resembles our own in the cinema. Aloof and separated from the hard facts of prostitution and its class implications, both the camera and the spectator remain

comfortably removed. This thesis' initial premise would have held that any window, insofar as it reduplicates the frame in a film, could comment on the situation of viewership. Upon further investigation, however, one finds that actual windows rarely present a transparent view, but one frequently obfuscated by curtains, screens, or simply reflections of objects within its purview.

Returning to the shot described above, one gradually notices a vague reflection of a woman's face in the window. With such a distortion of the viewing plane, the notion that a character's view through a window repeats the situation of the cinema falls apart. The idea that any frame redoubles our relationship to the cinema necessarily elides how real windows figure in films. The vague blur of Catherine's face in the window begs for a reading more complex than one that equates this window with a cinema screen. In short, the pronounced ability of the window to reflect calls for a reconsideration of the window as a metatextual figure, and to perform that reconsideration, this project will attempt to combine the window and the mirror as theoretical metaphors in order to produce a new figure. If the window presents a transparent view and the mirror a complete reflection, a mixture of the figures produces a reflecting window. The remainder of this thesis will, in turn, present the window and the mirror as theoretical constructs, merge them to produce the reflecting window, and finally read them through films, allowing diegetic windows to twist and shift the merged figure. Through this procedure, I hope to produce a metaphor capable of expressing the stakes of reality and construction in photographic cinema, through which we may gain a novel understanding of the cinema's future in digital automatisms.

Before moving to the window and the mirror, however, I would like to move to another figure that my focus on the window and mirror necessarily elides: the picture-frame. Both Andrew and Sobchack include this figure in their triads and associate it with formalist theory by Arnheim, Balázs, Eisenstein, etc. This metaphor basically claims that because the cinema, as the picture-frame, delimits a view, then its essence lies in its synthetic construction. This theory holds that the placement of figures within the field of view or the spatial-temporal leaps of montage should not correspond to the bland reproduction of the world as found in primitive modes of narration, but should instead attempt to mold that reality into a new kind of cinematic language. While this grouping under the banner of formalist theory makes sense, the picture-frame as metaphor presents two problems. First, its position in opposition to realist (window) theory seems inappropriate. Despite what seems like animosity between their theories, Eisenstein and André Bazin both call for a cinema of construction. Their two theories diverge on how that construction is to be formed and to what ends it is to be put. Second, the picture-frame, strictly speaking, is not a metaphor at all. While the phrases, "the cinema is a window" or "the cinema is a mirror," demand figurative explanations, "cinema is a frame" is indisputable. As a medium based on individually framed photograms and exhibition in a delimited and often framed space, the cinema must necessarily consider the frame at all points in its construction.

Anne Friedberg's *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* traces the metaphor of the window and the frame from the birth of perspective to the introduction of digital imaging. While she outlines the history of transparency as regards the window metaphor, she sees contemporary images as ultimately dependent on methods of

framing: "As we spend more of our time staring into the frames of movies, television, computers, hand-held displays . . . how the world is framed may be as important as what is contained within that frame" (Friedberg 1). This attention to the construction of viewing via frames demands most of her attention, likely because it most directly applies to that newest of visual technologies: the graphical user interface. Because Friedberg's project seeks to trace out historical conditions of visual culture, the evolution of film aesthetics becomes a device that signals, along with the graphical user interface, the breakdown of five-point perspective: "With the advent of digital imaging technologies and new technologies of display in the 1990s, the media 'window' began to follow painting's and architecture's lead in the challenge to a fixed perspective" (192).

Friedberg adopts a theory of convergence as applies to cinema, television, and digital imaging, and within this context, she proposes a new theory of spectatorship based not on a passive relationship to a single frame, but an active relationship to a multiplicity of shifting frames manipulated and shifted at the user's disposal (233). She notes that "If the digital image is postphotographic; the digital moving-image is postcinematic," suggesting that this breakdown in traditional perspective creates a new medium, one that we might not have a name for yet (Friedberg 6). Within this teleology, *Numéro Deux* (1974, dir. Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville) acts as a preview of this new visual culture, and *Time Code* (2000, dir. Mike Figgis) becomes its contemporary realization.

Friedberg's project indeed helps us to understand aspects of contemporary visual culture. Furthermore, it can help us understand new films whose digital technologies "make it easier . . . to construct seamless substitutions and simulation effects, but also

ease the use of inset framing devices, to facilitate multiple ‘windowed’ screens” (Friedberg 193). These observations are invaluable when faced with a film like *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* (2010, dir. Edgar Wright) in which the screen shifts rapidly in shape and size, following the logics of both the graphical user interface and the comic book panel. Still though, I am hesitant to follow her suggestion that cinema is moving toward such an idea of the image as a whole. The split-screen film, having undergone a renaissance of sorts in the early 2000’s with *Time Code* and *Conversations with Other Women* (2005, dir. Hans Canosa), never inspired widespread or lasting changes in screen aesthetics, and even examples such as *Scott Pilgrim* co-exist with a multitude of digital films that have not abandoned traditional 5-point perspective at all. As much as cinema has migrated to digital interfaces, methods of distribution, and automatisms engendered by its technology, it, in some ways, has remained resistant to abandoning perspectival views of the world. While we would err to deny that the graphical user interface has inspired modern cinema, to subsume cinema as falling seamlessly into these wider trends in visual culture may elide interrogations of what is indeed in the frame, and how digital images interact with the world we know.

CHAPTER 2 METAPHORS AND APPLICATION

The Window

As a metaphor for the cinema, the window generally refers to an idea of cinema's inherent realism, its automatic reproduction read as a "window on the world." A window frames a view but generally does not obstruct it. It simply presents a view and breaks the enclosure of interior walls. This description, of course, does not describe most windows, but this conception of the window as an unfettered presentation of a view resembles the concept of the window in realist film theory. This "window on the world" draws attention not to its own cinematic artifice but to the view itself. That is to say, this theory would have it that the cinema present itself without the window dressing of, say, German expressionism. The above treatment necessarily reduces the complexity of realist theory, but I do so because the depiction of realist theory also tends to reduce the complexity of realist theory to a kind of school united by its belief in the cinema as a window. Surprisingly though, despite the omnipresent association between realist theory and the window, works by André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer rarely mobilize the metaphor.

In fact, it seems as though the connection between realist theory and the window metaphor has been made more often by those positioning themselves against realist theory rather than by its actual practitioners. The general stereotype of the realist theorist has her/him believing in the cinema as presenting an unfettered or objectified moving picture of reality itself, a reality recorded without the intervention of the human hand. When Sobchack describes the window metaphor, she reiterates criticisms of realist theory common to its discussion since the late 60's: "the window as metaphor is

emblematic of the *transcendental realism* that informs realist film theory and its belief in the film object as *perception-in-itself* -- objectivity freed from entailment with the prejudicial investments of human being” (16). Friedberg notes, “Sobchack uses each metaphor as 'emblematic' of a theoretical position but does not suggest (or supply examples which might indicate) that these theories use the metaphors directly" (16). While Friedberg's observation holds true for Sobchack's schema, the ubiquity of this association between realist theory and the window metaphor deserves further interrogation. In the wake of semiotics and May 1968, theorists newly charged with uncovering the ideological structures of Western capitalism attacked film realism and realist theory, claiming that the very notion of realism in film “completely disguise[s] from the masses what is really at the origin of film creation, that is to say *the productive work and the class rapports that it implies: ideology*” (Zimmer 124). Beyond the denial of the production of the film, one also finds a sinister desire to bolster and sustain inequalities engendered by Western capitalism: “This ‘impression of reality’ thereby strengthens, reinforces the manifestation of the ideology conveyed by the picture. Whence the public’s *recognition* of that ideology, and beyond the recognition, the *identification*” (Zimmer 127).

Zimmer’s critique of realist theory goes further still and implies that Bazin’s “idealistic postulates” belong to a school whose “common origin [is] the illusion of the spiritualists for whom cinema borders on a manifestation of the ‘invisible’” (131). Zimmer’s critique here resembles the common portrayal of Bazin as a kind of Catholic soothsayer led astray by his naïve “belief in the film object as *perception-in-itself*” (Sobchack 16). These arguments seem oriented more toward Bazin’s “Ontology of the

Photographic Image” essay than his larger body of work. Daniel Morgan reminds us that Bazin’s realism refers to “the specific attitude a film takes to, on the one hand, the ontological basis of its medium, and, on the other, what the film holds as its central facts,” which are “only discovered by an investigation of [the film’s] style” (481).

Indeed, the larger arguments against realist theory generally concern style (transparency) more than ontology (realism). For critics of film realism, transparency “presents [the text] exactly as the presentation of objects to the reading subject” (MacCabe 18). Transparent styles efface their own status as narration or production and, subsequently, “guarantees the position of the subject exactly outside any articulation,” which opens her/him to the blind reception of a dominant discourse (MacCabe 18). This criticism gets more to the heart of Bazin’s project, for in the end, what he proposes resembles an aesthetic philosophy, an attempt to describe styles commensurate to both the camera’s recording ability and an intuitive sense of the profilmic event. Despite his championing of certain techniques (deep-focus, long takes, etc.), Bazin’s characterization of film realism encompasses a wide variety of approaches, ranging from the ambiguity and everydayness of Rossellini to the dramatic expressionism of Welles. Transparency here refers to the adaptation of the cinematic apparatus to the demands of the *particular world* a filmmaker seeks to visualize. So, for example, while Orson Welles’ visual strategies work for the world of *Citizen Kane*, they might not fare as well had he directed *Paisà*. In “Theater and Cinema, Part Two,” Bazin writes, “[the text,] having as its function to bring nature to [the stage] cannot, without losing its *raison d’être*, be used in a space transparent as glass. The problem then that faces the filmmaker is to give his décor a dramatic opaqueness while at the same time

reflecting its natural realism" ("Theater and Cinema" 111). Theater, Bazin claims, should not attempt to pass itself off as something akin to reality simply because its raw materials do not suit it to the task, yet his treatment of cinema here does not assume a simple reproduction of the real world. Instead, Bazin characterizes cinematic transparency as a kind of opaqueness, a layer of artifice applied to its natural realism. The essay calls for the film artist to craft reality with this opacity that, while perhaps denying a "space transparent as glass," offers the viewer an impression of the event's "natural realism."

The term appears again in a similar but perhaps more ambiguous manner in Bazin's spirited defense of Roberto Rossellini to Guido Aristarco: "To my mind, no one has been more successful in creating the aesthetic structure which in consequence of its strength, wholeness, and transparency is better suited to the direction of events than the author of *Europa 51*" ("In Defense" 101). This use of "transparency," in 1955, refers to a variable scale of stylistic modesty dependent on the nature of the event being filmed, but Bazin nevertheless retains here a sense that transparency comes about due to an "aesthetic structure," a conscious rendering of the world by an individual artist ("In Defense" 101). Rather than "the proposal of a discourse that disavows its operations and positions in the name of a signified that it proposes as its preexistent justification" (Heath 397), Bazin's transparency describes the way in which the film artist creates, through images of the real world, a take on that world in which one sees something in reality that may have gone unnoticed otherwise.

Despite the ethics that Bazin's theory pronounces, he ultimately fights for a particular kind of screen rhetoric, a rhetoric that, developed in accordance with the

reality of an event, can offer the spectator a sense of that event's essence. Likewise, those criticizing Bazin's theory, while utilizing ethical or religious motives as a means of argumentation, ultimately argue against the rhetoric he advocates. Theory after 1968, foregrounding ideology as the dominant concern, largely takes on two projects. First, it attempts to decode the structures of dominant discourse in the cinema (primarily Classic Hollywood). Second, it often promotes or theorizes new aesthetic strategies encouraging an understanding of the world as driven by economic conflict between classes. These theorists held that our perception of the world disguised underlying structures that dominate the individual and sway her/him to adopt bourgeois stances on class, gender, race, etc. Therefore, it became the job of the filmmaker to shock the viewer out of blindly accepting traditional forms of filmic narration. If the filmmaker could do so, she/he would introduce "the possibility of *another* activity, which rather than the simple subversion of the subject or the representation of different (and *correct*) identities, would consist of the displacement of the subject within ideology – a different constitution of the subject" (MacCabe 22). Transparency here acts not as a tool for the film artist to exploit but as the film artist's exploitation of the viewer.

Even though judgments of the metaphor's value shift decisively after May '68, its signified remains more or less constant. That is to say, whether one positively regards transparency as a necessary tool in the presentation of a singular reality or as a disingenuous strategy for ideological indoctrination, the basic meaning of the window metaphor remains stable. Across these positions, the metaphor refers to the presence of the production in the finished film. For *Screen* theory, the artist should foreground her/his intervention in the real world in order to allow the viewer a clear understanding of

how the cinema produces its images, its narration, and its ideological stance. Bazin's edicts for aesthetic practices does not require the artist to foreground his/her presence in the text, but to instead purposefully position the camera's natural recording ability toward the facts of the world in order to present a particular reality. For both schools, the artist's intervention results in a kind of opacity on an otherwise transparent window. In the end, the disagreement between realist theory and *Screen* theory does not arise in questions of authorship (both acknowledge that the filmmaker actively positions herself/himself in relationship to the world) but in the value of that authorship and its relationship to an audience.

If the window metaphor more or less retains a stable connotation, the mirror as a metaphor for cinema has largely varied from theorist to theorist with often radically different uses. Both Andrew and Sobchack date the metaphor's emergence in film studies as an aftershock of Lacanian psychoanalysis and a more general call for reflexivity regarding the relationship between spectator and screen. If what seemed like the naïve belief in reality became synonymous with classical narration and the window metaphor, then the metaphor of the mirror seems apt for an era of film theory obsessed with dismantling the passive viewer in favor of a conscious spectator aware of the latent ideology in popular cinema. These connotations, however, hardly exhaust the mirror's myriad connotations. While several decades of theory on photography and cinema have yielded more treatments of the mirror than this study will mention, I will focus on what I perceive as three common threads running throughout its use. First, Christian Metz's famous reworking of Lacan's mirror stage essay will be employed in an attempt to conceptualize the viewer's relationship to a "transparent" film. Secondly, I will trace out

the complicated relationship between the artist and culture in the cinema, reading the relationship through reflection theory and the interpretive schema developed by John Szarkowski in *Mirrors and Windows*. These interpretations of the mirror metaphor will be read through *Rear Window* (1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock) and *La Notte* (1961, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni). Both the metaphors and the films tense the relationship between the camera's objectivity and the manipulation of the image by the artist, and I will make the case that we can understand the application of these metaphors as medium specific, a case that I will test against "how to fix the world?" (2004, dir. Jacqueline Goss), a video that blends computer imagery and photographic capture. In an attempt to understand digital video as a reflecting window, I will finally turn to Christian Metz's return to the mirror in *L'Énonciation Impersonnelle*. There, Metz describes how the mirror invaluable acts to multiply and complicate cinematic space. This concept will help us conceptualize the ontological cut produced when digital imagery meets that of the real world.

The Mirror Stage, Mirror Theory

In his initial breakdown of the history of film theory's metaphors, Andrew associates the mirror entirely with the introduction of psychoanalysis to film theory (*Concepts* 12-13). This move, while perhaps occluding the diversity of approaches the mirror presents, seems logical considering the dominance of Lacanian psychoanalysis in 60's and 70's film theory and perhaps its most famous application found in Christian Metz's "Identification, Mirror" chapter from *The Imaginary Signifier*. Lacan's theory points to a moment in the development of the infant in which her/his encounter with her/his mirror image reinforces a sense of completeness as a human subject. This sense of wholeness, for Lacan, conceals or disguises the fundamental split enacted in

humans as a result of our acquisition of language, which, as it always tells too little or too much, causes a fundamental rift between the subject's ego and unconscious. The complete picture presented in the mirror allows the infant to consider him/herself as a self despite disjunctions between subjective experience and bodily-kinesthetic control. The infant cannot manipulate its body with full confidence at this point, but when he/she sees him/herself in the mirror, an imaginary image of wholeness displaces the true disjunction between identity and reality.

Lacan's mirror stage essay became one of the key focal points for film theory in the 60s and the 70s, made prominent, no doubt, due to Metz's famous employment of it. His larger project in *The Imaginary Signifier* attempts to draw comparisons and limits to the overlaps between psychoanalysis and the cinema experience. In "Identification, Mirror," Metz translates Lacan's mirror theory to cinematic spectatorship, but does not read identification, as some have, as seeing one's ego-ideal in the beautiful faces on the screen. Rather, Metz attempts to understand identification outside of a one-to-one relationship between the human viewer and the human subjects onscreen: "The spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object . . . At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am *all-perceiving*" ("Identification" 48). Metz's mirror does not, cannot, reflect the viewer. Instead, the cinema acts as a metaphorical mirror in that it provides us with views of the real world, but constantly relies on us to produce "a kind of transcendental subject," one whose access to the views offered by the cinema allows for a sort of omniscient viewing

situation: “the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception” (“Identification” 49).

Metz then tests his theory against a series of film styles. His discussion of “unusual” aesthetic strategies places his theory within a wider distrust of “transparent” style so prevalent during this decade of theory. While Metz does not claim that expressionistic framing, asynchronic cutting, or other overt announcements of filmic construction more forcefully express the author’s will, he does suggest that these devices can disrupt the viewer’s identification: “precisely because it is uncommon, the uncommon angle makes us more aware of what we had merely forgotten to some extent in its absence: an identification with the camera (with the ‘author’s viewpoint’). The ordinary framings are finally felt to be non-framings” (“Identification” 55). While Metz does not go as far as suggesting that this awareness would break the spell of identification, this move resembles the common sentiment among *Screen* theorists that standard cinematic codes (*i.e.*, the Classic Hollywood style), in their ubiquitous continuity, catch the spectator in an identification with perception, an identification that holds the viewer in an imaginary relationship that elides the ideological ramifications of the reactionary worlds one sees in mainstream films.

To a certain extent, Metz’s treatment of the mirror here is analogous to the ideologically inclined theorists’ treatment of the window in the 60s and 70s. For Metz, the mirror metaphor has nothing to do with reflecting on the apparatus, its aesthetic possibilities, or its relationship to the viewer. Instead, just Lacan’s mirror holds its subject in a state of imaginary identification with a false sense of completeness, Metz’s mirror understands the viewer as indulging in an imaginary situation in which he/she

assumes omniscience through the virtuality of the screen. Metz only marginally examines the role of aesthetics in perpetuating this identification. The pervasive distaste for “transparent” techniques (continuity editing, for example) ties passive identification to a style whose seeming completeness resembles the spectator’s perception of her/his omniscient view. What, then, makes for a reflexive film? Metz asserts that the imposition of bizarre or unusual camera angles will encourage the viewer to reflect on her/his own situation in the cinema, but he does not suggest that this, in itself, poses an escape for the bound viewer persuaded to passively identify with what seems like an omniscient perception. MacCabe, summarizing above, championed a distanced, Brechtian style to force the viewer out of this passive identification. This ethos served as an aesthetic *a priori* for filmmakers like Godard at the time, but I wonder if reflexivity and transparency need be mutually exclusive terms.

To test this question, I would like to turn to a film continually noted for its portrayal of the spectator’s look: *Rear Window* (1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock). We spend nearly the entire film sharing L.B. Jeffries’ (Jimmy Stewart’s) point of view. His leg shattered as a result of a car race photo shoot gone wrong, Jeffries sits near his window and watches his neighbors to pass the time. While this spying eventually allows Jeffries to expose the murder of a neighbor’s spouse, the film continually questions the ethics of viewing another person from an unseen vantage point, a viewing situation analogous to that of the spectator in the cinema. Seemingly as a result of the film’s concern over the ethics of looking, its critical literature has largely focused on the ways in which Jeffries’ narrative dilemma corresponds to the film-going experience. Jean

Douchet's influential reading of the film shows us some of the foundational assumptions of this reading:

Stewart is like the projector; the building opposite like the screen; then the distance which separates them, the intellectual world, would be occupied by the beam of light. If the reader also remembers that Stewart is first the spectator, he can conclude that the hero 'invents his own cinema.' But is that not the very definition of a 'voyeur,' the very core of morose gratification? (19)

Many elements of this short excerpt of Douchet's analysis -- the personification of the apparatus, its relation to individual characters, and the idea that the film judges the cinema as an altogether voyeuristic enterprise -- recur in subsequent writings on the film. For example, Laura Mulvey's famous treatment of the film in her "Visual Pleasure" essay assumes these same dynamics: "Jeffries is the audience, the events in the apartment block opposite correspond to the screen . . . his enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator, puts him square in the fantasy position of the cinema audience" (23-24).

So *Rear Window* "compulsively" reflects on the very experience it shares with viewers: "Jeff is a stand-in for the filmgoer, his chair the cinema's chair, his window the film screen" (Fawell 127). Even as a reflexive film, *Rear Window* employs a classically transparent style in order to perform these self-reflexive exercises, and as this style is employed to give us a view out of a window, questions of transparency and reflexivity apply to both formal and theoretical concerns. If Jeffries stands in for the viewer, what kind of view do we possess through him? Or, to put it another way, what kind of view possesses us?

Ten minutes or so into the film, its structure of views is clear. The film consistently relies on a complex editing pattern based on matching Jeffries' looking to

what he sees. Take, for example, a short pair of sequences that exemplify the film's merging of Jeffries' sight to the shots representing his point of view. The first comes during Stella's (Thelma Ritter) first appearance in the film. As she takes care of Jeffries' apartment, he watches his neighbors one-by-one. We see five distinct shots in this sequence: high-angle medium-long-shots of Thorwald (Raymond Burr) and another neighbor in the courtyard, a medium-long-shot of Miss Torso (Georgine Darcy) combing her hair in her apartment, a medium-shot of newlyweds seeing their home for the first time, and Jeffries watching them in a close-up reverse-shot. This shot of Jeffries connects each individual shot and lends the scene its overall logic. We first see Jeffries staring off screen and then cut to the object of his inquiry. At this point in the film, Jeffries has not used binoculars or his camera's zoom lens to allow closer looks at his neighbor's windows, yet we still manage to get a close look into the neighbor's apartments. These shots, while clearly not comparable to Jeffries' physical distance from the object of his view, offer both the audience and Jeffries greater knowledge of what happens across the courtyard. Hitchcock "cheats" on what we actually see, but he cheats in fascinating ways.

We first see Thorwald, having just argued with the sunbather, return to his building adjacent to Jeffries'. The high-angle shot, commensurate with a view from Jeffries' apartment, has the corner of his window's frame visible on the right side of the shot, further convincing us of the idea that what we see corresponds to his point of view. The film cuts back to Jeffries and then to a repeated high angle shot of the sunbather, asleep underneath a newspaper. This shot, while close, does not ask us to suspend our disbelief. The "realism" of these views, insofar as we perceive them as coming from

Jeffries' apartment, smooths out the sudden jump across the courtyard the camera makes with the next edit as we spy with Jeffries on the half-dressed Miss Torso. This shot, impossibly close to the apartment to have come from Jeffries' view, floats by without question due to the earlier imposition of the window's frame in the shot of Thorwald. From this view, the film cuts back to Jeffries. He shifts his attention to his left, and another cut offers a medium-shot of the newlyweds that will finish out the sequence. The newlyweds' window sits closest to Jeffries, just to the left of his apartment, and we see not only a window frame on the left side of the screen but also a tree branch that slightly obstructs our view. The film closes the sequence with this view, which, like the earlier shot of Thorwald, is obstructed slightly by a window frame in Jeffries' apartment. The placement of physical objects such as window frames and tree branches in these shots allows us to accept other shots that could not possibly be from Jeffries' point of view.

The film complicates the equivocation between Jeffries' point of view and shots of his neighbors in the next sequence. After Stella calls Jeffries a "windowshopper" when she catches him peeping in on the newlywed's apartment, a fade-out signals the end of the sequence. The film resumes with a shot of the composer's apartment. This shot, taken from Jeffries' apartment, retains the distance between the two apartments and begins the sequence with a realistic presentation of Jeffries' point of view. Once again, a visible window frame occupies the right side of the shot, solidifying our impression that the shot was made from inside Jeffries' apartment. The camera then pans to the left and reveals the rest of the apartments adjacent to Jeffries' building. We just saw these apartments in the previous sequence, and the long pan across the

adjacent building again lets us know that the camera is indeed in Jeffries' apartment. In this single take, it quickly becomes clear that the view from Jeffries' apartment is significantly farther from the neighbors' apartments than the previous closer shots indicated. In other words, even the brief shot of Thorwald entering his building in the previous sequence was embellished and offered a closer shot than would be possible from Jeffries' apartment. In that shot, a window frame, supposedly from Jeffries' apartment, had been placed in the frame to sell the shot as emanating from Jeffries' point of view. This later shot reveals the placement of that window frame as a strategic measure meant to convince the viewer that the shot represented Jeffries' sight.

This "true" view of the apartment buildings continues as the camera pans across Miss Torso's apartment, offering a rare view of the city outside of the courtyard, represented by two planes of buildings, a closer one that obscures the shot's vanishing point, and another of nondescript buildings further off. The camera then tilts down to show us the entrance to the courtyard where we can also see the boisterous activity outside the apartment complex, suggesting that the complex is set within a real city. Even though the film's décor is rich in detail, one notices in the neat division of space and our easy access to all the neighbor's windows something false. Surely, we share Jeffries' excitement in watching without being watched, but his neighbors, never bothering to shut the blinds or to act discretely, seem a bit too eager to act for Jeffries, their open windows only shut when the narrative demands it. One takes pleasure in knowing but at the same time may wonder why Miss Lonelyhearts does not bother to shut her blinds when she has a dinner date with an imaginary friend in her apartment. We can see a visual correlate of this simultaneous pleasure and suspicion during the

long pan across the apartment buildings described above. In the shot, orange light suffuses the set, simulating a sunset. The intense saturation of orange color in the light candy coats the set and helps to confirm our impression of the set's artificiality. Our pleasure in the cinematic artifice removes us from the film's diegetic reality while nevertheless returning us to the reality of the production itself. The obvious embellishment removes us from the careful construction in which we share Jeffries' view, but allows us to see the set and construction for what they are.

This intuition that what we see has an artificial gloss to it can be even more readily seen in the extensive use of process shots for driving scenes in other Hitchcock films. The style hides the seams, but the artifice of the production fails to put itself in the place of our day-to-day reality. Here, transparent style fails to disguise the artifice of a cinematic construction. To put it in the terms of our metaphors, the film's views are transparent, but the obvious construction of a cinematic artifice reflects a separation between the world of the film and the world of everyday experience. Even though the viewer is offered an omniscient point of view, that view's hold on the spectator's identification constantly finds itself under threat by an active viewer's sense that while these images, taken from our world, do not resemble our world as much as another world, another reality.

The Mirror as Reflection of Artist, Medium, and Culture

In the 1978 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, John Szarkowski situates almost two decades of American photography between two poles defined by the mirror and the window. Even though this project focuses on still photography, its window metaphor involves many of the same assumptions of cinematic window theory. Here, the metaphor relates to the sense that

the camera's objectivity can present a true picture of the real world. Eugène Atget's "Prostitute, Paris" is typical of this classification in that its seemingly simple depiction of social class announces itself not through the artist's intervention but simply by her/his capture of a slice of emblematic reality.

Whereas "window artists" attempt to show us the world as it is (or seems to be), "mirror artists" look to the personal and employ "synthetic" revisions in order to present a subjective view of the world. The mirror artist does not present *the* world as much as a subjective interpretation of a personal world. Szarkowski defines "mirror" photography as "reflecting a portrait of the artist who made it" but also asserts that one of the most direct ways an artist attempts to do so is through the drawing of attention to form and presentation (25). Jerry McMillian's "Untitled, Torn Bag" utilizes such a device in order to present the artist's subjective intervention. In this piece, a torn paper bag houses an image of a field on the edge of a forest. The self-conscious presentation of the photo brings together new relationships between photographic representation and its foregrounded frame. The viewer, confused, attempts to figure out a relationship between the torn bag frame and the image behind it. Could the grocery bag emphasize a commodification of nature found in commercial photography? Does the paper bag, coming as it does from trees, act as a kind of reminder of what industry does to nature?

Szarkowski emphasizes the mirror artist's manipulation of the materials of photography as a means to produce a subjective rendering of reality. At the same time, however, Szarkowski also considers window artists as essentially reflecting on their art, the age of photography-as-reportage supposedly past: "Photography has become more and more aware of its own history and limits as a medium: a debate about these is built

into the art, so that photography, instead of being an unproblematic record of appearances, is also selfcriticism” (Hughes). Szarkowski’s admittedly aesthete approach to curation has garnered a series of criticisms: “Szarkowski is out to prove, in this show, that Atget’s work is about itself – not about Paris, or Atget’s life, or being enchanted by reality and trying to preserve some slice of it” (Coleman 23). Even as a window artist, therefore, one’s task is not to discover something of culture or lived reality but something of form.

Many authors writing on film’s ability to mirror something of culture situate themselves against these prescriptions for photography. Andrew notes, “cinema’s delayed action is constitutive of its essentially reflective nature. The image bounces back to us after some time, echoing up from the past and permitting the spectator in turn to reflect on it, more than ‘participate in it’ as we do with live TV” (*What Cinema Is!* 16). Because the image comes from the past, Andrew argues, it allows us to “reflect” on a previous state of affairs. Similarly, the rhetoric of the mirror in film studies frequently posits the cinema not as a means of personal reflection but as a passive mirror for culture and history. Works like *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood*, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema*, “Italian Neorealism: A Mirror Construction of Reality” or “A Mirror for Fascism, How Mussolini Used Cinema to Advertise His Person and Regime” portray the movies as a passive mirror held up to the world.

Reflection theory also concerns the relationship between culture and art, asking how the work of art might reflect the artist’s material sociocultural position:

The Marxist theory of reflection covers not only the subjective acts of cognition but also all that man, through his cognitive activity, creates in the

way of cultural values, which is to say that it also refers to works of art. Art is a reflection of reality, though to be sure a specific *kind* of reflection (Horn 27-28).

In particular, reflection theory concerns the ways in which culture, reflecting material economic conditions, might inscribe “the relationship between a socioeconomic base on the one side and a cultural superstructure on the other” in a literary form (White 364). For Georg Lukács, realism can persist as an ideologically responsible form because of its “[focus] on the mediation between an author and his material condition” (Lee 71). Bela Kiralyfalvi notes that this ability of the medium to mirror the economic base through a cultural product must not be considered automatic: “in Lukac’s system the term ‘reflection’ is a constant reminder of the objectivity of art, but it definitely does not have a passive, mechanical meaning, with the implications of copying, photography, or any kind of naturalistic technique” (cited in Lee 74).

So, on the one hand, Szarkowski asserts that form only reveals the artist’s take on her/his medium. On the other, reflection theory holds that the artist expresses him/herself in the production of art but further reveals something of his/her material position in a society originating from material economic relationships that the artist then communicates unconsciously through the construction of cultural forms. Of course, it should be noted that neither Szarkowski nor reflection theory deals with cinema as such. Where, then, does the cinema position itself between these two positions? Does it merely reiterate its relationship to its form? Does it merely reflect culture? If we see the cinema as a reflecting window, how does its ability to passively capture a moment of reality relate to, on the one hand, the world as a cultural milieu and, on the other, its own abilities as a medium?

La Notte (1961, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni) doesn't seem to be a film about cinema. Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni), the film's male protagonist, agonizes over his literary endeavors; Antonioni and Gianni Di Venanzo's camera is concerned with the relationship between humans and architecture; the narrative dilemma concerns the failure of communication and the disintegration of a marriage. The above concerns could apply to many of the films Antonioni made during the 1960s, but Antonioni's concern with glass as an architectural motif and philosophical objective correlative sets the film apart.

The hustle and bustle of the modern city assaults our ears before we can make out the film's first image. Two cars pass each other in the foreground of the shot before the camera tilts upward to reveal two buildings. The one on the left, the closest to the camera, is a modest building of a classical style, its ceiling and edges smoothed out by ornate cornices. The other building, the Pirelli tower, sits further off in the distance but nevertheless looms over the classical building. Its clean, hard lines conflict with the antique buildings beside it. A sudden cut jumps the viewer onto the modern skyscraper's roof, offering a vast but remote picture of the city. After another shot like this, the film cuts to an ambiguous image of an industrial staircase, presumably leading into the building. Instead of moving inside, however, the camera begins descending, stationary and frontal but tracking down the building on an elevator of some kind. The opening credits play over this shot, but due to its duration, we also have ample time to look at the close-up of the building's glass façade. This glass does not offer a view of the building's interior, however. Instead, the tower's glass reflects the Milanese cityscape, the individual windows thinly separating individual frames of this image.

Midway through the sequence, this shot gives way to one ninety degrees to the previous shot's left. In this image, the Milanese cityscape and its mirrored image in the Pirelli tower sit against each other: "Architecture becomes object viewed and frame for viewing" (Schwarzer 199). In this sequence, the film promises us a view of the city through the lenses of modernist architecture and the cinema.

Why should Antonioni center his depiction of Milan in the glass of a modernist skyscraper? Had we seen these images, say, in the reflections of a bakery's window, the sequence would not carry the same kind of force. What specifically about the modernist use of glass interests Antonioni here? Modernist architects in the first half of the century had imagined glass as a solution to various social ills they imagined were caused by what Le Corbusier calls "the congestion of buildings . . . interlaced by narrow streets full of noise, petrol fumes, and dust" (53). With glass towers, the city's buildings would become "invisible and society open" and return "to a natural state, within which the dispersed institutions of the new society would be scattered like pavilions in a landscape garden" (Vidler 51). Ostensibly, this urban garden would solve modern humanity's most prescient problem: the irreconcilable distance between a human's subjectivity and a previously felt connection to the world.

Antonioni had previously charted the shifting mores of 60s Italian culture in *L'Avventura* (1960). In that film, Antonioni related Sandro's (Gabriele Ferzetti) fleeting dedication to women to his inability to sustain his career as an architect. Here, Antonioni's struggling artist is Giovanni, a novelist who agonizes over his inability to suit his artistic means to contemporary reality. Near the end of the film, he talks with Valentina (Monica Vitti) in her room and characterizes his problem: "I know what I want

to write about, but not *how to write it*. It's called a crisis, very common for writers today." Earlier, Giovanni had expressed the same sentiment to Valentina's father, Gherardini, (Vincenzo Corbella), a business tycoon who wants to buy Giovanni's writing for his company's morale. Giovanni, worked up, slaps his knees with frustration and asks, "Isn't writing an irrepressible but antiquated instinct?" For his part, Gherardini faces no such crisis. He tells Giovanni, "I've always looked upon my businesses as works of art. Their financial profit was almost immaterial. The important thing is to create something lasting." While Giovanni elsewhere expresses contempt for Gherardini's commodity-driven "art form," he nevertheless tells him, "You have the advantage of using real people. You create real houses, real cities. The pace of life is in your hands. Maybe even the future is." These lines, vague but powerful, task modern art with shaping a modern way of life. In response to Giovanni's complaints in the later scene, Valentina takes a reel-to-reel tape recorder from under her bed and plays Giovanni a tape she had recorded with the device. It consists of a speech by Valentina in which she spells out the sad facts of her bourgeois youth. The film never makes evaluate judgments about good and bad characters, and without such judgments, we can see in the Gherardinis two attempts to create art. For the father, his ability to manipulate the tangible materials of everyday life enables him to make lasting changes to "the pace of life." For the daughter, her hesitantly-worded speech reveals an emotional and intellectual depth, but her private recordings change no one, not even herself.

Moving back to the film's opening credit sequence, we see the tangible materials of everyday life through a recording device meant for mass distribution. Considering the prominence given to glass and its reflections here and throughout the film, Antonioni's

aesthetics seem to use the window as a figure to think through this modern art form. The glass of the modernist buildings in the film do not yield a liberated subject freed from the anxieties of the city. Instead, they allow for perfect mimicry. Several readings of the opening credit sequence have observed the individual windows and their separation as analogous to the individual photograms of the celluloid strip, but I am less concerned with the embodiment of the apparatus than with the glass' ability to mimic celluloid cinema's fundamental element: the photographic trace. The Pirelli tower's glass façade turns the real city behind the camera into a two-dimensional image, existentially connected to its reference by reflected light. This interaction between light and the creation of the image bears many similarities to the cinema.

Before the scene described above, in which Giovanni expresses to Valentina his doubts about writing, the two had talked in the building's courtyard. Glass demarcates this space, acting both as exterior walls and separating a small garden in the yard's center. Giovanni and Valentina, shrouded in darkness, each express their ineffable sadness in front of this small garden, heavy rainfall obscuring the plants but not the actors' reflections in the glass. This shot encourages viewing habits that Antonioni takes to extremes in *L'Eclisse* (1962). Throughout the shot, the camera frames the actors' bodies either from behind or in profile. Very rarely do we see the actors' faces except in their reflections on the glass. This kind of shot forces the viewer to observe the trace of the actors' faces in the glass in order to make sense of their lines, their emotions, and their relationship to each other. As Valentina leaves to grab a cigarette from her room, Giovanni watches her, his back to us. After she has disappeared up the steps into the background of the shot, Giovanni turns, absently looking at the garden. His eyes, for

only an instant, meet those of his reflection in the glass before he turns his look upward to glance at the rain. If only in this one moment, he looks his ideal art form in the face. The glass walls of modernist architecture do not offer Giovanni a reconciliation with the objective world, but instead point him to an art form through which to express his modern subjectivity.

Even as the film offers Giovanni this trace as a means to create art, the trace's residence in modernist architecture forces us to contextualize the trace in a cultural milieu. Once again, if we had seen the Milanese cityscape reflected on a bakery window, our reading of it would have to change. If we read reflections as objective reproductions of the world in front of them, how does that trace interact with culture in the production and meaning of images? Earlier in the film, Lidia (Jeanne Moreau), Giovanni's spouse, leaves a party celebrating his new book and embarks on a famous walk in the streets of Milan. Those writing on Antonioni sometimes take this sequence as representative of his oeuvre in that Moreau and her character's actions offer only the subtlest of hints regarding character psychology and narrative progression.

The first section of the walk emphasizes Lidia's place vis-à-vis the men in this urban area. When she first steps out of the party into the street, we see what appears to be a documentary image of Milanese urban life. Traffic and pedestrians stride at every corner of the image, but within this "documentary" image, two figures move toward the camera and demand our attention. An old man, annoyed, lifts his hand as though to strike his younger female companion as they approach the camera. This gesture positions Lidia within a specific cultural milieu as she begins to move amidst Milan's diverse architecture. Lidia pays little attention to this couple as she moves down the

street and approaches, in the next shot, a middle-aged worker leaning against a building and eating his lunch. Lidia coyly moves past him, glancing as she passes. When the man, lost in his sandwich, fails to notice her pass, Lidia stops and steps back a half-step to look him straight in the eye. Finally, he returns her look. Smiling, Lidia walks away, flirtatiously glancing back over her left shoulder at this complete stranger. These small moments, with little or no interpretive frame, suggest something in Lidia that her demure shyness has held from us up until this point.

Eventually, Lidia walks by an office building, her back to us. On the right, Lidia walks between the building's glass façade and a concrete pillar. On the left, her reflected image doubles her movement. Both images stop and look at each other, and we may get the sense that Lidia has decided to take a long look at herself. As she looks into the mirroring window, the shot cuts, and we see Moreau in profile, not looking at herself as we previously assumed but at a solitary business man inside a marbled chamber. The man stares down at his desk, but after a moment, he returns Lidia's look. After a brief meeting of eyes, she moves on, but for a moment, we see a doubled look, Moreau looking not only at the man looking at her but also at herself being looked at. The film quickly cuts back to the previous shot, but as Lidia walks away, her corporeal presence disappears behind the concrete pillars at the right of the shot, leaving only her reflection, a trace of her presence. The shot in the middle of this scene offered a mise-en-abyme of looks informed by sexual corporeal presence. We see Lidia, her indexical trace, and the man looking at her all at once. This moment, quick as it may be, complicates the objectivity of the trace. Despite whatever psychological motivation we may dredge out of this sequence, only Lidia's trace remains in the end, and as the

scene has dictated to us thoroughly, that trace bears with it the cultural residue that any pattern of looks contains. Through Antonioni and di Venanzo's framing, the trace, objective and transparent carries with its cultural context. *La Notte* refuses to consider culture and self-reflexivity as mutually exclusive terms. Instead, the film demands for the cinema an understanding of the trace that always carries with it its contemporary reality, each twenty-fourth of a second reproducing the culture within which it was produced.

In both *Rear Window* and *La Notte*, a transparent style opens the films to expanded possibilities of reflexivity. Rather than openly exposing their own codes, however, both films show us how the objective photographic trace of the past can reveal worlds simultaneously fabricated through the apparatus and yet uncannily our own. Along with the camera's passive recording of the set or the city, the cinema captures the complications of reality, unsettling the viewer's omniscient perception in Metz's mirror. *Rear Window* complicates its transparent point of view by way of a surreal representation of sunset that forces the viewer to contemplate the film's rocky relationship to reality. *La Notte*, on the other hand, abandons sets almost entirely, favoring the city streets and buildings of Milan. This transparent view, rather than concealing the production, forces us to puzzle over the rendering of reality in order to make heads or tails of the film's narrative and form. Through the film, we see a very specific reality that alerts us to the cinema's abilities to not only show us a real time and place but also to express the viewpoint of an artist (or, frequently, artists). In both films, the objectivity of the cinematic apparatus offers the viewer a new way of seeing the world. While *Rear Window* shows us the exaggerated world of the cinema, *La Notte* helps us to understand the world through the cinema.

The Reflecting Window's Multiplication of Worlds

In *L'Énonciation Impersonnelle*, Metz returns to the mirror and observes several ways it acts in films as a point of elaborating the camera's relationship to a character, an actor, or an idea. As Maureen Turim points out, all of the points Metz makes here involve either the multiplication or addition of space (165). Metz notes that the mirror often allows a film to escape hard and set boundaries of spatial unity and eventually compares this function to that of the superimposition:

Marc Vernet has isolated another figure, a sort of graft of the superimposition onto the principles of the mirror that permits to the cinema a magical escape from the constraints of the strict reflection proper to quotidian perception, that is to say, from the limitation of the reflected surface by the reflecting surface (*L'Énonciation* 81).

This emphasis on the shared ability of the figure and the formal technique to escape "quotidian perceptions" of the world positions the mirror as a useful tool through which to explore digital cinema, for if anything, digital technologies have facilitated cinema's escape from the real world, blending the logics of photography and animation in increasingly automated ways. That Metz links the mirror to the superimposition here only pushes this comparison further because the movement of digital effects has largely been one of superimposition.

Of course, the superimposition -- the layering of a new image on one preexisting -- should not be confused with the process shot. In the process shot, characters or objects interact with a background simultaneously projected. This method informs a certain school of "green screen" filmmaking as seen in films like *Sin City* (2005, dir. Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller, and Quentin Tarantino) or *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004, dir. Kerry Conran), but I would argue that the superimposition and the

logic behind its use offer more complex ways of investigating the relationship of photographic and digital cinemas. Metz writes,

One thinks also of the superimposition that, in principle, condenses two screens. But Marc Vernet has shown with force that it consists in erasing the square of one of the two images, and by doing so diffuses it throughout the other; thus a face becomes the emblem of the entire landscape, that in return communicates something of its inanimate majesty. The superimposition is thus the extreme evolution of the second screen, and at the same time its negation (*L'Énonciation* 78).

This focus on erasure and diffusion can help us distinguish between superimposition in classical cinema and its sustained use in digital cinema. While I hesitate to make sweeping claims about the "newness" of digital cinema, one often finds that rather than one regime of the image erasing the other through gradual diffusion, these processes encourage a kind of uneasy co-existence between photographic elements and digital effects. Popular films, especially in science fiction and fantasy, sustain these relationships indefinitely, refusing to cede the photographic to the digital, or vice versa.

In these kinds of films, both worlds merge in the frame. The physics and logic of digital characters often requires a suspension of our awareness that the figures we see have no corporeal reality. This fact poses challenges especially when flesh and blood figures turn to digital doppelgangers to perform physically impossible maneuvers. One often sees these visual distortions in action movies employing digital effects (one that comes to mind occurs near the middle of *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002, dir. George Lucas) in which Hayden Christiansen suddenly jumps onto a banshee-like creature, his digital body blurring as he impossibly arches his back to perform an equally impossible back flip). In these examples, filmmakers attempt to make the digital subservient to their films' aspirations to replicate something approximating our phenomenal world, but the role of superimposition as a theoretical tool proves even

more fruitful in characterizing a cinema that does not insert new digital elements, but uses digital processes to simply correct color, remove lighting flares, or otherwise mold the image to a specific vision unable to be accomplished photographically. Processes similar to these have been around since the birth of photography, but since they are removed from the context of photography's inscription, one must ask how these modifications affect cinematic ontology.

In the aforementioned films, one can readily distinguish, for the most part, the boundary between "real-world" elements and those originating from digital computation, but the principle of superimposition can also help us to characterize films with seemingly no digital modification. For *In Vanda's Room* (2001, dir. Pedro Costa), digital video does not act as a means for further manipulation. If anything, Costa's aesthetic seems to fit almost perfectly the popularly-accepted precepts of a Bazinian realist aesthetic. The film utilizes long takes, minimal editing, and a respect for space, yet one often notices digital artifacts that soften the textures of Costa's setting. The soft purples and grays of the slum's walls often blur in a way not evident in *Ossos* (1997, dir. Pedro Costa), a film that shares the setting and director, but that was shot on 35mm.

I would like to understand superimposition here as a space in which the digital apparatus meets the photographic. The video's realist style does not use or call for the manipulability of a digital apparatus, yet the digital imagery nevertheless leave their mark on Costa's images. What we see in *In Vanda's Room* is not diffusion or erasure between worlds, but rather an integration of the features of two worlds. While we look through a window that seems transparent, we still find ourselves removed from the omniscient perception of Metz's mirror. Unlike *Rear Window*, however, our removal from

the cinema's hold occurs not because of a tangible feature of the production poking through the transparency but because of a visible mark of the apparatus.

Cathrin Senn has written at length on the way that the window functions as a mediator between worlds in literature. She writes, "the window may act as both a uniting and separating plane, and metaphorically, it may depict both correspondence and parallelism as well as difference and contrast between two worlds" (57). Just as the window serves as a separating plane between inside and outside, Senn notes that literature often uses it to characterize other dualities such as life and death, heaven and hell, etc. This figuration of the window as a space between dualities, to me, epitomizes a cinema stuck between two regimes of imagery: those taken photographically and those originating from digital technologies.

"how to fix the world?" (2004, dir. Jacqueline Goss) illustrates this principle through its conscious dissociation of digital figures and the natural world. The video illustrates a series of dialogues taken from A.R. Luria's work with the preliterate peasant farmers of 1930's Soviet Uzbekistan. These dialogues track the efforts on behalf of the Soviet government to introduce the preliterate culture to the logic of literacy. For example, one segment has three peasant women asked to pick the odd item out of a hammer, a saw, a log, and a hatchet. As an exercise in classification, one might expect the women to pick the log because the others are tools, but because primary oral cultures anchor themselves in concrete situations, the women insist on the log's necessity to the group. After all, without a log, what good would the other tools be? A title card at the beginning of the film reads, "Knowing how to read lets one draw

conclusions without sensory proof,” and without the apparatus of literacy, these women cannot attain the distance required to solve the problem.

Visually, Goss moves beyond these historical circumstances in order to pose questions of a contemporary apparatus shift. Her aesthetic relies heavily on the digital compositing of simple Flash-type animations and real-world images made by video. Working from Max Penson’s photos taken in Uzbekistan from 1925 to 1945, Goss creates static digital permutations of the photographic subjects, minimally animating them (for the most part, only their mouths and eyes move). These characters never attempt to resemble their historical inspirations in a photographic sense. Lines are simplified; most are monochromatic mock-ups. This willingness to forgo any sense of photographic reality, along with the video’s dedication to this particular aesthetic, forces the viewer to tease out the relationship between these two regimes of images.

After a brief prologue, we see the video’s first “human” subject, an old man with a hawk perched on his shoulder. Behind him, wind blows through trees and a small crop of wheat. The roughly animated figure, colored throughout with green, stands out sharply from the natural landscape behind him. Brought to life by Goss’ animation, the figure nonetheless departs from a photographic relationship to a natural setting. While some scenes derive both setting and character from Penson’s photographs, this man in particular has been removed from his previous photographic context and now finds himself reinserted as a digital mark on a natural landscape.

An earlier title states that “Literacy allows a person to understand the world more profoundly,” but the visual disjunction between the real world and the man questions this claim and draws into question the relationship between literacy and one’s

experience of the world. In the middle of the video, we see a simple image of the moon and a tree branch. The branch slowly sways in the wind underneath the cool full moon. Gradually, two titles appear over the image: "They taught us to read and write. They gave us a new alphabet to make it easier." As we see this superimposition of two signifying regimes on top of each other, the shot gives way to another. The moon still sits on the right side of the frame, but a group of animated peasants now occupies the lower part of the frame, and they look up as the Russian alphabet suddenly bursts in rapid succession over the image of the moon. In both shots, language literally writes over images of nature as it attempts to shift the consciousness of the primary oral culture to one based on the automatism of writing.

The video asks its audience about its own literacy of digital imagery. The introduction of writing to primary oral cultures carries with it dramatic shifts in their experience of the world:

In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld . . . A chirographic (writing) culture and even more a typographic (print) culture can distance and in a way denature even the human (42).

What kind of experience of the world does "how to fix the world?" show us? We can see its artifice laid bare, but unlike the false sunset of *Rear Window*, this artifice has no real world equivalent such as colored light or rear projection. Instead, we see two ontological states dispersed in a single frame, yet the displacement of Penson's photographic subjects yields them not to a culture that blindly reflects itself onto the celluloid, but to a tense field in which the artist manipulates a meeting between the physical world and digital imagery.

Friedberg claims for the cinema a prefiguring and early integration of the visual strategies of the graphical user interface. For her, cinema's future lies in its gradual convergence with the logics and functions of the non-perspectival computer screen. A video like "how to fix the world?" point us to another path cinema has begun to take. Goss' video briefly shows us the kind of multiple frame Friedberg alerts us to, but the video's primary mode of narration still relies on a convergence of the physical world and digital imagery within a single perspectival frame, which represents the two worlds not in a state of convergence, but in discontinuity and difference. Goss' window emphasizes a certain inability of the digital apparatus to present its worlds transparently. This apparatus' relationship to the world and, by extension, our relation to the world through it, has departed from predominantly resembling phenomenal reality as photographic cinema did and does. Faced with an inability to craft a world we wholly recognize as our own, digital cinema instead layers the two worlds in a relationship both continuous and discontinuous, both singular and plural, opaque but not transparent.

This window may eventually become transparent. High definition televisions continue to increase in resolution, and digital effects more perfectly recreate the real world with each passing year. At this point, however, the digital cinema's reflecting window does not vacillate between artifice and reality, or the trace and culture. It acts like a pane of glass looking out onto the world but nevertheless offers a reflection of another world of digital computation. It could easily be that our current cinema, unable to perfect digital imagery's impersonation of the physical world, is to a digital cinema what the cinema of attractions was to modern cinema. If these early films helped humanity to adapt to the shocks of the early 20th century, perhaps this early state of

digital imagery is simply preparing us for a world bombarded by digital interfaces and computing devices, a world that calls for a reflecting window to sate our feeling for the real in the face of its vague and uncertain future.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Todd Jurgess was born and raised in Harbor Beach, Michigan. He began his post secondary education at Central Michigan University before transferring to the University of Florida in 2006. In 2008, he received his Bachelors of Arts, majoring in English with a focus on American literature. Upon re-entering the University of Florida's Department of English, however, he moved from American literature to film and media studies where he now studies under Maureen Turim, Robert Ray, Scott Nygren, Gregory Ulmer, Terry Harpold, and the other fine faculty in Florida's department. He has presented numerous papers on topics as varied as Italian cinema, home video, animation, indexicality, and materiality.