Transcendental Style in Film

Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer

Paul Schrader

With a New Introduction:
Rethinking Transcendental Style

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Praise for Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film, with a New Introduction*

"Schrader's book is a classic—one of the very few seminal books on religion/spirituality and film. His new introduction linking transcendental style to the time-images of Deleuze and Tarkovsky, as well as slow cinema, which followed, only adds to its importance. A must-read!"

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"With an extensive new introduction, Paul Schrader brings his influential work on transcendental style up to date, relating it to contemporary slow cinema and to recent developments in film criticism. This book is essential for anyone interested in the means by which narrative film can encourage spectators to 'lean into' the film, to experience contemplation and the transcendent."

—Carl Plantinga, author of *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement*

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—Joseph G. Kickasola, Professor of Film and Digital Media, Baylor University, and author of *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image*

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Religion and art
are parallel lines
which intersect only at infinity,
and meet in God.

—Gerardus van der Leeuw

Contents

Acknowledgments *ix*

Rethinking Transcendental Style *1*
Introduction to the Original Edition *35*
Ozu *45*
Bresson *85*
Dreyer *133*
Conclusion *169*

Notes *187*
Selected Bibliography *197*
Index *207*

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Rethinking Transcendental Style

What became of transcendental style? What in the 1950s began as art house cinema has blossomed into the hydra-headed creature we call slow cinema. Bresson and Ozu, seen as esoteric and slow, now are audience friendly compared to the multi-hour epics of Béla Tarr and Lav Diaz and Pedro Costa. A theater experience for art house customers morphed into marginalized audio-video presentations shown only at film festivals and art galleries.

What happened? Gilles Deleuze happened. So did Andrei Tarkovsky. And slow cinema was soon to follow.

I WRITE A BOOK

In 1971, at the age of 24, a grad student a UCLA film school, I had the temerity to write and publish a book titled *Transcendental Style in Film*. Forty-five years later I found myself on a panel at the annual convention of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies titled "Rethinking Transcendental Style: New Approaches in Spirituality and Cinematic Form."

So I started rethinking. How did I come to write the book in the first place and how does its premise hold up after forty-five years?

I wasn't drawn to the topic out of academic obligation or desire to publish. I had a problem and I was looking for an answer. It was the same impulse that caused me to write a screenplay two years later.

I was a product of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, a Calvinist denomination which at that time proscribed theater attendance and other "worldly amusements." So naturally I was drawn to the forbidden—not the forbidden forbidden, of course, but the acceptable forbidden. I wanted to square my love of movies with my religious upbringing. *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) was the point of entry; *Viridiana* (1961) was the counterpoint of entry.

That didn't last long. Two years later it was 1968 and I was in Los Angeles in full pursuit of the profane. Calvin College was a memory.

Then, as a film critic for the *Los Angeles Free Press,* I watched the LA release of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959). And wrote about it. And saw it again. And wrote about it again. I sensed a bridge between the spirituality I was raised with and the "profane" cinema I loved. And it was a bridge of *style,* not content. Church people had been using movies since they first moved to illustrate religious beliefs, but this was something different. The convergence of spirituality and cinema would occur in style, not content. In the How, not the What. Susan Sontag was for me (and many others) the first to shine a light in this murky ideological expanse. Her essay on Robert Bresson in *Against Interpretation* (1966) and the "Aesthetics of Silence" in *Styles of Radical Will* (1967) jolted me into thought.[1] Pauline Kael had inspired my first love of popular cinema; Sontag took my appreciation to the next level. Film could and did operate on a spiritual plane.

Yasujiro Ozu was using techniques similar to Bresson in Japanese family dramas. And to not dissimilar effect. These techniques were neither parochial nor Christian nor Western. They were spiritual (related to the spirit as opposed to matter). So I cautiously—and with the generous help of scholars far more knowledgeable than myself—began to explore how such a style worked. I was curious. That curiosity grew. I realized I was far too young to write such a book. But I also realized that nobody else was writing it. I was in a unique moment of transition: my love of movies was full blown and my knowledge of theological aesthetics still intact. In a few years I would not be able to devote a year to writing a book that produced no income. If I didn't write it now I never would. And neither would anyone else. Sontag, ever voracious, had moved on.

University of California Press was kind enough to publish *Transcendental Style in Film*. Two years later I stopped writing regular criticism and focused on film-making.

ENTER DELEUZE

Transcendental style can be seen, forty-five years later, as part of a larger movement, the movement away from narrative. A way station, if you will, in the post–World War II progression from neorealism to surveillance video.

In 1971, struggling with the concept of transcendental style, I sought to understand how the distancing devices used by these directors could create an alternate film reality—a transcendent one. I wrote that they created disparity, which I defined as "an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment," "a growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality."

By delaying edits, not moving the camera, forswearing music cues, not employing coverage, and heightening the mundane, transcendental style creates a sense of unease the viewer must resolve. The film-maker assists the viewer's impulse for resolution by the use of a Decisive Moment, an unexpected image or act, which then results in a stasis, an acceptance of parallel reality—transcendence. At that time, I had little idea how the phenomenology of such a process would work. I posited that the psyche, squeezed by untenable disparity, would break free to another plane.

Ten years later French philosopher Gilles Deleuze wrote two groundbreaking works on cinema *(Cinema I* and *Cinema II)* and by 1989 both were published in English translations.[2] Deleuze explicitly addressed the phenomenology of perception through time.

To grossly simplify Deleuze, he contends film history falls into two perceptual periods: (1) movement-image and (2) time-image. Movement-image began with the origins of cinema and was the dominant perceptual principle until after World War II. It's the action of a projected image. Such movement perceived on screen continues in our minds. We're hardwired for it. Even after the image of the running man is cut on screen, the viewer still imagines the runner completing his task. Deleuze references Aristotle and the notion of the first mover to explain how our mind continues a movement even after the image has gone. "Light is stronger than the story," he wrote.

World War II dates the rough demarcation of a shift, more in Europe than America, from movement-image to time-image. Screen movement still occurred, of course, but it was increasingly "subordinated to time." What does that mean? It means that a film edit is determined not by action on screen but by the creative desire to associate images over time.

The maid strikes a match. From *Umberto D.*

Man exits one room, enters another—that's movement-image editing. Man exits one room, shot of trees in the wind, shot of train passing—that's time-image editing. Man exits one room, the screen lingers on the empty door. That's time-image editing. Deleuze called this the "non-rational cut." The non-rational cut breaks from sensorimotor logic. Deleuze first sees this in the deep-focus films of Welles but, for practical purposes, it comes to the fore in walking/wandering films like Rossellini's *Voyage in Italy* (1954), Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960), Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). The time-image reached first full expression in the films of Yasujiro Ozu. "The vase in *Late Spring* (1949)," writes Deleuze, "is interposed between the daughter's half smile and her tears. . . . This is time, time itself . . . a direct time-image which gives change unchanging form."[3] Movement-image is informed by Aristotelian logic: "A" can never equal "not A." Time-image rejects the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, posits a world where something and its opposite can coexist: "A" can be "not A."

Deleuze opens *Cinema II* with a description of the four-minute maid sequence in De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952), the scene which had so impressed André Bazin eighteen years before.[4] The young girl, a minor character, gets up, comes and goes into the kitchen, hunts down ants, grinds coffee.

Béla Tarr's cows. From *Sátántangó*.

Where Bazin emphasized the scene's realism, Deleuze focused on its use of time. The young maid strikes a match against the kitchen wall three times; it fails to light. *She gets another match and strikes again.* Without cutting, without comment. Irrelevant action in real time. This is a defining moment in cinema. Just as the runaway baby carriage of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) epitomizes the movement-image, the "little maid" and her match strikes exemplify the time-image.

Another way to put it: Deleuze feels that "mature cinema" (post-WWII) was no longer primarily concerned with telling stories to our conscious selves but now also seeks to communicate with the unconscious and the ways in which the unconscious processes memories, fantasies, and dreams.

Bergson's concept of duration is crucial to Deleuze's concept of time-image. Time allows the viewer to imbue the image with associations, even contradictory ones. Hence the long take. What began as a four-second shot of a passing train in Ozu grows to eight minutes of meandering cows in Béla Tarr.

Deleuze is getting at the nuts and bolts of transcendental style. This is what I was struggling to apprehend. Our minds are wired to complete an on-screen image. We create patterns from chaos, just like our forefathers did when they imagined stars in the form of mythic beasts. We complete the action.

Film artists realized from the beginning they could use this neurological predisposition to manipulate the viewer. Cinema, after all, is only still images projected in rapid succession. The spectator will imagine the gun firing, the monster emerging from the cave, and so forth.

Postwar fi lm-makers realized that just as movement-image could be manipulated to create suspense, time-image could be manipulated to create introspection. We not only fi ll in the blanks, but we create new blanks.

Introspection has always been a goal of art. What film-makers (and, as a consequence, Deleuze) came to realize was that introspection created by a moving photographic image is unique. It's not like the introspection evoked by a sculpture or painting or passage of music; it is the by-product of a changing image. Cinematic introspection can be molded to a greater extent than introspection caused by a singular image, say, a Rothko canvas or Zen garden. It can vary. It can change. The film artist molds introspection via duration. Duration can evoke Deleuze's "memories, fantasies and dreams." Duration can peel back the social veneer of an activity. Duration can invoke the Wholly Other.

In the past fifteen years the new field of neuroesthetics, pioneered by Semir Zeki, has sought to scientifi cally explain what Deleuze theorized. Combining science and aesthetics, neurobiologists use brain scans to study which areas of the brain perceive visual stimuli and how they process it—how in fact, the brain determines whether something is beautiful. ("Can an aesthetic judgment ever be quantifi ed," Zeki rhetorically asks. "The answer is yes."[5]) No one has yet explained how the brain processes slow cinema, but I expect the answer will be as satisfying as knowing how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

In *Transcendental Style in Film* I wrote about hierophanies evoked by style. Deleuze attempted to explain how that actually works.

TARKOVSKY IS THE FULCRUM

Like Deleuze, Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky sensed a shift in the cinematic winds. He and Deleuze were simultaneously working on the same paradigm shift. Both understood that the use of time in movies had evolved.

Tarkovsky directed five fi lms from 1962 to 1986. He was not interested in the spiritual per se; although he often spoke of the spiritual nature of fi lm art and employed religious imagery, his primary interest was in cinema's ability to evoke poetry and memory—more pantheistic

than theistic. (A disputable opinion. Joseph Kickasola, a theological fi lm scholar, describes Tarkovsky as "one of the most directly religious film-makers ever."[6])

Tarkovsky was an aesthetician as well as a fi lm-maker. His theoretical writings echo his journey as a director. He came of film-making age during Deleuze's postwar second era of cinema. Tarkovsky admired Mizoguchi's long slow takes, Antonioni's de-dramatized narrative, De Sica's emphasis on mundane reality, Bergman's use of ordinary sounds, and most of all, Tarkovsky admired Robert Bresson's "unity of theory and practice." On the surface Bresson's and Tarkovsky's films are quite diff erent. Critic Fredric Jameson wrote that Tarkovsky likes to gorge the spectator's eyes whereas Bresson prefers to starve them.[7] But both artists felt the keys to the artist's kingdom lie in the application of style over content. It's the form of things that makes you free.

Tarkovsky rejected the Soviet school of montage in favor of André Bazin's "ontology of the photographic image" and Bazin's advocacy of the Italian neorealists. Bazin felt that with the invention of moving photographs, the age-old artistic desire to represent reality had reached its apotheosis. Cinema was "as complete an imitation as possible of the outer world." Sergei Eisenstein felt that the power of cinema was in its ability to orchestrate reality. Bazin said it was just the opposite: the power of cinema was not to manipulate reality. Neorealism revealed "the aesthetic implicit in cinema." "Neorealism knows only immanence," said Bazin. "It is from appearance only." For Bazin the long take favored by the neorealists enabled spectators to choose what they wanted to see rather than what had been dictated by montage.[8]

Tarkovsky embraced Bazin. Then he turned neorealism on its head. Bazin had written, "The photographic image is the object itself. The object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. Viewed from this perspective, the cinema is objectivity in time. Now, for the first time, *the image of things is the image of their duration"* (italics mine).[9] Of the duration of the Eskimo waiting for the seal in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), Bazin said, "The length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, its true object."[10] But for Tarkovsky duration was more than mere waiting. It was Henri Bergson's *"durée,"* duration, time itself, the vital force governing and meditating upon all organic life.

Tarkovsky stands in a line of documentary observers of life. Also in the line are contemplative stylists Ophüls, Mizoguchi, Rossellini, Resnais, Dreyer, Bergman, Ozu, Bresson. What exactly makes him so special?

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Here's what I think is the difference: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer, Mizoguchi, De Sica, and the rest used film time to create an emotional or intellectual or spiritual effect. Tarkovsky used film techniques to study time. For Tarkovsky time was not a means to a goal. It was the goal.

The manifestation of time on film is the long take. Not the fancy out-the-door-down-the-street long takes of Orson Welles or Alfonso Cuarón—no, even though those takes run long in screen time, they are little different than conventional film coverage. They are driven by the logic of edits: wide shot, over-the-shoulder, close-up, point of view, two-shot.

The Tarkovsky long shot is more than long. It's meditative. The psychological effect of slow cinema's "long take" is unlike any other film technique. Film techniques are about "getting there"—telling a story, explaining an action, evoking an emotion—whereas the long take is about "being there." Julian Jason Haladyn in *Boredom and Art* compares the effect of the long take to a train journey, an early symbol of modernity.[11] The train journey places emphasis on expectation rather than presence. The traveler's mind is focused on the destination, not where he or she is here and now. Travelers can't appreciate being in the present because their perception of time and space is constantly shifting. Motion pictures, like modernity itself, embraced this constant flux. Slow cinema, specifically the long take, sought to reverse the headlong impetus of technology in favor of the present.

Andrei Tarkovsky stands at the fulcrum of an aesthetic paradigm shift. His earlier films, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) and *Andrei Rublev* (1966), although slow-paced and replete with associative imagery, adhered to chronological narrative. As he evolved as an artist, Tarkovsky realized that what he was really after was more akin to boredom (my choice of word, not Tarkovsky's) than slowness. He called it "time pressure."

Toward the end of his life (he died at age 54) Tarkovsky organized his thoughts in a book appropriately titled *Sculpting in Time*. "The cinema image," he wrote, "is the observation of a phenomenon passing through time. Time becomes the very foundation of cinema. . . . Time exerts a pressure which runs through the shot. . . . Just as a quivering reed can tell you about the current or water pressure of a river, in the same way we know the movement of time as it flows through the shot."[12]

The long take gives time power. It intensifies the image. Jonathan Rosenbaum referred to this moment as the "pedal point. . . . When you hold a chord for a long time it becomes meditative, because it gives you

time to think and almost makes a demand on your imagination."[13] Watch an image long enough and your mind goes to work.

"The pauses," director Theo Angelopoulos contended, "the dead time, give the spectator the chance to assess the fi lm rationally but also to create, or complete, the diff erent meanings of a sequence."[14] The long take demands a viewer involvement—pro or con. "Dead time" *(temps mort)* is predicated on the active viewer. It seems counterintuitive to say that slow cinema requires more viewer involvement, but that is exactly the point. Pedro Costa, a third-generation slow director, made a documentary about Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, second-generation slow directors, titled *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* (2001), in which Straub describes dead time as "a reduction, only it's not a reduction—it's a concentration and it actually says more."

This was a crucial transition in Tarkovsky's work: from narrative digression to dead time. There is a fundamental diff erence between being slow to create mood and being slow to activate the viewer. What Bresson and Ozu were moving toward, Tarkovsky brought to resolution. Delayed cuts were extended indefi nitely. Ozu's "pillow shots" (still-life images) became entire scenes.

The opening of Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983) speaks volumes. A static shot of a foggy landscape. A compact green car enters screen right. The camera slowly pans with the car. The car exits screen left. The camera holds on the foggy landscape. Will the car re-enter? It does. A couple emerges from the car; they talk, walk into the fog. In that moment—when the car exits and there is no splice—Tarkovsky's work segued from delayed cut to dead time, from transcendental style to slow cinema.

Tarkovsky didn't innovate in isolation. In 1967 Pasolini described the long take as "a search for relations among discontinuous meaning, . . . the schematic and primordial element of cinema."[15] Antonioni, Miklós Jancsó, Chantal Akerman, Jean Eustache, and others were all pushing the boundaries of contemplative cinema. But it was Tarkovsky's international success that legitimized slow cinema. He was a regular presence at the Cannes and Venice film festivals. Each year brought new honors. By the time he died, he was the poster child for slow cinema.

Tarkovsky's success was the tipping point in the movement toward slow cinema. There is a before-Tarkovsky and an after-Tarkovsky. Before was art house cinema. After was fi lm festival and art gallery cinema. Before was slow cinema predicated on paying viewers. After was slow cinema underwritten by arts organizations. Tarkovsky was not a "pure" slow cinema stylist—he was more interested in poetry than

stasis—but he made slow cinema fashionable. He made Béla Tarr possible.

WHAT IS SLOW CINEMA?

"Slow cinema" is a fairly recent term used to designate a branch of art cinema which features minimal narrative, little action or camera movement and long running times. Harry Tuttle listed the four criteria for slow cinema as plotlessness, wordlessness, slowness, and alienation.[16] Many terms have been used to describe this phenomenon: stasis, contemplative, austere, abstract, landscape, meditative, "deliterate," organic, expanded, and, yes, transcendental—all of which in certain cases are accurate. Which is why a multipurpose term like "slow cinema" is useful. It's malleable.

In the last fifteen years slow cinema has exploded. Slow movies are now being made faster than we can see them. There are slow cinema websites, slow cinema conferences, slow cinema blogs, slow cinema books, slow cinema film festivals, and even a slow cinema VOD website. Forty to fifty slow films were premiered last year, primarily in festivals. They are rarely shown in theaters. Their reach extends to film schools, cinematheques, and art museums. They come from every nation in the world.

Slow cinema has a fundamentally different attitude toward time. The promise of motion pictures was that of a river on which you could float images. Photography through time. Cinema itself was narrative, even if the image was the arrival of a train: there was the first appearance of the train, the train stopping, passengers getting out, and so on. Attach that image to second, and a story begins. Time serves storytelling.

Slow films invert this relationship. Time becomes the story—or at least its central component. Slow cinema examines how time affects images. It's experiential, not expositional.

"Time becomes story." How can time be the story? One has to be careful because it's so easy to slip into jargon when analyzing film. (What is time? What is story?) Let's go back to the beginning: the Lumière brothers 1895 *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*. The first movie. A steam train pulls into a station. A fifty-second snippet of time from 120 years ago. Eight hundred still frames projected sequentially.

But what if that clip were projected in a loop for five minutes? Five hours? What if the film were slowed so that it took fifteen minutes for the train to arrive? What would the film then be about? Would it be

about the arrival of the train or about your experience as a viewer watching the arrival of the train? What did you think about for those fifteen minutes it took the train to arrive? This is the question conceptual artist Gordon Douglas posed in *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), a version of Hitchcock's *Psycho* projected at two frames rather than twenty-four frames per second, causing it to run twenty-four hours.

Stripped of aesthetic jargon, this then is the definition of "slow cinema": making something take longer than we have been conditioned to expect.

Slow movies have exploded multidirectionally. Not all slow cinema is the same. This is why discussions of slow cinema are so problematic. Not all directors use "slow" techniques for the same purposes. Although it seems logical to discuss directors such as Lav Diaz, Béla Tarr, and Tsai Ming-liang in the same context because they employ similar stylistic devices, their intentions and films are in fact quite dissimilar.

There are many types of slow cinema, but only, I believe, three tendencies. If one accepts that the natural state of cinema is narrative—not necessarily the case, but a defensible premise given that movies are connected images seen over time—then three different branches of slow cinema can be seen to move away from narrative in three different directions, each with a different destination. More on this later.

WHAT ARE THE TECHNIQUES OF SLOW CINEMA?

The techniques of slow cinema may seem arbitrary, but they are practical. They all have the same purpose: to retard time. They withhold the expected.

The *long take* is the sine qua non of slow cinema. These are not the complex long dolly and tracking takes of film school lore; no, these are for the most part static frames, sometimes abetted by languorous pans or dolly moves. The seven-and-a-half-minute opening shot of Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994), which intermittently studies and follows cows in a barnyard, has become the textbook example of slow cinema. Tarr's last film, *The Turin Horse* (2011), features thirty-one shots over 146 minutes, approximately four and a half minutes per shot.

But a long take need not be of Olympian length to serve its purpose. It just needs to be longer than expected. A static shot of someone, say, making coffee would dramatically require ten to fifteen seconds of screen time. If that shot is held for thirty seconds, it has another effect. Held for a three minutes, quite another. Thirty seconds, however, are

sufficient to create a dissonance between time and narrative, between the narrative time requirements of a particular shot and the actual amount of time allotted to the shot.

Other film techniques reinforce the dissonance:

Wide angles are favored by slow cinema. A tableau, whether exterior or interior, offers multiple points of interest. One can see the action, the surroundings, the people talking, the people listening, the weather, and so on. The frame doesn't direct the viewer's gaze; it frees it to wander.

Static frame. A locked-off camera position is often employed in conjunction with the long take. "Sometimes when you are very still," film-maker Nathaniel Dorsky (*Love's Refrain,* 2001) explains, "you feel things that are hidden. I think [the static frame] has to do with seeing how deeply you can go."[17] There variations of the static frame technique. In *Ida,* (2013), Pawel Pawlikowski used a static 1:33 frame but composed for the lower half of the frame. Cristian Mungiu (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days,* 2007), like a number of his fellow "New Romanian" directors, pushed the action to the edges of a frozen frame, leaving the center vacant.

Minimal coverage. "Coverage" refers to the different angles a director uses to capture a scene: two-shot, over-the-shoulder, single, close-up, cutaway, and so on. Coverage guides and governs the viewer's attention. The film-maker manipulates the audience's reaction by editing the coverage. Dispensing with coverage, the slow cinema director is left to rely on staging, framing, and length of shot.

Offset edits. When edits occur, they are frequently offset in time—either too early or too late. In normal cutting, a splice is made "on action." If someone leaves a room, the cut is made as the person leaves; if someone enters, it is made as the person enters. In slow cinema the cut is made *after* the character leaves—sometimes much after. I first noticed this tendency in the films of Bresson and Ozu. It threw off the viewer's rhythm—the cut was too "early" or too "late." In this way, the film-maker reorients time. Film scholar Ben Singer described these as "post action lag."[18] Subsequent directors have offset these edits progressively more and more. In 1977 Theo Angelopoulos in *The Hunters* held for multiple beats before and after characters enter and exit. Twenty-five years later Tsai Ming-liang in *What Time Is It There?* (2001) held onto a static frame to the point where the viewer was uncertain if a character would ever enter.

The delayed cut. Beginning, middle, end frames of a shot from *Pickpocket*.

Images preferred over dialogue. Slow cinema isn't very talky. There's dialogue, of course, but not as much as in conventional narratives. Human beings are vococentric; our ears prioritize the human voice over other sounds. Slow cinema film-makers intentionally dispense with dialogue to reorient time. If we watch a scene with and without dialogue, the non-dialogue version will necessarily seem "slower."

Highly selective composed music—if any. Slow cinema favors diegetic sound—that is, sound which emanates from the action on screen. Non-diegetic music, composed music, is the most effective way to control film time; it can make a scene seem fast or slow. The absence of film score heightens the sense of being in a specific moment in time; it "extends" time. Bresson was the first codify this rule. "No music as accompaniment, support or reinforcement," he wrote in *Notes on Cinematography*.[19] The more a director is committed to slow cinema, the less he or she uses musical scoring. Andrei Tarkovsky and Theo Angelopoulos, for example, began their careers by using composed music, and ended by using little or none.

Heightened sound effects. Practical sound effects fill the vacuum left by dialogue and music. Keys jangle, chairs scrape, motor engines turn over, clothes rustle, wind blows, and humans inhale, exhale. All these emphasize the quotidian, the banal moment-by-moment reality of any situation.

A visual flatness. Slow cinema eschews drama—visual drama as well as story drama. Visual compositions in slow films tend to be symmetrical, not weighted toward specific visual information—no dramatic foregrounding and oblique angles. Camera movement, when it occurs, is painstakingly incremental and most often at right angles—either side to side or directly forward or backward. Human figures are presented as composition equals with other items on screen. David Bordwell uses the term "planimetric photography" to describe this flatness.[20] Viewers are refused easy entrance to the image, held at a deliberate distance. They are left to assemble their own visual priorities.

Repeated compositions. Ozu incorporated identical shots into his style, planimetric compositions with a central corridor or road leading directly away from the camera. Sometimes characters (full figure) will walk through these compositions. Sometimes not. The effect is to make the viewer aware of context. It was a leitmotif for Ozu. By 1989 such repetitions had become a central motif, as in Hou Hsiao-hsien's epic *City of Sadness,* which returns to the same compositions year after year.

Planimetric composition. From Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon;* Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days;* Bruno Dumont's *Hadewijch*.

Doubling. In my 1972 book on transcendental style, I also mentioned "doubling," by which I meant unnecessarily reiterated information. The example I gave was from *Pickpocket,* in which the main character, Michel, states, "I sat in the lobby of a large bank." (1) The viewer hears this in voice-over; (2) the viewer reads this on screen as Michel writes the words in his diary; (3) the viewer sees this as Michel is pictured entering the lobby of a bank. This overlapping of information is a distancing device.

Non-acting. Barely moving. Bresson referred to his actors as "models," objects in human form. Performers in slow cinema do not "act" or interpret emotions. They are figures in a composed landscape. Not only do these performers not "act," they move slowly. Actors in slow cinema tend to take a while to get anywhere, like mimes in a Robert Wilson opera. If a character in slow cinema enters frame headed right to left, the viewer knows two things: (1) the scene will not end until after the character exits frame, and (2) it will take the character a long time to cross screen.

Color and screen ratio. The choice to use black and white when color is the norm doesn't necessarily retard time but it is a withholding device. It gives less. Compare for example, Pawlikowski's *Ida* with Margarethe von Trotta's *Vision,* two films about nuns. *Vision* works in warm yellow colors with shifting camera perspective and brisk editing. *Ida* is just the opposite. Similarly, Pawlikowski's use of the restrictive screen ratio of 1:33 gives you less.

Not all these techniques are present in a given "slow film." Some counteract each other. It's a buffet of technical choices. Slow directors mix and match. Different directors employ different techniques. Some are more austere, some less. But this is the menu.

The techniques may be similar, but the intentions are diverse. A quick (alphabetical) look at some of the prominent practitioners of slow cinema reveals an eclectic group: Chantal Akerman, Lisandro Alonso, Theo Angelopoulos, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Pedro Costa, Claire Denis, Lav Diaz, Bruno Dumont, Michelangelo Frammartino, Hou Hsaio-hsien, Abbas Kiarostami, Kim Ki-duk, Hirokazu Kore-eda, Nicolás Pereda, Kelly Reichardt, Ben Rivers, Alberto Serra, Alexander Sokurov, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang, Apichatpong Weerasethakul. These are very different film-makers with very different artistic intentions.

Yet they all use slow cinema techniques. What unites them is time.

THE VIEWER JOINS THE MOVIE

"How does time make itself felt in a shot?" Tarkovsky wrote. "It becomes tangible when you realize, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction but a pointer to something stretching beyond the frame into infinity."[21] The viewer makes time felt in a shot. The viewer is operative; the viewer acts upon the image.

These techniques manipulate the viewer's perception of time. Motion pictures have two essential qualities: pictures and motion. Photographed reality through time. Empathy and action. A photograph creates empathy (or identification, if "empathy" is too strong a word)—that sandwich looks delicious, or the sea creature is frightening, for example. A moving photograph creates empathy over time. Two intercut moving photographs create narrative (the definition I proposed earlier).

So this was what films were really good at: action and empathy. The advances in early film-making were designed to emphasize one or the other. Hollywood specialized in action (the chase), the Soviets in empathy (montage). These were the innovations of early cinema. This was what movies did best.

Slow cinema works against the grain of cinema itself. It turns its back on what movies do best. It replaces action with stillness, empathy with distance. The techniques of slow cinema are all, to varying degrees, distancing devices. They push the viewer away from the "experience," that is, from immediate emotional involvement. This is different from modernistic distancing devices in the other arts to the same degree cinema is different from earlier art forms.

Expectations are turned in on themselves. There is no music to guide emotions, no close-ups to indicate importance, no acting to affect feelings, no fast motion to distract the eye.

Slow cinema is passive aggression par excellence. The slow cinema director says, "I know what you want; I know what you expect; but I'm going to do the opposite." Why? "Because I'm after something else and will use your expectations to get it." Roles are reversed. The film-maker, instead of creating a film world in which the viewer needs only to surrender, creates a world which the spectator must contemplate—or reject out of hand.

In her review of Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse* (1986), Pauline Kael complained: "Watching *Thérèse* is like looking at a book of photographs of respectfully staged tableaux and not being allowed to flip the pages at your own speed. You have to sit there while Cavalier turns them for

you, evenly, monotonously, allowing their full morbid beauty to sink it. You're trapped inside his glass bubble."[22] *Exactly.*

But isn't this manipulation of another sort? Isn't passive aggression another form of aggression? What is the difference between manipulating film time to create suspense and manipulating time to create boredom?

A lot. Take, for example, the difference between a *smash cut* and a *delayed cut*. Both are manipulations. The smash cut jumps ahead of the viewer's expectations, delivering an action before it is expected. A western saloon: a cowboy's hand hovers over his pistol and—suddenly—a shot has been fired and his opponent lies dead. That's a smash cut.

The same saloon. The cowboy holsters his gun. The cowboy exits—but the camera doesn't cut. It waits at the static empty saloon door for two, three, four, five beats before the scene changes. Time is arrested. A manipulation just as much as the smash cut. But with a diametrically different effect.

The smash cut depreciates the viewer's participation; the delayed cut demands it. After the smash cut, the viewer is propelled unthinking through the ongoing narrative. After the delayed cut, the viewer is frozen outside the narrative. The empty saloon door. Five beats of dead time. *Temps mort.* And during this dead time the spectator is left alone to think or reflect.

In that reflection lives the concept of slow cinema.

Another example serves to demonstrate the intricacies of slow time. Early in Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up* (1990), Kiarostami pans with an aerosol can accidentally kicked by one of the characters. The frame holds on the can as it tumbles down the sloping pavement. The drama stops to watch this. Then, just as the can comes to a stop and is about to exit frame, he cuts back to the story he was telling. This is quasi slow cinema. Kiarostami creates a contemplative pace by focusing on an irrelevant action. But he wants to distance the viewer only a little. If he had wanted to really slow time, he would have held on the empty frame after the aerosol can exited. Kiarostami's end game is humanistic, not spiritual, so, having made his point about the need to process information in an unhurried manner, he returns to more conventional narrative.

A final example. Imagine a frozen frame: A bucolic countryside. Fields, two dirt roads. A wooden barn on the right, a flock of goats on the left. Fluff y clouds above. A Béla Tarr frame. We wait; then a man enters from upper frame right and begins to cross the landscape. Slowly. He heads toward lower frame left. The viewer, familiar with the Tarr aesthetic,

The wayward canister. From *Close-Up*.

knows there will be no cut until the man exits lower frame left, however long it takes, three minutes, four, five. So what does the spectator do? Well, look at those clouds—the sun has moved, the shadows have changed. What's that sound? Is a car coming? If so, on which road? The sound passes—no car, but now the goats have moved. Some have left the frame. Will they come back? Oh, look, the sun has reappeared—new cloud patterns. Some goats have returned. Is that a plane overhead? And still the man is only halfway across the screen. (This is an exaggerated example of the opening shot of Bruno Dumont's *Humanity* [1999], which watches a distant character cross the horizon in the upper quadrant of the screen for a minute and twenty seconds.)

What is happening here? A new movie is being created. A simultaneous movie. The spectator's movie. Bazin scholars describe this as "the democracy of the eye"—given opportunity, the eye will explore. The film-maker has forced the viewer to enjoin the narrative process, creating his or her own narrative. The two films overlap: the director's tableau and the spectator's meditations on that tableau.

Humanity, opening shot.

BOREDOM AS AN AESTHETIC TOOL

Deny the viewers what they seek. Deny, deny, deny. Why would a viewer put up with such abuse? Such boredom?

Well, most viewers don't. Most slow fi lms are in fact "boring" (a subjective judgment, but there it is), and the lovers of slow cinema are relatively small in number.

Some slow fi lms have the opposite eff ect. They hook the viewer. They calculatingly use boredom as an aesthetic tool. Boring morphs into mesmerizing. These are the truly important films.

Why do we take it? The boredom. The distance. First, because eff ective slow cinema fi lm-makers are masters of anticipation. Employing striking visuals and auditory tricks and bits of activity, the slow film director keeps his viewer on the hook, thinking there is a reward, a "payoff " just around the corner. It's adroit blackmail. If I leave, I'll miss what I've been waiting for. Even the seasoned viewer of slow cinema anticipates *something*. Some moment. Some unexpectation. The wait will be worth it.

Second, because something *is* happening. Cinema lets us look around. Good slow cinema gives us something to see when we do.

The third reason has to do with the act of theatergoing. Going to a fi lm is like going to a church. A commitment is made. "I've come here of my own will and I accept the rules." One doesn't leave a church service after half an hour because it's boring. Slow fi lms prey upon this pact between the viewer and the viewed.

Fourth is what Haladyn called the "will to boredom."[23] This results in the "passionate *yes*"—the Nietzschean yes—"that endures while standing before the meaninglessness of a subjective world in the hopes of seeing more . . . of creating meaning where none exists."

Slow cinema's not for all viewers. It alienates. It distances. A brief tour through comments on various film blogs demonstrates the anger slow cinema can generate. (A polite example from the blogger "The Swede": "There is simply no functional reason and no intellectual justification to hold on a shot 10 times longer than the action it's depicting. It's amateurish."[24]). Slow directors, in fact, are known to respond to the limited acceptance they receive by creating even longer, slower films. Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994) runs 7 hours 12 minutes; Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004) clocks in at 10 hours 47 minutes, and the year 2020 promises to bring Anders Weberg's *Ambience* at 720 hours (30 days)—the 7-hour trailer was released in 2016.

But when it works, it works. "No good movie is too long and no bad movie is short enough," wrote Roger Ebert.[25]

WHERE DOES TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE FIT IN?

Transcendental style is not slow cinema. It's one of several precursors to slow cinema. Bazin's neorealism was another. As were Antonioni's soulful meanderings. Transcendental style evolved as "time-image." Filmmakers in different places and different traditions understood they could slow movies down to create a new reality, to explore memory, to beget contemplation, and in some rare cases simulate transcendence.

Transcendental style as I described it forty-five years ago still exists, although it's as rare now as it was then. The mechanics of transcendental style—the everyday, disparity, decisive action, stasis—can be seen in films like Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse,* Alexander Sokurov's *Mother and Son* (1997), Carlos Reygadas's *Silent Light* (2007), Bruno Dumont's *Hadewijch* (2009), Jessica Hausner's *Lourdes* (2009), Eugène Green's *La Sapienza* (2014), and Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida.*

Dietrich Brüggemann's *Stations of the Cross* (2015) is a striking recent example. Brüggemann's film consists of fourteen planimetric tableaus, one for each station of the cross. The frame for each is static. As in *Ida,* there is no camera movement until the very end. *Ida* ends with an eye-level tracking shot. *Stations of the Cross* ends with a crane up to God's POV. Pawlikowski concludes with non-diegetic music à la Bresson; Brüggemann

concludes without music. I asked Brüggemann why he didn't do the "Bresson thing" and hit a music cue during the transgressive final crane shot. He replied, "As we were addressing music as such in the story, I felt it was wiser not to use it. If the priest had talked about camera movements, we'd probably refrained from doing those [camera movements] we did."

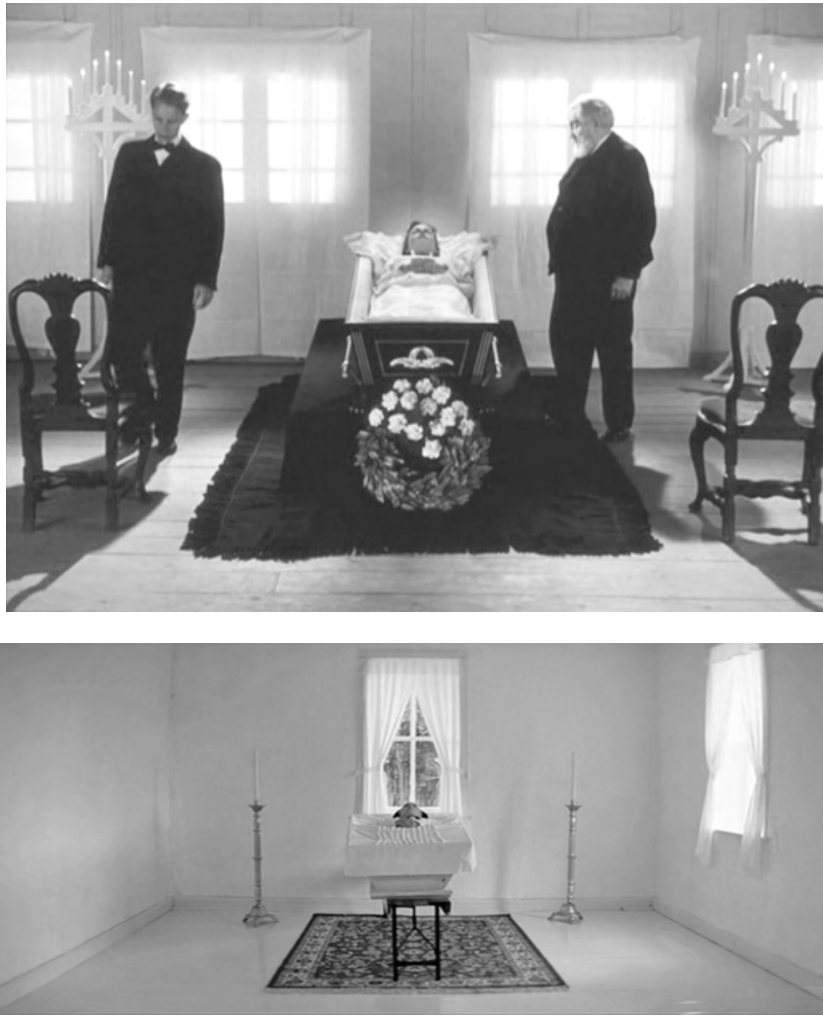
All of these examples involve films with religious characters or themes. This brings up the question of whether transcendental style is tied to spiritual themes. My answer: In theory, no. In practice, more often than not.

To test this point, let's theoretically set two silent films made six years apart side by side: Andy Warhol's *Blow Job* (1964) and Larry Gottheim's *Fog Line* (1970). Both are static shots lasting ten minutes. The first is the face of a young man receiving oral sex. The second is an obscured landscape as the fog slowly clears. Which image is more transcendent? Art history, practice, and good taste says the latter. But then transcendence is in the eye of the beholder.

Transcendental style directors are deceptively difficult to emulate. *Une Simple Histoire* made in 1959 by Marcel Hanoun is a direct imitation of Bresson's style, yet it is "off," not quite right—too much of this technique, too little of that. Hou Hsiao-hsien's "homage to Ozu," *Café Lumière* (2003), seems a bloodless exercise; on the other hand, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Still Walking* (2008) finds new life in the Ozu formula. U.S.-born French film-maker Eugène Green is the most successful heir to Bresson's style. *La Sapienza* (2014) uses Bresson's techniques—planimetric staging, flat line readings, off set cuts, bursts of unlikely music—to powerful secular effect. Added to this list must be *Silent Light,* Reygadas's luminescent remake of Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955).

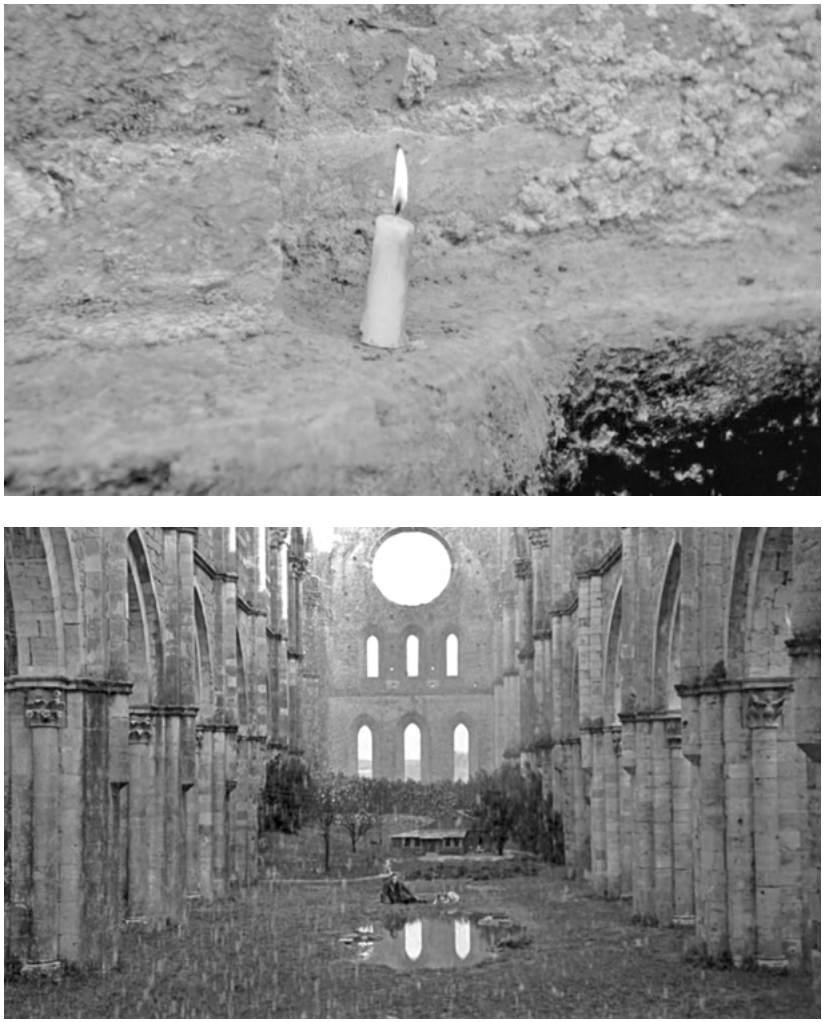
There are also faux uses of transcendental style: films that employ abundant means throughout and then conclude with a decisive action and stasis. The most notable example is Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996), which after two and a half hours of action cuts, jittery camerawork, and tempestuous drama concludes with a static "holy image." In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention my perhaps problematic decision to attach the ending of *Pickpocket* to *American Gigolo* (1980) and *Light Sleeper* (1992), films which otherwise bore no evidence of transcendental style.

To my mind, Andrei Tarkovsky was not interested in the transcendental style per se. He had religious themes, obsessions, and characters. He was austere. He employed distancing devices. But his intent was different. A transcendental guide or guru or film director self-effacingly seeks to escort the respondent to another level of consciousness, a



The Miracle. From *Ordet* and from *Silent Light*.

Wholly Other world. The transcendental film director is a "spirit guide." Tarkovsky was more interested in passing through the portal himself than he was in escorting his viewer. This seems clear in *Nostalghia*. At the end of the film, Dominic, a deranged mystic, immolates himself. In response, Andrei, the film's protagonist and Tarkovsky's surrogate, fulfills a promise to Dominic to carry a lit candle across the waters of a mineral pool. The pool is empty but Andrei struggles against



Two endings. Bresson vs. Tarkovsky. From *Nostalghia*.

wind and failing health to complete his task—back and forth, back and forth. Andrei places the fl ickering candle on a stone ledge and dies off camera. This is stasis, the end point of transcendental style. It's a Bressonian ending. It's the last shot of *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951); it's the last shot of *Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962).

But Tarkovsky doesn't end *Nostalghia* there. It concludes with a black-and-white image of Andrei resting beside his dog outside his

ancestral home before a refl ecting pool, poetic images from Tarkovsky's repertoire. The camera pulls back to reveal that Andrei and dog and house are all on a grassy fi eld inside a ruined cathedral. Snow falls, folk music plays. The intent is not to namelessly escort the viewer. This is the artist's self-apotheosis. This is not about the Wholly Other. It's about Andrei Tarkovsky.

THREE DIRECTIONS

When cinema broke free from the iron nucleus of narrative, when time became an end rather than a means, when Aristotle's formulations yielded to Deleuze's, it headed one of three directions.

Imagine cinema as an atom, a tight nuclear ball of neutrons and protons bound by the glue ("strong force" in physicist speak) of narrative. Nuclear narrative glue holds the medium in place. But a particle breaks free. And spins off with great energy. Which direction does the errant particle go? One of three anti-narrative directions.

The further the particle breaks free, the farther it fl ies, the closer it comes to time itself. "I despise stories," Béla Tarr stated. "They mislead people into believing something has happened. In fact, nothing really happens as we fl ee from one condition to another. All that remains is time. This is probably the only thing that's still genuine—time itself: the years, days, hours, minutes and seconds."[26]

Direction One: The Surveillance Camera

A primary impulse of non-narrative cinema is toward *quotidian,* day-to-day reality. Turn the camera on, let it record. This is what excited Andre Bazin about neorealism. "All the arts are based on the presence of man," he wrote. "Only photography derives an advantage from his absence."[27] Real time equals real cinema. Cinema's ability to record an event over time, its ability to "imprint of the duration of the object,"[28] elevated it above photography. Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) was "one of the fi rst examples of pure cinema. No more actors, no more story, no more sets, which is to say that in the perfect illusion of reality there is no more cinema."[29] An article in *Esprit* after Bazin's death quoted Bazin as saying: "The year 2000 will salute the advent of a cinema free of the artificialities of montage, renouncing the role of 'art of reality' so that it may climb to its fi nal level on which it will become once and for all 'reality made art.'"[30] Today we call this a surveillance camera.

Although Bazin understood the uniqueness of cinema (its "ontology"), he overstated its importance. A cinematic frame is ipso facto a human intervention. A choice. Even without edits, the long take expresses "presence of man," the presence of the observer.

By 1975 the young maid in De Sica's *Umberto D* had grown up and become Jeanne Dielman, the single mother in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles,* who spends thirty minutes at a stretch on household tasks. In an interview Akerman objected to the "hierarchy of images" that gives a car accident or a kiss greater importance than an image of washing dishes. By 2009 Jeanne Dielman had evolved into the family members of Jiayan Liu's *Oxhide II,* who prepare and eat dumplings over the course of her 132-minute, nine-shot film. The everyday: grinding coff ee, preparing meat loaf, making dumplings.

Another manifestation of non-narrative quotidian is the "walking" fi lm. Characters walk around. Matthew Flanagan has traced the roots of this subgenre, beginning with Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) to Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) proceeding to Gus Van Sant's death trilogy—*Gerry* (2002), *Elephant* (2003), and *Last Days* (2005)—and arriving at Tsai Ming-liang's *Walker* (2012), in which a Buddhist monk silently walks around Taipei for a half hour.[31] Avishai Sivan's *The Wanderer* (2010) uses a static camera to observe a young yeshiva student's aimless meanderings in Tel Aviv replete with repeated compositions and off set edits. Laura Marks uses the word "vestibular" to describe this type of fi lm, meaning its sensibility is based on the sense of balance provided by the inner ear—which I think is a clever perspective.[32] A Walking Film, however, is not a road movie, which uses the trope of a travel route to attach narratives like beads on a string. The walking fi lm is an anti-narrative road movie.

Another variant: direct cinema, an "anthropological" cinema developed by Jean Rouch in France and refi ned by Frederick Wiseman in the United States. In *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960), Rouch chronicled day-to-day events without editorial comment. Chinese director Wang Bing carries this type non-narrative fi lm to extreme lengths with his observational documentaries such as *Crude Oil* (2008), a fourteen-hour film that monitors Inner Mongolian oil fi eld workers as they go about their daily routine.

Realistic non-narrative fi lms have also turned their attention to history, beginning with Roberto Rossellini's historical re-creation *The Rise of Louis XIV* (1966), Jean-Marie Straub's *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968), and Cavalier's *Thérèse.* Most recently this tradition has

Vestibular cinema. From *Elephant*, *Walker*, and *The Wanderer*.

been carried forward by Spaniard Alberto Serra in *The Story of My Death* (2013) about Casanova and, in a nod to Rossellini, *The Death of Louis XIV* (2016). Rossellini deserves special mention in any discussion about fi lms that push non-narrative boundaries. He was a pioneer of neorealism (*Rome, Open City* [1946]), meditative realism (*Voyage in Italy* [1954]), and historical realism *(The Rise of Louis XIV)*. Three groundbreaking trends. Rossellini led the way in each.

All realistic non-narrative fi lms vector the same direction. The more pure they become, the less editorial, the more objective they are; the more they resemble the surveillance camera. That is the end point of Bazin's "objective reality." The unending, all-seeing eye of the closed-circuit camera. "Pure cinema."

Direction Two: The Art Gallery

A second direction cinema can go after it escapes the nuclear glue of narrative is toward pure imagery: light and color.

This type of non-narrative fi lm has existed from cinema's inception. It was termed "experimental" and derived from various artistic movements—abstraction, Dadaism, cubism, surrealism, and constructivism. Hans Richter hand-animated shorts; Oskar Fischinger employed abstract patterns; artists such as Germaine Dulac and Jean Cocteau used photographed images as abstractions.

These avant-garde exercises were outside the realm of "the movies." They were "experimental shorts." Not until they grew to feature-film length were experimental fi lms recognized as a branch of theatrical cinema. Maya Deren was instrumental in the post-WWII shift of experimental cinema toward long form. *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1943), replete with dream imagery—mirrors, wind, staircases, rain, knives—held together by, connected by unconscious associations, ran fifteen minutes. It set the stage for longer and more abstract non-narrative fi lms. Deren argued that the "transfi guration of time"—slow motion, reverse motion, stop motion—was the center of the cinematic art, but her concept, P. Adams Sitney pointed out, was unlike Tarkovsky's. "Deren has a magical view of the manipulation of time"; Tarkovsky's film concepts were based on "the exfoliation of time within a shot."[33]

It's not coincidental that Deren came upon the fi lm scene the same time as neorealism and the period Deleuze identifi es as the transition from the movement-image to the time-image. Richter completed *Dreams Money Can Buy,* a feature-length surrealist trance fi lm in 1947. The same year

Amos Vogel founded Cinema 16 as a birthing facility for American experimentalism. In 1966 Stan Brakhage released *Dog Star Man* (1963), a sixty-six-minute assemblage of paint on celluloid, fast-cut abstract images, collages, and multiple exposures. Eventually it grew to four hours in length.

The "light and color" movement has several iterations. There is dream (also called oneiric) cinema. There is structural cinema. There is abstract cinema.

Dream cinema, a collage of associative imagery, begins with Jean Epstein's *Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), continues through Maya Deren and Jean Cocteau, to Sergei Parajanov's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) and Sara Driver's *You Are Not I* (1981). Today oneiric cinema is best represented by the late works of Jean-Luc Godard, such as *Goodbye to Language* (2014) . There's a branch of dream cinema that deals with childhood memories, exemplifi ed by Bill Douglas's *My Childhood* (1972), Terence Davies's *The Long Day Closes* (1992), and Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011).

Structural cinema, which evolved in the 1960s, pursues a predetermined stylistic path—the shape of the fi lm the crucial, the content peripheral. Michael Snow (*Wavelength* [1967]), Hollis Frampton (*Zorns Lemma* [1970]), and Ernie Gehr (*Serene Velocity* [1970]) were structural cineastes par excellence. In the conclusion to *Transcendental Style in Film,* I described them as "stasis artists," a description I would now amend. Stasis artists in fact follow the third non-narrative direction, the mandala.

Abstract cinema, which began as what Walther Ruttman called "painting in time" ("Malerei mit Zeit"), follows a line from Fischinger to Norman McLaren's fi lm scratches to Ken Brown's psychedelic 8mm light shows. Jordan Belson led the movement toward computer abstract fi lms in the 1960s. Abstract computer visualizations are now omnipresent and, in the case of software artist Scott Draves's *Electric Sheep* (2005–200?), collective. Draves's program is "run by thousands of people all over the world," interacting with participant computers to create ever-evolving abstractions.[34]

What all these iterations have in common is their end point. The end point is the art gallery. The end point is light and color. Follow this non-narrative direction to its logical conclusion and you encounter artists like Bill Viola and James Turrell who describe their artistic medium as light itself.

The end point of this non-narrative vector is Tony Conrad's magisterial *Yellow Movie* (1973–infi nity). Conrad sought to create a movie that

would never end. To do that, he filled a 1:85 frame with cheap white house paint that would yellow over the decades, thus creating an unending film. Tony Conrad died in 2016, but his *Yellow Movie* is still playing.

Direction Three: The Mandala

A third direction an image electron freed from the narrative nucleus can head is toward meditation. To my knowledge there are no early examples of meditative cinema. The notion that cinema could be used to evoke quietude is a fairly recent one. Static street shots from the silent era may seem meditative today but that certainly was not their original intent.

Film theorists such as Bazin, Jean Mitry, and Deleuze paved the intellectual path for a new cinema: a cinema of inaction. And Bresson may be the prototypical director of inaction. Before Bresson, I can think of no director who proposed inaction as cinematic tool. Bresson made "waiting" a verb. Transcendental style is a mile marker on the journey toward stillness.

There are also iterations of meditative cinema. In the realistic vein, Philip Gröning's *Into Great Silence* (2005) did for Carthusian monks what Wang Bing did for Inner Mongolian coal workers with a very different result. Wang's film is sociological, Gröning's spiritual. Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* (2016) has a similar impact. It follows eleven Buddhist pilgrims as they trek twelve hundred miles over the course of a year, purposefully falling to the ground every few steps, touching their foreheads to the earth.

There are also imagistic voyages such as those by Godfrey Reggio (*Visitors* [2013]) and Ron Fricke (*Samsara* [2011]). There are seasonal traverses like Kim Ki-duk's *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring* (2003) and Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le Quattro Volte* (2010).

Growing quieter, there is what Michael Walsh called "durational cinema," films that observe to the point of trance. Warhol pioneered this subgenre with academic exercises like his eight-hour observation of the Empire State Building, *Empire* (1964). Larry Gottheim's aforementioned *Fog Line,* ten minutes long, demonstrates how magical waiting can be. James Benning's *Twenty Cigarettes* (2011)—106 minutes of close-ups of people smoking—is the current exemplar of this tradition.

I would place Abbas Kiarostami's *Five* (2003) in this category as well. Also titled *Five Dedicated to Ozu,* the film contains five static, dialogue-free shots near the ocean. People passing by, driftwood afloat, ducks

passing by. The fifth shot is a black screen accompanied by the sound of frogs. Moving clouds reveal the reflection of the moon on black water. Twenty-seven minutes later the screen begins to lighten. A rooster crows. Kiarostami's career, like that of Rossellini, traces an arc through the history of observational cinema. He began in the 1970s making neorealist documentary shorts for the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. He transitioned to feature-length depictions of the lives of common people (a schoolboy, a tax collector). His work assumed soul-searching dimensions in *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and found an end point with moonlight reflected on water in *24 Frames* (2017).

Does durational cinema strive for the surveillance camera or the mandala? Is it an unremittingly open eye or the source of enlightenment? It depends on the observer. One viewer watching the fog drift from the mountains might find it an exercise in contemplative boredom; another might experience it as transcendental meditation.

All meditative cinema shares an end point. It is silence. It is the candle, the rock garden, the flower arrangement. It is the mandala. One can meditate upon a mandala for hours on end. There's nothing more a movie can offer.

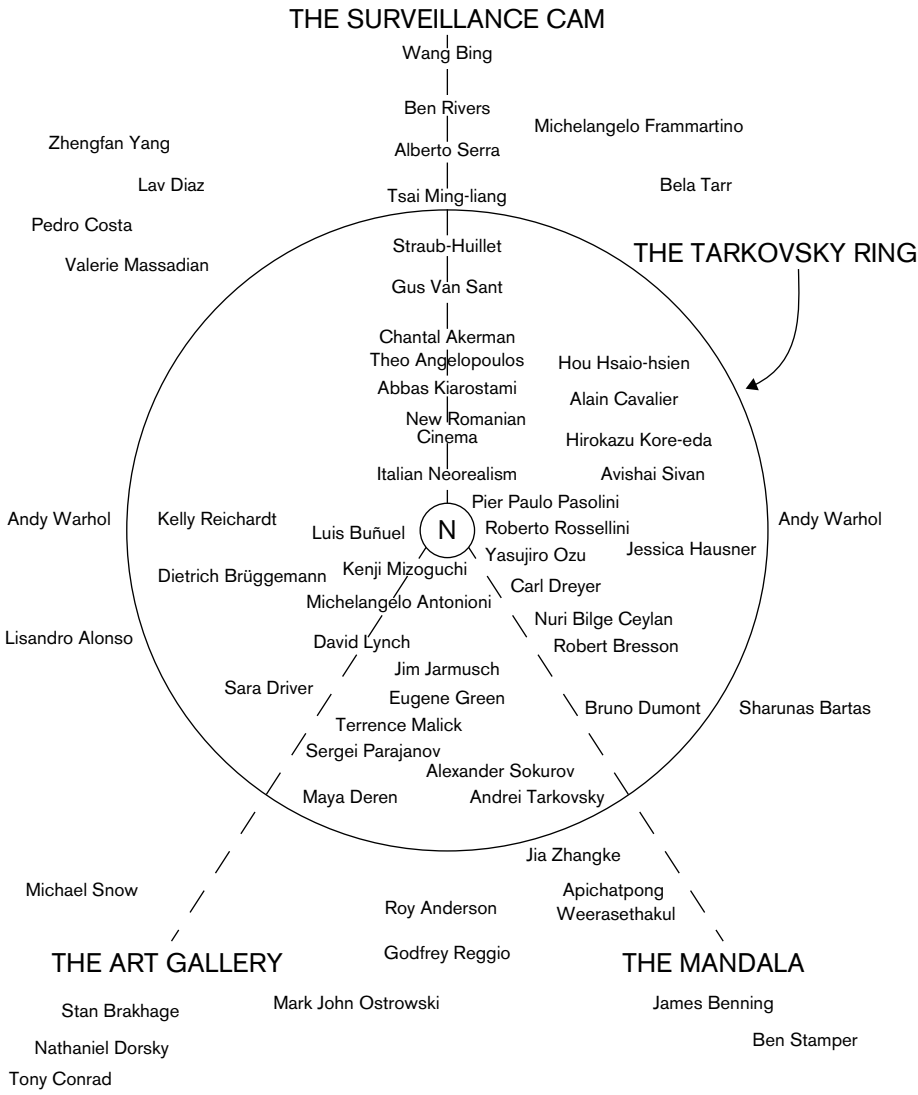
A FINAL NOTE

In 2011, film director Martha Fiennes created a first-of-its-kind installation, titled *Nativity,* which combined all three tendencies: the surveillance camera, the art gallery, and the mandala. Using SLOimage software, Fiennes filmed a nativity scene based on Renaissance paintings. The cast of characters (the Holy Family, shepherds, Magi) are entered into a multilayered computer program that self-generates slow-motion movement both randomly and perpetually. There is no beginning, middle, or end, just a tableau that transforms itself continually like a sophisticated visual version of iTunes shuffle. With 500,000 permutations it is unlikely that this moving painting, this motion picture, will ever end or repeat itself.

The effect is mesmeric. An unending movie.

A DIAGRAM

So much for rethinking. I have a deeper understanding of what interested me forty-five years ago, although the heart of transcendental style remains a mystery.



In order to better understand the ground fi eld of non-narrative cinema, I've created a diagram. The narrative nucleus ("N") lies at the center. Errant electrons run one of three directions: the surveillance camera, the art gallery, the mandala. These electrons pass through the "Tarkovsky Ring" separating theatrical cinema from fl m festival and

art museum cinema, on their journey to pure concept. The placement of various film-makers in the diagram is subjective and to some degree arbitrary. Directors are represented by the films discussed rather than by their body of work. Not every slow director is included. Transcendental style occupies a bit of space just inside the ring.

And somewhere in the expanses, each artist finds a place.

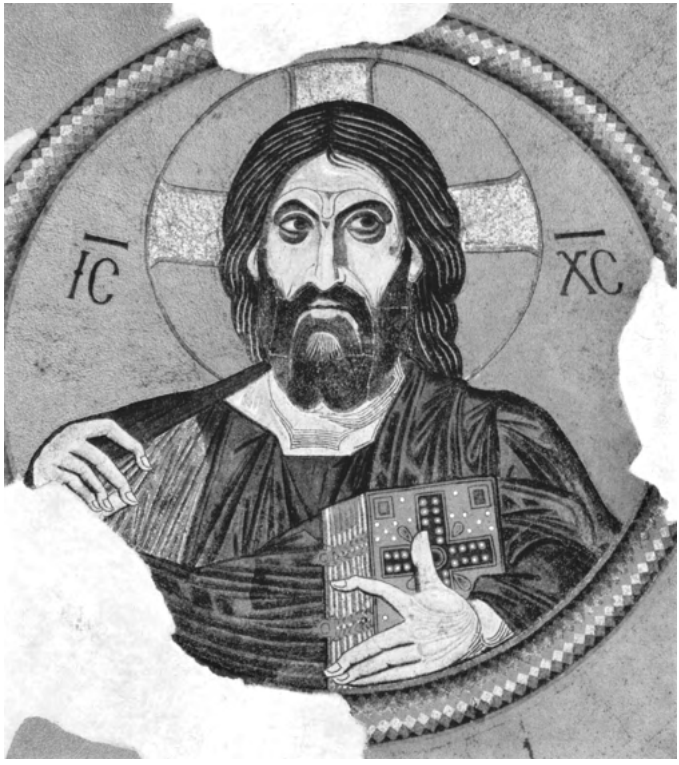
Introduction to the Original Edition

In recent years film has developed a transcendental style, a style which has been used by various artists in diverse cultures to express the Holy. Just as anthropologists at the turn of the century discovered that artisans in unrelated cultures had found similar ways to express similar spiritual emotions, so, in cinema, unrelated film-makers have created a consensus of transcendental style. The style is not intrinsically transcendental or religious, but it represents a way (a *tao,* in the broadest sense of the term) to approach the Transcendent. The matter being transcended is different in each case, but the goal and the method are, at their purest, the same.

Yasujiro Ozu in Japan, Robert Bresson in France, to a lesser degree Carl Dreyer in Denmark, and other directors in various countries have forged a remarkably common film form. This common form was not determined by the film-makers' personalities, culture, politics, economics, or morality. It is instead the result of two universal contingencies: the desire to express the Transcendent in art and the nature of the film medium. In the final result no other factors can give this style its universality.

The "spiritual universality" of transcendental style may be variously interpreted by theologians, aestheticians, and psychologists; but it can only be demonstrated by critics. At this point everyone must return to the evidence; one must analyze the films, scenes, and frames, hoping to extract the universal from the particular.

Because transcendental style is fundamentally just that, a style, it can be isolated, analyzed, and defined. Although transcendental style, like



Christ Pantocrator, c. 1100, dome mosaic at Daphni.

any form of transcendental art, strives toward the ineff able and invisible, it is neither ineff able nor invisible itself. Transcendental style uses precise temporal means—camera angles, dialogue, editing—for predetermined transcendental ends. It has three distinct stages and those stages can be studied both individually and as part of the larger whole.

"Transcendental style" is not a vague label like "religious film" which can be attached to fi lms which feature certain religious themes and evoke the appropriate emotions; it is not a catchbasin for all the sniffl es, sobs, and goosebumps one has experienced at religious films. It is neither a personal vision nor an offi cial catechism. It is not necessarily typifi ed by Joan at the stake, Christ on the Mount, or St. Francis among the fl owers; it is not necessarily suff ering, preaching, or good will among men. It is only *necessarily* a style.

If a critic hopes to extract this style and its component parts from the individual artists who employ it, from the cultures which infl uence

those artists, and from the emotions it must use and transform, he must have some fairly precise critical tools (and even then it's like trying to separate sound from the waves it travels on). A term like "transcendental," after all, is almost nonfunctional in art criticism, and "style" is little better. Causing more problems than it solves, "transcendental" has fallen under the jurisdiction of journalese, particularly among film critics. "Transcendental" is currently a catchall term for the imprecise critic: a film's plot, setting, acting, theme, and direction are all spoken of as transcending each other or themselves, and "style" can refer to anything from a camera angle to a way of life.

"Transcendental style," however, can be a useful term in film criticism, and when analyzing the films of certain film-makers, such as Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer, it can be indispensable. The understandable reluctance of aestheticians and serious film critics to employ the concept of transcendence has caused these films to be underestimated and misinterpreted to varying degrees, and evaluated within critical patterns for which they were not intended. But before these terms can be of any use to a critic they must have meaning: he must know what is "transcendental" and what is "style." And knowing this, he not only has a term which denotes a specific style, but also the critical method with which to analyze it.

DEFINITION NO. 1: TRANSCENDENTAL

The Transcendent is beyond normal sense experience, and that which it transcends is, by definition, the immanent. Beyond this truism there is little agreement about the nature of the transcendental in life and art. Transcendence has been a subject of the philosophical debate since Plato, of the aesthetic debate since Plotinus, and has been variously interpreted by philosophers, aestheticians, theologians, anthropologists, and psychologists. Part of the confusion is semantic; the term "transcendental" can have different meanings for different writers. It can mean, directly or indirectly, (1) the Transcendent: the Holy or Ideal itself, or what Rudolf Otto called the "Wholly Other," (2) the transcendental: human acts or artifacts which express something of the Transcendent, or what Mircea Eliade in his anthropological study of comparative religions calls "hierophanies," (3) transcendence: the human religious experience which may be motivated by either a deep psychological need or neurosis (Freud), or by an external, "Other" force (Jung).

Similarly, these terms can refer to general varieties of sacred art: (1) works which *inform* the viewer/reader/listener about the Transcendent,

which by their very definition must come directly from the Transcendent itself since no man can know about the Holy; works such as untampered nature (common revelation) and "divinely inspired" Scriptures (special revelation), although this category may be only theoretical since even many theologians regard the various Scriptures as only expressive of the Holy, (2) works which *express* the Transcendent in human reflection; man-made, man-organized, or man-selected works which are more expressive of the Wholly Other than of their individual creators; works such as the Byzantine ikons or Zen gardens, (3) works which relate the human experience of transcendence, which *express* not the Transcendent but the human who experiences the Transcendent; works such as expressionist paintings or any of the many psychological novels about religious conversion.

The terms "Transcendent," "transcendental," and "transcendence" represent a hierarchy of the spiritual from the Other-oriented to the human-oriented. Because the Transcendent rarely speaks out on such matters, there is bound to be some semantic confusion over these terms. Philosophers and artists are human, and humans have often yielded to the temptation to cross-interpret from one category to the next, to define the Transcendent by the human experience of transcendence.

Carl Jung was reacting against this tendency when he wrote, "Every statement about the transcendental ought to be avoided because it is invariably a laughable presumption on the part of the human mind, unconscious of its limitations. Therefore, when God or Tao is named as a stirring of, or a condition of, the soul, something has been said about the knowable only, but nothing about the unknowable. Of the latter, nothing can be determined."[1]

Human works, accordingly, cannot *inform* one about the Transcendent; they can only be *expressive* of the Transcendent. This essay will concentrate on transcendental art, art which expresses the Transcendent in the human mirror.

By conjoining the words "transcendental," generally a religious term, and "art" into one term, "transcendental art," one implies that he considers religion and art homogeneous. This, of course, sections him off from the considerable body of critics who consider the transcendental outside the province of art. Transcendence in art is often equated with transcendence in religion because they both draw from a common ground of transcendental experience. Transcendence is the imperious experience; art and religion are its twin manifestations, as Clive Bell wrote: "Art and Religion are the two roads by which men escape from circumstance to

ecstasy. Art and Religion are means to similar states of mind."[2] Transcendental art is not sectarian, however: "Art can be religious," the late Gerardus van der Leeuw wrote, "or can appear to be religious; but it can be neither Mohammedan nor Buddhist nor Christian. There is no Christian art, any more than there is a Christian science. There is only art which has stood before the Holy."[3] The proper function of transcendental art is, therefore, to express the Holy itself (the Transcendent), and not to express or illustrate holy feelings.

CRITICISM AND TRANSCENDENTAL ART

The critical queasiness about transcendental art is understandable because the more pure and absolute such an art becomes the less useful it is. At its best transcendental art is a self-destructive process. In his study of traditional Christian and Oriental art (essentially transcendental art), Ananda Coomaraswamy writes, "Art, even the highest, is only a means to an end, even scriptural art is only a manner of 'seeing through a glass, darkly,' and although this is far better than not to see at all, the utility of iconography must come to an end when the vision is 'face to face.'"[4] Like transcendental religion, transcendental art merges with mysticism: "Absolute religion is mysticism; it is without shape and without sound. Absolute art can neither be seen nor heard."[5] A critical devotion to the transcendent in art may eventually lead to the end of creative production, as it did for Coleridge after 1815. Both religion and art are highly partisan, and when conjoined under the banner of transcendental expression they will abide no peers. Transcendental art may tolerate other forms of expression, but it cannot accept them as equal or alternative. Good criticism is eclectic, transcendental art is autocratic; they have made understandably poor bedfellows.

Like transcendental art, the criticism of transcendental art is a self-destructive process. It continually deals in contradictions—verbalizations of the ineff able. The concept of transcendental expression in religion or in art necessarily implies a contradiction. Transcendental expression in religion and art attempts to bring man as close to the ineffable, invisible, and unknowable as words, images, and ideas can take him. Like the artist, the critic knows that his task is futile, and that his most eloquent statements can only lead to silence. The critical inquiry, Roger Fry stated, ends at the gulf of mysticism.[6]

Although a critic cannot analyze the Transcendent, he can describe the immanent and the manner in which it is transcended. He can discover how the immanent is expressive of the Transcendent.

DEFINITION NO. 2: STYLE

Like "transcendence," the term "style" is susceptible to semantic confusion. It can have various meanings: it can mean, as Wylie Sypher states, "a contemporary view of the world"[7] expressed by a particular geographic-historical culture, or it can mean the individual expression Raymond Durgnat describes as the "creation of a personal, a subjective, a 'non-objective' world,"[8] or it can mean what Heinrich Wölfflin called a "general representative form."[9] The style described in this essay is a style in the way that Wölfflin used that term, a style like the primitive or classic styles, the expression of similar ideas in similar forms by divergent cultures. The first two of the above-mentioned uses of style, Sypher's and Durgnat's, respectively describe the cultural and personal qualities of a work of art, and therefore are most appropriate for art which expresses the human experience rather than the Transcendent itself. Wölfflin's use of style, on the other hand, is concerned with what is universal rather than particular in the various means of expression, and therefore is ideally suited to describe a style which seeks to express the Wholly Other through divergent cultures and personalities.

DEFINITION NO. 3: TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

Semantically, transcendental style is simply this: a general representative filmic form which expresses the Transcendent. As used in this essay, "transcendental style" refers to a specific filmic form, although there could conceivably be several transcendental styles in film. The critical approach I associate with the term "transcendental style" echoes the above definition and may be loosely called an Eliade-Wölfflin method.* This method is, again quite simply, a study of contemporary artistic hierophanies through the analysis of common film forms and techniques.

The critical method used in this essay is based on two premises: (1) that there are such things as hierophanies, expressions of the transcendent in society (Eliade); (2) that there are common representative artistic forms shared by divergent cultures (Wölfflin). Transcendental style is each of these.

* It will shortly become obvious, however, that my method does justice to neither Eliade nor Wölfflin. I am more interested in contemporary and self-conscious artistic techniques than Eliade, and more interested in metaphysical meaning than Wölfflin. The term "Eliade-Wölfflin" is more associative than descriptive.

Any film (or phenomenon), of course, can be discussed from any critical perspective. No definition of "transcendental" or "style" monopolizes the discussion of any work of art. Films employing transcendental style may be studied from the cultural or personal perspective, and they usually are. Although the critical method I associate with the term "transcendental style" does not have a monopoly over the discussion of the films of directors like Ozu and Bresson, I think it has a priority. In most films the film-maker's ability to express his culture or personality is more important than his inability to transcend them, but when a film does seem to have that genuinely transcendent, "Other" quality, such as Ozu's *Late Autumn* or Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest,* the cultural and personal approaches, although perhaps factually accurate, are inadequate. A cultural or personal approach necessarily disregards the unique quality of transcendental style: its ability to transcend culture and personality. There is a spiritual truth that can be achieved by objectively setting objects and pictures side by side that cannot be obtained through a subjective personal or cultural approach to those objects.

The study of transcendental style reveals a "universal form of representation." That form is remarkably unified: the common expression of the Transcendent in motion pictures. The differences among the films of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer are cultural and personal; their similarities are stylistic, and represent a unified reflection of the Transcendent on film.

TOWARD A WORKING DEFINITION

Many film-makers have employed the transcendental style, but few have had the devotion, the rigor, and the outright fanaticism to employ it exclusively. Elements of the transcendental style can be detected in the films of many other directors: Antonioni, Rossellini, Pasolini, Boetticher, Renoir, Mizoguchi, Buñuel, Warhol, Michael Snow, and Bruce Baillie. One of the complications of discussing transcendental style is that it enters in and does business with all sorts of styles. Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* may be described as a transcendental film which indulges in expressionism, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* as a transcendental film which gives way to Marxist realism, and Boetticher's *Seven Men From Now* as a transcendental film which yields to psychological realism.

Two directors have defined the transcendental style—Yasujiro Ozu in the East and Robert Bresson in the West. They have taken an intellectual, formalistic approach to film, and their films are the culminant products

of erudite and sophisticated cultures. The family-office cycle of Ozu's later films and the prison cycle of Bresson's middle films construct a similar style to express the Transcendent. Carl Dreyer employs the transcendental style extensively, although his films are not prescriptive of the style, as are Ozu's and Bresson's. Dreyer expressed the Transcendent in a manner similar to Bresson, notably in *Ordet,* but he never completed a cycle of films employing the transcendental style. This essay could be extended to consider additional examples of the partial (and partially successful) use of transcendental style in certain of the films of Budd Boetticher and Roberto Rossellini. Although these would be valuable variations on the theme, three examples should be sufficient to carry the weight of the argument.

Transcendental style seeks to maximize the mystery of existence; it eschews all conventional interpretations of reality: realism, naturalism, psychologism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism, and, finally, rationalism. To the transcendental artist rationalism is only one of many approaches to life, not an imperative. "If everything is explained by understandable causal necessities," abbot Amédée Ayfre wrote, "or by objective determinism, even if their precise nature remains unknown, then nothing is sacred."[10] The enemy of transcendence is immanence, whether it is external (realism, rationalism) or internal (psychologism, expressionism). To the transcendental artist these conventional interpretations of reality are emotional and rational constructs devised by man to dilute or explain away the transcendental.

In motion pictures these constructs take the form of what Robert Bresson has called "screens,"[11] clues or study guides which help the viewer "understand" the event: plot, acting, characterization, camerawork, music, dialogue, editing. In films of transcendental style these elements are, in popular terms, "nonexpressive" (that is, they are not expressive of culture or personality); they are reduced to stasis. Transcendental style *stylizes* reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power. Transcendental style, like the mass, transforms experience into a repeatable ritual which can be repeatedly transcended.

In this essay there will be many occasions to draw comparisons between transcendental style and earlier means of religious and artistic expression. The most irreducible of these metaphors is between transcendental style and primitive art primarily because primitive art has always been closely associated with primitive religious belief. If one

divides art into primitivism and classicism as Waldemar Deonna has done,[12] transcendental style invariably falls into the primitivism column. Using Deonna's dichotomies, transcendental style chooses irrationalism over rationalism, repetition over variation, sacred over profane, the deific over the humanistic, intellectual realism over optical realism, two-dimensional vision over three-dimensional vision, tradition over experiment, anonymity over individualization. (The primitive-classical dichotomy is not necessarily a chronological one; they can be found in all cultures.) The reason for the affinity between transcendental style and primitivism is obvious: both have "a world view which encloses mankind and the All in a deeply felt unity, which constitutes the essence of their religiousness."[13] Whenever religious primitivism emerges from a post-Hellenic culture, a new artistic style results, whether it be Byzantine, Gothic, or suprematist. In cinema, the new form is transcendental style.*

In each of the three chapters that follow there will be appropriate references to earlier artistic-religious expression: Ozu to the Zen arts of painting, gardening, and haiku; Bresson to Byzantine iconography; Dreyer to Gothic architecture.

This essay hopes to posit the transcendental style and explain some of its aesthetics. I have not attempted a full analysis of the directors

* In relation to transcendental style, the terms "primitive" and "traditional" invite some inevitable semantic confusion. Although these terms are open to various interpretations, for the purpose of this book I will define my use of them. All three terms belong to the category of transcendental art, art which is expressive of the transcendent. "Primitive art" denotes transcendental art in a pre-Hellenic culture (and such cultures can still exist). It is an art of superstition and magic: "all the indications point to the fact that it was the instrument of a magical technique and as such had a thoroughly pragmatic function aimed entirely at direct economic objectives. This magic apparently had nothing in common with what we understand by religion; it knew no prayers, revered no sacred powers, and was connected with no other-worldly spiritual beings of any kind of faith, and there failed to fulfill what has been described as the minimum condition of an authentic religion" (Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* [New York: Vintage Books, 1951], I, p. 7). "Traditional art" denotes transcendental art in a post-Hellenic culture. It is represented by a civilized religion with its own theology and aesthetics. Traditional art has reacted to Hellenism by turning Platonic idealism to sacred objects. In traditional art one can speak, as Ananda Coomaraswamy has, of a Christian and Oriental *philosophy* of art. The once-superstitious artists now "believe in a twofold order of reality, the one visible, palpable, and subordinate to the essential laws of motion; the other invisible, intangible, 'spiritual,' forming a mystic sphere which encompasses the first" (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* [London: Allen & Unwin, 1926], p. 86). "Transcendental style" denotes a transcendental art in a post-Renaissance culture. This term has no general usage in art history and I use it to identify attempts by recent artists to restore the sacred qualities of art to a culture which has felt the humanizing effect of Greece and the individualizing effect of the Renaissance.

Left: Madonna and Child icon, Tikhvin Monastery; right: *Virgin and Child,* by Master Michiel, Netherlands, 1520. "Transcendental style chooses intellectual realism over optical realism, two-dimensional vision over three-dimensional vision, the deific over the humanistic."

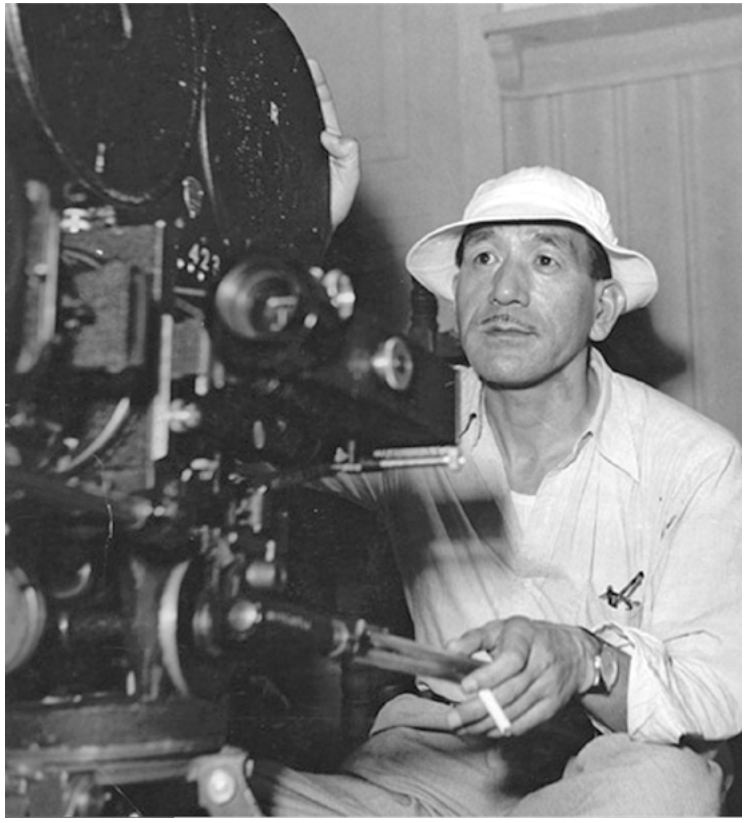
since I am primarily interested in these film-makers to the extent that their films reveal the transcendental style. From a study of Ozu's later family-office cycle of films one can extricate the transcendental style from an indigenous (Oriental) culture and examine how it functions both in and out of its culture. In Bresson's prison cycle films, Western history and thought have already alienated the transcendental style from its culture; his films provide an excellent opportunity to study in depth and suggest how it actually "works" on the viewer. Dreyer's films, although less successful on the transcendental level, illustrate how the style (or a part of it) functions in a hostile environment.

The Conclusion will discuss some of the problems raised by a theory of transcendental style in the cinema.

I. Ozu

The films of Yasujiro Ozu exemplify the transcendental style in the East. In his films this style is natural, indigenous, and commercially successful, largely because of the Japanese culture itself. The concept of transcendental experience is so intrinsic to Japanese (and Oriental) culture that Ozu was able both to develop the transcendental style and to stay within the popular conventions of Japanese art. Ozu, often described as the "most Japanese of all directors," gained respect as a genre director and critical and financial success—rewards which no director interested in transcendental style could expect to reap in the West.

Oriental art in general and Zen art in particular aspire to the Transcendent. Like primitive art, traditional Oriental art makes no distinctions between the sacred and the secular. The Orient forged a lasting culture out of what the Neoplatonists and Scholastics hypothesized and in rare cases realized: an anonymous art in which "all that is true, by whomsoever it has been said, has its origin in the Spirit."[1] In Zen, this is expressed by R. H. Blyth: "The poetical and the religious are identical states of mind. . . . To the religious all things are poetical . . . to the poetical all things are religious."[2] For thirteen hundred years Zen has cultivated the transcendental experience, and the Transcendent has found expression not only in religion and the arts, but also in a wide variety of "commonplace" activities. This expression of the Transcendent was not the perquisite of an intellectual or clerical elite. It became an endemic part of the Oriental heritage mainly through the arts, and



Yasujiro Ozu.

no distinction was made between the fine and the manual arts. Zen dislikes the "odor of abstraction" which comes from a term like "transcendence," D.T. Suzuki points out, because in fact Zen dislikes any appeal to words. Acknowledging this semantic obstacle, it is safe to say, as Suzuki does, that Zen operates within the "realm of transcendence."[3]

Thus Ozu did not need to revive the expression of the Transcendent in Japan, or inject it into the Oriental culture, but only to adapt it to film. Ozu represents traditional Japanese thought and art, and he brings the weight of Oriental tradition to the modern, anarchic film medium. Donald Richie has schematized Japanese film directors, placing Kurosawa on the far left (modern) and Ozu on the far right (traditional).[4] Ozu was markedly conservative in subject matter and method (he was among the last Japanese directors to utilize sound or color), and he

strove to put the old tradition in the new format. In Japan "modern civilization is only one hundred years old and is a veneer over a civilization which has endured for two millennia";[5] in Ozu's films Zen art and thought is the civilization, film is the veneer.

Although the Japanese cultural tradition afforded Ozu some luxuries, his task was not as easy as it may seem. Cinema has been one of the primary Westernizing influences in contemporary Japan, and in his striving for traditional values Ozu often ran contrary to current trends and is still regarded as reactionary by many Japanese youths. In a sense Ozu bucked fashion in his pursuit of a filmic transcendental style, but the resistance he met was relatively minor compared to the resistance encountered by Bresson who, in France, has to go back to the Scholastics for an aesthetic precedent and on the way forfeited any hope of mass popularity or commercial success.

Ozu's career was one of refinement: he constantly limited his technique, subject matter, and editorial comment. Early in his career (Ozu made fifty-four films over thirty-five years, from 1927 to 1962) he filmed the romantic and social themes insisted upon by Japanese producers, but later in life, particularly after the Second World War, Ozu limited himself to the *shomin* genre, and within the *shomin-geki* to certain forms of conflict and resolution.

The *shomin* genre concerns proletarian and middle-class life and "the sometimes humorous, sometimes bitter relations within the family."[6] The *shomin-geki,* initially a genre of melodrama and light comedy, originated in the later 1920s and early 30s, only after the Japanese middle class had become sufficiently entrenched to laugh at itself. Several critics have pointed out the evolution of Ozu's approach by comparing the 1932 *I Was Born, But . . . (Umarete wa mita keredo)* with the 1959 remake, *Good Morning (Ohayo)*. Ozu's intentions in *I Was Born, But . . .* were social and particular; his intentions in *Good Morning* were satirical and universal. Compared to the remake, *I Was Born, But . . .* was "active rather than contemplative."[7] Ozu's early films (such as *I Was Born, But . . .*) were squarely within the original *shomin-geki* concept: light understated comedies with a tinge of social consciousness. Time, affluence, the war, governmental pressures, and Westernization sobered the *shomin-geki* in general, and Ozu in particular. When Ozu changed—when his light comedy slowly turned to "resigned sadness"—he took the *shomin-geki* with him, exerting much the same influence over the *shomin* genre as John Ford did over the American Western. Ozu's later films were not descriptive of the *shomin-geki,* but prescriptive of it.

Tokyo Story: "In every Ozu film, the whole world exists in one family. The ends of the earth are no more distant than outside the house."

"In every Ozu fi lm," Richie writes, "the whole world exists in one family. The ends of the earth are no more distant than outside the house."[8] In his fi lms the middle class is represented as offi ce workers, and in some fi lms, such as *Early Spring* (*Soshun,* 1956), the offi ce "family" replaces the household family unit. Ozu focuses on the tensions between the home and the offi ce, the parent and the child, which are extensions of the tensions between the old and new Japan, between tradition and Westernization, and—ultimately—between man and nature.

Toward the end of his life (he died in 1963 at the age of sixty), Ozu focused his attention on certain forms of confl ict within the *shomin-geki.* This confl ict is not drama in Western terms, and it certainly is not plot: "Pictures with obvious plots bore me now," Ozu told Richie. "Naturally, a film must have some kind of structure or else it is not a film, but I feel that a picture isn't good if it has too much drama or action."[9] And concerning *Late Autumn* (*Akibiyori,* 1960): "I want to portray a man's character by eliminating all the dramatic devices. I want to make people feel what life is like without delineating all the dramatic ups and downs."[10] In Ozu's mind Japanese life had resolved into certain oppos-

ing forces which he repeatedly demonstrated in his films, and although these forces must be reconciled, they would not be reconciled by anything as artificial as plot.

Ozu's later cycle of family-office films (thirteen films from 1949 to 1962) features the estrangement of parents and children. The incidents of estrangement are in themselves remarkably petty: marriage, relocation, bickerings, and at most running away from home. Behind these incidents are the divisive elements of modern Japan: the Second World War (the children are called the *après-guerre* generation) and Westernization (the compartmentalizing effect of office routine). The parent-child estrangement is not a failure to "communicate," as in American juvenile delinquency films. Even in successful relationships Ozu's characters do not communicate, as that word is used in sociological jargon, with commiseration and emotional interchange. The estrangement results from the loss of the traditional family unity which was never verbally communicated in the first place. In his later films Ozu set these opposing forces within a home-office superstructure containing a variety of interchangeable character-conflict infrastructures. One story (really nothing more than an anecdote) could sustain several films. Ozu was notorious for filming the same situation over and over again: the father-daughter conflict of *Late Spring* (*Banshun,* 1949) became the mother-daughter conflict of *Late Autumn* and reverted to a father-daughter conflict in *An Autumn Afternoon* (*Sanma no aji,* 1962).

Just as Ozu settled on certain conflicts to present in his films, he settled on certain people to help him present those conflicts. The majority of the later films were photographed by Yushun Atsuta and all were written in collaboration with Kogo Noda. Ozu and Noda enjoyed a legendary relationship between director and writer: "Although we don't write down the details of the sets, they are in our minds as one common image. We think alike. It is an amazing thing."[11] Ozu and Noda would devise the projected film entirely in their minds, word by word and image by image. After this extensive preparation (which took from four months to one year in seclusion), Ozu would mechanically shoot the preset Ozu-Noda script.

Similarly, Ozu settled on a select group of actors and actresses to appear in his films. The nucleus of this group consisted of Chishu Ryu, Setsuko Hara, Nobuo Nakamura, and Shin Saburi. They were Ozu's filmic "family." In each film they would play slight variations of character, acting out domestic conflicts with the sense of resigned awareness which comes from playing the same roles and feeling the same emotions many times. Ozu chose his actors not for their "star" quality or acting

"The father-daughter conflict of *Late Spring* [above: Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu] became the mother-daughter conflict of *Late Autumn* [center: Hara, Yoko Tsukasa] and reverted to a father-daughter conflict in *An Autumn Afternoon* [below: Shima Iwashita, Ryu]."

skill, but for their "essential" quality. "In casting it is not a matter of skillfulness or lack of skill an actor has. It is what he is."[12]

But most of all, Ozu refined his technique. Ozu is cinema's consummate formalist; his films are characterized by "an abstentious rigor, a concern for brevity and economy, an aspiring to the ultimate in limitation."[13] Because Ozu's technique is so limited and predictable, it can be examined closely and in depth, a task which Donald Richie has accomplished in a remarkable article entitled "Yasujiro Ozu: The Syntax of His Films."[14] Richie described Ozu's "syntax" as exemplified in his grammar, structure, editing, tempo, and scene, and there will be need to periodically refer to some of Richie's observations as this section progresses.

Ozu's camera is always at the level of a person seated in traditional fashion on the *tatami,* about three feet above the ground. "This traditional view is the view in repose, commanding a very limited field of vision. It is the attitude for watching, for listening, it is the position from which one sees the Noh, from which one partakes of the tea ceremony. It is the aesthetic attitude; it is the passive attitude."[15] The camera, except in the rarest of instances, never moves; in the later films there are no pans, no dollies, no zooms. Ozu's only filmic punctuation mark is the cut, and it is not the fast cut for impact or the juxtaposing cut for metaphorical meaning, but the pacing cut which denotes a steady, rhythmic succession of events.

One must not, however, mistake Ozu's "predictability" for superficiality or obviousness. It is not necessarily a virtue—nor necessarily a fault—if a director uses the same techniques repeatedly in film after film. Predictability in Ozu's films does not stem from a lack of initiative or originality, as it does in the films of some directors, but rather from the primitive concept of ritual in which repetition is preferred to variety.

It is possible to define Ozu's style by what it is not. Ozu is the filmmaker who doesn't do certain things. This rarefication of technique continued throughout Ozu's lifetime, from his first film to his last. As he got older there were more and more things he didn't do. This can be seen not only by comparing the early and later films *(I Was Born, But . . .* and *Good Morning),* but also by comparing the different phases of his later films. *Early Summer* (*Bakushu,* 1951) was made in about the middle of Ozu's later (postwar) period, yet it is markedly different from his last films made ten years later, *Late Autumn, The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family* (*Kohayagawa-ke no aki,* 1961), and *An Autumn Afternoon.* For example, in his last films Ozu completely forsook certain techniques he had used in *Early Summer:* (1) the tracking shot, of which

there are fifteen in *Early Summer,* (2) a close-up with emphasis on facial expression, such as an old man's pleasure in watching the theatre, (3) a physical action to express obvious emotion, such as the throwing down of a handkerchief in disgust, (4) a cut on motion, that is, a cut which breaks one action by an actor into two shots, (5) a cut between two different indoor settings without an outdoor "coda" pause, (6) use of chiaroscuro, non-"flat" lighting, although this is very rare even in early Ozu. *Early Summer* also contains techniques which Ozu did not completely discard but came to use less and less: (1) nonfrontal (90°) angles, (2) camera takes of relatively short duration, (3) scenes whose sole purpose was light comedy.

The purpose of this essay, however, is not to define Ozu's style by what he omitted, but by what was left after his unceasing prunings—his final style, which might be called a transcendental style.

FOLLOWING THE FISH

Before one can analyze the transcendental style in Ozu's films, one must make (or attempt to make) the crucial yet elusive distinction between transcendental art and the art of transcendental experience within Ozu's work. Do Ozu's films express the Transcendent, or do they express Ozu, Zen culture, and man's experience of the Transcendent?

The first, immediate answer must be: "both, of course." There is no static-free communication with the Holy, and any work which expresses the Transcendent must also express the personality and culture of its artist. Then comes the thorny problem of individual instances, of determining influences and effects. The distinction between transcendental art and the art of transcendental experience resolves into several incumbent questions: which influenced Ozu's art more? His personality,* Zen culture, or the Transcendent? And which critical definition of style is best suited to uncover that influence? The personal, cultural, or Eliade-Wölfflin (transcendental style)?

All three critical methods reveal something about Ozu's films, and none can be neglected. Each can best reveal its respective influence. But for every artist there is an appropriate priority of critical methods, an artist's

* A belated definition of "personality" may be helpful at this juncture. "Personality," as used in this essay, refers to those psychological characteristics which distinguish one person from another, such as his preoccupations, needs, likes, dislikes, idiosyncrasies. It does not refer to those subconscious, archetypal characteristics in which all men are similar.

personality may be a reflection of his surroundings, or vice versa. In Ozu's films it seems that his personality was enveloped by Zen culture, and that Zen culture was enveloped by a transcending reality, like the fish who ate the fish who ate the fish. And, tracing this sequence of influences, it is hoped one will arrive at the final unique influence on Ozu and his films.

OZU AND HIS PERSONALITY

The question of personality is not simply a matter of whether or not it is possible to detect Ozu's personality in his films. Obviously it is. The dilemmas and solutions of Ozu's films are also the dilemmas and solutions of his own life. Ozu never married, but stayed at home living with his aging mother. His films are often about the relationships of children to parents, the hard decisions of marriage, and the trauma of the family "breaking up." Following this critical emphasis, one writer has contended that the mother is stronger in Ozu's films because she was so in his own life.[16] As is often the case with film-makers, the age of Ozu's lead character usually corresponded to his own age, and as Ozu grew older his characters came more and more to embody the older traditional virtues of Japan. On the other hand, there were also many experiences in Ozu's life which he did not represent on film. (His experiences as an army sergeant and a newspaperman are not reflected in his films to any appreciable degree.)

It might be more helpful to phrase the question of Ozu's personality differently. To what extent was Ozu's personality unique, and to what extent was it representative of the Zen culture? Did Ozu subjugate his personality in the manner of the traditional Oriental artist, or were his films actually highly individualistic expressions? Post-Renaissance Western art, including motion pictures, has been structured, by and large, around the concept of personal expression—"the delusion," Coomaraswamy says, "that I am the doer"—whereas in traditional Oriental art "human individuality is not an end but only a means."[17] If Ozu was a "personal" director like, say, Fellini (that is, if he sought primarily to express his personality in his films), that would seem to place him in the tradition of Western individualistic art rather than traditional Oriental art.

Richie seems to ride both sides of the issue: on one hand he writes that "Ozu is not an intuitive artist, he is a master craftsman; for him, film is not expression but function,"[18] and on the other hand he states that Ozu's approach is "intuitive rather than analytic."[19] Questioned about the apparent contradiction of his statements Richie replied, "Ozu was a craftsman who always made his films the same way. He never

varied his way of making a fi lm, nor his way of editing one—a long and painful process. Now this means that he was a craftsman. But I don't think he ever thought of what all this *meant*—and in that regard I find him intuitive. He did what he felt like doing. Ozu would talk with you for hours about a kind of lens of a certain color, but if you asked about the meaning of anything or the idea behind his presented idea he would shut up. He wasn't interested. Ozu's inner self is there for all to see, but my point is that showing it was not one of his concerns."[20] And later, "I think that my riding both sides of the matter is correct and I think it is the only position to take in a non-dualistic culture."[21]

On closer examination one realizes that Richie's fence-straddling is unavoidable, and, as he says, proper. The personal versus cultural dilemma which so vexes Western critics would not have occurred to the traditional Oriental artist. Considered in the larger context of Zen culture, man and his surroundings are counterenveloping, just as are mind and body, content and form; any distinction between them is arbitrary. If Ozu's work is really steeped in Zen culture, as the next section maintains, then any study of the "individual" Yasujiro Ozu apart from traditional Zen values is meaningless. To compound the paradox one might say that Ozu's intuition was nonintuitive, that is, his instincts were formalistic. This may strike the Westerner as a meaningless contradiction, and it is a natural roadblock to any cross-cultural appreciation of Ozu's fi lms in particular or traditional Oriental art in general. Because Zen is a cultural phenomenon (that is, it occurs within a particular area among a particular number of people), it is possible to say that the Zen culture envelopes the individual personality, but none of these statements, including paradoxical epigrams like "Ozu's intuition was nonintuitive," have any meaning until one realizes that both personality and culture are enveloped by a transcending reality.

It is possible to detect Ozu's personal life and beliefs in his films, but this does not mean that the personality-oriented critical method is the best approach to his fi lms. The privileged information garnered from his private life may be irrelevant. If we happened to know a great deal about the private life of Zen artist Ma Yuan it would not explain his "one-corner" style of *sumi-e* painting; similarly, all the facts of Ozu's private life cannot explain his mysterious transcendental pauses. These elements are not derived from an individual personality.

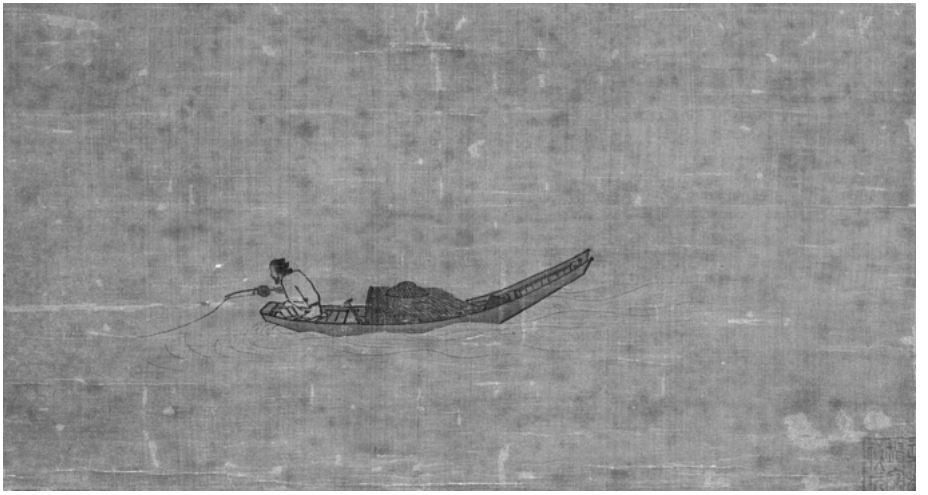
The personal interpretation of Ozu's fi lms has been encouraged by two misleading circumstances: one, that we simply happen to know much more about Ozu than we do about earlier traditional artists, and

two, that Ozu, unlike a Zen poet or painter, must use living human beings as his raw material. The characters on screen are experiencing life, and the critic, who naturally empathizes with their feelings, may conclude that their feelings are representative of the fi lm-maker and let the matter go at that. But the characters who are emoting on screen may be no more or less representative of the fi lm-maker than a nonhuman shot of a train or a building. The characters' individual feelings (sorrow, joy, introspection) are of passing importance: it is the surrounding form which gives them lasting value. Each person, each emotion is part of a larger form which is not an experience at all, but an expression, or rather, not an expression of the individual or cultural experience of transcendence, but an expression of the Transcendent itself.

Every indication is that Ozu did not attempt to explore his personality through the psychology of his characters. On the contrary, he made every attempt to drain his actors of any psychological nuance, any emotion. Ozu's actors report that he would force them to do the same scene twenty or thirty consecutive times until any hint of nuance or subtlety had been frozen into rote, automaton-like action, and only then would he approve the scene for fi nal shooting. Actors were forbidden to make even natural actions if these disturbed Ozu's composition. These circumstances, and many others like them, seem to indicate that Ozu was after a bigger prize than personal, psychological revelation, that he sought, like the traditional Oriental artist, to eliminate his personality in order to propose a thesis.

BEYOND PERSONALITY: OZU AND ZEN CULTURE

Much of Ozu's approach is derived from Japanese culture itself, and it is the traditional elements which make him the "most Japanese of all directors." The most appropriate analogy for the cultural elements in Ozu's fi lms is Zen art. Zen is not an organized religion with physical and political concerns like Shintoism or Christianity, but a way of living which has permeated the fabric of Japanese culture. The Allied Powers' Religious and Cultural Resources Division reported: "The type of conduct usually expressed by the words 'Japanese spirit' is essentially Zen in nature,"[22] a conclusion echoed by both Alan Watts[23] and Langdon Warner.[24] Zen is the quintessence of traditional Japanese art, an art which Ozu sought to introduce into cinema. In Japanese history the way of Zen came to predominate in certain arts—painting, gardening, the tea ceremony, poetry, archery, Noh drama, Judo, Kendo—and these



Ma Yuan, *Lone Fisherman,* the "one-corner style": "The blank sheet of paper is perceived only as paper, and remains as paper. Only by filling the paper does it become empty."

arts are the precedents for Ozu's fi lms. Tom Milne has written that Ozu's fi lms are structured like the haiku with its pauses and pregnant statements,[25] but the haiku, of course, is only one example of an attitude in all the Zen arts and in Ozu's films.

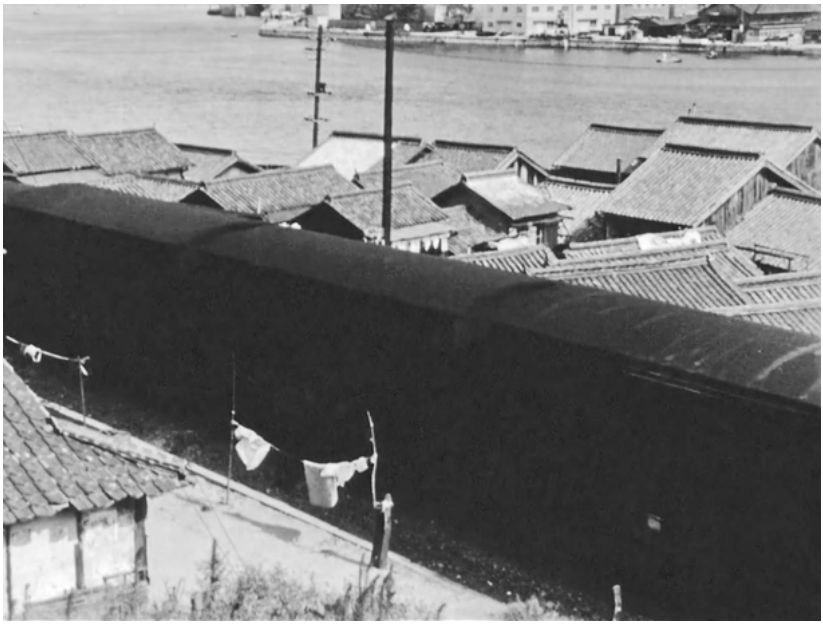
Perhaps the basic principle of Zen art is the first *koan* of Zen, *mu,* the concept of negation, emptiness, and void. Emptiness, silence, and stillness are positive elements in Zen art, and represent presence rather than the absence of something. "The blank sheet of paper is perceived only as paper, and remains as paper," Will Peterson writes. "Only by filling the paper does it become empty. Much in the same way the sound of the frog plopping into the still pond creates the silence in Basho's well-known haiku. The sound gives form to the silence—the emptiness."[26] *Mu* is the character used to refer to the spaces between the branches of a flower arrangement; the emptiness is an integral part of the form. Ma Yuan, Sung painter and originator of the "one-corner style," painted only one corner of the canvas, leaving the remainder blank. The emptiness, however, was a part of the painting and not just an unpainted background. The simple fi shing boat placed in one corner gives meaning to the whole space. In the same manner the stones in a Zen garden give meaning to the raked space, and the lines of a haiku give meaning to the unwritten transitions.

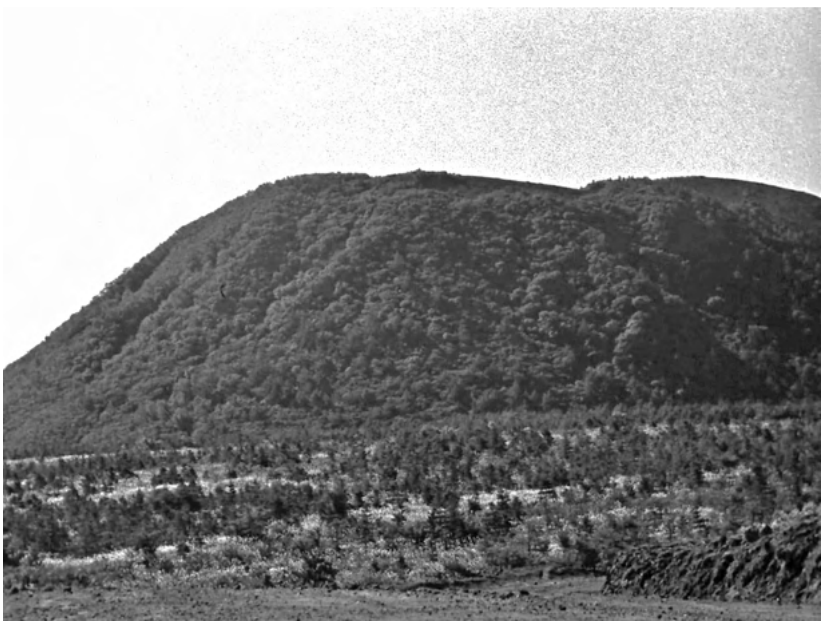
Like the traditional Zen artist, Ozu directs silences and voids. Silence and emptiness are active ingredients in Ozu's fi lms; characters respond to

them as if they were audible sounds and tangible objects. Although such responses are usually quite subtle, a rather obvious use of active silence occurs in *Early Summer:* Setsuko Hara has just told her parents of her intention to marry, a decision which displeases them. After a polite argument the parents, despondent, go upstairs. In the next shot the father is staring into the camera while in the background the mother does some busywork and speaks to him. She makes a trivial remark, and he replies, "Ah." She makes another remark, he again replies, "Ah." The mother leaves the room and Hara walks noiselessly through the background. The father again says, "Ah." The silence has become electric, much more meaningful than anything the mother could have said.

In Ozu's films it is also possible to detect a remnant of the thirteenth-century one-corner style. A static environment fills Ozu's frame while in one corner a distant action (boats, trains slowly moving, people conversing) occurs. In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (*Ochazuke no aji,* 1952) there is an obvious example of this: the husband has just left for a lengthy stay in South America. His wife, who had inexplicably left home several days earlier, did not come to the airport to see him off. As his plane departs Ozu holds it in the upper right-hand corner of the frame. The rest of the frame is empty, and the plane slowly vanishes from view. It is a "full" composition, and as in the one-corner paintings, the plane brings out the quality of the void.

But most of all, *mu* is expressed in Ozu's "codas." His films are structured between action and emptiness, between indoors and outdoors, between scene and coda. The conflicts are always explicated in indoors, usually in long dispassionate conversations. The settings may vary (home, office, bar, restaurant), but the story is rarely forwarded by anything but indoor conversations (and the one or two exceptions in each film are thematically crucial). These indoor discussions are set off by "codas": still-life scenes of outdoor Japanese life, empty streets and alleys, a passing train or boat, a distant mountain or lake. Richie has described Ozu's films as a combination of (1) long shots, (2) medium shots, (3) close-ups, in the usual sequence of 1–2–3–2–1.[27] The coda still-life shots are inserted between the long shots, thus linking the conversational indoor by outdoor still lifes. Each of the codas sets off an Ozu "paragraph," to use Richie's terminology. There are no chapters, only paragraphs and codas. The codas in Ozu's films fulfill the same purpose as the *mu* between the stones in the famous Ryōan-ji garden: "the emptiness is that of desertion. Man is implied, but is not present, and the resultant sensation is one of longing and loneliness."[28] In Western art one would naturally assume that





Ozu's codas: above, a train passing a clothesline in *Tokyo Story*; below, the mountain in *Late Autumn*. "One would naturally assume that the still-life codas are inserted to weight to the action, but for Ozu, as for Zen, it is the opposite: the action gives meaning to the still life."

the codas are inserted to give weight to the paragraphs, but for Ozu, as for Zen, it is precisely the opposite: the dialogue gives meaning to the silence, the action to the still life. Ozu is permeated with *mu;* it is the single character inscribed on his tomb at Engaku-ji.

"When life is empty," Watts writes, "with respect to the past, and aimless with respect to the future, the vacuum is filled with the present."[29] In Zen art the sense of the "infinitely expanded present" is nowhere stronger than in the art of tea *(cha-no-yu)*. The tea ceremony celebrates the present tense through a meticulously predetermined ritual. In the sixteenth century as many as one hundred rules for *cha-no-yu* were laid down, determining everything from the subjects to be discussed during tea to the depth of the lacquer on the tea caddy. Rather than occupy the mind, these minute rules free it, enabling it to think of nothing, to be timeless, or in the words of a famous Zenrin poem, to be "sitting quietly, doing nothing."

Similarly, Ozu's films portray the "aimless, self-sufficient eternal now" *(ekaksana)*. "His characters . . . are living in the *now,*" Richie writes, "and they have no history. . . . When a person dies in Ozu's world (which is often) he is merely and instantly *gone*. There are no ghosts in Ozu as there are in Resnais and Bergman. The past barely exists for Ozu."[30] "Nostalgia" in Ozu's films, such as the scene when the father in *An Autumn Afternoon* revisits the bar where the barmaid resembles his dead wife, is not so much a longing for the past in Western terms but is more likely an "expansion" of the present so familiar to Zen art. When Ozu focuses on a wall clock, watching the seconds tick futilely away, it is partially to contrast film time and psychological time, as both Milne and Richie suggest, but it is also to create the mood of total timelessness integral to Zen art. The clock is impotent; mechanical time does not affect those living in an eternal present. There is no "race against the clock." A shot of a clock serves the same purpose as, say, a shot of a vase; its movements are not those of time, but the imperceptible movements of the mind in contemplation. Ozu importantly includes the clock shots in his codas; time is part of the *mu,* the nothingness.

Ozu achieves the "eternal now" in the same manner as *cha-no-yu,* through ritual. Each possible event in an Ozu film can be reduced to a predetermined, limited, and precise number of shots. If the tea bowl is of a certain color or texture, a certain type of conversation will ensue; if an Ozu character is in a certain location, a certain type of conversation will ensue. In the home Ozu characters discuss domestic arrangements (finances, housework, what other family members are doing); at the office they make concrete arrangements (future meeting places and times); in a restaurant they reminisce and discuss social problems (marriage proposals, what other

The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice. Ozu's four locations: restaurant, office, home, and bar. "If an Ozu character is in a certain location, a certain type of conversation will ensue."

members of the family are doing); in a bar they reminisce and express disillusionment (the *après-guerre* generation, office life). These categorizations are not ironclad, but neither is the tea ceremony; they are products of what Zen calls "controlled accident."

In Zen painting the technique ritual evolved into an alphabet of brush strokes. There were a certain number of brush strokes used to represent natural objects; they were learned by rote, practiced piecemeal, and were meaningless until assembled. Similarly one may speak of Ozu's alphabet, a set of predetermined shots from which he would never depart. Just as a Zen painter would use the "crab claw" stroke to represent a bunch of pine needles, so Ozu would use a shot of a clothesline in the foreground and a moving train in the background to express the feeling of permanence within transience *(mono no aware)*. In traditional Oriental art these would be practiced to perfection; an artist would spend his life perfecting certain brush strokes, painting and repainting the same scene. Ozu was also a perfectionist; he spent his life perfecting a small repertoire of shots, filming and refilming the same story. The end product of a Zen painter's career could be a single painting; similarly, the end product of Ozu's career can be described as a single film.

In a Zen artistic alphabet—whether in painting, gardening, or the tea ceremony—the same letter is never repeated identically within one work. A difference, however minute, is always inserted between two items which may seem to be identical. This may be a variation of brush stroke in a calligraphic letter, or a slight deviation in parallel architectural structures. Even in such nearly indiscernible matters Ozu adheres to the tradition of Zen art. Although it is possible in film, unlike any other art, to have photographic identicality, Ozu repudiates it. When repeating the same letter of his filmic alphabet, say, a shot of Chishu Ryu walking down the street in front of his home, Ozu would film each letter/shot separately. To the unpracticed eye it may seem as if Ozu has reprinted one shot over and over, using it a dozen times in one film, but each shot is a separate entity and there is variety within seeming repetition.

Ritual in Oriental art is not structured around a single cathartic event (like the blinding of Oedipus, for instance), but is cyclic, with little rise and fall, revealing the timeless Oneness of man and nature. "Where European art naturally depicts a moment in time," Coomaraswamy writes, "an arrested action or an effect of light. Oriental art represents a continuous continuation."[31] The continuation is based on the infrastructure of ritual. A certain pattern of shots is repeatable within an Ozu paragraph, a certain pattern of Ozu paragraphs is repeatable

within an Ozu film, and a certain number of Ozu films are repeatable within an Ozu career. The ritual is not separate from the form, which is not separate from the content.

In Ozu's films, as in all traditional Oriental art, the form itself is the ritual which creates the eternal present *(ekaksana),* gives weight to the emptiness *(mu),* and makes it possible to evoke the *furyu,* the four basic untranslatable moods of Zen which are described thus by Watts:

> Where the mood of the moment is solitary and quiet it is called *sabi.* When the artist is feeling depressed or sad, and this peculiar emptiness of feeling catches a glimpse of something rather ordinary and unpretentious in its incredible "suchness," the mood is called *wabi.* When the moment evokes a more intense, nostalgic sadness connected with autumn and the vanishing away of the world, it is called *aware.* And when the vision is the hinting at an unknown never to be discovered, the mood is called *yugen.*[32]

Although each of the *furyu* are obviously present in Ozu's films, Richie writes that Ozu is primarily the artist of *mono no aware* for which he gives Tamako Niwa's translation, "sympathetic sadness": "the end eff ect of an Ozu fi lm is a kind of resigned sadness, a calm and knowing serenity which maintains despite the uncertainty of life and the things of this world."[33] Ozu's technique, Richie writes elsewhere, is saturated with *wabi* because of its poverty and "extraordinary restriction."[34] It is very diffi cult for the average Western viewer to appreciate the *aware* of Ozu's themes or the *wabi* of his technique, much less to distinguish between the moods of the *furyu.* The Japanese-English dictionary itself despairs of any attempt to defi ne or delimit the aesthetic twins of *sabi* and *wabi.* Simply because the Western viewer cannot make the distinctions between *sabi, wabi, aware,* and *yugen* in Ozu's films he should not mistakenly think that Ozu is after a single basic emotion, as is much of Western psychological realism. The codas of Ozu's fi lms are remarkably complex, and the diff erence between a still shot of a vase, a *tatami,* and Mount Fuji may mean the difference between *sabi, wabi,* and *aware.* When the still shot of the vase is fi rst shown in *Late Spring* it evokes *wabi,* but by the time that same shot is "repeated" later in the fi lm it also connotes both *aware* and *yugen.*

The fountainhead of Zen and Zen art is a fundamental unity of experience—"all things are of one Suchness." Any dichotomy between man and nature (which Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki defi nes as "all that constitutes what is commonly known as man's objective world"[35]) is false. When Yahweh set Adam over the Garden of Eden he set the West on a course that the East has never accepted. "I am Nature and Nature is me," Suzuki wrote. "Not mere participation in each other, but a fundamental identity

between the two."[36] Translated into Western terms this comes close to pantheism, a comparison Zen would not accept because pantheism involves an artificial conceptualization of a unity which is natural and spontaneous. The unity of man and nature finds pure expression in the Zen garden. When a Zen priest ceaselessly clips, prunes, weeds, and trains his garden "he is not interfering with Nature because he is Nature."[37] In its most reactionary form (at least to Western minds) this unity is expressed in the analogy that as the fish swims in the water and never wearies of it, so man lives in nature and should never tire of it.

The greatest conflict (and the greatest resulting disillusionment) in Ozu's films is not political, psychological, or domestic, but is, for want of a better term, "environmental." That the aged cannot communicate with the young, that the parents cannot communicate with their children, that the craftsmen cannot communicate with the office workers—these are all dimensions of the problem that the modern Japanese cannot communicate with his environment. During a disillusioning saké-drinking bout a character in *Late Autumn* says, "It is people who tend to complicate life. Life itself is very simple." This despair is reflected in a similar drinking scene in *Early Spring* in which a character says, "The world today isn't very interesting," and his friend replies, "That's the fate that is awaiting us. Just disillusionment and loneliness." These statements reflect a breakdown in the traditional attitude toward nature in Zen art. How can man complicate life? How can the fish complicate the water? This for Ozu, is the great threat of modernization: it threatens the traditional Oneness, and when that unity wobbles, the rest of the structures—home, office—come tumbling after. This real or potential disunity between man and nature has always been a theme of Japanese art but has gained a certain schizoid intensity since "modernization" in Japan. The affront of *après-guerre* Japanese youth (and it is extraordinarily mild in Ozu compared to younger directors like Hani and Oshima) against parents and political leaders is an extension of their affront against the traditional concepts of acceptance and "flowing."

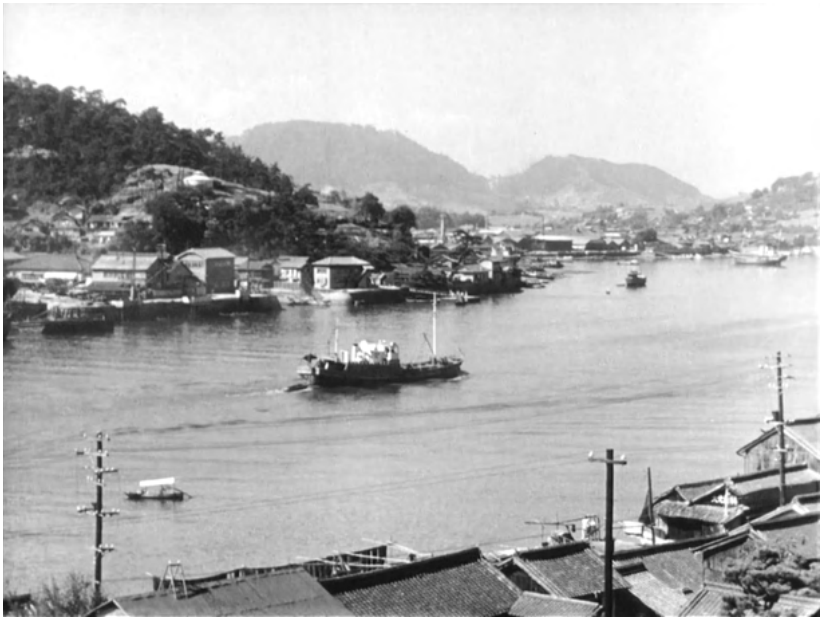
Ozu responds to the disunity in Japanese life by evoking the traditional verities of Zen art in a contemporary, cinematic context. He is naturally more predisposed to the older generation because they are closer to traditional culture and because time itself evokes *aware,* the mood of autumn. "I am somewhat more sympathetic with the old people than with the young," Ozu stated in 1958. "The theme of many recent movies tends to deny the values of the old generation and to approve of the erratic behavior of the young. But the old people are displeased by the aimless rebellion of the young and are apt to oppose them."[38] In the tradition of Zen art, Ozu does

not forge an artificial synthesis between the old and the young, man and nature, but situates these elements within the larger context of the *furyu* which affects and encompasses everything. The runaway, *après-guerre* daughter of *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku,* 1957) manifests the same "sympathetic sadness" which permeates her respectable, misunderstanding father. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* is one of the least successful of Ozu's later films because he breaks his rule of situating seeming conflicts within the larger context of the *furyu.* Ozu normally resolves the conflict between parent and child by demonstrating that, no matter what their personal differences are, both share a deep sense of *mono no aware.* In *Green Tea,* however, Ozu attempts to portray a change of heart, a conversion from coldness to *aware,* rather than, as in his other films, a gradual understanding that *aware* was always present. As a result, the wife's "conversion" is quite unconvincing and Ozu resorts to a rare use of gimmick (the husband's plane is forced to return because of bad weather) to make his point. The wife's "change of heart" violates the Zen belief that unity is always present, and that all man need do is become cognizant of it. There cannot be a "conversion" because that would imply that there had been a change—that where there once had been disunity there is now unity—which would violate the principle that there never had been a disunity. Ozu was probably conscious of the error of *Green Tea;* he never again attempted such a drastic change of character and once admitted that *Green Tea* was "not well made."[39]

Because of Ozu's normal emphasis on unity rather than disunity, on *aware* rather than conflict, he is not really the advocate of either the old or the young, but the advocate of traditional Oneness: "His films so faithfully reflect Japanese life that—more than any other director—Ozu is the spokesman for both the older and younger generations."[40]

The final shots of Ozu's films, like the codas, are reaffirmations of nature. These shots may depict something as traditional as a mountain, or they may incorporate such contemporary elements as a boat on a river, or a smokestack. These scenes are the final codas, the final silences and emptiness. Ozu does not eliminate the conflict between man and nature by plot maneuverings or psychological revelations, but by merging man and nature with Zen thought and life. He does not so much eliminate the conflict between man and nature as, you might say, transcend it.

Zen art and culture is an accurate metaphor for Ozu's films. Other precedents can be found for Ozu's techniques: the rote repetition of movement was a gag in Japanese silent comedy and became incorporated into Ozu's technique; and his stationary camera shots, Ozu once half-facetiously stated, were due to the fact that a dolly could not



The final coda for *Tokyo Story*: "The final codas of Ozu's films are reaffirmation of nature; they are the final silence and emptiness."

operate at such a low angle. And, of course, his "personality" also influenced his approach to film-making. But taken as a whole Ozu's techniques are so similar to traditional Zen methods that the influence is unmistakable, and one must consequently assume that Ozu's personality, like that of the traditional artist, is only valuable to the extent that it expresses his thesis. His personality, like those of his characters, merges with an enveloping sense of *mono no aware,* and—the ultimate achievement of Zen art—finally becomes undistinguishable from it.

BEYOND ZEN CULTURE: THE TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

Ozu instilled the virtues of Zen art into motion pictures and in the process he utilized certain elements which were not necessarily limited to Japanese culture, but which can also be found in France, Denmark, Italy, the United States, and wherever else artists try to express the Transcendent in motion pictures. These are the common qualities of transcendental style and take the form of three progressive steps. This section will attempt to extricate these steps from Ozu's films, and the next chapter,

on Bresson, will discuss their component parts and the possible effects on the viewer more precisely. One cannot analyze the transcendental style from the perspective of a single culture (e.g., Zen) or it might seem to be an exclusive product of that culture. One must study the steps of this style as used by different artists in different cultures to ascertain its truly universal qualities. One can extract the transcendental style from Zen culture but the test of its universality will rest on its use elsewhere.

The desire of Ozu, Bresson, and to lesser degrees, Dreyer and others to express the *aware,* ideal or ecstatic (not synonymous terms, but all transcendent) is formalized in the triad of transcendental style, and it is perhaps not coincidental that these steps correspond to the classic Zen aphorism: "When I began to study Zen, mountains were mountains; when I thought I understood Zen, mountains were not mountains; but when I came to full knowledge of Zen, mountains were again mountains." The steps of transcendental style are these:

1. *The everyday: a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living,* or what Ayfre quotes Jean Bazaine as calling *"le quotidien."*[41]

At one time such an approach would have been called "realism," but it is more accurately a stylization. The desire to strip life of all expression often bypasses the reality of day-to-day living which, after all, does have moments of genuine theater and melodrama. Given a selection of inflections, the choice is monotone; a choice of sounds, the choice is silence; a selection of actions, the choice is stillness—there is no question of "reality." It is obvious why a transcendental artist in cinema (the "realistic" medium) would choose such a representation of life: it prepares reality for the intrusion of the Transcendent, much in the way that *cha-no-yu* prepares tea drinking for any of the moods of the *furyu*. The everyday celebrates the bare threshold of existence, those banal occurrences which separate the living from the dead, the physical from the material, those occurrences which so many people equate with life itself. The everyday meticulously sets up the straw man of day-to-day reality (the illusion that the mountain is only a mountain *materially*), so that it may be knocked down later.

Many artists have used "realism" as a springboard for other interpretations of life, overlaying a seemingly realistic environment with fantasy, folk-myth, expressionism, and so forth. Carried to the extreme, this tendency to create an underminable reality results in the everyday. Most of these artificial "realities" are designed with built-in loopholes which the film-maker can conveniently slip through later in the film. For example,


3

The opening five shots of *An Autumn Afternoon*: "The everyday celebrates the bare threshold of existence; it meticulously sets up the straw man of day-to-day reality."

because the grim "realism" of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* bristles with volatile emotions it is not surprising later in the fi lm when those emotions pass the borderline into fantasy. This is not to fault Buñuel's fi lm, but only to point out that his prefantasy "realism" is not the everyday. The everyday attempts to close up all those loopholes; it rejects all the biased interpretations of reality, even if they are such conventionally acceptable "realistic" techniques as characterization, multiple point-of-view camerawork, telltale sound eff ects. In the everyday nothing is expressive, all is coldness.

In Ozu, the stylization is near complete. Every shot is from the same height, every composition static, every conversation monotone, every expression bland, every cut forthright and predictable. No action is intended as a comment on another, no event leads inexorably to the next. The high points of conventional drama, the beginning and the end, are neglected. The "action" usually occurs in the middle of a scene; a setting is established, there is an expectation that something will occur, a conversation takes place, a line or two seems to have some importance but the conversation passes over them, the discussion trails off unsatisfied and unfulfilled, the people exit, and the image draws to a close. By placing the action in the middle ground (Bresson uses this technique for as simple a matter as opening a door; in Boetticher it encompasses the whole story) the action is deprived of its cathartic meaning, set into the "flow" of life, and again stylized. Every aspect of Ozu's film-making—storyline, acting, camerawork, soundtrack—falls under the tight restriction of the everyday, and the exact techniques of this restriction, though perhaps already apparent, will be discussed in connection with Bresson's use of everyday.

If the everyday was an end in itself it would be a style rather than as a step within a style. As such the everyday artist would see life as totally deprived of meaning, expression, drama, or catharsis, as in Warhol's early films. But as part of the transcendental style, the everyday is clearly a prelude to the moment of redemption, when ordinary reality is transcended.

2. *Disparity: an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment which culminates in a decisive action;* what Jean Sémolué calls *"un moment décisif"* when writing of Bresson's films.[42]

This disparity is a growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality, and, if one were restricted to Freytag's triangle, it might be described as the inciting incident. This step casts suspicion on the nonemotional everyday; the viewer suspects that there might be more to life than day-to-day existence, that the mountain may in fact not be a mountain. This creates a schizoid reaction in the viewer; the first step negated his emotions, told him they were of no use, and yet in the second step he begins to feel that all is not right in this banal world. He is in a mood of expectation; he seeks direction as to what role his feelings will play.

Disparity is caused by the insertion of what Ayfre calls "human density" into the cold context of the everyday. "The illusion of the reality of transcendent values depends upon the presence of a minimum of reality of human values," Ayfre wrote. "The 'fabulous,' if it is to be anything more than an abstract pattern of allegories or meaningless juggling, needs a human density."[43] In films of transcendental style there is,

in this stage, an inexplicable outpouring of human feeling which can have no adequate receptacle. This overwhelming compassion seems *sui generis;* it comes suddenly and unexpectedly and is not derived from the empirically observed environment. If a human being can have true and tender feelings within an unfeeling environment, then there must necessarily be a disparity between man and environment. If the environment is unfeeling, where do man's feelings come from?

Examined more closely, however, this "human density" is actually a spiritual density. This boundless compassion is more than any human can bear and more than any human can receive. This compassion is marked by solemnity and suff ering; it is an extension of the holy agony. Such overwhelming compassion cannot come from the cold environment or the humane instinct, but comes only from touching the transcendent ground of being. It is a totally out-of-place emotion, a burden rather than a tool in dealing with an unfeeling environment. The "growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality" becomes an open rupture, and fi nally, in the moment of decisive action, there is an outburst of spiritual emotion totally inexplicable within the everyday.

During disparity the spectator watches agonizing human feelings and experiences on screen; there is no expression of the Transcendent. Instead, there is only a totally unresolved tension between a maximum of human expression and nonexpression. Disparity extends spiritual schizophrenia—that acute sense of two opposing worlds—to the viewer.

A potential disparity between man and nature underlies Ozu's films. He suggests that the fl ow of man and nature may be separate rather than unifi ed, which, within the context of his traditional structure, certainly does create a schizoid reaction. This disparity becomes obvious when Ozu juxtaposes similar codas after contrasting family scenes. A shot of a snow-capped mountain inserted after a discussion by several parents plainly suggests the unity to which they aspire, but the same shot inserted after a parent-child quarrel suggests that the traditional unity may have little meaning within the postwar family structure. The codas can be not only a positive statement on the unity of man and nature, but also a wry commentary on the lack of it.

For the most part, disparity in Ozu's fi lms is conveyed by a strange human density which seems inappropriate to the clinically observed environment, and which, at the moment of decisive action, reveals itself to be a spiritual weight. Throughout his fi lms there is an undercurrent of compassion which, although not overtly expressed, seems inherent in the treatment of the characters by each other and more importantly by their

director. The viewer senses that there are deep, untapped feelings just below the surface. Usually this "sense" of compassion is nothing obvious; it is not tied into dialogue or editorial camera techniques, but is a matter of camera nuance. Tadao Sato, a Japanese critic, points out one example of this: in *Late Spring* the aunt and her niece are seated in front of their home bidding farewell to a guest. Ozu shoots the scene in his conventional manner—a perpendicular single angle showing the ladies bowing and putting their hands on the *tatami.* But then the ladies suddenly break the timing and balance so basic to Ozu's technique and the upper parts of their bodies swing clumsily out of balance, one to the right, the other to the left. This is a trifling movement, one often seen in natural life, but in the context of Ozu's strict everyday it brings an unexpected flash of human density. "In the picture of strict geometrical balance," Sato writes, "it sometimes happens that the movement of a man is made to feel very fresh by letting us see the movement which delicately breaks the balance."[44]

In a similarly ambivalent manner Ozu simultaneously evokes both laughter at and sympathy for his characters. Even when he makes fun of his characters, as in the drinking scene in *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo monogatari,* 1953), Ozu also evokes sympathy for them. His unblinking camera impresses the viewer with its fairness, its willingness to watch all of a man's conduct, both ludicrous and noble, without comment. The director seems to have compassion for his characters, he respects even their most fatuous feelings, yet also seems to be an objective observer. The characters seem to be automatons, yet they also seem to have periodic, natural human gestures. The nagging sense of disparity grows and grows.

In this mild form disparity is often reflected by a thoroughgoing sense of irony. In films of transcendental style, irony is the temporary solution to living in a schizoid world. The principal characters take an attitude of detached awareness, find humor in the bad as well as the good, passing judgment on nothing. The characters treat life with irony and are in turn treated with irony by their directors. Ironic humor is obviously present in the films of Bresson, Dreyer, and Boetticher, but it is also present in the films of Ozu. In *Tokyo Story* the grandmother expresses the ironic mode perfectly when she says to her widowed daughter-in-law, "What a treat to sleep on my dead son's bed." But later in the same film she herself is treated with irony: the grandfather watches from a distance as the grandmother asks their young grandson what he will be when he grows up, but the grandson ignores her, running playfully away. In *An Autumn Afternoon* the ironical situations are reversed: first, two friends, Kawei and Hirayama, play a joke on a waitress (and

The irony of disparity in *Tokyo Story* (Chieko Higashiyama and Setsuko Hara): "What a treat to sleep on my dead son's bed."

the audience) by straightforwardly pretending that their third companion, Professor Horei, has suddenly died of too much lovemaking; later in the fi lm Kawei and Horei play a similar joke on Hirayama (and the audience) by pretending that the arrangements for his daughter's marriage have fallen through. The humor in each scene is malicious by normal standards,[45] but because Ozu's characters take an ironical attitude toward life, such jokes are passed off as light humor. Irony is Ozu's way to cope with disparity—in lieu of transcendence.

Ozu's use of character ambivalence and irony is similar to that of Czech director Milos Forman, and an interesting comparison can be drawn between their fi lms. Both perfected a form of light comedy which contrasted documentary "realism" with fl ashes of human density. In their comedies, disparity is refl ected by a tragicomic attitude toward character and a resultant irony. Their early fi lms, given cultural diff erences, were remarkably similar, but Ozu's later fi lms moved gradually out of the light comedy category and acquired a weight as yet unknown to Forman's work. This is because the later Ozu fi lms employ transcendental style: by changing superfi cial "realism" to the rigid everyday and by changing mild

disparity (character ambivalence, irony) into unexpected decisive action, Ozu transforms human density into spiritual density. Assuming that Forman and Ozu started from an analogous base in light comedy *(Black Peter* vis-à-vis *I Was Born, But . . .),* Ozu's evolution may be hypothesized thus: the twin influences of the age of postwar Westernization heightened the innate conflict between Zen culture and modernization in Ozu and forced him little by little to intensify his already schizoid style so that the differences could no longer be resolved but had to be transcended. The compassion of Ozu's later films is so overburdening and disparate that rapprochement cannot be achieved by laughter as in light comedy, but only by a deep spiritual awareness. (Milos Forman is still a young director, of course, although the surrealistic conclusion of *Firemen's Ball* suggests that his career will take a different course.)

Disparity, therefore, is a gradual process, each progressive step eating away at the solid veneer of everyday reality. At first, it is a "sense" of compassion which teases the viewer, making him believe that emotions are present but giving him no tangible proof. Finally, it is a *decisive action,* a totally bold call for emotion which dismisses any pretense of everyday reality. The decisive action breaks the everyday stylization; it is an incredible event within the banal reality which must by and large be taken on faith. In its most drastic form, as in Dreyer's *Ordet,* this decisive action is an actual miracle, the raising of the dead. In its less drastic forms, it is still somewhat miraculous: a nonobjective, emotional event within a factual, emotionless environment. The technical stops employed by the everyday are to varying degrees pulled out—the music soars, the characters emote. The everyday denigrated the viewer's emotions, showing they were of no use; disparity first titillates those emotions, suggesting that there might be a place for them, and then in the decisive action suddenly and inexplicably demands the viewer's full emotional output. How the viewer reacts to this demand by and large determines to what extent the final step of transcendental style, stasis, will be achieved.

The decisive actions in Ozu's films are less dramatic and less obvious than in the films of Bresson or Dreyer. In an Ozu film there are likely to be several preludial decisive actions before the culminant one. In *An Autumn Afternoon,* for example, each coda is a small decisive action—a burst of four-directional Western music demands an emotional output when there is nothing on the screen but a still-life view to receive it. In addition, there are three scenes in which the codas are combined with tears: the spinster daughter of a noodle-shop owner breaks down in tears when her father is brought home drunk, Hirayama's daughter

cries when she discovers that the young man of her choice is already married, and at the conclusion of the film Hirayama himself weeps silently after his daughter has been married. In each case the person weeps alone; it is not a public spectacle, but an outpouring of their deepest emotions. The weeping here, like Setsuko Hora's famous tears at the conclusion of *Tokyo Story,* is plausible but unexpected—the viewer has seemingly not been prepared for such an emotional outburst. In *An Autumn Afternoon* every other event has been accepted with complete stoicism; even when Kawei and Horei play their "malicious" joke on Hirayama, he only nods resignedly. Except in these rare, "decisive" moments irony and the everyday prevent any display of emotion.

Of the culminant decisive action, Hirayama's solitary weeping, Tom Milne writes, "Nothing, apparently, has prepared for the emotional depth of the last scene, yet it is a perfectly natural climax towards which the whole film has been moving."[46] Throughout *An Autumn Afternoon* Hirayama had been a paragon of stoicism; no disaster could perturb his hard exterior. His deeply engrained ironic attitude would let nothing affect him outwardly. So when "nothing"—and there is no immediate cause for his weeping—does so radically affect him, it is a decisive action. It is the final disparity in an environment which had been becoming more and more disparate. It demands commitment. If a viewer accepts that scene—if he finds it credible and meaningful—he accepts a good deal more. He accepts a philosophical construct which permits total disparity—deep, illogical, suprahuman feeling with a cold, unfeeling environment. In effect, he accepts a construct such as this: there exists a deep ground of compassion and awareness which man and nature can touch intermittently. This, of course, is the Transcendent.

But, as Milne realized, "something" did prepare the viewer for the final scene of *An Autumn Afternoon,* or else he would have rejected it outright. That "something" was the transcendental style which throughout the film was constructing a form—first in the everyday, then in the progressive degrees of disparity—which could assimilate a decisive action, make it credible, and transform it into stasis.

3. *Stasis: a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it.*

Stasis is the end product of transcendental style, a quiescent view of life in which the mountain is again a mountain. Step three may confront the ineffable, but its techniques are no more "mysterious" than steps one and two. There is a definite before and after, a period of disparity and a period of stasis, and between them a final moment of disparity,

The decisive action of *Tokyo Story*: Setsuko Hara bursts into tears. "Nothing, apparently, has prepared for the emotional depth of the last scene, yet it is a perfectly natural climax towards which the whole film has been moving."

decisive action, which triggers the expression of the Transcendent. The transcendental style itself is neither ineffable nor magical: every effect has a cause, and if the viewer experiences stasis it is with good reason.

The decisive action does not resolve disparity, but freezes it into stasis. To the transcending mind, man and nature may be perpetually locked in conflict, but they are paradoxically one and the same. In Ozu, as in Zen, stasis evokes the moods of the *furyu* and particularly *mono no aware*. Man is again one with nature, although not without sadness. "In this respect Nature is divine. Its 'irrationality' transcends human doubts or ambiguities, and in our submitting to it, or rather accepting it, we transcend ourselves."[47]

Complete stasis, or frozen motion, is the trademark of religious art in every culture. It establishes an image of a second reality which can stand beside the ordinary reality; it represents the Wholly Other. In Ozu, the image of stasis is represented by the final coda, a still-life view which connotes Oneness. It is the same restrictive view which began the film: the mountain has become a mountain again, but in an entirely different way. Perhaps the finest image of stasis in Ozu's films is the lengthy shot

of the vase in a darkened room near the end of *Late Spring*. The father and daughter are preparing to spend their last night under the same roof; she will soon be married. They calmly talk about what a nice day they had, as if it were any other day. The room is dark; the daughter asks a question of the father, but gets no answer. There is a shot of the father asleep, a shot of the daughter looking at him, a shot of the vase in the alcove and over it the sound of the father snoring. Then there is a shot of the daughter half-smiling, then a lengthy, ten-second shot of the vase again, and a return to the daughter now almost in tears, and a final return to the vase. The vase is stasis, a form which can accept deep, contradictory emotion and transform it into an expression of something unified, permanent, transcendent.

The decisive action—the miracle of the tears—has little meaning in itself but serves to prove the strength of the form. The transcendental style, like the vase, is a form which expresses something deeper than itself, the inner unity of all things. This is a difficult but absolutely crucial point; transcendental style is a form, not an experience. The purpose of transcendental style is not to get the viewer to share Hirayama's tears, but to purge those tears and integrate them into a larger form. This form, like the mass, can encompass many emotions, but it is expressive of something greater than those emotions. (I don't mean to drift into ineffability here, because I believe that this "purging of tears" is caused by solid, phenomenological reasons, but, again, I prefer to hold off that discussion until I can write from the wider perspective of Bresson's films.)

The everyday and disparity are experiential, however; they taunt and tease the spectator's emotions. But stasis is formalistic; it incorporates those emotions into a larger form. The everyday and disparity present an obstacle course for the emotions: they undermine the viewer's customarily rock-solid faith in his feelings, hopefully bringing him to the point where he is willing to accept and appreciate an idea of life in which all emotions, however contradictory, have no power in themselves but are only part of a universal form which expresses the inner unity of every phenomenon. Stasis, by showing a static, quiescent, organized scene, reinforces this newfound idea of life. If successful, stasis transforms empathy into aesthetic appreciation, experience into expression, emotions into form.

This distinction between form and experience is not pedantic, but fundamental: a form can express the Transcendent, an experience cannot.

The final five shots of *Late Autumn*: "Stasis presents the same restricted view which began the film: the mountain has become a mountain again, but in an entirely different way."

A form can express the common ground in which all things share. An experience can only express one man's reaction to that common ground. Both form and experience can lead to experience, however. This conundrum perhaps can be clarified by this sequence of possible events: a certain form (the mass, transcendental style) expresses the Transcendent. A viewer, perceiving and appreciating that form, undergoes the

experience of transcendence. He then seeks to evoke that same feeling in his friend. He tells his friend exactly how he felt; his friend is curious and faintly amused, but does not share the speaker's transcendent feelings. In order to successfully induce transcendence in his friend, the viewer would have had to transform his feelings into a form (as transcendental style does) in which his friend could perceive the Transcendent, and then experience transcendence. Therefore, it is possible in *An Autumn Afternoon* for Hirayama to experience transcendence on screen, and for the viewer in the theater to experience transcendence watching him, and both not be communicating any emotion, but only a simultaneous participation in a larger form.

Decisive actions and final stasis shots are not exclusive to transcendental style. Christ's healing of the disfigured man in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* and Simon's restoration of the peasant's amputated hand in Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert* are decisive actions very similar to the raising of the dead in *Ordet,* or Hirayama's tears in *An Autumn Afternoon.* Similarly, the concluding shots of Mizoguchi's *Sansho the Bailiff ,* his *Ugetsu monogatari,* and Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* correspond to the final stasis shots of Ozu and Bresson: a long pull-back from the central characters, a still view of natural surroundings, and the strong implication of the unity of all existence. But the transcendental style is not defined by any one of its elements; the techniques of decisive action and stasis can exist in any film. The use of stasis does not make Antonioni a transcendental artist any more than the use of the everyday by Warhol, mild disparity by Forman, or decisive action by Buñuel make them transcendental artists. They utilize parts of the transcendental style and profit by it, but they are not exclusively concerned with the Transcendent.

An Eliade-Wölffl in-inspired analysis of transcendental style in Ozu's films may seem very similar to a cultural analysis, primarily because Zen culture incorporates the idea of transcendence. But this method, which seeks to delineate universal forms of spiritual expression, does have certain advantages when confronting similar phenomena in different cultures, such as in the case of "frontality."

Tadao Sato, in his cultural analysis, points out that Ozu's characters often directly face into the camera. Even if a character were staring at a wall one foot away, Ozu would figuratively "remove" the wall in order to shoot the actor head-on. Sato attributes this to Ozu's traditional sense of decorum and courtesy: "The camera of Yasujiro Ozu behaves toward the characters with the attitude of the host toward the guests.

Conversely, the characters of Ozu's films behave themselves as if they were guests of the host."[48]

Considered as an aspect of transcendental style (first in everyday, then in stasis), however, frontality has obvious affinities with religious art in many cultures. Hieratic frontality is the characteristic of Byzantine iconography as well as primitive West African sculpture. Although Ozu used frontality to convey the gentility of traditional Japan, he more importantly used frontality the way religious artists have always used frontality: to inspire an I-Thou devotional attitude between the viewer and the work of art. The Wölfflin analysis seeks to define the roots and origins of form, and is therefore appropriate to transcendental style, which seeks to locate the roots of spiritual feeling.

TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE EAST AND WEST

One can only extract so much from culture—most characteristics of a work of art are inseparably linked to their culture. Transcendental style is a "way of liberation" from the terrestrial to the Other world, and consequently its origins are necessarily intrinsic to the particular culture from which it springs. Until "liberation," the influence of culture is pervasive.

Each artist must use the raw materials of his personality and culture. Yasujiro Ozu, in particular, seems totally bound by his culture. The Japanese make little attempt to separate Ozu from his culture; they by and large consider his films only as "entertainments." And with good reason—the point at which Zen style stops and transcendental style begins is almost indiscernible in Ozu's films. It is not possible to extrapolate the transcendental style from within a totally Japanese perspective; one needs several cultural perspectives. By demonstrating how the three steps of transcendental style function in the West (in Bresson's films), it is possible not only to separate the transcendental style from Zen culture, but also to show the unity of the style. The differences between Ozu and Bresson are personal and cultural, their similarities are stylistic, but until the moment of transcendental stasis, the personal and cultural differences are all-important. If stasis is not achieved there can be no proper use of the Eliade-Wölfflin method. Without stasis, there is no expression of the Transcendent, and without expression of the Transcendent, there can be no fundamental interrelation between cultures, and without interrelation there can be no "universal form of representation."

Although Ozu and Bresson are the exemplary directors of transcendental style, although they both employ an everyday-disparity-stasis

progression, their films are not identical but as different as the East from the West. The trappings of the Transcendent, prior to stasis, are different East and West, and Ozu and Bresson reflect these differences.

Christopher Dawson distinguishes between the cultural trappings of the Transcendent East and West:

> Western philosophy started with the Hellenic conception of Nature. Its raison d'être was to explain and rationalize nature, and God was ultimately brought in as the key-stone of the philosophic edifice—as the First Cause or the Prime Mover. Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, started with the principle of Transcendent Being and then attempted to explain the world, or the existence of relative conditional existences, in terms of the absolute.[49]

Rudolf Otto divided these two varieties of transcendental expression into "The Way of Unifying Vision" and "The Way of Introspection."[50] The West tended to conceive of nature as an opponent, or, at best, a reluctant partner who had to be subdued, overcome and forcibly unified with man, most often through symbolic acts. The introspective way of the East sought nature within man, thus eliminating the classic dichotomies of Western thought: man versus nature, body versus soul. The East sought the Transcendent within the world; the West, apart from it. But whenever there is an expression of the Transcendent (and an accompanying transcendental experience), whether in Śankara or Eckhart, these differences are totally obscured: The Way of Unifying Vision leads to introspection and the Way of Introspection leads to Unifying Vision. This fusion is the necessary condition of mysticism; it engenders a common transcendental style in the East as well as the West, in film as well as all the arts.

The difference between transcendental expression East and West is the difference between *satori* and conversion: "*Satori* (enlightenment) is knowing the world as it really is; not, as some Christians believe conversion to be, something descending from on high that changes the world."[51] *Satori* is a single flash of awareness, but conversion is dipartite: it includes crucifixion and resurrection, a bloody forsaking of the ego and body, and an incorporeal entrance into glory. "Crucifixion has no meaning whatsoever unless it is followed by resurrection," Suzuki writes. "It is different with enlightenment *(satori)*, for it instantly transforms the earth itself into a Pure Land."[52] The difference between transcendental expression East and West affects the filmic transcendental style through its disparity.

The disparity in Ozu's films is primarily internal: man cannot find nature within himself. The disparity in Bresson's films is primarily external: man cannot live harmoniously with his hostile environment. In

Ozu, there are no futile protests against the frailty of the body and the hostility of the environment, as in Bresson. In Bresson, there is no resigned acceptance of environment, as in Ozu.

The decisive action in Ozu's films is a communal event between the members of a family or neighborhood. The decisive action in Bresson's films is limited to a lonely figure pitted against a hostile environment. Bresson stands in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the single redeemer: Moses, Christ, the priests, saints, and mystics who each in his own life righted man with the world. Ozu does not structure his films around a specific Christ or a specific Calvary. In Ozu's films a number of characters can participate in the Transcendent through a number of decisive actions.

The differences between Ozu and Bresson are unified in stasis, the culmination of transcendental style. The Wholly Other, once perceived, cannot be limited by culture.

II. Bresson

The films of Robert Bresson exemplify the transcendental style in the West, but, unlike Ozu's, are estranged from their culture and are financially unsuccessful. In a medium which has been primarily intuitive, individualized, and humanistic, Bresson's work is anachronistically nonintuitive, impersonal, and iconographic.

The transcendental style in Bresson's films has not been unchronicled. Amédée Ayfre, André Bazin, and Susan Sontag have all written perceptive analyses of Bresson's "Jansenist direction," "phenomenology of salvation and grace," and his "spiritual style." The qualities of transcendental style have also been chronicled by Bresson himself. Bresson is a rarity among film-makers: he apparently knows exactly what he does and why he does it. The many statements Bresson has made in interviews and discussions, properly arranged, would constitute an accurate analysis of his films (a statement which can be made of no other film-maker to my knowledge), and any study of Bresson must take into account his astute self-criticism.

Bresson's output has been meager: nine films in twenty-seven years. Bresson's career, like Ozu's, has been one of refinement, but, unlike Ozu, he served no lengthy apprenticeship. His first film, *Les Affaires publiques* (1934), has apparently been "lost," but his second, *Les Anges du péché* (1943), displayed what one critic called a "vision almost mature."[1] After *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1944), a film which found Bresson somewhat at odds with his material, Bresson entered

Robert Bresson.

into a cycle of fi lms which present the transcendental style at its purest. The four fi lms of the prison cycle deal with the questions of freedom and imprisonment, or, in theological terms, of free will and predestination. "All of Bresson's fi lms have a common theme: the meaning of confi nement and liberty," Susan Sontag writes. "The imagery of the religious vocation and of crime are used jointly. Both lead to 'the cell.'"[2] All of Bresson's prison cycle fi lms concern spiritual release: in *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Le Journal d'un curé de campagne,* 1951) this release occurs within the confi nes of a religious order; in *A Man Escaped* (*Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé,* 1956) it concurs with escape from prison; in *Pickpocket* (*Pickpocket,* 1959) it concurs with imprisonment;

in *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (*Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1962) it occurs both within the confines of religious belief and a physical prison. Bresson's latest three films—*Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), *Mouchette* (1967), and *Une Femme douce* (1969)—have explored and expanded some of his traditional themes, but do not as yet seem (it may be too early to tell) to have achieved the resolution of the prison cycle.

Bresson's prison cycle provides an excellent opportunity to study the transcendental style in depth for several reasons: one, because the prison metaphor is endemic to certain theological questions; two, because Bresson's statements clear up much of the ambiguity in which critics are often forced to operate; and three, because there are few cultural elements intermingled with transcendental style in his films. In Ozu's films the transcendental style had to be extricated from the culture; in Bresson's films this has already happened to a large degree: Bresson is alienated from his contemporary culture.

Like Ozu, Bresson is a formalist: "A film is not a spectacle, it is in the first place a style."[3] Bresson has a rigid, predictable style which varies little from film to film, subject to subject. The content has little effect on his form. Bresson applies the same ascetic style to such "appropriate" subjects as the suffering priest in *Diary of a Country Priest* as he does to such "inappropriate" subjects as the ballroom sequences in *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* and the love-making sequence in *Une Femme douce*. In discussing how accidents on the set can affect a director's style, Raymond Durgnat remarked, "It's no exaggeration to say that such stylists as Dreyer and Bresson would imperturbably maintain their characteristic styles if the entire cast suddenly turned up in pimples and wooden legs."[4]

Spiritual sentiments have often led to formalism. The liturgy, mass, hymns, hagiolatry, prayers, and incantations are all formalistic methods designed to express the Transcendent. Form, as was stated earlier, has the unique ability to express the Transcendent repeatedly for large and varied numbers of people. Bresson's statement on his art is also applicable to religious forms and rituals: "The subject of a film is only a pretext. Form much more than content touches a viewer and elevates him."[5]

Susan Sontag has gone so far as to say that Bresson's form "*is* what he wants to say,"[6] a statement which is somewhat ambiguous because when a work of art is successful the content is indiscernible from the form. It would be more helpful to say that in Bresson's films (and in transcendental style) the form is the *operative* element—it "does the work." The subject matter becomes the vehicle (the "pretext") through which the form operates. The subject matter is not negligible; Bresson has chosen his sub-

ject very carefully, as the term "prison cycle" indicates. But in transcendental style the form *must* be the operative element, and for a very simple reason: form is the universal element whereas the subject matter is necessarily parochial, having been determined by the particular culture from which it springs. And if a work of art is to be truly transcendent (above *any* culture), it must rely on its universal elements. Appropriately, Bresson has set his priorities straight: "I am more occupied with the special language of the cinema than with the subject of my films."[7]

Both Ozu and Bresson are formalists in the traditional religious manner; they use form as the primary method of inducing belief. This makes the viewer an active participant in the creative process—he must react contextually to the form. Religious formalism demands a precise knowledge of audience psychology; the fi lm-maker must know, shot for shot, how the spectator will react. "I attach enormous importance to form. Enormous. And I believe that the form leads to the rhythm. Now the rhythms are all powerful. Access to the audience is before everything else a matter of rhythm."[8]

THE TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE: THE EVERYDAY

The everyday in films has precedents in religious art; it is what one Byzantine scholar calls "surface-aesthetics."[9] A fanatical attention to minute detail is evident in Chinese porcelain, Islamic carpets, and Byzantine architecture (*belopoeika* and *thaumatopoike*). In the third-century Alexandrian School the study of Scripture became a matter of minute detail; the Alexandrine exegetes believed that mystic meanings could only be reached through concentration on each detail of the text.

In fi lm, "surface-aesthetics" is the everyday, and is practiced by Bresson: "There is a nice quote from Leonardo da Vinci which goes something like this: 'Think about the surface of the work. Above all think about the surface.'"[10] Cinematic attention to the surface creates a documentary or quasi-documentary approach. Concerning *A Man Escaped,* Bresson told a reporter: "I really wish that it would almost be a documentary. I have kept a tone bordering upon the documentary in order to conserve this aspect of truth all the time."[11] A screen title to *A Man Escaped* reads, "This story actually happened. I set it down without embellishments." Similarly a title at the beginning of *The Trial of Joan of Arc* reads, "These are the authentic texts." Like the Alexandrine exegetes Bresson believes, "The supernatural in fi lm is only the real rendered more precise. Real things seen close up."[12]

By taking all fact as reality, each fact with neither significance or connotation, Bresson creates a surface of reality. The "surface" is achieved, writes Ayfre, through "a very precise choice of details, objects and accessories; through gestures charged with an extremely solid reality."[13] Bresson's "reality" is a celebration of the trivial: small sounds, a door creaking, a bird chirping, a wheel turning, static views, ordinary scenery, blank faces. He uses every *obvious* documentary method: actual locations—Fort Monluc in *A Man Escaped* and the Gare de Lyon in *Pickpocket*—nonactors, and "live" sound. Yet there is no desire to capture the documentary "truth" of an event (the *cinéma-vérité*), only the surface. Bresson documents the surfaces of reality.

Bresson's everyday stylization consists of elimination rather than addition or assimilation. Bresson ruthlessly strips action of its significance: he regards a scene in terms of its fewest possibilities. A seeming trivial anecdote may illustrate this: while shooting a scene in *Diary of a Country Priest* Bresson instructed an assistant to have a man without a hat walk through the background of the scene. When, a short time later, the assistant told Bresson that the bareheaded man was ready, Bresson corrected him saying that he didn't want a bareheaded man, but a man without a hat.[14] Bresson defi nes reality by what Aristotle called "privation," by the qualities that an objects lacks yet has potential for. Water, for example, is defi ned as potential steam. In Bresson's fi lms the bareheaded man is potentially a man with a hat, and the everyday is potentially stasis. A reality defi ned by privation is as desolate and without signifi cance as one defined by nihilism, but it is also predicated upon a change. To use a scriptural metaphor, a privated universe groaneth and travaileth for its potential.

Bresson admits that the everyday is a sham: "I want to and, indeed, do make myself as much of a realist as possible, using only the raw material taken from real life. But I end up with a fi nal realism that is not simply 'realism.'"[15] The realistic surface is just that—a surface—and the raw material taken from real life is the raw material of the Transcendent.

Bresson's use of the everyday is not derived from a concern for "real life," but from an opposition to the contrived, dramatic events which pass for real life in movies. These emotional constructs—plot, acting, camerawork, editing, music—are "screens." "There are too many things that interpose themselves. There are screens."[16] Screens prevent the viewer from seeing through the surface reality to the supernatural; they suppose that the external reality is self-suffi cient.

This is why Bresson's work seems so perverse to the uninitiated viewer: Bresson despises what the moviegoer likes best. His fi lms are

The everyday in *A Man Escaped*: "The supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise," Bresson says. "Real things seen close up."

"cold" and "dull"; they lack the vicarious excitement usually associated with the movies. Bresson, Sontag writes, "is pledged to ward off the easy pleasures of physical beauty and artifice for a pleasure which is more permanent, more edifying, more sincere"[17]—and the average moviegoer is unlikely to relinquish these "easy pleasures" easily. What are the "screens" and "easy pleasures" and how does Bresson ward them off?

Plot

Like Ozu, Bresson has an antipathy toward plot: "I try more and more in my films to suppress what people call plot. Plot is a novelist's trick."[18] The plot "screen" establishes a simple, facile relationship between the viewer and event: when a spectator empathizes with an action (the hero is in danger), he can later feel smug in its resolution (the hero is saved). The viewer feels that he himself has a direct contact with the workings of life, and that it is in some manner under his control. The viewer may not know how the plot will turn out (whether the hero will be saved or not), but he knows that whatever happens the plot resolution will be a direct reaction to his feelings.

In Bresson's films the viewer's feelings have no effect on the outcome. *A Man Escaped* would seem of all Bresson's films the most plot-oriented; it is about a prison break. But the title dispenses with any possibility of suspense—*Un Condamné à mort s'est echappé* (a man condemned to death has escaped). In *The Trial of Joan of Arc* the viewer, of course, knows the ending, but in case of any doubt the English guard repeatedly reiterates the fact: "She will die." "She must burn." The events are predestined, beyond the viewer's control and beyond—seemingly—Bresson's.

By using plot to evoke audience empathy, a dramatist limits the ways in which he can manipulate his audience. Even if he toys with the plot, confusing the viewer's emotions, he nonetheless restricts the result to the emotional level. "As far as I can I eliminate anything which may distract from the interior drama. For me, the cinema is an exploration within. Within the mind, the camera can do anything."[19] The internal drama is in the mind, Bresson seems to say, and emotional involvement with an external plot "distracts" from it. (There is emotional involvement with Bresson's films, but it is the emotional involvement which follows recognition of form.)

Bresson's films, of course, are not entirely devoid of "plot"; each has a succession of events which have a rise and fall, a tension and relaxation,

however slight. By the term "drama," however, Bresson does not mean simply the manipulation of events, but the appeal to the emotions through the manipulation of events. This sort of drama is something imposed on fi lms; it is not endemic to the cinematic form: "Dramatic stories should be thrown out. They have nothing whatsoever to do with cinema. It seems to me that when one tries to do something dramatic with fi lm, one is like a man who tries to hammer with a saw. Film would have been marvelous if there hadn't been dramatic art to get in the way."[20]

Acting

Bresson's most vehement denunciations are reserved for acting: "It is for theater, a bastard art."[21] The acting process is one of simplification; the actor modifi es his personal, unfathomable complexities into relatively simple, demonstrable characteristics. "An actor, even (and above all) a talented actor gives us too simple an image of a human being, and therefore a false image."[22] "We are complex. And what the actor projects is not complex."[23]

An actor is primarily concerned with the character of the man he portrays. Bresson is concerned with how he can use that actor to convey a reality which is not limited to any one character. The actor's most convenient approach to a character is psychology, and Bresson despises psychology: "I do not like psychology and I try to avoid it."[24] Psychological acting humanizes the spiritual, "good" psychological acting even more so than "poor" psychological acting. Bresson, Bazin pointed out, is "concerned not with the psychology but with the physiology of existence."[25]

Psychological acting is the easiest and most appealing of all the screens, and therefore Bresson must work the hardest to avoid it. If not properly restrained an actor will exert a creative force in a film—and in a Bresson fi lm, Bresson is the only one who does the creating. "You cannot be inside an actor. It is he who creates, it is not you."[26]

In order to reduce acting to physiology, Bresson carefully instructs his actors in nonexpressiveness. He forces the actor to sublimate his personality, to act in an automatic manner: "It is not so much a question of doing 'nothing' as some people have said. It is rather a question of performing without being aware of oneself, of not controlling oneself. Experience has proved to me that when I was the most 'automatic' in my work, I was the most moving."[27]

Bresson's treatment of actors is remarkably similar to Ozu's, and for the same reasons.* Both strove to eliminate any expression from the actor's performance. Neither would give the actor "hints" or explain the emotions that the actor should convey, but would give only precise, physical instructions: at what angle to hold the head, when and how far to turn the wrist, and so forth. Both used repeated rehearsals to "wear down" any ingrained or intractable self-expression, gradually transforming fresh movement into rote action, expressive intonation into bland monotone. Bresson's instructions to Roland Monod, the pastor in *A Man Escaped,* explain both the method and rationale behind this theory of acting: "Forget about tone and meaning. Don't think about what you're saying; just speak the words automatically. When someone talks, he isn't thinking about the words he uses, or even about what he wants to say. Only concerned with what he is saying, he just lets the words come out, simply and directly. When you are reading, your eye just strings together black words on white paper, set out quite neutrally on the page. It's only *after* you have read the words that you begin to dress up the simple sense of the phrases with intonation and meaning—that you interpret them. The film actor should content himself with *saying* his lines. He should not allow himself to show that he already understands them. Play nothing, explain nothing. A text should be spoken as Dinu Lipatti plays Bach. His wonderful technique simply releases the notes; understanding and emotion come later."[28]

Camerawork

A tracking shot is a moral judgment, Jean-Luc Godard once remarked, and so, for that matter, is any camera shot. Any possible shot—high angle, close-up, pan—conveys a certain attitude toward a character, a "screen" which simplifies and interprets the character. Camera angles and pictorial composition, like music, are extremely insidious screens; they can undermine a scene without the viewer's being aware of it. A slow zoom-out or a vertical composition can substantially alter the meaning of the action within a scene.

* Compare, for example, Ozu's statement about *Late Autumn* with Bresson's statements about drama and acting. "It's very easy," Ozu said, "to show emotion in drama: the actors cry or laugh and this conveys sad or happy feelings to the audience. But this is mere explanation. Can we really portray a man's personality and dignity by appealing to emotions? I want to make people feel what life is like without delineating dramatic ups and downs" ("Ozu on Ozu: The Talkies," *Cinema* 6, no. 1 [1970], p. 5).

Bresson strips the camera of its editorial powers by limiting it to one angle, one basic composition. "I change camera angles rarely. A person is not the same person if he is seen from an angle which varies greatly from the others."[29] Like Ozu, Bresson shoots his scenes from one unvarying height; unlike Ozu, who prefers the seated *tatami* position, Bresson places the camera at the chest level of a standing person. As in Ozu's films, the composition is primarily frontal with at least one character facing the camera, seeming caught between the audience and his environment. Again and again, the static, well-composed environment acts as a frame for the action: a character enters the frame, performs an action, and exits.

Bresson's static camerawork nullifies the camera's editorial prerogatives. When each action is handled in essentially the same nonexpressive manner, the viewer no longer looks to the angle and composition for "clues" to the action. Like all of Bresson's everyday techniques, his camerawork postpones emotional involvement; at this stage the viewer "accepts" Bresson's static compositions, yet is unable to understand their full purpose.

Similarly, Bresson avoids the self-serving "beautiful" image. "Painting taught me to make not beautiful images but necessary ones."[30] The beautiful image, whether attractive like *Elvira Madigan,* or gross like *Fellini Satyricon,* draws attention to itself and away from the inner drama. The beautiful image can be a screen between the spectator and the event—the pictorial images of *Adalen 31* tell the viewer more about Widenberg's idea of revolution than all his rhetoric. Bresson, on the other hand, "flattens" his images: "If you take a steam iron to your image, flattening it out, suppressing all expression by mimetism and gestures, and you put that image next to an image of the same kind, all of a sudden that image may have a violent effect on another one and both take on another appearance."[31] André Bazin pointed out that the pictorial sumptuousness of Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest*—the rabbit hunts, the misty air—is most vividly conveyed in Renoir's films.[32] Bresson, in his adaption of Bernanos's novel, rejected the obvious interpretation, emphasizing instead the cold factuality of the priest's environment.

Editing

Bresson's films are edited for neither emotional climax nor editorial information. Climax cutting, whether in service of a plot or self-sufficient, elicits the artificial sort of emotional involvement which Bresson studiously avoids; metaphorical editing, whether subtle or obvious, is

an editorial rather than an emotional screen, a totally artificial argument imposed from without by the film-maker. Both "interpret" the action of screen.

Like Ozu, Bresson prefers the regular, unostentatious cut. He once described *A Man Escaped* as "one long sequence" in which each shot, each event, led only to the next.[33] Bresson's editing does not pose any artificial comparisons; each shot reflects only its own surface. "The form in Bresson's films," Susan Sontag writes, "is anti-dramatic, though strongly linear. Scenes are cut short, set end to end without obvious emphasis. This method of constructing the story is most rigorously observed in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. The film is composed of static, medium shots of people talking; the scenes are the inexorable sequence of Joan's interrogations. The principle of eliding anecdotal material is here carried to its extreme. There are no interludes of any sort. It is a very deadpan construction which puts a sharp brake on emotional involvement."[34]

The Soundtrack

Music and sound effects are the filmmaker's most subtle tools—the viewer is seldom aware of the extent to which his feelings are being manipulated by the soundtrack. The soft beat of drums or the blare of Mexicali trumpets give the spectator a textbook of information. "The ear is more creative than the eye. If I can replace a set by a sound I prefer the sound. This gives freedom to the imagination of the public. This phenomenon helps you suggest things rather than having to show them."[35]

In the everyday Bresson uses contrapuntal sound not for editorializing, but to reinforce the cold reality. The soundtrack consists primarily of natural sounds: wheels creaking, birds chirping, wind howling. These minute sounds can create a sense of everyday life that the camera cannot. These "close-up" sounds are like the close-up shots of Michel's hands in *Pickpocket:* they establish a great concern for the minutiae of life. And because the ear is more creative than the eye, they create this concern best when the camera is at a distance from its subject.

Bresson, keenly aware of the emotional and editorial potential of music, does not use it at all in the everyday, but instead restricts himself to common, "documentary" sounds. Almost any music artificially induced into the everyday would be a screen; every piece of music carries with it certain emotional/editorial intonations which would interpret the scene. (Bresson, however, does use music as Ozu does, in the decisive action and in stasis. When Bresson uses music as decisive action,

like the use of Mozart's Mass in C Minor in *A Man Escaped,* it is not editorializing but like Ozu's coda music is a blast of emotional music within a cold context.)

In the everyday Bresson replaces the "screens" with a form. By drawing attention to itself, the everyday stylization annuls the viewer's natural desire to participate vicariously in the action on screen. Everyday is not a case of making a viewer see life in a certain way, but rather preventing him from seeing it as he is accustomed to. The viewer desires to be "distracted" (in Bresson's terms), and will go to great lengths to find a screen which will allow him to interpret the action in a conventional manner. The viewer does not want to confront the Wholly Other or a form which expresses it.

The everyday blocks the emotional and intellectual exits, preparing the viewer for the moment when he must face the Unknown. The intractable form of the everyday will not allow the viewer to apply his natural interpretive devices. The viewer becomes aware that his feelings are being spurned; he is not called upon, as in most fi lms, to make either intellectual or emotional judgments on what he sees. His feelings have neither place nor purpose in the schema of the everyday. "The eff ect of the spectator being aware of the form is to elongate or retard the emotions."[36]

But moviegoers love emotional constructs, they enjoy emotional involvement with artifi cial screens, and one can only sympathize with the viewer who storms out of *Diary of a Country Priest* for the same reason he storms out of Warhol's *Sleep*—it's just too "boring." Although the irate viewer's attitude is understandable, his perception is poor. He has mistaken the everyday for transcendental style, and has only seen a fraction of the film. The viewer who stays recognizes that there is more than the everyday, that Bresson has put a strangely suspicious quality into his day-to-day living. The viewer's emotions have been superficially rejected, but they have been simultaneously tantalized by the disparity.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE: DISPARITY

One of the dangers of the everyday is that it may become a screen in itself, a style rather than a stylization, an end rather than a means. The everyday eliminates the obvious emotional constructs but tacitly posits a rational one: that the world is predictable, ordered, cold. Disparity undermines the rational construct.

Disparity injects a "human density" into the unfeeling everyday, an unnatural density which grows and grows until, at the moment of deci-

sive action, it reveals itself to be a spiritual density. In the initial steps of disparity Ozu and Bresson use different techniques to suggest a suspicious and emotional quality in the cold environment. Because Ozu's everyday stylization is more "polite" in the traditional Zen manner than Bresson's, Ozu can use what Sato called a "break in the geometrical balance" to create disparity. Ozu also makes more use of character ambivalence than Bresson does (possibly because of Ozu's background in light comedy), but both employ irony. Bresson, unlike Ozu, uses "doubling," an overemphasis of the everyday, to create disparity. Both, however, create disparity by giving their characters a sense of something deeper than themselves and their environment, a sense which culminates in the decisive action. All the techniques of disparity cast suspicion on everyday reality and suggest a need, although not a place, for emotion.

Bresson overemphasizes the everyday through what Susan Sontag calls "doubling." Through the use of repeated action and pleonastic dialogue Bresson "doubles" (or even "triples") the action, making a single event happen several times in different ways. For example, in *Pickpocket* Michel makes a daily entry into his diary. Bresson first shows the entry being written into the diary, then he has Michel read the entry over the soundtrack, "I sat in the lobby of one of the great banks of Paris." Then Bresson shows Michel actually going into one of the great banks of Paris and sitting in the lobby. The viewer has experienced the same event in three ways: through the printed word, the spoken word, and the visual action.

Bresson's favorite "doubling" technique is interior narration. In *Diary of a Country Priest, A Man Escaped,* and *Pickpocket* the main character narrates the on-screen action in a deadpan narration which is often only an audio replay of what the viewer has already witnessed. In *Diary of a Country Priest* the priest calls anxiously on the Vicar of Torcy. The housekeeper answers, obviously informing the priest that the vicar is not at home. The door closes and the priest leans dejectedly against it. When we hear the priest's voice, "I was so disappointed, I had to lean against the door." In *A Man Escaped* the order is reversed: first Fontaine narrates, "I slept so soundly the guard had to awaken me." Then the guard walks into his cell and says, "Get up."

Interior narration is customarily used to broaden the viewer's knowledge or feelings about an event. In Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and Lean's *Brief Encounter,* for example, the heroines recount their romantic experiences through narration. In each case the reflective and sensitive female voice is used as a counterpart to the harsh "male"

world of action. The contrast between "female" and "male," sound and sight, narration and action expands the viewer's attitude toward the situation. Bresson, however, uses interior narration for the opposite reason: his narration does not give the viewer any new information or feelings, but only reiterates what he already knows. The viewer is conditioned to expect "new" information from narration; instead, he gets only a cold reinforcement of the everyday.

When the same thing starts happening two or three times concurrently the viewer knows he is beyond simple day-to-day realism and into the peculiar realism of Robert Bresson. The doubling does not double the viewer's knowledge or emotional reaction; it only doubles his perception of the event. Consequently, there is a schizoid reaction: one, there is the sense of meticulous detail which is a part of the everyday, and two, because the detail is doubled there is an emotional queasiness, a growing suspicion of the seemingly "realistic" rationale behind the everyday. If it is "realism," why is the action doubled, and if it isn't realism, why this obsession with details?

"The doublings," Sontag concludes, "both arrest and intensify the ordinary emotional sequence."[37] That statement, like many by Sontag, is both astute and baffling, and the perceptive reader will immediately ask "How?" and "Why?," questions which Sontag doesn't attempt to answer. The above description may partially explain Sontag's perceptions. The "emotional sequence" is arrested because of the everyday stylization (the blocking of screens); it is intensified because of the disparity (the suspicion that the film-maker may not be interested in "reality" after all). The viewer's mood becomes wary, expectant.

Techniques like doubling cast suspicion on the everyday, and the next step of disparity goes farther: it tries to evoke a "sense" of something Wholly Other within the cold environment, a sense which gradually alienates the main character from his solid position within the everyday. Jean Sémolué has distinguished three levels of such alienation in *Diary of a Country Priest:* (1) sickness: the priest and his body, (2) social solitude: the priest and his parishioners, (3) sacred solitude: the priest and the world of sin.[38] The young priest is unable to relate to any of the elements in his environment; even nature, which does not figure in Sémolué's schema, seems hostile to the suffering priest as he collapses under the gray sky and tall, dark barren trees. At this level Bresson's theme would seem to fit his pseudodocumentary everyday technique: the unending conflict between man and environment is one of the cardinal themes of documentary art.

But the conflict is more complicated than it at first seems. The source of this alienation does not seem to be intrinsic to the priest (his neurosis, misanthropy, or paranoia) or to his environment (antagonistic parishioners, inclement weather), but seems to originate from a greater, external source. The priest is the frail vehicle of an overwhelming passion which in the context of *Diary of a Country Priest* is called the Holy Agony (*la Sainte Agonie*). Little by little, as if moving down the Way of the Cross, the priest comes to realize that he carries a special weight, a weight which he finally accepts: "It is not enough that Our Lord should have granted me the grace of letting me know today, through the words of my old teacher, that nothing, throughout eternity, can remove me from the place chosen for me from all eternity, that I was the prisoner of His Sacred Passion."

As in Ozu's films, the passion in *Diary of a Country Priest* is greater than a man can bear, more than his environment can receive. The young priest's cross of spiritual awareness gradually alienates him from his surroundings and eventually leads to his death.

The levels of alienation demonstrated by Sémolué are actually extensions of the Holy Agony. In fact, what seems to be a rejection by the environment is more accurately a rejection by the priest—and not because he wishes to estrange himself, but because he is the unwilling (at first) instrument of an overwhelming and self-mortifying passion.

1. Sickness. The priest's illness seems factual enough: his health slowly wanes and finally fails him because of what is eventually diagnosed as stomach cancer. But there is a complication: the more ill he becomes the more adamantly the priest refuses to take nourishment or rest. He feels himself condemned by the weight he must bear, and associates his agony with the sacrificial agony of Christ. His need for atonement drives him to self-mortification. He eats only small portions of bread dipped in wine, an alcoholic parody of the sacrament. He ignores the needs of the flesh, exerting himself until the moment of death. The physical pain seems to be real enough, but its source is ambiguous; is it cancer or the spiritual malady?

2. Social solitude. The priest's ministry is a failure. He is timid and inept; his parishioners are antagonistic—or so it seems. But it is uncertain whether the priest is actually unfit for the priesthood or whether his devouring passion blocks any attempt at ministry. At first the priest seems unduly paranoiac; he thinks his parishioners dislike him. Then he receives an anonymous note, "A person of good intentions advises you to request your transfer. . . ." But the premonition comes first: it is as if the priest willed to be unwanted. The country community at first had no

The sacred solitude of the country priest: "What seems to be a rejection by the environment is more accurately a rejection by the priest—and not because he wishes to estrange himself, but because he is the unwilling instrument of an overwhelming and self-mortifying passion."

more hostility toward him than they would have had toward any new young priest, but the priest's melancholy turns them against him. After an unsuccessful catechism class the priest enters in his diary, "But why the hostility of these little ones. What have I done to them?" His religious obsession has led him to believe that the mischievous children are against him. The priest's agony alienates the community, and it is an agony which he seems unable to control.

3. Sacred solitude. The priest is unable to cope with the world of sin, either in himself or others. The normal recourse of a Christian, prayer, is not open to him. "Never have I strived so much to pray," he writes. And later: "I have never felt with so much violence the physical revolt against prayer." He is able to bring peace to others, yet has none himself. This is the miracle of the empty hands: "How wonderful that we can give others a peace which we ourselves do not possess. Oh, the miracle of our empty hands." His holy agony allows him none of the temporal means of release which Church, society, and body provide. None of the temporal metaphors can satisfy his passion, so he progresses inexorably toward the metaphor of martyrdom.

On each level the priest's alienation originates in neither the environment nor himself, but in an overpowering, transcendental passion. The melancholy priest earnestly desires to be like his peers ("My God," he writes of the Vicar of Torcy, "how I would wish to have his health, his stability"), but an irresistible force drives him further and further away from them. If the origin of this holy agony is not natural (human or environmental), it is of necessity supernatural.

Bresson's protagonists, like the country priest, cannot find metaphors capable of expressing their agony. They are condemned to estrangement: nothing on earth will placate their inner passion, because their passion does not come from earth. Therefore they do not respond to their environment, but instead to that sense of the Other which seems much more immediate. Hence the disparity; the Bresson protagonist lives in an all-inclusive cold, factual environment, yet rather than adapting to that environment, he responds to something totally separate from it.

It is a shock when Joan of Arc answers her corrupt inquisitors with sincerity, forthrightness, honesty, and complete disregard for her personal safety—she is not responding to her environment in a 1:1 ratio. She answers her judges as if she were instead speaking to her mysterious, transcendental "voices." Similarly, in *A Man Escaped* Fontaine's desire to escape surpasses any normal prisoner motivation. He is nothing but

Disparity in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*: "It is a shock when Joan answers her corrupt inquisitors with sincerity, forthrightness, honesty, and complete disregard for her personal safety—she is not responding to her environment in a 1:1 ratio. She answers her judges as if she were instead speaking to her transcendental 'voices.'"

an embodied Will to Escape; the viewer only sees him as a prisoner whose every breath strives to be free. Throughout the film Fontaine wears a ragged, filthy, and bloody shirt, and when he finally receives a package of new clothes, the viewer rejoices (or wants to rejoice) for him. Instead of trying the new clothes on, Fontaine immediately tears them up to make ropes. To Fontaine's mind (as defined by "privation") the package did not contain new clothes at all, but potential ropes. Another prisoner, who had the desire but not the passion to be free, would have used the old clothes as ropes. Fontaine's obsession is his definitive quality, and it is greater than the desire to be inside or outside of those prison walls. The prison at Fort Montluc is only the objective correlative for Fontaine's passion. In *Pickpocket,* Michel's pickpocketing has the same familiar obsessive quality; it is neither sociologically nor financially motivated, but instead is a Will to Pickpocket. And when Michel renounces pickpocketing for the love of Jeanne, his motivation is again ill-defined. The viewer senses that Michel's overburdening passion has been transferred to Jeanne, but still does not know its source.

In each case Bresson's protagonists respond to a special call which has no natural place in their environment. It is incredible that Joan the

prisoner should act in such a manner before a panel of judges: nothing in the everyday has prepared the viewer for Joan's spiritual, self-mortifying actions. Each protagonist struggles to free himself from his everyday environment, to find a proper metaphor for his passion. This struggle leads Michel to prison, Fontaine to freedom, and the priest and Joan to martyrdom.

The viewer finds himself in a dilemma: the environment suggests documentary realism, yet the central character suggests spiritual passion. This dilemma produces an emotional strain: the viewer wants to empathize with Joan (as he would for any innocent person in agony), yet the everyday structure warns him that his feelings will be of no avail. Bresson seems acutely aware of this: "It seems to me that the emotion here, in this trial (and in this film), should come not so much from the agony and death of Joan as from the strange air that we breathe while she talks of her Voices, or the crown of the angel, just as she would talk of one of us or this glass carafe."[39] This "strange air" is the product of disparity: spiritual density within a factual world creates a sense of emotional weight within an unfeeling environment. As before, disparity suggests the need, but not the place, for emotions.*

The secret of transcendental style is that it can both prevent a runoff of superficial emotions (through everyday) and simultaneously sustain those same emotions (through disparity). The very detachment of emotion, whether in primitive art or Brecht, intensifies the potential emotional experience. ("Emotion cannot be projected without order and restraint."[40]) And emotion will out. The trigger to that emotional release occurs during the final stage of disparity, decisive action, and it serves to freeze the emotional into expression, the disparity into stasis.

Before the final stage of disparity, however, Bresson, like Ozu, derives ironic humor from his characters and their alienated surroundings. Irony, in fact, is almost unavoidable—Bresson's characters are so totally alienated from their environment. The country priest's paranoia is cru-

* One can never be sure of audience reactions, but even Eric Rhode, in his argument against Bresson's religious phenomenology, makes the same point: "The Naturalism of Bresson's motifs puts an irresistible pressure on us to expect the usual sorts of explanation for behaviour; but Bresson often ignores motives, quite deliberately. We never learn why Fontaine is imprisoned, why the country priest is snubbed by his parishioners, why Michel is able to go abroad without a passport. These are only a few of the many motives withheld. Because of this unresolved pressure, his heroes arouse a considerable unease in me." Precisely. Rhode also realizes that "many of his paradoxes vanish once we make the often unconscious leap into thinking along his lines," but rejects what he terms the "'hey presto' of Grace" (*Tower of Babel* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966], pp. 41–43).

cial, obsessive—and ridiculous. When Olivier, a foreign legionnaire on leave, offers the priest a ride to the railroad station on his motorbike, the priest reluctantly accepts and then feels the exhilaration of the ride. He then states to himself, with no hint of self-parody, that he has been allowed to taste the pleasures of youth only so his sacrifice will be more complete. Bresson also uses understatement as an ironic commentary on his characters. In *A Man Escaped* Fontaine spends every possible moment hiding and disguising his means of escape. When it appears that his cell will be searched, his plan discovered, and he executed, Fontaine says in deadpan interior narration, "I dreaded the thought of a search."

Irony makes it possible for a filmmaker to create disparity over a period of time. If a viewer does not want to completely accept the dilemma of disparity (and few do), he does not have to reject it outright but can take an ironic attitude—which is essentially a wait-and-see attitude. Such a viewer can look at the disparity from an ironic distance, seeing its tensions and humor, and does not have to commit himself. Like the disparity which produces it, irony is a technique designed to hold the spectator in the theater until the final decisive action—which does demand commitment.

The decisive action is an incredible event within the ban structure. The prescript rules of everyday fall away; there is a blast of music, an overt symbol, and an open call for emotion. The act demands commitment by the viewer (the central character has already committed himself), and without commitment there can be no stasis.

In *Diary of a Country Priest* the decisive action is the priest's death, when his frail body falls from the frame and the camera holds on a blatant symbol: the shadow of the cross cast on a wall. In *A Man Escaped* it is the nocturnal escape, with its concomitant and all-important acceptance of grace in the person of Jost. In *Pickpocket* it is Michel's imprisonment and his inexplicable expression of love for Jeanne. In *The Trial of Joan of Arc* it is Joan's martyrdom, when the camera holds on the symbol of the charred stake, which is preceded by the inexplicable symbols of the flying dove and three ringing bells.

Before these decisive actions there have been "decisive moments" which anticipate the final act. In these moments, Sémolué writes, the "hero realizes that he is right to desire what he desires, and from then on identifies himself more and more with his passion."[41] (The final decisive action is more audience-oriented: the viewer must then face the dilemma of the protagonist.) As in Ozu's early codas, these decisive moments are characterized by a blast of music. In *A Man Escaped* each

interlude of Mozart's Mass in C Minor becomes a decisive moment. As in Ozu's codas, there is nothing on screen to properly receive such a burst of emotion-inducing music. On ten occasions Fontaine and his fellow prisoners rotely walk across the courtyard, emptying their slop buckets to the accompaniment of Mozart's Mass. "In *A Man Escaped* there was no direct relationship between image and music. But the music of Mozart gave the life in prison the value of ritual."[42] Joan's regular walk back and forth from her cell, accompanied by overloud door-latchings, creates the same sort of coda in *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* as do the lyrical sequences of pickpocketing in *Pickpocket*. Each of these moments call for an unexpected emotional involvement and prefigure the final decisive action.

Pickpocket is the only fi lm of the prison cycle which does not overtly discuss religious values, yet it is nonetheless a good example of the role of the decisive action within transcendental style. There is no invocation of the spiritual as in *Country Priest* and *Joan of Arc,* no debate of grace as in *A Man Escaped,* yet there is transcendental style, and the decisive action is the "miraculous" element within it. *Pickpocket* opens with the familiar everyday stylization: Michel is a pickpocket within a cold factual world. He displays no human feeling, either for his dying mother or for Jeanne, a family friend. He does, however, have a passion: pickpocketing. His obsession with pickpocketing goes beyond the normal interests of crime and questions of morality. In one of his discussions with the police inspector he contends that some men are above the law. "But how do they know who they are?" the inspector asks. "They ask themselves," Michel replies. Michel's passion, in the ways previously mentioned, creates a growing sense of disparity. Then, in a somewhat abrupt ending, Michel is apprehended and imprisoned. The police had been lying in wait at Longchamp for Michel for some time, and it is uncertain at the moment of his capture whether he was captured unaware or whether he willingly let himself be captured. In the fi nal scene, Michel, who has led the "free" life of crime, is now in jail. Jeanne comes to visit him in prison and he, in a totally unexpected gesture, kisses her through the bars saying, "How long it has taken me to come to you." It is a "miraculous" event: the expression of love by an unfeeling man within an unfeeling environment, the transference of his passion from pickpocketing to Jeanne.

The decisive action forces the viewer into the confrontation with the Wholly Other he would normally avoid. He is faced with an explicably spiritual act within a cold environment, an act which now requests his participation and approval. Irony can no longer postpone his decision.

The decisive action in *Pickpocket:* "How long it has taken me to come to you."

It is a "miracle" which must be accepted or rejected.

The decisive action has a unique eff ect on the viewer, which may be hypothesized thus: the viewer's feelings have been consistently shunned throughout the fi lm (everyday), yet he still has "strange" undefined feelings (disparity). The decisive action then demands an emotional commitment which the viewer gives instinctively, naturally (he wants to share Hirayama's tears, Michel's love). But having given that commitment, the viewer must now do one of two things: he can reject his feelings and refuse to take the fi lm seriously, or he can accommodate his thinking to his feelings. If he chooses the latter, he will, having been given no emotional constructs by the director, have constructed his own "screen." He creates a translucent, mental screen through which he can cope with both his feelings and the fi lm. This screen may be very simple. In the case of *Pickpocket* it could be that people such as Michel and Jeanne have spirits which have deep spiritual connections, and they need no earthly rationale for their love. In *Diary of a Country Priest* it could be that there is such a thing as the Holy Agony, and the tormented priest was its victim. Bresson uses the viewer's own natural defenses, his protective mechanism, to cause him, of his own free will, to come to the identical decision Bresson had predetermined for him.

Bresson calls this the moment of "transformation": "There must, at a certain moment, be a transformation; if not, there is no art."[43] At the

moment of transformation all the stripped, flat images, dialogue, camerawork, and sound effects unite to create a new screen, the one formed by the spectator: "I have noticed that the flatter the image is, the less it expresses, the more easily it is transformed in contact with other images. . . . It is necessary for the images to have something in common, to participate in a sort of union."[44]

Music, as opposed to sound effects, is one of the vital elements of this transformation: "I use music as a means of transformation of what is on the screen."[45] Music, properly used, "can transport us into a region that is no longer simply terrestrial, but rather cosmic, I would even say divine."[46] Music, the "miraculous" event, and the overt symbol are components of the decisive action, which can effect a "transformation" in the spectator's mind.

This "transformation" does not resolve *disparity,* it accepts it. Disparity is the paradox of the spiritual existing within the physical, and it cannot be "resolved" by any earthly logic or human emotions. It must, as the decisive action makes inescapably clear, be accepted or rejected. If the viewer accepts the decisive action (and disparity), he accepts through his mental construct a view of life which can encompass both. On screen this is represented by stasis.

TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE: STASIS

Stasis is the quiescent, frozen, or hieratic scene which succeeds the decisive action and closes the film. It is a still re-view of the external world intended to suggest the oneness of all things. In *Diary of a Country Priest* it is the shadow of the cross, in *A Man Escaped* it is the long shot of the darkened street with Fontaine and Jost receding in the distance, in *Pickpocket* it is Michel's imprisoned face, in *The Trial of Joan of Arc* it is the charred stump of the stake.

This static view represents the "new" world in which the spiritual and the physical can coexist, still in tension and unresolved, but as part of a larger scheme in which all phenomena are more or less expressive of a larger reality—the Transcendent. In stasis, the viewer is able to crossinterpret between what seemed to be contradictions: he can read deep emotion into the inexpressive faces and cold environment, and he can read factuality into the inexplicable spiritual actions. The charred stake in *Joan of Arc* is still a physical entity, but it is also the spiritual expression of Joan's martyrdom. In short it is—as we shall see—an icon.

Stasis: the final shot of *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. "The charred stake in *Joan of Arc* is still a physical entity, but it is also the spiritual expression of Joan's martyrdom. In short, it is an icon."

The term "transcendent" may seem to some an exaggerated description of the effect of Bresson's stasis, and although Bresson never nails down his intentions to any specific term, it seems quite clear that the Transcendent is what he has in mind: "In *A Man Escaped* I tried to make the audience feel these extraordinary currents which existed in the German prisons of the Resistance, the presence of something or someone unseen: a hand that directs all."[47] And again, "I would like in my films to be able to render perceptible to an audience a feeling of a man's soul and also the presence of something superior to man which can be called God."[48] Whether that "something superior" is called "extraordinary currents," "the invisible hand," or "God," it transcends immanent experience and may be called, if only for practical purposes, the Transcendent.

The moment the viewer creates his own screen, the moment he accepts disparity, Bresson has accomplished not only the task of the artist, but the task of the evangelist and iconographist as well. The evangelist is theoretically a man who evokes a conversion not by his own sophistry but by bringing the listener into contact with the divine. The transcendental style, neither magical nor ineffable in its techniques, hopes similarly to bring the viewer into contact with that transcendent ground of being—into stasis.

But just "how" does this come about? Why is it possible for a viewer, at one point, to "accept" disparity? These questions are very tricky and to some degree unanswerable. It has, I think, something fundamentally to do with the fact that disparity is an emotional experience (an "emotional strain"), whereas stasis is an expression of the Transcendent. It is not really possible to "accept" an emotional strain (or else it would no longer be a strain), but it is possible to accept an expression which includes tensional elements. And for this reason the above questions must be in the final account unanswerable. It is possible to postulate how the human emotions react to upsetting experience, but no one has ever given a satisfactory account of how the human psyche perceives a form of artistic expression.

How does experience turn to expression and return to experience? All the aestheticians who adhere to an expression theory of art have addressed themselves to this question in one way or another, and I have nothing unique to add to their debate. (In fact, the concept of transcendental style is more useful if seen from within the context of preexisting aesthetic systems; it can be thought of as form, symbol, or expression.) John Dewey, who studied the experience-expression-experience puzzle in depth, felt that emotions served to catalyze aesthetic expression: "In the development of an expressive act, the emotion operates like a magnet drawing to itself appropriate material: appropriate because it has an experienced emotional affinity for the state of mind already moving."[49] Emotions are vehicles through which the artist must act; he teases and trains the emotions until they are transformed into an expression "distinctively aesthetic."

This is pretty much, I think, the way transcendental style works. Through everyday and disparity it concurrently flaunts and tantalizes the emotions, placing the viewer under a growing emotional strain which culminates in the decisive action. Man's natural impulse for emotional stability abets the transcendental style in its effort to achieve stasis. The emotions are active; in a desire to comprehend the disparity they continually attempt to outflank the everyday. The decisive action is a carefully planned cul-de-sac for this emotional activity. It simultaneously appeals to the emotions and makes the viewer aware of their futility. This necessitates a conscious, aesthetic solution to an emotionally irresolvable dilemma. Once that aesthetic perception is made, transcendental style is no longer an experience but an expression. The emotions have proved unreliable and the mind somehow recognizes this. This purging of the emotions permits the aesthetic facility of the psyche to

operate. And it can recognize transcendental style for what it is—a form designed to express the Transcendent. Then, after the expression is complete and the work of art has fi nished its task, the viewer can return to a life of experience, feeling the "new" emotions which result from aesthetic participation.

One can never fully answer "how" stasis is achieved. Critical method has pursued the ineff able as far as it can; Roger Fry's "gulf of mysticism" yawns wide open. If transcendental style really is a hierophany, if there really is a Transcendent, then the critic can never fully comprehend how it operates in art. He can recognize the Transcendent, he can study those methods which brought him to that realization, but that actual "why" of that realization is a mystery. Bresson's protagonists cannot reveal those reasons: Bresson's characters, Ayfre writes, "even in their most extreme confi dences, never reveal anything but their mystery—like God himself." Bresson cannot reveal it: Ayfre continues, "these are people whose ultimate secret is not only beyond the viewer, but beyond Bresson himself."[50] The fi nal "why" of transcendental style is a mystery even to its creator: "I wanted to show this miracle: an invisible hand over the prison, directing what happens and causing such and such a thing to succeed for one and not for another . . . the fi lm is a mystery."[51] If successful, Bresson would probably be willing, like the traditional religious artist, to give co-credit to the divine. A spiritual artist can predict how an audience will react to a specifi c form, whether it be the mass or transcendental style, but at the moment of stasis, when art merges with mysticism, he can only, in Sontag's words, "be patient and as empty as possible."[52] "The audience must feel that I go toward the unknown, that I do not know what will happen when I arrive."[53]

In a successful work of art human experience is transformed into human expression, both personal and cultural; in a successful transcendental work of art the human forms of expression are transcended by a universal form of expression. The static view at the close of Ozu's and Bresson's fi lms is a microcosm for the transcendental style itself: a frozen form which expresses the Transcendent—a movie hierophany.

PRETEXTS

Until stasis the infl uence of personality and culture are for Bresson, as for Ozu, pervasive. Bresson calls the subject matter a "pretext" for the form, but until the form is fully achieved in stasis, the "pretexts" weigh

heavily on the viewer's mind. Form is the operative element in Bresson's fi lms, but it operates through personality and culture and is necessarily infl uenced by them. Transcendental style is as much infl uenced by Bresson's cultural traditions as it is by Zen culture. Transcendental style is a common formalistic solution to similar problems in individual cultures, and before a viewer can appreciate the solution he must experience the problems.

The remainder of this chapter on Bresson will consider some of the "pretexts" of Bresson's work: his personality, his cultural traditions—theological, aesthetic, and artistic—and his synthesis of those traditions. It is easier for a Western viewer to recognize Bresson's use of culture than Ozu's. He may fi nd the moods of the *furyu* indistinguishable, but he knows or easily understands the nuances of Western theology and aesthetics. In each case Ozu and Bresson utilize their parochial characteristics, reducing them to their common element: form.

BRESSON AND HIS PERSONALITY

Considered by itself Bresson's "personality" can be misleading. To some of Bresson's critics, both admirers and detractors, he is not only the consummate stylist but also the consummate oddball: morbid, hermetic, eccentric, obsessed with theological dilemmas in an age of social action. He is a cultural reactionary and an artistic revolutionary—and the secret to this paradox lies somewhere within his curious inner logic. Considered solely in terms of his personality, Bresson becomes an obsessive religious fanatic, a tortured, brooding, Romantic figure who because of religious training, prisoner-of-war experiences, or guilt obsession is forced to live out his neuroses on screen.

This confusion results because Bresson, unlike Ozu, has become alienated from his contemporary culture. His immediate culture has had virtually no infl uence on his work. Bresson's asceticism is certainly at odds with the movie tradition which has zealously celebrated every aspect of the physical. And his concern for spirituality, free will, predestination, and grace is only an oblique comment on contemporary French society. Bresson is today what Ozu will be in the Japan of the near future, an artist alienated from his cultural environment.

But Bresson is not simply a displaced person, a suicidal neurotic, or an eccentric genius; he is also, and more importantly, a representative of a diff erent and older culture which may not be immediately obvious to

the modern viewer but is not irrelevant either. This older culture had a well-grounded theology and aesthetic which provided not only for the role of the individual artist, but also for the function of art in a universal, multicultural sphere. Seen from these traditions, Bresson is not neurotic or eccentric, but a self-conscious artist who has assigned himself a near-impossible task: to update an older aesthetic into a contemporary form.

In the light of this older culture, Bresson's "personality" is not unique or important. Both Ozu and Bresson were soldiers, but of the two only Bresson utilized his war experiences (as a prisoner) in his fi lms, not just because he was diff erent from Ozu, but because the prison metaphor is inherent to his theological tradition. Bresson may be a suicidal, hermetic person, but these are also characteristics of the culture he works from within.

The more a critic realizes Bresson's theological and aesthetic underpinnings, the further he shies away from a purely psychological interpretation of Bresson's "personality." Bresson's personality, like those of his characters, becomes increasingly identifi ed with his passion (or in Coomaraswamy's terms, his "thesis"). At the close of *Country Priest* the priest "gives up" his body, metamorphosing into the image of the cross; in a similar manner it may be said that Bresson's personality is enveloped by transcendental style. There are many precedents in religious art for such an approach; religious artists were often required to live out the virtues they portrayed. The Stoglav Council of 1551 decreed that the Russian iconographer should "be pure and decorous."[54] Fra Angelico, in his only recorded statement, wrote, "Art requires much calm and to paint the things of Christ one must live with Christ."[55] More recently Jacques Maritain stated, "Christian work would have the artist, as man, a saint."[56] If Bresson desires to create saints in art, tradition holds, he must become "saintly" himself, submitting his personality to the transcendent passion. In the context of his theological and aesthetic culture Bresson's personality has little value. Like the country priest's it is vain, neurotic, morbid. It only has value to the extent that it can transcend itself.

There is, however, another way one can speak of Bresson's personality (without, as was previously stated, resorting to a Jungian definition), and that is as his personal contribution to the culture from which he operates, his peculiar synthesis of his theological and artistic traditions. This will be considered in a later section.

THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION: THE PRISON METAPHOR

The prison metaphor is endemic to Western thought. Western theories, whether theological, psychological, or political, are inevitably couched in terms of freedom and restraint. On the theological level, the prison metaphor is linked to the fundamental body/soul dichotomy, a linkage which is made by the wellsprings of Western thought: both Plato and the Scriptures. Shortly before his death Socrates describes his body as the "soul's prison."[57] To St. Paul the body of sin is prison; he is a man in "captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:23–24). (In Christianity, however, there is redemption, after which the body becomes "the temple of the Holy" [I Cor. 6:19] and Paul becomes the "prisoner of the Lord" [Eph. 4:1].) The prison metaphor in Christianity is summed up by Calvin's statement that at death "the soul is freed from the prison house of the body."[58]

On one level the prison metaphor is a relatively straightforward representation of the body/soul conflict. His characters gradually relinquish their bodies, much in the same way Fontaine escapes prison step by step. The prison house of the body is the last impediment to the soul's emancipation. Joan of Arc puts her faith in Christ and St. Michael half hoping, half expecting that they will come to her aid, "even if by a miracle." But when she realizes that the "miracle" of her escape will in fact be her martyrdom, she retracts her false confession and chooses death, stating, "I'd rather die than endure this suffering." The night before her execution she is given communion and questioned by Brother Isambart. "Do you believe that this is the body of Christ?" he asks. "Yes, and the only one who can deliver me," she replies. "Don't you have hope in the Lord?" Isambart asks a short time later, and Joan replies, "Yes, and with God's help I shall be in Paradise." Joan's deliverance becomes her death, and her escape from prison is the escape from her body.

As the body becomes identified with the prison, there is a natural tendency toward self-mortification. The country priest mortifies his body and at the moment of death surrenders himself into the hands of God. In *Pickpocket* the metaphor is reversed; Michel's prison is crime, his freedom is in jail. His is also a self-mortification, but it does not lead to death. Fontaine is the only one of Bresson's prison cycle protagonists who does not actively persecute himself, although his habits are rather ascetic. The freedom of his body coincides with the freedom of his soul,

and this unique occurrence is the result of grace, a theme which Bresson handles in depth in *A Man Escaped*.

Intertwined with the abjuration of the body in Bresson's fi lms is the vexing problem of suicide: If the body enslaves the soul, why not destroy the body and be free? St. Ambrose stated the case quite clearly: "Let us die, if we may leave, or if we be denied leave, yet let us die. God cannot be off ended with this, when we use it for a remedy,"[59] and Augustine and Aquinas rushed to counter the argument. Marvin Zeman, in an essay on suicide in Bresson's fi lms, has demonstrated that Bresson, particularly in his later fi lms, has come to associate himself with a radical wing of Christianity (including, among others, St. Ambrose, John Donne, George Bernanos) which regards suicide as a positive good.[60]

In the prison cycle the natural suicidal extension of the prison metaphor is already evident. Both the country priest and Joan "give up" their lives (as Christ did on the cross) but do not die by their own hand. A suicide in *Country Priest* presents St. Ambrose's case, a case which grows stronger in *Au hasard Balthazar, Mouchette,* and *Une Femme douce:* the countess has been contemplating suicide, but lacks the courage. The country priest in a long dark night of the soul brings her to a faith in God, whereupon she commits suicide. The implication is clear: the countess, having found salvation, was now "free" to die. Upon learning of her suicide the priest himself feels the temptation of suicide, although he has already chosen a more subtle course.

The prison metaphor gains in complexity and depth as Bresson extends it to the theological paradox of predestination and free will. The body/soul confl ict is a dichotomy for Bresson: he prefers the soul to the body, even to the point of death; whereas the predestination/free will confl ict is a paradox, it cannot be resolved by death but has to be accepted on faith. Predestination/free will is a complex and contradictory concept, and Bresson's prison metaphor adapts to this complexity. Predestinarianism, as taught to varying degrees by Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Jansen, holds that man, having been previously chosen by God, is now able to choose God of his own free will. Man becomes "free" by "choosing" the predetermined will of God. God is Truth, the Truth makes you free, and freedom is choosing God. It's a neat jungle of logic which seems quite preposterous from the outside; yet from the inside, accepting certain theological givens, it is the natural thing to do.

Bresson's prison metaphor allows for this complexity. In his films man's "freedom" consists of being a "prisoner of the Lord" rather than a prisoner of the fl esh. Joan of Arc seemingly chooses martyrdom of her

own free will, yet the film also repeatedly emphasizes that her fate is predetermined. The opening shot with its reading of Joan's postmortem readmission into the Church and such declamatory statements as "She will die" and "Don't forget, she must burn" leave no question as to the outcome. The only tension, as in predestinarianism, is whether or not she will choose her predestined fate. In *Diary of a Country Priest* the priest realizes he is a "prisoner of the Holy Agony" yet his agony only comes to culmination when he escapes from that other prison, the body. In *Pickpocket* Michel chooses freedom by imprisonment; in *A Man Escaped* Fontaine chooses freedom by escape: they are the opposite sides of the predestination/free will paradox. Each finds true freedom through the acceptance of a predestined grace, within or without bars.

Bresson's treatment of the prison metaphor justifies his often rather voguish labeling as a "Jansenist." Once asked if Fontaine was predestined Bresson replied, "Aren't we all."[61] Bresson predestines his characters by foretelling the outcome of their lives; the drama is whether or not the character (or the viewer) will accept his predestined fate. Bresson treats his viewers in the same way a Jansenist God treats his minions: "You must leave the spectator free. And at the same time you must make yourself loved by him. You must make him love the way in which you render things. That is to say: show him things in the order and the way that you love to see them and to feel them; make him feel them, in presenting them to him, as you see them and feel them yourself, and this while leaving him a great freedom, while making him free."[62]

Bresson hopes to make the viewer so free (by leaving him uncommitted during everyday and disparity) that the viewer will be forced to make Bresson's predetermined decision (during the decisive action). On the surface Bresson leaves the spectator totally free; his transcendence, Bazin points out, "is something each of us is free to refuse."[63] But once the viewer makes the commitment, once he accepts the "presence of something superior," then he surrenders his "freedom" and joins in that jungle of predestinarian logic. Once on the inside, the arguments leveled from the outside are of little avail.

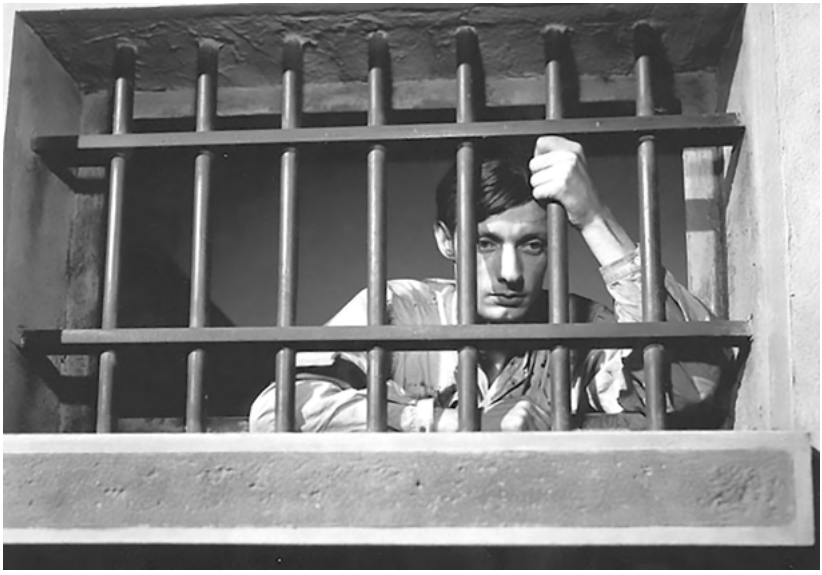
The mysterious, conciliatory element in the predestination/free will paradox is grace. Grace is the catalyst for religious commitment because, as Jansen writes, "of the nature of a good work which is such that no created thing can achieve this effect without the aid of Grace."[64] Unlike Calvinism, Jansenism holds that "common" grace is nonuniversal; it is a special gift and not everyone can receive it. The comings and goings of grace are unpredictable; one must know both how to recognize it and

how to receive it. "In Jansenism, there is perhaps this, which is an impression that I have as well: it is that our lives are made at once of predestination—Jansenism, then—and of *hasard,* chance."[65]

The "chance" of grace is the theme of *A Man Escaped* whose subtitle, "*Le Vent souffl e où il veut*" ("the wind bloweth where it listeth," from Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus, John 3:8), expresses the unpredictability of grace. In *A Man Escaped* a prisoner-priest writes out the subtitle/text for Fontaine. Fontaine reads these words to himself as his friend Orsini is being executed for an unsuccessful escape attempt (long shot of Fontaine in his cell window, "close-up" of interior narration and of the fi ring squad's gunshots). Later Fontaine realizes that Orsini's death has made it possible for him to escape. His aging neighbor, Blanchet, says, "Orsini had to show you how." "How strange it is," Fontaine replies. Blanchet counters that it is not strange, and Fontaine replies that it is strange that Blanchet should say that. Earlier in the fi lm Fontaine and the priest have a similar conversation when a Bible mysteriously appears in the priest's pocket. "It's a miracle," Fontaine says. "I was lucky," the priest replies. Grace is making itself manifest in Fontaine's life, and he is as yet only dimly aware of it.

The crucial manifestation of grace in *A Man Escaped* occurs when Fontaine, the night before his planned escape, is without warning given a cell-mate, a boy named Jost. Fontaine must then decide whether to kill Jost or take him along, and he chooses the latter. Only later, while in the process of escaping, does Fontaine realize that it takes two men to scale the prison wall, that without Jost his escape would have been a failure. It was Fontaine's acceptance of Jost and the *hasard* of grace which allowed him to escape, even though it had been predetermined from the beginning of the film (by the title) that he would escape.

In Bresson's fi lms grace allows the protagonist to accept the paradox of predestination and free will, and Ayfre quotes Augustine to demonstrate Bresson's orthodoxy at this point: "the freedom of the will is not void through Grace, but is thereby established."[66] But it is not enough for grace to be present, man must choose to receive it. Man must *choose* that which has been predestined. Because Fontaine has previously willed to escape he can correctly accept the intervention of grace through Jost. Because Joan wills to believe her voices ("How did you know that it was an angel's voice?" she is asked; "Because I had the will to believe it," she replies) she can realize grace in death. At the close of *Pickpocket* Michel comes to an acceptance of grace in the person of Jeanne, and he says to her through the bars, "How long it has taken me to come to



The beginning of *A Man Escaped* and the end of *Pickpocket*: "Imprisonment is the dominant metaphor in Bresson's films, but it is a two-faced metaphor: his protagonists are both escaping from prison of one sort and surrendering to a prison of another."

you." The culminant statement of grace is by the country priest, whose dying words are "all is grace." If one accepts transcendental style, then all is grace, because it is grace which allows the protagonist and the viewer to be both captive and free.

Given this theological backdrop, Bresson's "pretexts" must necessarily be diff erent than Ozu's. In Bresson's fi lms, as in Christian theology, transcendence is an escape from the prison of the body, an "escape" which makes one simultaneously "free from sin" and a "prisoner of the Lord." Consequently, the awareness of the Transcendent can only come after some degree of self-mortifi cation, whether it be a foregoing of the "sins of the fl esh" or death itself. Prison is the dominant metaphor of Bresson's fi lms, but it is a two-faced metaphor: his characters are both escaping from a prison of one sort and surrendering to a prison of another. And the prison his protagonists ultimately escape is the most confi ning prison of all, the body. In a sense, Bresson "mortifi ed" his actors; he not only killed them fi ctionally, but also artistically, refusing to use an actor in more than one fi lm.* The actor had been "worn out"; in the next fi lm there was a new (but similar) actor who had to be mortified.

In contrast, Ozu did not feel the need to compare the tension between man and nature, soul and body, to that between a prisoner and a prison. Self-mortifi cation had little place in his fi lms. There were no chains, bars, persecutions, self-fl agellations. The "new body" was available on earth; his characters did not need to undergo the death of the old body. Ozu used a "family of actors whom he did not "kill off " but put through the same tensions in fi lm after fi lm. For Ozu grace was neither limited nor unpredictable, but easily available to all. The awareness of the Transcendent was for Ozu a way of living, not, as for Bresson, a way of dying.

THE AESTHETIC TRADITION: SCHOLASTICISM

Bresson's theology, his formulation of the problems of body and soul, predestination and free will, grace and redemption, seems obviously Jansenist, but to infer from this, as some critics have, that his aesthetic and artistic infl uences were also Jansenist is incorrect. Jansenism, like Calvinism, had little feeling for aesthetics or art in general, and almost

* When asked if he would use Claude Laydu, the priest in *Country Priest,* again Bresson replied, "No. How can I? For *Journal* I robbed him of what I needed to make the film. How could I rob him twice?" (quoted in Marjorie Greene, "Robert Bresson," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 3 [Spring 1960], p. 7).

none for the "visual arts" in particular. Certain art forms were favored by Jansenism and Calvinism (church music and architecture), and there were maverick "Calvinist" artists (Donne, Revius, Rembrandt), but neither of these sects developed a positive aesthetic or promoted any movement in art. "Images" had little place in their logical theology,* a theology which could lead, in its excesses, to iconoclasm. Jansenism could give Bresson some of its leanness and asceticism, but it certainly would have had no sympathy for a work of art which sought to express the Transcendent in a nonsectarian manner through images—particularly if that work of art considered its religious subject matter a "pretext." Bresson, the artist, received no aid or comfort from Jansenism; he had to look elsewhere for his aesthetics.

Bresson's immediate culture was also unable to provide the aesthetics Jansenism lacked. There has been little sympathy in modern culture in general, and cinema in particular, for the spiritual problems which troubled Bresson. There has been, of course, a twentieth-century revival of interest in the relations between form and inner meaning in the contemporary arts, and Bresson has been on the forefront of this. But in cinema this has been to a substantial degree Bresson's creation, not his "tradition."

There have been, however, several traditions in Western art which correspond remarkably to both Bresson's theological problems and his artistic solutions. And although one can never be certain where Bresson got his aesthetics, some preliminary research reveals that although he is alienated, he is not *sui generis,* and his particular approach is part of a long, though presently dormant in film, artistic tradition.

Ananda Coomaraswamy writes:

> It should be remembered that "European art" is of two very different kinds, one Christian and scholastic, the other post-Renaissance and personal. It will be evident enough from our essay on Eckhart, and might have been made equally clear through a study of St. Thomas and his sources, that there was a time when Europe and Asia could and did actually understand each other very well.[67]

The Scholastic tradition, of which Dr. Coomaraswamy writes, would have appreciated the films of Ozu and Bresson. Ozu and Bresson have

* "At the rationalizing stage of religion," Herbert Read points out, "when religion becomes more than anything else an affair of philosophical concepts and of individual mediation, then there is bound to grow up a feeling that religion can dispense with such materialistic representations as works of art" (*Art and Society* [New York: Schocken Books, 1966], p. 50).

little in common theologically or culturally, but they both share in the legacy of Scholasticism, the last major pre-Renaissance aesthetic.

Neither St. Thomas nor any of the Schoolmen wrote a specific treatise on aesthetics, but in *Art and Scholasticism* Jacques Maritain extrapolates a Scholastic definition of art as an "intellectual virtue,"[68] a definition which corresponds quite closely to Coomaraswamy's definition of Asian art as "a delight of the reason."[69] "Art seems to be nothing other than a certain ordination of reason," Aquinas wrote, "by which human acts reach a determined end through determined means."[70] Art for both the Scholastic theologian and Asian artist sought an idea (beauty, nature) which was both in the world and transcended it.

The Scholastic aesthetic provides a common meeting place for East and West, and by extension, for Ozu and Bresson. It was a primitive aesthetic which had become traditional, gathering to itself a rationalized organon of thought while retaining its ultimate respect for mystery. Ideal portraiture changed: the primitive totem became a disembodied idea, but it was only a change in degree. Whether totem or idea, the end of art was mystery, and not bound by any rationalized, humanized, or secularized concepts of life. All art, like all theology and scripture, are (to use Augustine's word) "vain"; they are the means to an end, but not to be confused with the end. The artist too is a means, and his end is not himself. This aesthetic leads naturally enough to an art form, which, Coomaraswamy writes, could be either abstract or anthropomorphic, but was not sentimentalized or humanized. Bresson's use of unsentimentalized form, his pursuit of "mystery" certainly seems part of this tradition, and would explain his stylistic, although not theological, affinities with Ozu.

The Scholastic aesthetic is also appropriate for Bresson's art because it allows a place for the intellectual formulation of ideas within the form. Logic was not opposed to mystery but just another means to appreciate it. The Schoolmen "attempted a task not yet clearly envisaged by their forerunners and ruefully to be abandoned by their successors, the mystics and the nominalists: the task of writing a permanent peace treaty between faith and reason."[71] This aesthetic, which could serve both faith and reason in East and West, can also serve the seemingly contradictory qualities of Bresson's film-making.

Scholasticism, Erwin Panofsky has demonstrated, found its clearest expression in Gothic architecture. The Schoolmen define Gothic architecture by its mathematical unity rather than its later expressionist facade. Like St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* the Gothic world sought

to create clarity through organization, synthesis through form. It represented, Panofsky writes, an "acceptance and ultimate reconciliation of contradictory possibilities."[72] On this level one could draw certain obvious parallels between Gothic architecture and Bresson's films. Both enclosed theological paradoxes within a larger form, both favored the anonymity of the artist, both sought to evoke the final "mystery."

The Gothic cathedral may be an appropriate aesthetic metaphor for Bresson's films, but in artistic practice its delicate coalition between faith and reason began to break down, more and more producing not spiritual stasis but sensual disparity. Gothic architecture, which quite literally forced faith and reason to remain under the same roof, eventually cracked under its internal strain, and its previously calm rational aesthetic became exaggerated, yielding to contorted lines and distorted figures. Artistically, Bresson's films bear more resemblance to Byzantine portraiture, an art form which lived out an aesthetic similar to Scholasticism before there was the need to create an aesthetic.

THE ARTISTIC TRADITION: BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHY

There undoubtedly are many major and minor artistic traditions which have influenced Bresson in one way or another, but the most important, I think, is Byzantine iconography. It has been a common thread in Western and Oriental art and influenced the Scholastic aesthetic; it serves to further strengthen the link between Bresson, Ozu, and the universal form of representation.

Like Oriental art, Byzantine iconography was an art of fixed ends, and those ends were spiritual and ideal rather than human and sentimental. The work of art was the means to an ineffable end: "The adoration of the icon," St. Basil stated, "passes to the prototype, that is to say to the Holy person represented."[73]

To achieve these ends Byzantine art was anonymous and impersonal. Some icons were described as pictures "made without hands," formed, rather, by miraculous contact with the original. To enforce anonymity Late Byzantine mosaicists were enjoined by ecclesiastical fiat to make their representations of Christ conform to certain requirements. This rule, one scholar wrote, "was designed to promote, not the artistic merit of the mosaic, but the honor of Christ; and since the majesty of Christ was the transcendent idea, of which the mosaic was the material image, this rule actually helped to draw the attention of both the mosaicist and the spectator to the right quarter."[74] Individual influence was, of course, discern-

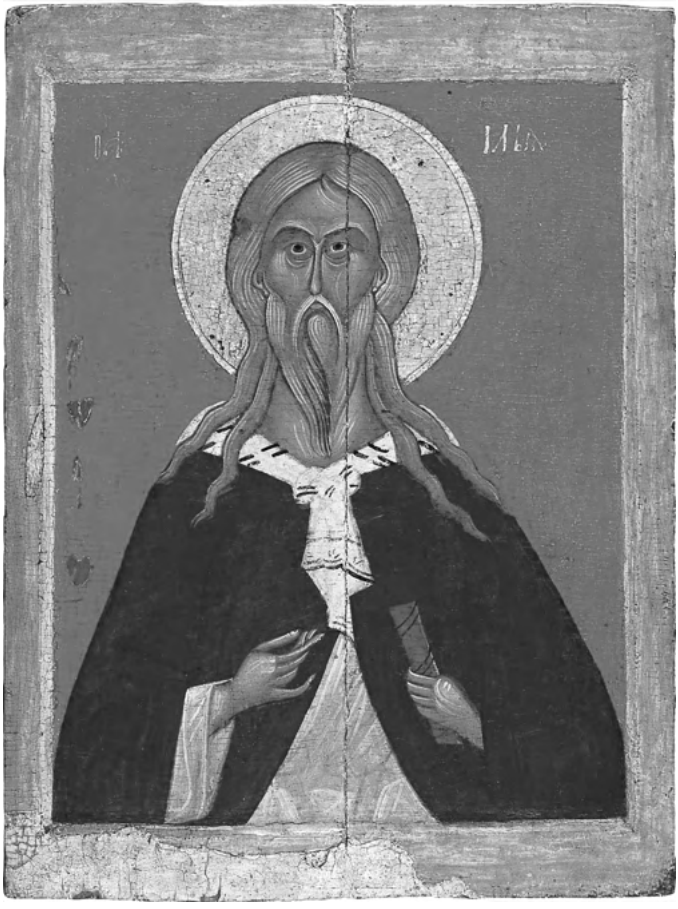
ible, but not peremptory; artists came and went, Byzantine iconography stayed.

Byzantine iconography was a function of the liturgy. The spectator's attitude toward the icon was the same as his attitude toward the mass. The individual became absorbed into the collective order, the collective order hardened into a form, and the form expressed the Transcendent. Consequently, the icons became stylized, rigid, hierarchical, further and further apart from the world of verisimilitude and sensation. "In the Byzantine era Christian iconography had, slowly but surely, climbed away from the alluring world of the senses, soaring ever higher into a region of theological symbolism and, through its images, carrying man's imagination to the transcendent realm where images hovered between God and man."[75]

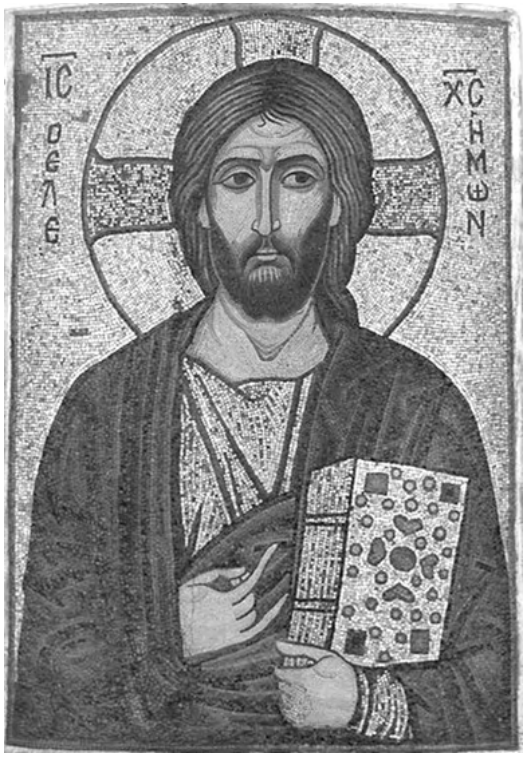
The Schoolmen were infl uenced, primarily through the writings of the Neoplatonists, by Byzantine iconography and its attitudes toward art. Aquinas's artistic contemporaries, the Late Byzantine and Romanesque painters, may have been aesthetically infl uenced by Scholasticism but they were artistically stimulated by the Byzantine techniques they saw in imported icons and in the work of refugees from the Iconoclastic controversies. Byzantine iconography has been a continuous infl uence on European art. Long after the decline of Byzantium, its art molded painters like Cimabue, Duccio, Cavallini, and Giotto; aff ected Quattrocento painters like Mantegna; and was the basis of Carolingian, Northumbrian, and Ottonian art. Byzantine art often functioned in this manner, breathing fresh Eastern life into stagnating, rationalistic Western theories. Byzantine iconography may be seen to aff ect Bresson's films in the way it aff ected European art until as late as the sixteenth century (and in some cases, such as Rouault and Derain, until the present); it brings the force of specific, hieratic, "spiritual" techniques to a rationalized organon.

Bresson uses methods of representation very similar to those employed by Byzantine painters and mosaicists, and for some of the same reasons. Barthélémy Amengual has already noted, in passing, the similarities between Bresson's fi lms and Byzantine art. In both, he writes, there is the "dialectic of concrete and abstract . . . the proximity, almost the identity, of the sensual and the spiritual, of emotion and idea, of static body and mobile mind."[76] The analogy can be carried even further; there are technical as well as theoretical similarities between Bresson's fi lms and Byzantine iconography.

Frontality, nonexpressive faces, hieratic postures, symmetric compositions, and two-dimensionality are common to both. The Byzantine mosaicist constructed the nonexpressive face because God himself was



Elijah from a fourteenth-century Novgorod icon; Florence Carrez as Joan of Arc; Christ, from a twelfth-century Byzantine icon; Martin Lassalle in *Pickpocket*. "The long forehead, the lean features, the closed lips, the blank stare, the flat light, these all identify Bresson's protagonist as objects suitable for veneration."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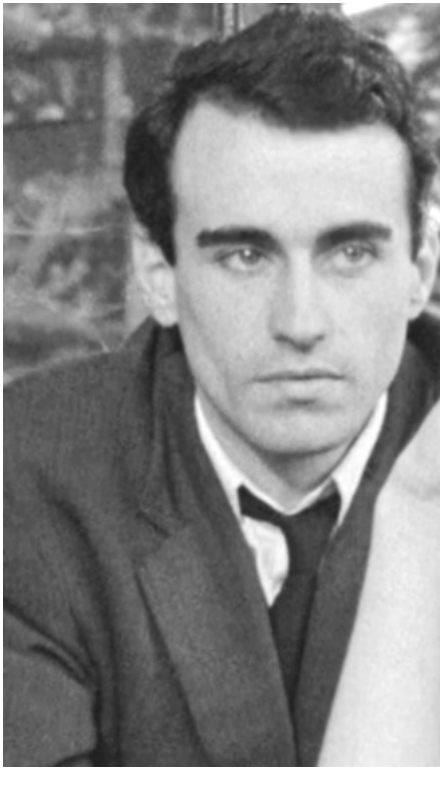

beyond all expression; similarly, Bresson uses the nonexpressive face to "deprejudice" the viewer's attitudes toward the Transcendent. Bresson's statement about taking a steam iron to the image, "flattening it out," could have been written by the Stoglav Council which prohibited the "sensuality of heretics" in iconic portraiture.[77] Frontality in iconography was designed, Agathias wrote, so that "the man looking at the ikon directs his mind to a higher contemplation. No longer has he a confused veneration."[78] Bresson uses frontality to create a respectful, noncommitted attitude within the viewer which can result in a stasis very similar to that evoked by a religious icon.

The long forehead, the lean features, the closed lips, the blank stare, the frontal view, the flat light, the uncluttered background, the stationary camera, these identify Bresson's protagonists as objects suitable for veneration. When Michel's cold face stares into the camera in scene after scene in *Pickpocket,* Bresson is using his face—only one part of Bresson's complex film-making—like a Byzantine face painted high on a temple wall. It can simultaneously evoke sense of distance (its imposing, hieratic quality) and a strange sensuousness (the hard-chiseled stern face amid a vast mosaic or environmental panorama). And when Bresson brings the rest of his film-making abilities to bear on that face, it takes its rightful place in the liturgy. Just before the priest collapses in fatigue on a barren hillock, almost enveloped by gray dusk and dark barren trees, there is a long shot in Bresson's *Country Priest* which creates a composition familiar to Byzantine wall paintings, such as the Ascension mosaic at St. Sophia: an agonized, lonely, full figure set against an empty environment, his head hung to the left, wrapped in body-obscuring robes, about to succumb to the spiritual weight he must bear.

It is possible, but not profitable, to continue this analogy between Bresson's faces and compositions and Byzantine mosaics and paintings. One might draw comparisons to the Christ types in Byzantine portraiture, Christ the Pantocrator, Christ the King of Kings, Christ the Merciful, Christ the Suffering, and so forth, or one might compare the "three-circle" method of Byzantine painting to Bresson's lighting. But such comparisons would overextend the value of the analogy. Motion pictures are so different from mosaics that any 1:1 comparison would be inaccurate. Bresson's films are more than filmic adaptions of Byzantine icons, just as Ozu's films are more than screen versions of *sumi-e* paintings.

To mold his modern-day saints Bresson draws on the specific techniques of the long-standing tradition of Byzantine art. These techniques not only produce certain desired, tried-and-true audience reactions, but

they also link Bresson's work to a method of representation which has its roots in the East and has been successfully adapted to dozens of cultures. Unlike his other artistic traditions, Byzantine iconography ties Bresson to a universal form which has been used by many artists, among them Yasujiro Ozu. The common historical aesthetic and artistic traditions shared by Bresson and Ozu, even though seemingly remote, set the stage for their contemporary stylistic union.

A SYNTHESIS OF TRADITION: IMAGO DEI

Bresson is a man of (at least) three traditions. Although it is possible to delineate each of these traditions and analyze them separately, in the course of his fi lms these traditions must necessarily join and disjoin, forming more or less lasting syntheses. The necessity of cultural syntheses was not so evident in the study of Ozu's fi lms because, although several subtraditions were noticeable (such as light comedy), it seemed (at least to this Western mind) that he, by and large, adhered to one overriding tradition, Zen, with all its "theological," aesthetic, and artistic implications.

One of the most interesting of Bresson's syntheses is his depiction of the Image of God. *Imago Dei* is the pivotal concept in any discussion of Christian art, and Bresson's handling of it demonstrates how he applied Byzantine concepts of portraiture to Jansenist theology. The very fact that an artist should become involved in the Image of God controversy is determined, van der Leeuw contends, by the fact that he thinks historically and transcendentally.[79] In Christianity and the West the Transcendent is fi xed in a single person, the Redeemer, both God and man, and how to portray that person must be the crucial question of religious art.

Historically, there have been two interpretations of *Imago Dei,* the Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant, with the Roman Church straddling the area in between. Both start from a common point: the original unity of God and man when God created man in his image (Gen. 1:26, 27). One camp, which is exemplifi ed by the Protestant churches, takes as its text Exodus 20:3 which prohibits any graven image. The unity had been shattered by the Fall; sin-dominated man could not possibly depict the Holy. This view was expressed as early as the second century by Clement of Alexandria: "It has been plainly forbidden us to practice deceptive art; for the prophet says, 'Thou shalt not make the likeness of anything that is in Heaven, or in the earth beneath.'"[80] This notion has enjoyed continuous favor, being articulated by the eighth-century

Ascension mosaic at St. Sophia and Claude Laydu in *Diary of a Country Priest*: "An agonized, lonely full figure set against an empty environment, his head hung to the left, wrapped in body-obscuring robes, and about to succumb to the spiritual weight he must bear."

Iconoclasts, espoused to more moderate degrees by Anselm, Luther, and Calvin, and it assumed its most virulent form when Cromwell's Puritans smashed England's religious statuary. The Protestants have taken a theoretical stand against religious images of any sort (although in practice certain images have been tolerated), whereas the Roman Church continues to permit images so long as they are not worshipped or venerated.

On the other hand, the Eastern Church takes as its proof text Philippians 2:6, which emphasizes the incarnation, the fact that God came down "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of a man." The Eastern view holds that as Christ is the image of God, so he can be worshipped through images. The Synod of Trullo (692) legalized this position, decreeing that "from now on icons should show . . . Christ

our God in His human shape . . . so that we may be reminded of his incarnate life."[81] The Western Church saw in images (to the extent that they were permitted) only instruction, education, and edification; the Eastern Church, on the other hand, saw in images mysteries which effect salvation. The Eastern Church not only allowed images but prescribed the form they should take.

Viewed from the Roman or Protestant (which would also include the Jansenist) position, Bresson engages in the heresy of Eastern iconography. The *Imago Dei* dilemma comes up in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. The inquisitor asks Joan if her followers had made any images of her. This is a crucial question: the Roman Church is trying to convict her for the Eastern heresy of images. If Joan permits her followers to venerate images of her she is committing a double sin: blasphemy (setting herself up against God) and the creation of graven images. Joan answers with typical ambiguity, "I saw one." Bresson, with his own ambiguity, is admitting the iconographic heresy into the theology of the Western Church. Joan was not only a saint in the Roman Catholic sense (she was later canonized)—that is, a person whose life offers edification to those who contemplate and emulate it—but she was also, Bresson suggests, an image in the Eastern sense—an icon to be venerated. And Bresson goes on to posit an even more insidious heresy—that Joan is a spiritual

Transcendence in East and West, Ozu's *Late Spring* and Bresson's *The Trial of Joan of Arc*: "For Ozu, the awareness of the transcendent was a way of living; for Bresson, a way of dying."

icon in a Godless universe, that she should be venerated for her ability to transcend herself, thereby expressing an undefined "Transcendent" which is not any specific "God."

Bresson cannot be tied down to any one heresy; he is a heretic all his own. His techniques of portraiture come from Byzantium; his theology of predestination, free will, and grace from Jansenism; his aesthetics from Scholasticism. To each tradition he brings the virtues of the other, and to cinema he brings the virtues of all three. Perhaps this is why no religious denomination has ever embraced Bresson's seemingly religious films; they haven't figured out what sort of heretic he is yet.

BEYOND PRETEXTS

From this baffling maze of traditions and subtraditions, some perhaps more or less real than I have postulated, Bresson forges what could be called *his* tradition—a curious amalgamation of Western skeletons. Yet this synthesis is only a "pretext," the cultural elements Bresson finds easiest to work with. It seems only natural for the elements of Bresson's historical traditions to coalesce, for they must prepare to meet a formidable opponent: the "new" sensual, individualistic art of cinema, which with *its* traditions has tried to squash the spiritual qualities out of art. The resulting conflict pits the two traditions against each other in a bizarre time-machine manner: Scholastic aesthetic against movie aesthetic, ideal portraiture against individual portraiture, spiritual refie-

ment against dramatic development. (The implications of the expression of the spiritual occurring on film, of course, are somewhat involved and will be considered in the Conclusion.) Out of this struggle comes a new form: transcendental style. It is the old aesthetic in the new medium. The aesthetic is familiar, but the style is new.

On the surface there would seem little to link Ozu and Bresson; neither of them could make films in the other's country without experiencing "culture shock." They shared an ancient Christian/Oriental aesthetic heritage which had fallen into general disrepair, especially in motion pictures. But their common desire to express the Transcendent on film made that link crucial; each took the old aesthetic principles into a new art form. The aesthetic was the same, the medium was the same, and not surprisingly, the resultant style was remarkably similar.

Transcendental style, like Byzantine art, is a universal form because it can accommodate different artists and different cultures within a common structure. Byzantine art could reach from England and France to the Far East; transcendental style can reach to wherever men make movies. The differences which seem so culturally unbridgeable can both

function within transcendental style: frontality can be both Pantocrator hierarchism or it can be Zen "politeness"; disparity can be both alienation between man and nature and man and God; stasis can both be a quiescent view of nature and the symbolic icon. Transcendental style can express the endemic metaphors of each culture: it is like the mountain which is a mountain, doesn't seem to be a mountain, then is a mountain again; it is also like the prison in which man is involuntarily enclosed, yet from which through a dark night of the soul he can escape, choosing instead to enter a "new" prison. In sum, transcendental style can adapt to both cultures because it expresses the Transcendent, which knows no culture. It is not a metaphor which is restricted to its antecedents; it is a form which is universally appreciable.

At the moment of stasis the "pretexts" fall away, the Way of Introspection and the Way of Unifying Vision yield to each other. At such a moment (if it is fortunate enough to occur) the transcendental style in films is unified with the transcendental style in any art, mosaics, painting, flower-arranging, tea ceremony, liturgy. At this point the function of religious art is complete; it may now fade back into experience. The wind blows where it will; it doesn't matter once all is grace.

III. Dreyer

This essay has sought to track down a transcendental style—a universal form, which is used by different film-makers in divergent cultures in order to express the Wholly Other. This search has led to two directors who, although as culturally alien as two men are likely to be, used similar techniques for similar reasons. Yasujiro Ozu and Robert Bresson seemingly have contrasting conceptions of all of man's fundamental dilemmas: his attitudes concerning nature, death, the body, love, grace; yet they share a common element: the need to express that Other in form, which for them means film form.

Ayfre writes, "The style of transcendence does not allow wavering or half-measures—to attempt it without complete mastery is to invite disaster."* If this were so, this study of transcendental style might well

* Ayfre continues, "A lack of rigor in style, incertainties in inspiration, condescension and bad faith toward the audience, are enough to deprive many works of any truly sacred meaning" (*Cinéma et la foi chretienne* [Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1960], p. 87). Ayfre's definition of the "style of transcendence" differs from the definition of transcendental style used in this essay, not in the final result of that style ("the Invisible is evoked rather than represented" [ibid., p. 85]) but in description of the techniques which lead up to the final result. Ayfre, as far as I can tell, defines the "style of transcendence" by its end result, its intentions, its inner theology, its tone, but not by its specific techniques. His "definition" is, by and large, a description of the films which evoke the desired end, primarily the films of Bresson and Dreyer. It is not a definition of a distinct style. He does mention certain stylistic elements in these films, "the meticulous selection of highly concrete details," "liturgical purity," "the Holy Face," "extreme stylization," "an undecipherable

Carl Dreyer.

end here. Ozu and Bresson are the masters of the transcendental style; they exemplify its use in East and West. Any other film which employs transcendental style without "complete mastery" would be, in Ayfre's terms, a "disaster." But the case seems to be just the opposite. Any style which is composed of definite components can be used componentially. These components have their own identity and function, and they can bring partial or substantial success to films even though they are used in parody of the Transcendent (Buñuel, Warhol), for totally secular ends (Forman, Antonioni), or in service to a Transcendent, however vague, but without "complete mastery" (Dreyer, Boetticher, Rossellini).

For a film-maker, the selection of the transcendental style is not an easy one. A film-maker truly devoted to expressing the Transcendent on

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but undeniable secret" in the character which gives the "sense that life is something unique which does not belong to men," but he does not demonstrate, at least to my mind, how these elements—present in many fi lms, secular as well as sacred—are welded into a peculiarly transcendental style. Because Ayfre defi nes transcendental style by the eff ect evoked by its successful examples rather than by the organization of its component parts, he falls into the trap of mistaking partial successes for "disasters" and also, as is the case in Dreyer's films, mistaking partial successes for complete successes.

fi lm must not only eschew the more superfi cial elements of his personality and culture, but he must also sacrifi ce the vicarious enjoyments that cinema seems uniquely able to provide, empathy for character, plot, and fast movement. Ozu took many years to achieve a purified transcendental style; Bresson arrived there much quicker, but not without considerable introspection and determination. In the fi lms of Carl Dreyer one can see this struggle at work. Dreyer never totally yielded to the transcendental style; he respected it, pioneered many of its techniques, gradually came to use it more and more, but was never willing to completely forsake the expressive, psychological techniques at which he was also expert. His reluctance was not unwitting; on the contrary, his doubts about transcendental style stem from his fundamental doubts about the nature of the Transcendent in life and art. Throughout Dreyer's films and his writings about fi lm there runs a consistent thread of ambiguity: whether art should express the Transcendent or the person (fictional character or fi lm-maker) who experiences the Transcendent; whether the Transcendent is an outer reality or an inner reality. Toward the end of his life (he died in 1968), Dreyer seemed to be moving more and more toward an austere, predominantly transcendental style, but he never forsook his fundamental spiritual—and therefore stylistic—dualism.

Like Bresson, Dreyer had a meager fi lm output: fourteen films in fi fty-nine years. He was plagued with the financial diffi culties so familiar to Bresson. Audiences often found his fi lms "static" and "boring"; he lived from one critical "rediscovery" to the next. He lived in a time and place even less receptive to the solitary, uncorruptible artist than Bresson's. During the most mature, profound period of his directorial career, from the age of thirty-nine to his death at seventy-nine, he was able to make only six features.

Unlike Ozu and Bresson, however, Dreyer was not an unwavering formalist; he did not defi ne a single style throughout his career. On the contrary, Dreyer was proud of the fact that he had been able to create a diff erent style for each of his fi lms: "A Danish critic said to me one day, 'I have the impression that there are at least six of your fi lms that are stylistically completely diff erent, one from the other.' That moved me, for that is something I really tried to do: to fi nd a style that has value for only a single film."[1] Dreyer did not devote his life to the rarefication of the transcendental style, yet it was one of the recurring, fundamental elements in his approach to film.

Each of Dreyer's individual film "styles" is, to be more accurate, a synthesis between three basic and opposing styles at work in his fi lms.

In his study of Dreyer, Claude Perrin notes two of these opposing forces. "In order to defi ne Dreyer's aesthetic," he writes, "one must confront two opposing artistic schools: the *Kammerspiel* and expressionism."[2] Perrin goes on to demonstrate how the tension between these "schools" underlies all of Dreyer's work. This tension, to be sure, is integral to Dreyer's fi lms, but, it seems to me, it is unable to account for that peculiar, "spiritual" quality Perrin and others ascribe to his work. A "fundamental opposition" between Kammerspiel and expressionism was a consistent stylistic feature of the early German cinema, as Lotte Eisner points out;[3] yet none of the German fi lms evoke a world of transcendent values in the way Dreyer's fi lms do. There is, I suggest, another force—transcendental style—which interacts with both Kammerspiel and expressionism in Dreyer's fi lms, and brings them each a certain spiritual weight which they do not innately possess. Of the three "styles," Kammerspiel is the artistic raw material of Dreyer's films; expressionism and transcendental style act upon and distort that material, turning it to their own ends. Expressionism and transcendental style are both in opposition to Kammerspiel, but they are more crucially in opposition to each other, and one usually succeeds at the expense of the other.

The interplay of these forces, styles, or schools in Dreyer's films may be schematized thus: (1) some fi lms are straightforward, relatively unhampered Kammerspiel, such as *Mikael* (1924), *Master of the House* (*Du skal ære din hustru,* 1925), *Two People* (*Två människor,* 1945), *Gertrud* (1964); (2) in one film, *Vampire* (*Vampyr,* 1932), expressionism predominates over Kammerspiel and transcendental style; (3) in another, *The Word* (*Ordet,* 1955), transcendental style predominates over Kammerspiel and expressionism; (4) in others, most importantly *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1928) and *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag,* 1943), expressionism and transcendental style vie for control of the Kammerspiel.

KAMMERSPIELFILM

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *Kammerspiele* (literally, chamber plays) were the immediate stylistic precedents for Dreyer's fi lms; they infl uenced both his choice of subject and directorial method. Kammerspiele were a reaction against the elaborate showcase staging of classical drama; they desired to create an "intimate theater" in which

the effect of chamber music could be transferred to the stage. Max Reinhardt founded Die Kammerspiele in 1906 and August Strindberg started his Intimate Theater the following year. In these small theaters with dim lights and warm-toned wood paneling, an elite (not more than three hundred spectators) could "feel all the significance of a smile, a hesitation, or an eloquent silence."[4] The chamber plays themselves, like those written by Strindberg for his theater, were equally "intimate," featuring a slow-paced drama between members of a "family" (or social group) within a "house" (fixed number of rooms). These were the limits—both physical and thematic—in which psychological depths could be probed.

"In drama," Strindberg wrote his actors, "we seek the strong, highly significant motif, but with limitations. We try to avoid in the treatment all frivolity, all calculated effects, places for applause, star roles, solo numbers."[5] Kammerspiele have a simplicity of scenic means, a refusal to use declamatory effects, a systematic realism, rigorous action, and a measured symbolism.

The Kammerspielfilm (the chamber play transferred to the screen). Eisner writes, "is the psychological film *par excellence*."[6] Complex psychological states were revealed through meticulous staging, an insinuating manner, weighty, deeply felt gestures, and a ponderous slowness. In sum, Kammerspiele are distinguished from conventional drawing-room dramas by a Nordic sober-mindedness, a simplicity of artistic means, and a weighty psychological intent.

Dreyer was not only aware but proud of his origins in the "intimate" psychological Kammerspiele. He once described *Mikael* as a true Kammerspielfilm,[7] and later said he was flattered that *Mikael* had been called the first Kammerspielfilm.[8] In each of Dreyer's films one can detect elements of Kammerspiele: intimate family drama, fixed interior settings, unembellished sets, long takes emphasizing staging, the use of gesture and facial expression to convey psychological states, plain language, and a thoroughgoing sobriety. *Master of the House,* for example, contains almost all these elements; its enclosed interiors, its measured pacing, its emphasis on revelatory gesture, all place it within the Kammerspiele tradition.

Dreyer's roots in Kammerspiele are most evident in his treatment of actors. He puts great faith in his actors; he does not impress a stylization *upon* his actors, like expressionism or transcendental style, but teases expression *out* of them. "The director is careful never to force his

Kammerspiel in *Mikael*: "Complex psychological states are revealed through meticulous staging, an insinuating manner, weighty deeply felt gestures, and a ponderous slowness."

own interpretation on an actor, because an actor cannot create truth and pure emotions on command. One cannot push feelings out. They have to arise from themselves, and it is the director's and actor's work in unison to bring them to that point."[9] Consequently Dreyer, like the director of the Intimate Theater, places great emphasis on the revelatory nuances of gesture and expression: "In French and American psychological fi lms of recent years, facial expression is again brought to honor and given value, and it is all to the good. . . . Gesture endows the face with soul and facial expression is an extra-important plus to the spoken word. . . . The wrinkles in a face, small as well as large, tell you endlessly about the character."[10]

EXPRESSIONISM

The intent and techniques of expressionism are in direct opposition to Kammerspiel. It is the reverse side of man's psychological nature. Expressionism externalizes Kammerspiel's delicate interior drama, overtly exposes its tortured underpinnings, and transforms its calm facade and

measured symbolism into grotesque graphics and mythic imagery. Kammerspiel utilizes realism and understatement; expressionism utilizes exaggeration and overstatement; but both are dependent upon psychology, often of a complicated nature.

The ego is the essential part of the expressionist's universe; in fact, the universe is his projected ego. No image, if conjured up by the ego, can be too distorted, no plot too implausible, no gesture exaggerated. The expressionists employed every technique, every trick at their disposal to project their ego onto the universe, and cinema, with its endless possibilities for *trompe-l'oeil,* became a natural expressionist medium.

During the period from 1910 to 1920 expressionism became the dominant art force in Germany and, to a lesser extent, Scandinavia. At the height of expressionism there was almost no remnant of its Kammerspiel beginnings; it had become an art unto itself. Although Dreyer was not an expressionist he could not help but feel the influence of expressionism. Throughout Dreyer's career, in opposition to Kammerspiel, runs a thread of "caligarisme," the expressionist techniques perfected by the early German stage and cinema. German expressionism featured rich chiaroscuro, jutting and oblique angles, surreal architectonics, antirealistic sets, and distorted faces—techniques which are present to a greater or lesser degree in all of Dreyer's films.

Although it appeared well after the crest of German expressionism, *Vampyr* is Dreyer's only exclusively expressionistic fi lm. The expressionism seems to have run away with the Kammerspiel; there is little tension between the two. Both the subject matter (vampires, afterlife) and the techniques (chiaroscuro, exaggerated gesture, nonrealistic sets, rampant fantasy sequences) of *Vampyr* exhibit a confident appreciation of the strengths of expressionism and a calculated use of its methods. David Gray, the "protagonist" of *Vampyr,* is not a Kammerspiel actor whose interior feelings have to be "pushed out." His feelings are already externalized: he wears them quite literally on his sleeve, or his staircase, or his coffi n. His style is not one of nuance, but of exaggeration; he is not an individual personality, but the fl uid, human component of a distorted, expressionist universe. Gray's vampire world is rife with familiar expressionist visual fetishes: an obsession with darkened staircases, arching doorways, and vanishing corridors. *Vampyr* ranks with the greatest of the German expressionist films *(Nosferatu, Metropolis),* and its apparent singularity among Dreyer's fi lms demonstrates not only his versatility but also his intuitive cinematic genius for varying types of fi lm style. Compared with a doctrinaire Kammerspielfilm like *Master of*

Expressionism in *Vampyr*: "Gray's vampire world is rife with familiar expressionist visual fetishes: an obsession with darkened staircases, arching doorways, and vanishing corridors."

the House, it also serves to sow the seeds of stylistic schizophrenia that one senses in Dreyer's fi lms: the uneasy combination of definitely uncongenial styles.

Like Wilhelm Worringer, the German aesthetician whose theories anticipated German expressionism, Dreyer defi nes what one calls "expressionism" in his fi lms as "abstraction," the reducing of spatial instability into geometric form. "Abstraction allows the director to get outside the fence with which naturalism has surrounded his medium. It allows his fi lms to be not merely visual, but spiritual. The director must share his own artistic and spiritual experiences with the audience. Abstraction will give him a chance of doing it, of replacing reality with his own subjective interpretations."[11] Dreyer seems to be saying quite forthrightly that he consciously uses expressionistic techniques (abstraction) to break out of the fence of Kammerspiel (naturalism); he also states that he feels (like Perrin) that expressionism gives his fi lms their spiritual weight—an assumption which, of course, is under question in this essay. When com-

bined with Kammerspiel, expressionism perfoms a crucial function: it "abstracts" the individual psychology both thematically and visually, transforming it into a common myth. Despite the expressionist theoreticians, I do not feel that expressionism (at least in fi lm) has been able to raise abstraction to the level of transcendental awareness. It may give the inner psychology a corporate or universal quality, but it is still inner psychology. To locate the source of Dreyer's "spiritual values" one has to look to another style.

TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

Like expressionism, transcendental style in Dreyer's fi lms stems from the Kammerspiel and opposes it. But it also opposes expressionism and its right to control the Kammerspiel. Expressionism is an anathema to transcendental style: it is one of the "screens" Bresson scorns. It "interprets" reality, assigning to it a comprehensible (though irrational) psychological reality. The expressionist world is distorted, unreal, perhaps unendurable, but it is nonetheless understandable because one sees it through certain human eyes, whether they be the actor's, director's, or cameraman's. Expressionism doesn't eliminate the barriers which stand between the spectator and the Holy; it exaggerates them and makes them a value in themselves.

Transcendental style prefers to undermine the Kammerspiel rather than attack it. It does not transform the external world; in stasis the mountain looks pretty much like it did in the everyday. It transforms the rationale of the world without changing its exterior. It does not rely on objective "proof"—whether that be the slight gesture of an actor (Kammerspiel) or a transfi gured universe (expressionism)—but on a carefully constructed phenomenology of faith.

Everyday

The scrupulous attention to day-to-day reality in Dreyer's films, of course, has its origins in Kammerspiele. Motion pictures allowed filmmakers to carry even further the realistic tendencies of the nineteenth century, whether in the chamber play or the naturalist novel. Dreyer's use of everyday is not unique: in his earlier fi lms it was a Kammerspiel concern for minor details and seemingly insignifi cant movements; in his later fi lms it became more ascetic and Bressonesque, resulting in flat empty sets, inexpressive dialogue, natural soundtrack, and long takes.

In many areas one can detect the conflict between transcendental style and Kammerspiel and expressionism. In the Kammerspiel tradition he relies heavily on his actors ("he has to create. I can only stand by"[12]), but in his later films, like Ozu and Bresson, he instructed his actors to "play nothing."[13] Like Ozu and Bresson, Dreyer has a factual concern for faces, but that concern can very easily turn to empathy by nuance (Kammerspiel) or exaggeration (the painted masks of expressionism). If the everyday is able to successfully stylize the Kammerspiel, it then is mitigated by expressionism: Dreyer creates the surface of reality, then seemingly becomes enamored with the surface itself, mistaking the means for the end.

Disparity

Dreyer's films often feature a character totally estranged from his environment: Joan of Arc; Marte, the witch in *Day of Wrath;* John, God's fool in *Ordet.* As in Bresson's films these characters have no human metaphorical contact with reality, and their effect on the audience is similarly schizoid. To a large degree this disparity is caused by the tension between Kammerspiel (naturalistic settings) and expressionism (contrived camera composition and angle). Such a stylistic tension explains the protagonist's psychological dilemma, but it does not explain that other tension of which Dreyer speaks: "It is that latent tension, that smoldering discomfort behind the minister's family's everyday life that I have so urgently been trying to bring forward."[14] This disparity (the Other within the physical) is the disparity of transcendental style. Dreyer not only creates disparity in the conventional psychological sense by contrasting Kammerspiel and expressionism, but he also creates disparity in the manner of transcendental style by designing a character like John in *Ordet* who has no psychological (interior or exterior) cause for his estranging passion, a character who is truly the "fool of God."

In the case of *Ordet* the disparity is confirmed with the definitive decisive action, the raising of the dead. This unexpected miracle within a dour Nordic universe is quite consciously "shocking," and consequently demands some sort of pro or con commitment from the spectator. Within the context of Dreyer's varied styles the resulting effect of this miracle may not be what transcendental style prescribes, but the concept of a miraculous event within a carefully constructed banal reality is much more a part of transcendental style than Kammerspiel or expressionism.

Stasis

Dreyer's lack of commitment to the transcendental style becomes most apparent in his failure to achieve stasis. Some of Dreyer's statements ("We hope that fi lm will set ajar for us a door into other worlds"[15]) as well as his partial use of everyday and disparity indicate that he genuinely desired to create transcendental art, although the nonstasis endings of his fi lms, as we shall see, suggest other intentions. Whatever Dreyer's true intentions were (and I tend to think they were mixed), he was never able to achieve stasis, the fi nal test of transcendental art, to the extent that Ozu and Bresson did because, it seems to me, he never relied on the transcendental style to the extent that they did. When the fi nal moment of would-be stasis occurred, Dreyer had hedged his bets, leaving elements of Kammerspiel untouched and intertwining expressionism with transcendental style, thereby off ering the viewer alternative explanations, spiritual and psychological, for the decisive action.

Like many artists with spiritual intentions Dreyer uses the "frozen image," but it is crucial to ask what he is freezing. Is he freezing the commitment which comes after the decisive action, or is he freezing the disparity itself, creating an endless syndrome of earthly struggle?

Because Dreyer increasingly used elements of transcendental style in his fi lms, one may suggest that he was progressing toward a thesis-antithesis-synthesis/

Kammerspiel-expressionism-transcendental-style evolution. Although a late Dreyer Kammerspiel film *(Gertrud)* has more of the ascetic elements of transcendental style than an early one *(Master of the House),* Dreyer, as far as one can ascertain, rejected complete stasis to the very end of his career. Before positing an explanation why Dreyer did not choose to create stasis, it will be helpful to examine how Kammerspiel, expressionism, and transcendental style interrelate in three specific films.

THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC

A comparison between Dreyer's and Bresson's Joan of Arc fi lms is not only convenient but also fruitful, explicitly establishing their diff erent attitudes toward hagiography. Dreyer's fi lm is a passion;* Bresson's is a

* The passion of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is diff erent from the Passion I have associated with transcendental style, that is, the Holy Agony. Dreyer's passion is physical, psychological, and spiritual suff ering, whereas Bresson's is almost exclusively spiritual.


Joan at the moment of death, as visualized by Dreyer, left, and Bresson, right: "Both view Joan as a sufferingintercessorbetweenGodandman:Dreyerasthecrucifie d, sacrificial lamb; Bresson as the resurrected, glorified icon."

trial. Both depict the historical Joan, but whereas Dreyer emphasizes, in Bazin's terms, the psychology of her existence, Bresson emphasizes the physiology of her existence. Both Joans are alienated, but whereas Dreyer's Joan is reactive to her social surroundings, Bresson's Joan is a solitary soul, responding primarily to her voices. Both fi lms reveal the sainthood of Joan: Dreyer through her humanity, Bresson through her divinity. Both view Joan as a suff ering intercessor between God and man: Dreyer as the crucified, sacrifi cial lamb; Bresson as the resurrected, glorified icon.

This theological distinction carries over into direction and camera techniques. Dreyer and Bresson both employ the transcendental style, but whereas Dreyer weights the style heavily with Kammerspiel and expressionism, Bresson uses it exclusively.

In *The Passion of Joan of Arc* expressionist detail is evident in choice of subject, composition, camera movement, and staging. Characters in expressionist fi lms often wore masks or heavy face paint to obscure their individual identities and merge them with the distorted expressionist decor. The faces in Dreyer's *Passion,* although seemingly "documentary" because of their lack of make-up, become their own "masks." Dreyer's obsession with "wrinkles" soon surpasses the psychological concerns of the chamber play and comes to resemble the expressionist mania for distortion. Each face contains a wealth of detail: craggy ridges, puff y cheeks, bulbous eyebrows, sclerotic warts, globes of sweat; Dreyer's close-up camera accentuates every facial aberration, every "nuance" of expression. The faces of Joan's inquisitors are genuinely oppressive, and part of Joan's fear and trembling comes from the

expressionist tradition: an innocent female victim trapped and terrorized by ghastly demonic distorted faces. The antagonistic faces of the judges are active; they attack the defenseless and submissive Joan, whose passive face receives and reflects their emotional aggression.

For Dreyer the function of these distorted faces, as for expressionism, is to create audience empathy—both pity and fear—for Joan: "The result of the close-ups was that the spectator was as shocked as Joan was, receiving the questions, tortured by them. And, in fact, it was my intention to get this result."[16] Dreyer's use of faces is diametrically opposed to Bresson's, which actively spurns audience empathy. In his only recorded comment on Dreyer's *Passion,* Bresson stated, "I understand that at the time this film was a small revolution, but now I only see all the actors' horrible buff oon-eries, terror-stricken grimaces which make me want to flee."[17]

The composition and sets of *Passion* serve the same purpose as the faces: they off er an expressive environment in which the viewer can emotionally participate. This environment also permits the viewer to read-in character psychology which may not be explicit in the fi lm. The receding arches, each with its separate shadow, give the corridors an emotional weight of their own, and as Joan moves unwillingly through them she acquires that weight. The architecture of Joan's world literally conspires against her; like the faces of her inquisitors, the halls, doorways, furniture are on the off ensive, striking, swooping at her with oblique angles, attacking her with hard-edged chunks of black and white. The torture chamber sequence, in particular, is a familiar piece of expressionism; its horror comes not so much from its ability to infl ict pain as from its demented chiaroscuro and sinister obliquity.

The expressionistic architecture is implemented by the camerawork. In *Passion* Dreyer's camera is not stationary like Ozu's or Bresson's, but is hyperactive, taking as many as four or fi ve vantage points in a single scene. Dreyer's emotive intentions are often obvious: again and again he dollies down that long ominous line of oppressive faces, and cuts quickly, on motion, to a stationary shot of Joan's upturned, suff ering face. Not only is poor Joan being attacked by the judges, the architecture, the lighting, but even the camera movement is conspiring against her. Dreyer's use of camera angle is also unabashed: Joan is usually seen from a high angle as contrasted with the judges, who are shot from a long angle. A shot of the refl ection pool in which soldiers are seen running is less obvious in its intent, but like the low angle it serves a fundamental purpose: to create a directorial screen between the viewer and the event, a screen which will help place the event in time, space, emotion, and eff ect.

The Passion of Joan of Arc: "The receding arches, each with its separate shadow, give the corridors an emotional weight of their own, and as Joan moves unwillingly through them she acquires that weight."

But *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is much more than a chamber play with an overlay of expressionism, like the German expressionist films *Nju* or *The Treasure,* it also has that "other" quality. *Passion* also contains some of the elements of transcendental style. When unhampered by expressionist camerawork, there is a detached examination of detail, such as the shot of the blood spurting from Joan's arm. Like Bresson, Dreyer opens his fi lm with the shot of a ledger which details the factual, recorded evidence of the trial. In a manner very similar to Bresson, Dreyer allows the camera to linger on a scene after the "action" has passed: Joan enters the frame, opens the door, exits, and the camera holds on the closed door. The extensive use of close-up and lack of make-up also establish the everyday. On several occasions viewers have remarked that they thought *Passion,* a silent fi lm, was better without musical accompaniment than with. The reason, I think, is that without music there is more everyday; there is one less screen to interfere with the spiritual progress of Joan's soul. When a viewer sees a close-up of the jailer's key opening Joan's cell, he can hear the rattling in his mind, and the meticulous sense of everyday reality is reinforced.

The causes of Joan's disparity also seem deeper than just a conflict between Kammerspiel and expressionism, between simple life and distorted detail. Joan reacts emotionally to her hostile environment, but she also reacts spiritually to an external dimension. She does not only see her inquisitors as political pawns or demonic gorgons (as the camera sees them), but she also considers them representatives of the other world sent to torture and test her. She accuses them of being emissaries of the devil, and although her reasons seem to stem primarily from the expressionism-induced paranoia, they also stem from a genuine and overwhelming spiritual passion. She professes her faith quite simply and straightforwardly, and although her fear may come from the hostile surroundings, her faith does not. These elements of transcendental style—factual examination, overemphasis on detail in the door opening/closing scenes, an incredible faith—consistently suggest a spiritual weight in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

In the final test of transcendental style, stasis, however, Dreyer remains uncommitted to either psychology or spirituality, expressionism or transcendental style, and Dreyer's lack of commitment begets a similar lack of commitment in the spectator—stasis is not achieved. Dreyer uses his codas not for stasis, as Ozu and Bresson do, but to place the action in a social context. After a particularly grueling interrogation, Dreyer cuts away from Joan and focuses either on the reaction of the judges or the mobs gathered outside. The viewer feels pity for Joan, but that pity never leads to anything foolish (like belief) because the viewer continually is also given the perspective of uncommitted spectators. Thus when the supposed decisive action occurs—Joan's martyrdom—the viewer can evaluate it from a detached position, interpreting it either psychologically or sociologically. In his comparison of the two Joan of Arc films Jean Sémolué notes this crucial difference: "In *The Trial of Joan of Arc* each spectator adheres solitarily to the solitary agony of the heroine. In *The Passion of Joan of Arc* the flesh of a martyr interceding for us is beautified. . . . We, the spectators, are represented by the crowd, we become, through our intermediary, actors in the drama, like the kneeling donors of a medieval tableau, hands folded and faces bathed with tears."[18] Sémolué intends this to be complimentary toward *Passion* (and, indeed, it is complimentary, although not in the sense of transcendental style), but it also demonstrates that Dreyer by premeditating the Transcendent on emotional empathy deprives himself of the spiritually elevating effect of transcendental style. Dreyer's viewers are perpetually stuck at the foot of the cross, weeping over a corpse

soon cold, whereas Bresson's viewers may have transcended the veil of tears, passing on to something more permanent and edifying.

Any attempts Dreyer may have made at stasis collapse in the final moments of *Passion*. Joan's martyrdom is thrown into the simmering social context: the crowd turns to riot, the soldiers forcibly suppress them, killing and injuring many. This sequence is filmed in an empathy-evoking manner; the footage is action-cut and the soldiers are seen à la expressionism through grated bars from overhead. If he had any doubts, the last sequence takes the viewer off the transcendental hook. He may interpret Joan's death psychologically, sociologically, or spiritually, and given such a choice the viewer's natural preference is for either of the first two. The closing shots of the Dreyer and Bresson Joan of Arc films are ironically dissimilar. After the riot following Joan's death, Dreyer cuts back to the charred stake and pans upward, attempting artificially to force the viewer's thoughts heavenward while they actually remain on the chaos below. Bresson has no riot; her death is as perfunctory as her life. His also ends with a shot of the charred stake, but does not pan upward. The viewer's attention remains earthbound, but his soul, as dictates the transcendental style, theoretically soars upward.

The sociological ending of *Passion* justifies the interpretations of the film as a study of Joan the woman,[19] and as a film which reveals Dreyer's attitude toward women.[20] Such interpretations are viable because Dreyer does not, like Bresson, eschew arguments based solely on personality. In either case we move further away from transcendental style and toward the familiar, comprehensible terrain of expressionist and psychological cinema.

DAY OF WRATH

Day of Wrath also lends itself to analysis; it seemingly splits right down the middle: one-half predominantly transcendental style, the other half predominantly expressionist/psychological. Robert Warshow was probably the first critic to recognize what is described in this essay as "transcendental style." In a 1948 essay entitled "*Day of Wrath:* The Enclosed Image" Warshow described the dualistic quality of Dreyer's film. Warshow praised the first half (transcendental style), yet felt it was necessarily doomed to failure, as exemplified by the second half (expressionism). Dreyer's failure in *Day of Wrath* became prescriptive for any film attempting to evoke the spiritual dimension: "The camera," Warshow wrote, "cannot create a religious system."[21] Dreyer was the first director to

seriously raise the possibility of creating a "religious system" on film, and his particular difficulties were naturally attributed to the enormity of his task. But the failings of *Day of Wrath* stem more from Dreyer than from the style which would in other hands come remarkably close to creating a religious system—as close, in fact, as any work of art has come.

The first half of *Day of Wrath* concerns Herlof's Marte, an old woman who is condemned as a witch, hunted down, tortured, tried, and burned at the stake. Marte is the nether side of Joan of Arc—the Transcendent seen through a demonic mirror. Like Joan, her fate is predetermined (written out by official decree on the outset of the film), her inquisitors are narrow-minded, her confession is extracted through torture, and, most importantly, she responds viscerally to a nonhuman, spiritual force. But unlike Joan, Marte is old, misshapen, spiteful, conniving, and her "martyrdom" and "purification" are supposedly in service to Satan. (Although, crucially, Dreyer does not make a moral judgment on deviltry; it is not "evil." The characters of *Day of Wrath* assume that witchcraft is evil, but Dreyer treats it in the same affecting manner he treats sainthood in *Passion*. He seems more interested in the Transcendent than with moral judgments.)

Warshow's comments about this section of *Day of Wrath* prefigure many of the comments Sontag was to later make about Bresson. The music ("Dies Irae"), Warshow wrote, "does not aim at the listener's pleasure or require his consent." He points out that there is no "dramatic conflict" surrounding the witch, "yet this formalized and narrow spectacle creates a degree of excitement beyond anything one experiences during the later, more dramatic portions of the film." Warshow continues, "It is as if the director, in his refusal to acknowledge that physical movement implies dramatic movement, were denying the relevance of the spectator's feelings; one is left with no secure means of connecting the witch with reality, and yet she is real in herself and must be responded to; as responses are blocked, the tension increases." And, even more crucially, he states, "The feelings of the spectator really are in a way irrelevant: he is watching what has ceased to exist, and there is no one to care what he feels. He has feelings nevertheless."

The similarity of the comments by Warshow, Sontag, and Ayfre underline the thesis of this essay—that "spiritual" directors like Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer were not only similar in intent but in means, that there was a common style they drew on to achieve similar effects. Transcendental style in *Day of Wrath* seems a more precise explanation for the film's spiritual depth than Kammerspiel or expressionism, neither of which is normally known for its spiritual qualities.

Decisive action in the first half of *Day of Wrath*: the death of Herlof's Marte. "Marte is the nether side of Joan of Arc—the transcendent seen through a demonic mirror."

The Marte section of *Day of Wrath* is a remarkably straightforward use of the everyday-disparity-stasis formula. The everyday and disparity are created in the manner of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (the spiritual obsession within the cold reality), but the decisive action in *Day of Wrath,* unlike *Passion,* is not mitigated by social events and has a genuine force. As Marte's screaming body is lifted into the flames one senses that something Other Worldly has been destroyed. This is primarily because the sudden emotional release of her martyrdom functions as the decisive action, forcing the viewer to accept or reject the disparity prior to it. The decisive action breaks the everyday stylization thematically (total emotional release) and technically (the introduction of a vertical line into a previously horizontal composition). This "decisive" effect of Marte's martyrdom was calculated by Dreyer: "As a principal rule one can say that one shall try to keep a continuous, flowing, horizontally gliding motion in the film. If one then suddenly introduces vertical lines, one can by this reach an instantly dramatic effect—as, for instance, in the pictures of the vertical ladder just before it is thrown into the fire in *Day of Wrath*."[22]

Warshow points out both the everyday ("there is no one to 'care'") and the disparity ("he has feelings nevertheless"), but he passes over stasis—for the obvious reason that Dreyer himself passes over it. *Day of Wrath* continues and the Marte episode becomes the stimulus for a new expressionist/psychological drama. Anne (the wife of Absalon, one of Marte's judges) contracts witchcraft through contact with Marte. The focus of the film switches from witchcraft itself to the psychology of witchcraft. The central question of the first half of the film is, "Are there such things as witches?" The central question of the second half is, "Why does Anne think she is a witch?" Anne's witchcraft is not caused, like Marte's, by some transcendent source, but by intense psychological pressure.

Anne married the elderly, dour Absalon out of obligation, but she falls in love with his son Martin, who has returned from the seminary. Anne and Martin attempt to hide their love, romancing only on clandestine field trips. This conflict is reflected in the decor: the parsonage is claustrophobic and chiaroscuric; the fields are bucolic and well-lit. The dilemma of this section is, as Anne says, "Is it a sin to love?" This dilemma is resolved by the introduction of witchcraft into Anne's life. Marte had told her that Anne's mother was also a witch, and now Anne begins to feel this power. She wishes Absalon dead and after a near miss, she succeeds: Absalon has a heart attack. The central question of the second half of *Day of Wrath* then shifts from whether or not love is legitimate (and it obviously is) to whether persons under intense psychological pressure can have delusions of witchcraft.

Anne's witchcraft, as opposed to Marte's, seems to be the result of psychological tensions. Dreyer makes her look "witchy" by using chiaroscuric close-ups. Her face is often blocked half in light, half in dark; the candles beside Absalon's coffin flicker in her eyes. As Anne is being questioned there is a double exposure on her face of the shifting pattern of leaves which also appeared on Marte's face before she was burnt. Dreyer also employs overt symbolism, associating the powers of witchcraft with thunderstorms and lightning. The expressionistic techniques which are prevalent throughout the film now seem to bear directly on Anne's disintegrating mind. For Anne, witchcraft is a psychological delusion, the direct result of her forbidden love. After Absalon's death she says, "I believe he died for our sake." Martin replies, "Did you wish him dead?" and Anne says, "I love you. That is my only crime."

Absalon's "miraculous" death is not rational, but it is understandable: it is the expression of Anne's psychosis. In the second half of *Day of Wrath* the decisive action (Absalon's death) does not happen to the

Anne in *Day of Wrath*: "Dreyer makes her look 'witchy' by using chiaroscuro close-ups; her face is often blocked half in light, half in dark."

protagonist, but is used to give the viewer a detached perspective of the protagonist. After Absalon's death the spectator may be convinced of the reality and immediacy of Anne's psychosis, but he is unlikely to believe in a supernatural force.

Although both styles are consistently present in *Day of Wrath,* the first half seems primarily transcendental style, the second half primarily expressionism. Perhaps this is because Dreyer considered the first half exposition and characterized Marte one-dimensionally to set the stage for Anne's trauma. Marte is tortured in a "chamber of horrors" sequence and this expressionist environment could be seen as responsible for her witchcraft, although Marte's steadfast protests of innocence help make the environment reflect more on her tormentors than on herself. In any case, the crucial fact that Marte's witchcraft and not her personality is "at stake" allows the elements of transcendental style to operate in a less encumbered manner during the first half of the film.

Analyzing both sections of the film Warshow concludes, "The attempt to impose belief by purely aesthetic means is inevitably a failure, both dramatically and visually." Yet Warshow derives his arguments from the

second half of the film (the symbolic "evil" storm, the double-exposure on Anne's face) and applies them to the entire film. Warshow opposes transcendental style in principle, as every healthy skeptic should, but he takes his proof texts from the expressionist sections of *Day of Wrath*. Warshow is correct, however, in his implication that stasis is never achieved; the conflict between internal and external rationale is never resolved, or even confronted.

ORDET

Many of the elements of transcendental style are explicit in *Ordet*. Of all Dreyer's films, *Ordet* comes the closest in technique and effect to the work of Ozu and Bresson. Dreyer's *Ordet* is the second screen version of Kaj Munk's play. The first, filmed by Swedish director Gustav Molander in 1943, gave Munk's play a realistic, rational interpretation; the "miracle of Kaj Munk," Boerge Trolle wrote of the Molander *Ordet,* "was interpreted as a return to sanity, capable of scientific explanation but nevertheless appearing miraculous to those directly in contact with it."[23]

Dreyer's adaptation is obviously antithetical to Molander's.* In *Ordet,* as in no other Dreyer film, one senses the self-conscious use of transcendental style. Expressionism seemingly plays no role in *Ordet:* transcendental style operates from within the Kammerspiel and is given little "competition" from expressionism. In many ways *Ordet* is a conventional Kammerspielfilm: the action takes place primarily indoors, within a fixed number of rooms and among fixed groups of individuals. Certain scenes and conversations are repeated, expanded, refined until certain psychological truths are revealed. The sets are naturalistic; there is no exaggeration in lighting, camerawork, or acting.

* What seems obvious to the viewer of *Ordet,* however, may not have been so obvious to Dreyer. Reacting to a statement by Guido Aristarco that he had "[rejected] science for the miracles of religion," Dreyer stated that "the new science brings us toward a more intimate understanding of the divine power and is even beginning to give us a natural explanation to things of the supernatural. The John figure of Kaj Munk's can now be seen from another angle. . . . I have not rejected modern science for the miracle of religion. On the contrary, Kaj Munk's play assumed new and added significance for me, because the paradoxical thoughts and ideas expressed in the play have been proved by recent psychic research . . . explained the seemingly inexplicable happenings of the play and established a natural cohesion behind the supernatural occurrences that are found in the film" ("Letter," *Film Culture,* no. 7 [1956], p. 24). Dreyer's statement does not alter the fact that his *Ordet* is undeniably more "mysterious" and more "miraculous" than Molander's, but it does reinforce the contention of this essay that Dreyer's thinking was intentionally dualistic. He would not give up the scientific for the miraculous, just as he would not give up the miraculous for the scientific.

But the techniques of transcendental style go beyond the Kammerspiel, formalizing its naturalistic elements. The sets and lighting in the chamber plays, although not distorted as in the expressionist plays, were very expressive, correlating nuances of emotion with nuances of set design and chiaroscuro. In *Ordet,* however, the sets are often stark and the lighting toneless. In contrast to the previous Dreyer films, many of the scenes are shockingly one-dimensional; the characters recite their lines before a blank backdrop set at a 90° angle to the camera. The composition is generally static, permitting the characters to act out an event within a fixed frame; likewise the takes are long, allowing time for a character to walk the full distance of a room and engage in a conversation without a cut. These are the familiar techniques of everyday: by subrogating the empathetic qualities of natural life and formalizing its factual detail, everyday creates a cold stylization.

The "saint" of *Ordet* is John, a man so totally alienated from his environment that he is considered crazy. He is the "fool of God." He makes no secret of either his true identity or his purpose: "I am Jesus of Nazareth," he states. "People believe in the dead Christ but not the living. I have come back to bear witness in Heaven and perform miracles." John is such an obvious "Christ symbol" that it is a shock when Dreyer, with counter-strategy, subtly makes him something more: an actual reincarnated Christ of a later age. The other characters of *Ordet* realize that John is "closer to God" than they themselves, yet until the decisive action they only treat him as a symbol.

John's madness is disguised divinity. Like Joan and Marte he reacts primarily to the supernatural, not his surroundings; like Joan and Marte he is "persecuted" (in this case, mocked) for it. His disparity is the country priest's; he is a victim of the Holy Agony, totally unable to respond to his cold environment. Madness replaces martyrdom, it is the last refuge of the saint who must remain within the prison house of the body.

No other explanation for John's madness is given in the body of the film. John's old father, Marten, gives a possible explanation, "he was driven crazy by the study of Kierkegaard," but this reflects more on the father's dunderheaded attitude toward others than it does on his son. John is not the product of an oppressive, distorted environment as Joan, Anne, and to a lesser extent Marte are. His surroundings seem quite sane and commonplace, quite everyday; he is the only oddity in it. John's straightforward pronouncements, his inexpressive face, his overwhelming religious obsession, his inability to function in a pragmatic world, all mark him as a product of disparity.

Disparity in *Ordet*: John, the fool of God. "John's straightforward pronouncements, his inexpressive face, his overwhelming religious obsession, his inability to function in a pragmatic world, all mark him as a product of disparity."

Just as John's madness is disparity par excellence, so his miracle is a decisive action par excellence. In a "Lazarus" scene he raises his dead sister-in-law Inger from the dead. There is no coyness or trickery; John commands her to rise from her coffi n and she does. The miracle is unexpected, implausible, and demands commitment from the spectator.

It is at the stage of stasis, however, in *Ordet* as in Dreyer's other films, that transcendental style is clearly shown to be only a part of Dreyer's fi lm-making. John's decisive action partially elicits a spiritual commitment from the viewer (more, I think, than any other Dreyer fi lm), but it does not result in a lasting stasis. One could fault Dreyer for this failure, saying the decisive action was just too drastic to induce belief, but I think this "failure" was intentional. Like Ozu and Bresson, Dreyer uses elements of everyday and disparity, but he shows no inclination to create stasis as they did.

In a fi lm of transcendental style one would expect that the character who experiences the disparity and makes the decisive action would be the central character; it is his disparity which must result in stasis. But John is not the central character of *Ordet*. He is used as an allegorical figure, representing what the other characters must come to believe. In the opening scene he states: "I am a prophet in God's sight. Woe unto everyone

who believeth not. I am the light of the World, but the darkness apprehendeth it not. I have come unto my people but they have not received me." His "people," his family, at first reject him. His brother Michael states, "Miracles don't happen these days." John repeatedly predicts death, but he is ignored. As Inger lies ill John again predicts her death and states that he can perform a miracle, but a visiting vicar counters that "miracles don't happen nowadays." John finally receives the power to perform the miracle when Inger's daughter Anne believes in him. After Inger's resurrection the family seems to come to an acceptance of John and all he represents—the living Christ, miracles, disparity, madness. Talking with John after Inger's death Michael had said, "How can one tell madness from sense." And John replied, "You are coming closer."

At this juncture one might think that *Ordet* was using a roundabout version of transcendental style, that the characters of the film, like the viewers, had to gradually realize that John was the central figure. But after his miracle, John again becomes a minor character. The emphasis shifts from John's divinity back to Inger's corporeality. Before the miracle Michael, in response to the consolation that Inger's soul was in heaven, had stated, "But I loved her body too." Immediately after her resurrection, Inger, now sitting up in her coffin, kisses Michael at great length and very sensuously. Then Inger, in the last line of the film, says, "Now we begin to live." There is even a hint at this point that John, now with a contented smile on his face, has become sane again. For a spiritually obsessed character like John this is the opposite of martyrdom and sainthood; like Inger, he has been recycled back into life. Dreyer uses the decisive action to reaffirm humanity; it does not disembody the passion, it reembodies it.

The relative absence of expressionism from *Ordet* allows one to see the interreaction between Kammerspiel and transcendental style. The ending of the film indicates that *Ordet* is probably a psychological drama, a Kammerspielfilm, at heart. The main characters have learned to overcome their intolerance, reconcile their differences, live more joyfully, and humanize their dour faith. The amazing thing about *Ordet* is that it accomplishes this purpose through a partial use of transcendental style. Through the use of everyday and disparity Dreyer gives *Ordet* a spiritual depth it normally would not have; then he turns this depth back to work on the psychological drama. It is as if Dreyer carefully sets the viewer up for the Transcendent, then reveals the immanent.

Like Bresson, Dreyer values asceticism; he has never questioned the need for suffering as a means to revelation. Dreyer also, like Bresson,

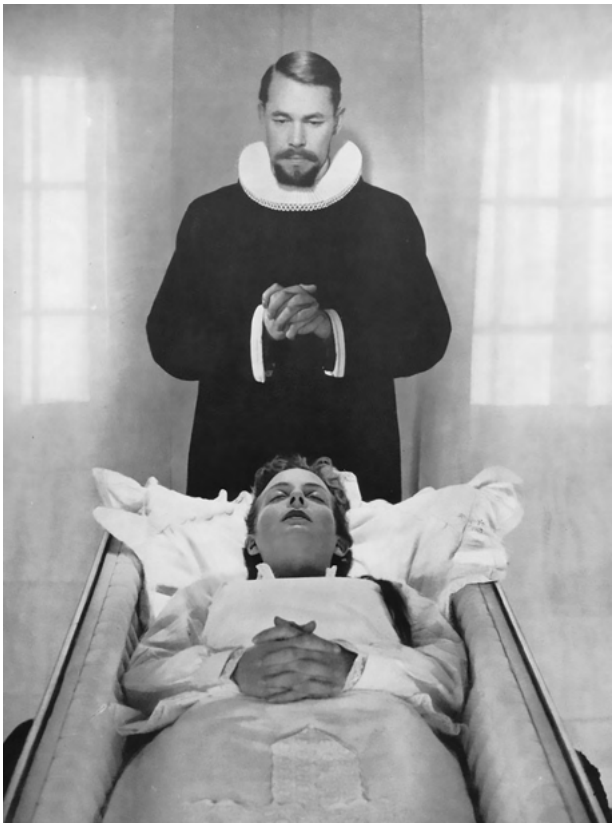
often structures his asceticism within the prison metaphor. The prison metaphor in Western theology leads to death, the separation of the body and soul, but whereas in Bresson death leads to iconography, the disembodied soul, in Dreyer death becomes reincarnation, the new body—Joan's death creates social upheaval, Marte's death affects Anne, Inger's death leads to rebirth. Dreyer does not want stasis; he seems to prefer perpetual disparity, the body and soul always alive and in tension.

Dreyer's preference for disparity places him in the tradition of Northern European art and theology, just as Bresson's striving for stasis places him in the Southern European Byzantine tradition. A brief glance at an analogous art form, Gothic architecture, as defined by its chief aesthetician, Wilhelm Worringer, will help explain Dreyer's fundamental dualism and its relation to his films.

GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE

Because Dreyer employs, to varying degrees, transcendental style, the prison metaphor, and religious subject matter, there is a natural tendency to equate his films with Bresson's and by association with Byzantine painting, as Perrin does.[24] But the differences between Dreyer and Bresson run as deep as their similarities; they had contrasting conceptions of the Transcendent and how it can be expressed in life and art. Dreyer's films are only similar to Byzantine iconography to the extent that they are similar to Bresson's films. The unique quality of Dreyer's films is close to another form of religious art—Gothic architecture. Dreyer is different from Bresson in many of the same ways the Gothic is different from the Byzantine.

The metaphor of Gothic architecture provides a convenient comparison between Bresson and Dreyer. In principle Gothic architecture is like Bresson's films; in practice it is like Dreyer's. The Scholastic premise of Gothic architecture, as defined by Coomaraswamy, Maritain, and Panofsky, is similar to that of Byzantine art and Bresson's films; the techniques of the actual Gothic cathedrals, particularly the later ones, as defined by Worringer, are similar to those of expressionism and Dreyer's films. Gothic architecture in Dreyer's films, like Zen art in Ozu's or Byzantine portraiture in Bresson's, provides a metaphor which both enlightens without limiting and relates a contemporary artist to an earlier form of religious art. The Gothic cathedral can only be a metaphor; the experience of a cathedral is fundamentally different from the experience of cinema, and what works in one may not work in the other. The Gothic



The raising of Inger in *Ordet*: decisive action and retreat from stasis. "It is as if Dreyer carefully sets the viewer up for the Transcendent, then reveals the immanent." See also "Rethinking Transcendental Style," p. 23.

metaphor is a generalization, of course, and for every generalization there is an army of exceptions, but perhaps it will be helpful.

Wilhelm Worringer's early books (*Abstraction and Empathy,* 1907; *Form in Gothic,* 1912) were major works of reevaluative aesthetics; they summarized everything that had been previously thought, criticized it, and posited a new way of thinking. Worringer was one of the first and most important theorists of abstract form in art. In an art world slowly awakening from the spell of realism, he championed Oriental, Gothic, and modern art. Although he did not use the term "expressionism," his theories became an integral part of expressionist canon. Quite briefly, Worringer divided art into two categories: "naturalism" and "style." Naturalism was the art of sensuousness; it evoked (in Theodor Lipps's term) "empathy." "Style" was the art of tension; it resulted in "abstraction." Naturalism was the product of a contented, earthbound culture; it was characterized by realistic portraiture and soft lines. The style of abstraction was the result of discontent, the striving for the spiritual; it was characterized by ideal portraiture and harsh angular or perpendicular lines. Only abstraction was a "style," Worringer felt; naturalism was "organic and true to life." Only through abstract style could man express the Transcendent: "For these abstract forms, liberated from all finiteness, are the only ones, and the highest, in which man can find rest from the confusion of the world picture."[25]

For Worringer, both Byzantine and Gothic art were "styles." Both desired to escape the temporal world through abstraction; both rejected empathy as the basis for art. Worringer realized that Southern European art (represented by Byzantine art and, before it, Oriental art) was more "sublime" than Northern European art (late Gothic) although his personal preference tended toward the Nordic:

> The difference between the expressionless, abstract line of Oriental man and the intensified expression of the abstract line of Gothic man is just the difference between a final definitive dualism, born of a most profound insight into the world, and a provisional dualism of a still undeveloped stage of knowledge; that is to say, the difference between the sublime quietism of old age and the exalted pathos of youth.[26]

It is easy to see how Worringer's theory of tension of abstraction was extended to the German expressionist cinema, even though he probably would have disapproved of the blatant empathy-inducing devices of many of the expressionist films.

Northern Gothic architecture resulted from theological as well as artistic tensions. Although rooted in the conventions of medieval art, it

anticipated the impending Renaissance. The Gothic tension is the tension between Florence and Byzantium; it results when man is placed at the center of God's unchanging universe. Gothic art had two poles: the ideal order of God's universe, and the changing existence of each person who feels the pain of past and present.

During the Gothic period, the concept of transcendence came to incorporate both humanism and pantheism. "Belief in the absolute transcendence of God then [early Middle Ages]," art historian Arnold Hauser writes, "involved a depreciation of nature, just as now [Gothic art] the prevalent pantheism brought about its rehabilitation. . . . The essential change is that the one-sidedly spiritual art of the early Middle Ages, which rejected all imitation of directly experienced reality and all confi rmation by sense, has given way to an art that makes all validity of statement, even about the most supernatural, ideal and divine matters, depend upon achieving a far-going correspondence with the natural sensible reality."[27] In sum, Gothic art was, Wylie Sypher writes, "the revenge of the person upon the inhumanity of the Romanesque ikon."[28]

This fundamental dualism of Gothic, Worringer contended, was neither resolved nor transcended (as in Oriental art); it remained perpetually in confl ict. "Its essential nature," he wrote, "seems to be far more that of a restless urge which in its quest for rest, its seeking for deliverance, can fi nd no satisfaction but that of stupefaction, of intoxication. And thus the dualism . . .resolves itself into a confused mania of ecstasy."[29] And "to express ecstasy," Émile Mâle concluded in his study of medieval art, "Gothic art made use of all its incantations, all its magic of light and shadow. Religious art had never attempted anything of the kind before; it reached the extreme limit of the possible."[30]

The late Gothic cathedral is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Scholastic method with its *sic* and *non,* its internal contradictions eternally interlocked: saints and gargoyles, Pantocrators and crucified Christs, oblique lines of force and verticals and horizontals. The lines of tension often clash randomly, lacking focus or climax; Gothic art furnished a dramatic space but not a dramatic focus to which all characters and lines were inevitably drawn. Worringer found in Gothic statuary a microcosm of the Gothic style: the face was often naturalistic, the robe abstract. The body, wrapped in stiff r obes, represented the order of Byzantium; the face, often empathic, cried out the humanism of Florence. The inherent contradiction of Gothic life drove the abstract line into near chaos. The impulse of the Gothic man toward true knowledge, Worringer wrote, "being denied its natural satisfaction, thus

exhausts itself in wild fantasies. . . . Everything becomes weird and fantastic."[31] The final solution of Gothic architecture was one of self-negation: instead of defining space, it attacked it; instead of creating order on earth, it thrust instability into the heavens.

Dreyer's films contain the same tensions and contradictions which plagued Gothic architecture. Like the Gothic artist, Dreyer sought a place for spiritual values within corporeality, and like the Gothic artist his search ended in frustration, abstraction, and in some cases, distortion. His films, like the Gothic cathedral, are an unstable equilibrium of world-affirming and world-denying impulses. His films are rife with contradictions: in *Day of Wrath* a stylized martyrdom is followed by pastoral scenes of summer romance; in *Ordet* the ultimate invocation of the Holy is followed by a sensuous kiss. Joan of Arc's struggle to both stay alive and "be with God" is a typically Gothic struggle. Confronted with some of the same problems as the Gothic artist, Dreyer evolved some of the same solutions: obliquity, multiplicity of focal points, contradictory themes.

In his excellent study of structure and composition in Dreyer's films, Philippe Parrain has demonstrated that Dreyer's films are composed on primarily oblique vertical lines which intersect at as many as four points in a single composition. Like the rocketing, crashing lines of a vaulted Gothic cathedral, these oblique verticals keep the eye continually in motion. With certain notable exceptions (such as the everyday scenes in *Ordet*), a solid horizontal line seldom intersects a dominant vertical line in Dreyer's films. Even in a seemingly placid scene the eye cannot rest—there are always tensions between foreground and background, between left-to-right and right-to-left lines of force which compete for attention. This tension can be created by costume design as well as set design and frame composition. In *Day of Wrath,* for example, Merete, Absalon's dour housekeeper, usually wears an enormous seventeenth-century white wing collar. In the dimly lit indoor scenes (the only ones in which she appears), Merete's collar picks up more light than her face or her surroundings. Her bright V-shaped collar, when extended, forms diagonal, intersecting lines of force in the shape of an X. When further extended, these lines of force go beyond Merete's heavyset, black-robed body and intersect with the vertical pillars or doorways in the background. Merete may speak commandingly, her tone of voice may demand attention, but the crucial lines of force are leading away from her and do not even intersect on her face. The strident, straightforward nature of Merete's speech conflicts with the attention-draining lines of

force and the multiplicity of focal points. This is not the sort of visual tension which contradicts the dialogue or action (as when something is happening in the background antithetical to the foreground), but it undermines it, breaking up its apparent unity.

Oblique orientation, whether in a cathedral or a film, pits large chunks of space against each other. It does not unify or pacify space, it antagonizes it. Oblique orientation presupposes that the artist does not conceive of space as a unity, but rather views every object or part of an object as an independent action within space. Therefore, no character in a frame which is splintered obliquely can speak authoritatively from that space, but must be considered as one of a number of interacting forces.

At times Dreyer's tension even bursts out of the frame. In a well-known composition from *The Passion of Joan of Arc,* a guard, partially hidden by the left vertical frame line, is tugging at Joan's arm while Joan herself is struggling to pull herself outside of the right vertical frame line. The frame line seems an arbitrary restriction on a tension which is on the verge of flying apart. The effect is similar to that which one experiences standing in the nave of a Gothic cathedral as the lines of force explode from the ceiling driving straight through the aisles, through the walls, and out into the flying buttresses. The frame or the nave, the movie or the cathedral themselves, are artistic restrictions upon a reality which by itself would disintegrate.

Dreyer's films and Gothic architecture are both forms of unresolved disparity. Disparity was the definitive quality of Worringer's statues, part stylistic abstraction, part naturalistic empathy. The Gothic counterpart to what this essay has called disparity is exemplified by what Wylie Sypher called the "final achievement of Medieval painting," the Villeneuve-Avignon *Pietà:*

> The anguished stiff body of Christ is bent at an angle full of pathos over the lap of a weeping and mannered Mary. . . . In the background, at the left, very small, are the walls and towers of Jerusalem. The sky is vacant bronze. The humanity of these figures is as authentic as anything in Renaissance painting; here are the Gothic *dramatis personae* . . . The Gothic figures are secular, but their world is not. They do not *fit into* a humanized perspective. . . . The focus is double, suiting the double Gothic experience of reality—worldly and other-worldly; and the proportions of the scene are alien to the men who inhabit it.[32]

Like the disparity of transcendental style, whether in the films of Ozu, Bresson, or Dreyer, the characters do not *fit into* their environment. But whereas many art styles—Zen, Byzantine, transcendental—have used

The guard struggles with Joan in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*: "The frame line seems an arbitrary restriction on a tension which is on the verge of flying apart. The effecti s similar to standing in the nave of a Gothic cathedral as the lines of force explode from the ceiling driving through the aisles, through the walls, and into the flying buttresses."

disparity as a means, Dreyer, like Gothic art, uses it as an end. Dreyer's fi lms and Gothic architecture present man's existential disparity in an agonized, unfl inching manner, but stasis seems beyond both their intentions and capabilities. The incomplete and inadequate knowledge disparity provides becomes a virtue in itself, the best a man can hope for.

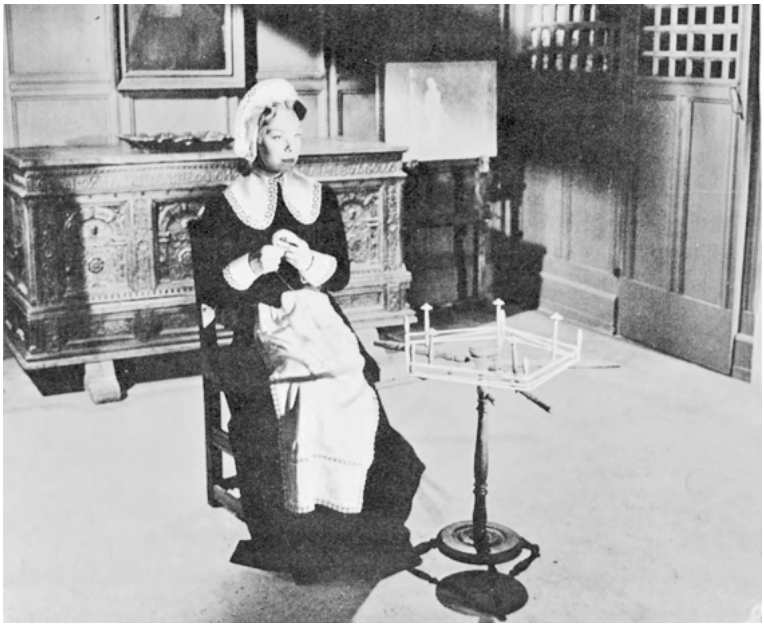
In Worringer's schema one can fi nd certain similarities between Bresson and Dreyer. Bresson and Dreyer both experience a tension between this world and the next and express this tension through abstraction. Both prefer style to naturalism, abstraction to empathy. But one can find even more crucial diff erences.

Bresson, like the Byzantine artist, unifi es space. He uses Worringer's "inexpressive abstract line" to formalize and pacify the background. Like the Byzantine icon, his frame composition has "a stability which cancels out contradictory movements."[33] In any given frame from Bresson's films there is most likely to be only one focal point, and that is the point which best expresses the tension between the protagonist and his surroundings.

Gothic disparity in the Villeneuve-Avignon *Pietà:* "The Gothic figures are secular, but their world is not. They do not *fit into* a humanized perspective."

Again and again in Bresson's fi lms the dominant horizontal line meets the dominant vertical line at a right angle at the protagonist's eyes or mouth. The viewer's attention is concentrated on the face; it is there he must read in the tension between the unfeeling background and the spiritual passion being expressed in the narration. Bresson unifi es space in order to present only one focal point, one tension, and one confrontation—the confrontation between the spectator and the Holy. If a viewer responds to Bresson's fi lms, he must respond at the points Bresson has predetermined for him. And Bresson's regular, unobtrusive editing is designed to build up this single confrontation through a series of frames and scenes.

Dreyer, like the Gothic artist, divides space. He uses Worringer's "intensifi ed expression of the abstract line" to antagonize and sector the elements within the frame. Dreyer's frame often has several focal points, seems restless, discontented, and at odds with itself. Dreyer's editing, particularly in *Joan of Arc,* intensifi es this breakup of space; the right-to-left oblique orientation of one shot may be directly opposed by the left-to-right orientation of the next shot, and so on in rapid succession. His fi lms contain both "naturalism" (pastoral scenes, *Day of Wrath*) and "style" (chiaroscuric interiors, *Day of Wrath*), both the inexpressive



Composition by Bresson and Dreyer, Byzantine and Gothic. Compare the shot from *Pickpocket* on page 13 with the above shot from *Day of Wrath*. "Bresson unifies space; in any given frame there is likely to be only one focal point. Dreyer divides space; the frame often has several focal points and seems restless, at odds with itself."

abstract line (white walls, *Ordet*) and the expressive abstract line (night interior scenes, *Ordet*), both humanity in conflict with distorted surroundings (Anne, *Day of Wrath*) and spirituality in conflict with factual surroundings (martyrdom of Marte, *Day of Wrath*), both frontality (John, *Ordet*) and agonized visage (Joan, *Passion*), both the Holy and holy feelings. Each of these tensions can be seen to have its focal point within any given frame, or between two frames as they are edited together. Consequently, the viewer is usually not forced into a single confrontation but given a multiplicity of responses. The divided space sets no priorities; the viewer is able to respond to any one of equally valid tensions he experiences in the film.

This contrast between Bresson and Dreyer—Byzantine and Gothic—is given a theological depth by Paul Tillich's essay on "Protestant art." Tillich defines the Protestant artist as one who is fixated on the "symbol of the Cross" and cannot find adequate symbols to represent the Resur-

rection.[34] His art is all tension, conflict, and suffering—the continual struggle between world-affirmation and world-denial. The suffering itself becomes an end and the cross is its ultimate symbol. Tillich's "Protestant art" is the art of disparity; it is by extension the art of the Gothic cathedral and the art of Carl Dreyer.

Bresson, on the other hand, is the artist of the resurrection, the artist of stasis. The cross for Bresson is a means to a resurrected end, and he is careful not to confuse the cross and the resurrection. Like Dreyer, Bresson uses suffering through the prison metaphor (the "symbol of the Cross"), but unlike Dreyer, Bresson transforms the prison into a symbol of resurrection. In this manner Bresson is like the Byzantine Christian who, as theologian Henri Daniel-Rops writes, "preferred the theology of Glory to the theology of the Cross."[35] Suffering for Bresson is never more than a stepping-stone to stasis.

Dreyer and Bresson are both great artists, and my intention has not been to place them in the same category, ranking one above the other. If Dreyer had attempted to achieve stasis and failed, then he might be placed a little lower on Bresson's ladder. But his art of disparity is distinct and can stand alone. No art historian would fault Gothic architecture at the expense of Byzantine iconography; each art is great in its own terms. Similarly, the disparity of Dreyer's films is just as immediate and fully realized as the stasis of Bresson's films. As artists, both Bresson and Dreyer are equally accomplished, equally "great."

As transcendental artists, however, they are not equally great. Bresson created an art "more edifying, more permanent," and one can make that difficult distinction through the criterion of transcendental style. Both Bresson and Dreyer had great styles, but only Bresson's was the transcendental style. Bresson's films exemplify transcendental style whereas Dreyer's films use only parts of transcendental style and use them well.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay there has been one persistent, overriding assumption: that the transcendental style is the proper method for conveying the Holy on film. This has been assumed, but is it necessarily so? Why do austerity and asceticism stand at the gates of the Transcendent; cannot the Transcendent also be expressed through exuberance and expressionism? Why is Ozu preferred to Mizoguchi, Bresson to Resnais, Dreyer to Bergman?

Jacques Maritain writes, "There is no style *reserved* to religious art, there is no *religious technique*. Anyone who believes in the existence of a religious technique is on the high road to Beuron."* Is not this essay, with its insistence on "transcendental style," on that high road?

This alleged "unique" quality of the transcendental style I have defined should be examined in the light of two pertinent considerations: one, what forms have spiritual expression taken in the past? and two, how do these forms relate to the "new" art of motion pictures? This central question (and its incumbent considerations) inevitably raises

* (Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962], p. 103). Beuronese art, developed in the monastery at Beuron in the 1860s, was one of the earliest modern arts, and with its primitive qualities anticipated the paintings of Gauguin, Cézanne, and Kandinsky. Beuronese art, however, locked the expression of spirituality into a single form, allowing no room for change and experimentation. Considering its initially innovative style, it had remarkably little impact on succeeding art forms.

Rocks and Bamboo, Wu Chen, Yuan dynasty.

theological and aesthetic problems beyond the scope of this essay, and my intention here, as throughout, is not to pretend any "new" aesthetics, but rather to situate my concept of filmic "transcendental style" within some previous theories.

THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

There are many ways to present the Holy in art; no artist or style has cornered the transcendental market. Although, as Maritain states, there is no specific "religious technique," he also goes on to say that "it is true that not every style is equally suited to sacred art."[1] In any given art some styles are best suited to express the sacred, others the profane; and in film no style is better suited to express the Holy than transcendental style.

What sort of general conclusions can be drawn from the checkered history of sacred art? What do the various expressions of the Transcendent have in common: West African sculpture, Zuni masks, Byzantine ikons, Zen gardens, illustrated medieval manuscripts, Gothic architecture, seventeenth-century meditative verse, morality plays, Rembrandt's paintings, Henry Moore's sculptures? Is there anything in the history of transcendental art which can be extracted, abstracted, defined, and then set against the relatively new medium, motion pictures? What distinctions between the Holy and holy feelings have been made in other art forms and do they apply to cinema?

The primal, most irreducible metaphor for the sacred in art, as I said in the Introduction, is the expression of primitive religion through primitive art. Many of the techniques which have been used throughout history to express the Holy in art originated in primitive art. Sacred art has often seemed to favor primitive techniques: two-dimensionality, frontality, the abstract line, the archetypal character.

As a distinction between the Holy and holy feelings, however, the primitive-classical dichotomy is, at best, only valid in principle; it cannot be applied to either a specific historical period or specific techniques. Recent anthropological studies have revealed that there was a good deal more social convention and intrapersonal intention in primitive art than its first exponents imagined, and that classical art, for all its naturalism, could also be intensely religious. The primitive-classical dichotomy has great importance as a generalization, and one must be careful not to use it as anything more than that.

Neither can the primitive-classical dichotomy be directly applied to artistic techniques. Techniques normally ascribed to primitive (sacred)

art have been successfully used for classical (secular) purposes. In the long run of history no individual technique can be ascribed to either the sacred or the profane. *There are no religious techniques*. Byzantine art, for example, maintained that the Holy was revealed through artistic compositions with one focal point, so that the viewer's attention is fixed on the face of the saint; Wassily Kandinsky in his apologia for a "new" primitive art 900 years later wrote that the spiritual could be revealed through a composition with many focus points, so that the viewer could appreciate the "inner relationship" of separate, individual shapes and colors.[2] In another example, seventeenth-century meditative poetry maintained that verse could express the sacred through a didactic proposal, rich description, and elaborate metaphor; contemporary poets, on the other hand, who desire to reveal the Transcendent prefer the "split line" and the disjointed metaphor. When applied to film, the question of "religious technique" becomes even more thorny. The abstract, expressionistic line which works so well in Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece may have a completely different effect in a feature-length film; an architectural structure which is effective in three dimensions may fail completely when used on a two-dimensional movie screen. When compared to cinema, these earlier forms of transcendental art, as I stated previously, can only function as metaphors.

Because there are no religious techniques, aesthetic generalizations become important and necessary. A technique or form can only be described as "religious" (or transcendental) when defined in a highly restricted context (Byzantine iconography, *sumi-e* painting); in order to apply the lessons of these individual works to another medium one must rely on generalization. Consequently aestheticians and theologians have continually revised the original primitive-classical dichotomy, each adapting it to their own circumstances, each attempting to keep that important distinction alive and meaningful. Worringer described it as the distinction between "naturalism" and "style"; van der Leeuw as the distinction between "naturalism" and "asceticism." To Aldous Huxley it was the difference between "tradition" and "individual style"; to Benjamin Rowland, Jr., it was the difference between "traditional art" and "nontraditional art." And on and on. Each of these distinctions is to some degree limited because they use artistic techniques to comment on universal principles; the aesthetician must be continually on guard: the techniques change, the principles do not. In attempting to correlate the forms of the spiritual in art I prefer a totally nonartistic metaphor, one which does not rely on artistic techniques, but instead refers to types of "good works."

In *Religion and Culture* (1930) Jacques Maritain described two types of "temporal means," and although they apply primarily to good works, he also uses them in referring to artists and theologians. By extension they can also refer to two general artistic forms, sacred and profane. The first of these temporal means, the abundant means *(moyens temporels riches),* are those which "of their nature demand a certain measure of tangible success."[3] This type of good work sustains life in a depraved world: "It would be absurd to despise or reject them, they are necessary, they are part of the natural stuff of human life." The abundant means are the means of the soldier, laborer, and businessman; they are the means concerned with practicality, physical goods, and sensual feelings.

The second means, the sparse means *(moyens temporels pauvres),* are "the proper means of the spirit." "The less burdened they are by matter, the more destitute, the less visible—the more efficacious they are. This is because they are pure means for the virtue of the spirit." The sparse means are not ordered toward tangible success but toward the elevation of the spirit. Being the "proper means of wisdom," they are the means of the poet and philosopher: Mozart, Satie, Rembrandt, Dante, Homer, St. Thomas.

"It must be understood," Maritain writes, "that there is an order and hierarchy of these temporal means." And the sparse means are higher than the abundant means: "the world is perishing of dead weight. It will recover its youth only through poverty of the spirit." Although both means are temporal, the sparse means, forsaking tangible success, are necessarily closer to the Holy. Like transcendental art, the sparse means are means approaching an end: "the closer one gets to the essence of the spiritual, the more do temporal means employed in its service diminish." Both means are necessary but not equal: the abundant means keep the body alive so that the sparse means can elevate the soul. Maritain might describe Bresson's country priest as a man who used abundant means only to sustain his sparse means, and who, when his sparse means approached their end, gave up both temporal means.

Similarly, it is possible to say that sacred art uses both abundant and sparse means. The abundant means sustain the viewer's (or reader's or listener's) physical existence, that is, they maintain his interest; the sparse means, meanwhile, elevate his soul. The abundant means in art correspond to Worringer's "naturalism." These means are sensual, emotional, humanistic, individualistic. They are characterized by soft lines, realistic portraiture, three-dimensionality, experimentation; they encourage empathy. The sparse means in art correspond to Worringer's

"style." The sparse means are cold, formalistic, hieratic. They are characterized by abstraction, stylized portraiture, two-dimensionality, rigidity; they encourage respect and appreciation. These opposing means are not segregated categories; they are both present and interwork in any piece of art, particularly sacred works of art.

The artist who wishes to express the Transcendent cannot neglect either the abundant or the sparse means, but he must know their priority. The abundant means must serve to sustain the sparse means, the sparse means must yield to a spiritual awareness. In a Byzantine church the abundant means are those which enclose space and facilitate the liturgy; the sparse means are those which, like the vertical line and iconography, demand veneration. Within the Byzantine ikon itself, the abundant means are the variation of color and realistic gesture of the subsidiary characters; the sparse means are the gold background and frontality of the central character. The ratio of abundant to sparse means, of course, varies greatly from one art form to another.

The ratio of abundant and sparse means can be a measure of the "spirituality" of a work of art. The more a work of art can successfully incorporate sparse means within an abundant society, the nearer it approaches its transcendental "end." It is not a very precise measure, of course, but at least it is universally applicable. It can relate to any human activity, artistic, social, or philosophical. Before applying this clumsy measure to fi lm, however, it will be helpful to make some general statements about the comparative nature of motion pictures.

CINEMA AND THE ARTS: TWO OVERVIEWS

In his study of the Holy in art, Gerardus van der Leeuw traces the history of the major arts from their origins in religious practice to the present secularized state. At its beginnings each art form was one with religion but throughout the centuries progressively suff ered a "breakup of unity." The ceremonial religious dance evolved into the *sacer ludus,* the *sacer ludus* subsequently subdivided into bourgeois drama and liturgy, the liturgy in its progressional turn became popularized; throughout history the constant trend of art is from the sacred to the profane. The Renaissance, with its emphasis on naturalness and individual eff ort, usually takes the rap for the "breakup of unity," but van der Leeuw points out that this trend goes as far back as "the great heretic Akhenaten" who gave Egypt's gods the sculptural faces of his family.[4] Only rarely in the history of art, van der Leeuw contends, have talented artists

been able to resist the trend toward secularization and return to the religious origins of art.

Van der Leeuw does not discuss cinema in his study. It is quite crucially the only major art form which does not fit into his schema. Motion pictures were not born in religious practice, but instead are the totally profane offspring of capitalism and technology. If a religious artist in cinema attempts to go back to his origins, he will find only entrepreneurs and technocrats.* When the Holy tries to enter into the cinema, the intrinsically profane art, there are bound to be some unusual consequences—consequences which van der Leeuw did not anticipate.

In his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," André Bazin, unlike van der Leeuw, contends that there never was an original unity between religion and art, and that art (in this case, painting) has always been torn between two ambitions: "one, the primarily aesthetic, namely the expression of spiritual reality wherein the symbol transcended the model; the other, purely psychological, namely the duplication of the world outside."[5] From their beginnings the graphic arts demonstrated both these ambitions: one, the primarily aesthetic, in the Byzantine ikons; the other, purely psychological, in the Egyptian deathmasks. "Great artists, of course," Bazin adds, "have always been able to combine the two tendencies."

Like van der Leeuw, Bazin felt that the spiritual in art gradually succumbed to the "duplication of the world outside." Although the "purely psychological" had always existed it did not come into dominance until the Renaissance. "Perspective," he writes, "was the original sin of Western painting," and from that time on the spiritual quality of art steadily diminished.

Each overview, whether monistic like van der Leeuw's or dualistic like Bazin's, holds that the spiritual quality in art suffered its decline at the expense of "realism," the duplication of either external or internal reality. Art has always been excited by the challenge of realism: the bison came off the walls and became sculptures, the sculptures became photographs, the photographs moved. Eventually the artist, in his desire

* The premise of the original unity of art and religion has been so strong in art criticism that some writers categorically refused to admit the possibility of a profane art. Twenty years after the invention of motion pictures, Alessandro Della Seta wrote: "Art will then never arise and develop among men unless it has a foundation in religion. Art absolutely profane in origin, art born to satisfy the aesthetic taste of the spectator . . . is unconceivable in human history and has absolutely never existed" (*Religion and Art* [London: T.F. Unwin, 1914], p. 35).

to imitate life, attempted to reproduce physical existence itself, not like the Greeks just to portray the highest sensual form. Victor Frankenstein's mad dream was a Gothic extension of a dream shared by many artists of his age: to *art*ifi cially recreate human life and its external surroundings. The urge to duplicate the external world was accompanied by an urge to duplicate the internal world. The romantic artist scrutinized and dutifully recorded his own feelings; he was accountable to no other reality than his own. The myth of the "artist personality" came into full bloom, resulting in both the psychological picturesque and impression, romantic verse and the psychological novel. Sypher has noted the similarities in nineteenth-century realism and romanticism; the romantic work of art, though verging on total fantasy, was only realism turned outside in.[6]

In their pursuit of reality the arts openly coveted each other. The arts of space envied the arts of time and vice versa. Hogarth created sequential paintings to simulate time; Balzac used meticulous painterly descriptions to evoke space. Each art desired the "realism" another dimension could off er, and the continuing search for an art which could be realistic in both space and time certainly engendered the arts' progressive plunge into reality.

Cinema, the duplicatory art in space and time, changed all this. Sypher's cursory contention that cinema threw every other art into the twentieth century and remained woefully in the nineteenth itself[7] is a crucial idea in the history of fi lm and contemporary art, and one which has yet to be fully explicated. Motion pictures have the immediate sense of reality that the arts had so often prostituted themselves to obtain; their axioms were the unattainable goals of realism. Although there still are realistic heights to attain (holographic cinema, for example), cinema has at least temporarily halted the artistic lust for likeness. If the original sin of painting was perspective, Bazin writes, then "it was redeemed from sin by Niepce and Lumière. In achieving the aims of baroque art, photography freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness. Painting was forced, as it turned out, to off er us illusion and this illusion was reckoned suffi cient unto art. Photography and the cinema on the other hand are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism."[8]

Cinema short-circuited the desire to duplicate external reality—no longer would a painter or novelist strive for the realism cinema inherently off ered—and plunged the desire to duplicate internal reality into a deeper, more complex level. Cinema was also, as Hauser wrote, "the

final step on the road to profanation."[9] It canonized the human, sensual and profane: it celebrated the realistic properties of the nineteenth century while the other arts went on to explore the twentieth. From its outset cinema exemplified the abundant means. Imitative, representational, experiential, it could produce instant empathy.

This peculiar historical perspective of cinema—its profane origins—can produce a sense of "chronological reverse." In the case of filmmakers like Ozu and Bresson, cinema did not become progressively profane, it became progressively sacred. In the history of film Bresson came after Dreyer who came after Lumière; it is as if in the history of painting the Byzantine iconographer came after the Gothic architect who came after Hogarth. In cinema it is possible to say that Bresson, whose films have been compared to ikons, purified and rarefied the work of Dreyer, whose films have been compared to a Gothic cathedral. Spiritual cinema has had to continually draw away from its potentials; being "abundant" at birth, it had to discover the "sparse."

TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE: ABUNDANT AND SPARSE

Seen in this historical perspective, the techniques of transcendental style come into clearer focus. Transcendental style differs from the previous forms of transcendental art in the same way cinema differs from the previous artistic media. Transcendental style adapts the theory of abundant and sparse means to cinema.

Transcendental style, quite obviously, operates in time; it must sustain the viewer's interest from one to three hours. Consequently transcendental style is not a fixed relationship between abundant and sparse means like sculpture, but a fluid interaction creating a temporal as well as spatial rhythm. It gradually can use less abundant and more sparse means, drawing the viewer from the familiar world to the other world. Transcendental style, therefore, has three steps; it is a progressional relationship. It can have the same effect as that upon a viewer who walks through a Byzantine church, moving from the abundant to the sparse artistic means. In cinema, however, it is the art which moves past the passive viewer; it can take him from abundant to sparse means. One way to determine the "spiritual quality" of a cinematic style, therefore, is to examine the manner in which it disposes of its inherent abundant means and substitutes sparse means.

The transcendentally minded film-maker finds himself in a unique position: he must properly dispose of a surfeit of abundant means

(cinema's inherent "realism"). He cannot ignore or neglect these means, but must turn them to his advantage. Cinema may have freed the other arts from their desire to imitate life, as Bazin and Sypher contend, but it did not free itself. In fact, Bazin writes, cinema thereby acquired new chains to the "obsession with reality." This unique alliance of media and abundant means has its advantages as well as its drawbacks. On one hand spiritual cinema was freed from the need to prostitute itself in order to achieve a sense of "realism." Before the advent of cinema, certain religious artists attempted to first create the illusion of the immanent, then break that illusion, thereby revealing the Transcendent. But, for the most part, these artists spent most of their energy unsuccessfully creating the illusion which they never could successfully "break." Because the transcendentally minded film-maker already has the illusion at his disposal, he can go immediately to the next stage, attempting to break the illusion. However, the religious film-maker cannot ignore the abundant in the way other artists can. A transcendentally minded painter like Kandinsky, for example, could functionally ignore the abundant means. For him, the abundant means were given; they were the physical gallery where the spectator stood. The canvas itself could be totally sparse, the interplay of abstract forces. Because the cinema is an imitative art in time it not only creates the abstract painting but the gallery as well; a transcendentally minded film-maker simply cannot dismiss the abundant means out of hand.

A motion picture, from its first frame, has great potential empathy; one of the functions of transcendental style is to use that empathy as *potential* and keep it at that level. The audience has a natural impulse to participate in actions and settings on screen; a film-maker employing transcendental style can use these given abundant means, this natural empathy, to hold the audience in the theater as he gradually substitutes sparse means for abundant. In transcendental style sparse means are, to a large degree, simply a refusal to use the available abundant means. There is no great need to invent new abstract forms; sparseness can be achieved by gradually robbing the abundant means of their potential. Transcendental style must always ride this thin line: it must use the given abundant means to sustain audience interest, and it must simultaneously reject the empathetic rationale for that interest in order to set up a new priority. And because the abundant potential of films is so great, its rejection can be even greater.

In a film of spiritual intent it is necessary, therefore, to have an everyday and a disparity; there can be no instant stasis. The everyday both

adheres to the superfi cial, "realistic" properties of cinema and simultaneously undermines them. A viewer expects certain immediate gratifications from a fi lm: a sense of verifi able reality, factual surety, comprehensible environment. Everyday provides these minor compensations, but it prevents the empathy which would normally ensue. The "reality" of everyday is so thoroughly stylized that it is unreceptive to the sort of empathy which naturally follows a sense of comprehensible environment. It is a textbook example of the proper use of abundant means in sacred art: the abundant means create an environment (on screen) and an audience (in the theater) in which sparse means can operate.

At the stage of disparity the confl ict between abundant and sparse artistic means becomes apparent—and disturbing—to the spectator. This confl ict is personifi ed by the protagonist; here is a product of abundant means, a man in realistic human form whose physical needs are like our own, yet whose conduct is a model of sparseness. There is a disparity of artistic means: there are abundant imitative techniques—the protagonist and his surroundings; and there is the cold, sparse stylization which supersedes these techniques. Again, transcendental style uses a minimum of abundant means to sustain a fi lm in which the means are becoming increasingly sparse.

Transcendental style theoretically substitutes sparse means for abundant; just how successful it is in this eff ort can be determined by the decisive action. It is clearly an abundant means, a dramatic or emotional action which cries out for audience empathy. Yet, if transcendental style is successful, the fi lm will at this late point be so bare, so sparse that an abundant technique will have no context to relate to. In the transformed order of artistic means the empathetic, dramatic device now seems out of place.

Stasis, of course, is the fi nal example of sparse means. The image simply stops. The abundant means have been shown to have little purpose; the sparse means, now dominant, will soon give way to the end of the fi lm. The transcendental style will have, it is hoped, set the viewer in motion, moving from abundant to sparse means, as if proceeding down the aisle of a Byzantine church. When the image stops, the viewer keeps going, moving deeper and deeper, one might say, *into* the image. This is the "miracle" of sacred art. If it occurs, the viewer has moved past the point where any "temporal means" (abundant or sparse) are of any avail. He has moved beyond the province of art.

The above schema, of course, is very rough; it does not allow for the subtle interplay of abundant and sparse means which enables the

transcendental style to sustain a level of interest over a period of several hours. But if transcendental style is able to create this movement from abundant to sparse means, it has satisfied at least one universal definition of spiritual art within a "new" medium. It has set a spiritual process in motion.*

OVERABUNDANT MEANS: THE RELIGIOUS FILM

If transcendental style represents the proper ratio of abundant to sparse means, it stands to reason that there should then be films overweighted to either side of the ratio, films which use either overly abundant or overly sparse means. The "religious" film, either of the "spectacular" or "inspirational" variety, provides the most common example of the overuse of the abundant artistic means.

Those interested in conveying the Holy on film were among the first to attempt to turn the profane medium to sacred ends. Lumière filmed the Passion Play at Horitz in Bohemia in 1897, Méliès made a fantasy of Christ walking on the waters in 1899, and Zecca created a dramatic film titled *The Prodigal Son* in 1901. Since then film-makers have continually attempted to set the spiritual directly into film. The habitual failure of such "spectacular" and "inspirational" films stems to a large degree from a logical but mistaken notion about the relation between cinematic and spiritual reality. Accepting two assumptions, one, as Ayfre writes, that "the role of cinema . . . is to cause in the spectator . . . the illusion of the Sacred,"[10] and the other, by Durgnat, that "just because the moving photograph satisfies our sense of reality, it is an ideal medium for making fantasy seem real,"[11] the course of action for the religious propagandist was clear: he would simply put the spiritual on film. The film is "real," the spiritual is "on" film, ergo: the spiritual

* There are many ways one might describe this "spiritual process." I have used Maritain's terms "abundant" and "sparse means" because they have a universal value. Because these terms can be applied universally, however, they lack precision when applied to specific films. Donald Skoller, in an article on Bresson's films, offers a more filmic description of this "spiritual process." He also divides Bresson's films (in this case, *A Man Escaped*) into three stages which reveal a "progressive purification of the visuals." In his terms, the spiritual progression from abundant to sparse means is "a journey through narrative, graphic, and finally plastic levels of being, depicting these phases or zones of the spirit, themselves, through parallel cinematic modalities. He [Fontaine, the protagonist] has gone beyond time and space—the narrative and graphic phases of film—into a realm where things are presented in their essence" ("*Praxis* as a Cinematic Principle in Films by Robert Bresson," *Cinema Journal* 9, no. 1 [Fall 1969], pp. 21–22).

is real. Thus we have an entire history of cinematic magic: the blind are made to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, all on camera.

A classic demonstration of this false syllogism occurs in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956). In the title scene Moses is on Mount Sinai and God is off-screen to the right. After some premonitory thundering, God literally pitches the commandments, one by one, onto the screen and the awaiting blank tablets. The commandments first appear as small whirling fireballs accompanied by the sound of a rushing wind, and then quickly—building in size all the while—zip across the screen and collide with the blank tablets. Puff! the smoke clears, and the tablet is clearly inscribed. This sort of chicanery appears in a slightly less ridiculous manner in the low budget "inspirational" films.

In the Billy Graham feature *The Restless Heart,* for example, the cosmic fireball is replaced by a miraculous cure and conversion. In case the viewer may have missed the significance of these acts, a cherubic child appears to inform him that, yes, God still does work miracles. Normally, the spectator does not have "faith" in either of these methods. The slapdash conversion is just as unconvincing as the divine fireball. He knows that the overhand delivery of the commandments was not conceived in heaven, but in some film laboratory, and that the miraculous cure was not due to divine intervention, but to a heavy-handed scriptwriter.

With the exception of some of the more fraudulent DeMille-inspired sex-and-sand epics, many of these films genuinely hope to inspire religious belief. These religious films, like the films of transcendental style, use a decisive action to crystallize their intentions. About seven-eighths of the way through the "miracle" occurs, Lazarus plods from his cave, the music soars; why is there no spiritual belief? The truth is, of course, that these films *do* induce a belief; the weeping millions who saw *A Man Called Peter* can testify to that. But this belief cannot honestly be ascribed to the Wholly Other; it is more accurately an affirmative response to a congenial combination of cinematic corporeality and "holy" feelings. And for the many who require no more from sacred art than an emotional experience, these films are sufficient.

The conventional religious film uses a style of identification rather than of confrontation. The style amplifies the abundant artistic means inherent to motion pictures: the viewer is aided and encouraged in his desire to identify and empathize with character, plot, and setting. For an hour or two the viewer can become that suffering, saintly person on screen; his personal problems, guilt, and sin are absorbed by humane,

Overabundant means: Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments*. "The conventional religious film uses a style of identification rather than confrontation. It fulfills the viewer's fantasy that spirituality can be achieved vicariously."

noble, and purifying motives. The spiritual drama, like the romantic drama, becomes an escapist metaphor for the human drama. A confrontation between the human and spiritual is avoided. The decisive action is not an unsettling stylistic shock, but the culmination of the abundant means used throughout the fi lm. It fulfi lls the viewer's fantasy that spirituality can be achieved vicariously; it is the direct result of his identifi cation. The abundant means are indeed tempting to a film-maker, especially if he is bent on proselytizing. With comparative ease he can make an ardent atheist sympathize with the trials and agonies of Christ. But he has not lifted the viewer to Christ's level; he has brought Christ down to the viewer's.

The film-maker intent on expressing the Transcendent must take the other course: he must gradually eliminate the abundant means and the earthly rationale behind them. The moment of confrontation can only occur if, at the decisive action, the abundant means have lost their power. If the "miracle" can be seen in any humanistic tradition, psychological or sociological, the viewer will avoid a confrontation with the Transcendent. By rejecting its own potential over a period of time, cinema can create a style of confrontation. It can set the abundant and sparse means face to face in such a way that the latter seem preferable.

This seemingly self-evident truth about fi lm is something which many aestheticians and theologians, van der Leeuw included, have failed to understand. Van der Leeuw backs up his contention that "rigidity better

expresses the deepest nature of things than does movement" by stating, in his only comment on cinema, that "aesthetically and humanly, the puppet theater ranks higher than the cinema."[12] He assumed that films would be restricted to abundant artistic means because they represented real people in actual situations, and that puppets, with their sparse stylized faces, would naturally "rank higher." But just the opposite proved to be true: because cinema was so much more "abundant" than puppet theater, it could also be more "sparse"; because it was so liberated in technique, it could be more stylized. In cinema's unique ability to reproduce the immanent also lies its unique ability to evoke the Transcendent.

OVERSPARSE MEANS: THE STASIS FILM

A good work can be of "oversparse" means if it fails to sustain life until the process of spiritual purification occurs. The ascetic who starves himself to death out of repentance rather than faith, the church which folds because it won't accept contributions, these would be victims of overly sparse means. "Oversparse" does not mean "oversacred." These means, rather, are not oversparse in principle but in particular: they are too sparse for the particular individual or organization to which they have been applied.

In cinema, therefore, oversparse means would theoretically be those which cannot sustain an audience. Oversparse means in this context should not be mistaken for lack of popularity or small box-office receipts; instead, oversparse means are those which are too sparse too quick. An oversparse film does not allow the viewer to progress from abundant to sparse means. It requires too much of him, demanding instant stasis, and drives him figuratively (and often literally) from the theater.

In *Film Culture* there has been a debate over a type of film which might be called "oversparse." P. Adams Sitney originally described what he called "structural film," and George Maciunas more accurately redefined it as "monomorphic structural film," film "having a single simple form, exhibiting essentially one structural pattern."[13] Within this general category of monomorphic films there is a subcategory I would call stasis films. The films, in terms of transcendental style, are simply extended stasis; they examine a frozen view of life through a duration of time.

The most famous of these "stasis films" is Michael Snow's brilliant *Wavelength,* which is a 45-minute uninterrupted zoom across an apartment loft and "into" a photograph of the sea pinned to the far wall. The overriding movement of the film is that of the constantly self-restricting

camera which examines the still view closer and closer. Bruce Baillie's *Still Life* is a one-shot, fixed-frame, two-minute study of what the title implies, a still life consisting of a tabletop, a floral arrangement, and some table objects. Stan Brakhage's *My Mountain: Song 27* is a 30-minute film study of a Rocky Mountain peak from various angles. Sitney reports that Harry Smith once suggested to Warhol that he film a lengthy fixed shot of Mount Fuji, in which case one would have a concrete case of a transcendental style stasis film—the isolation and prolongation of an Ozu coda.

I don't want to condemn or belittle these films; I would simply like to suggest that, in terms of transcendental style, they employ overly sparse artistic means. Transcendental style builds a spiritual momentum, progressing from abundant to sparse artistic means. To achieve this effect it uses and progressively rejects certain abundant movie devices: character delineation and interaction, linear narrative structure. The stasis films reject even this level of abundant means; they begin at stasis. Transcendental style induces a spiritual movement from everyday to stasis; stasis films require that that movement be already completed. Earlier in this essay I referred to Warhol's static films *(Sleep, Eat, Empire)* as everyday films; they may also be described as stasis films. In Zen terms, both everyday and stasis are the "mountain." Warhol's static films can be thought of as either everyday or stasis films, but, importantly, I do not think they can be thought of as both, effecting movement from one to the other. And movement from abundant to sparse means is our working definition of sacred art.

In order to be effective, stasis films require a special knowledge and commitment on the viewer's part. Unless the viewer has a knowledge of past achievements in film and art, and a commitment to explore the spiritual through art, he cannot appreciate the innovation or intention of these films. Stasis films, unlike films of transcendental style, cannot operate on a "cold," unprepared viewer and take him to another level. It is in this sense that the overly sparse stasis films cannot sustain an audience.*

* An important distinction must be made here; these *stasis* films are only oversparse to the extent that they fall into the same category as films of transcendental style. If Warhol's never-filmed Fujiyama film had sought to evoke the same awareness as *Late Autumn,* then it would have necessarily failed from oversparseness: there simply would have been no attempt to set the spiritual process in motion. But most stasis films, rather than being an extension of transcendental style, are a different breed of film altogether. The best of the stasis films (those by Gehr, Landow, Frampton) attempt, if I understand them, to evoke a transcendental awareness in a method closer to contemporary painting than to the filmic transcendental style. I think, for example, that a fixed-tripod-zoom film

A FINAL DEFINITION OF TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

There is an entire spectrum of abundant artistic means leading to sparse artistic means, just as there is a spectrum of holy feelings leading to a final transcendent attitude. If one did not make this admission he would indeed be on the high road to Beuron. Spirituality in art must have room to move, to change with the times and the arts. The best definition of spiritual art is one that is similarly in flux. It is situated on the spectrum of temporal means and may from time to time move on that spectrum.

In each art and age the transcendental finds its proper level and style. Sometimes that style uses more abundant means, sometimes more sparse means. In film, at present, that level is transcendental style. It represents that point on the spectrum at which the Transcendent is most successfully expressed. If it used more abundant means, it would be less Holy; if it used more sparse means, it would be solipsistic.

Spiritual art must always be in flux because it represents a greater mystery, also in flux: man's relationship to the Holy. In each age the spectator grasps for that special form, that spot on the spectrum, whether in art, religion, or philosophy, which can take him to the greater mystery. At present, no film style can perform this crucial task as well as the transcendental style, no films as well as the films of Ozu and Bresson. To expect or settle for any less from film in general, or the films of Ozu and Bresson in particular, underestimates and demeans them. Transcendental style can take a viewer through the trials of experience to the expression of the Transcendent; it can return him to experience from a calm region untouched by the vagaries of emotion or personality. Transcendental style can bring us nearer to that silence, that invisible image, in which the parallel lines of religion and art meet and interpenetrate.

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like Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (a 30-minute shot of a corridor quickly intercut from various zoom positions), would be better served rear-projected in an art gallery or home than in a movie theater. Like Kandinsky, these fi lm-makers accept the abundant means as given and operate only within sparse means. This, again, is not to demean the film-painter, but to distinguish him from the fi lm-maker of transcendental style. Of all the stasis film-makers, Michael Snow has come closest to transcendental style in *Wavelength* and he may in fact be evolving a new transcendental style in movies.

Notes

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19. Richard Rowland writes that *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is the "splendid solitude of a pure and determined woman" (*Cine-Technician* [January–February 1951], p. 5).

20. Boerge Trolle writes, "Is the Swedish critic Gerd Osten right when, in interpreting Dreyer's work in psychological terms, she puts forward the suggestion that the fear of women plays a much more important part than has been

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Index

abstraction: abstract cinema, 29–30; abstract computer visualization, 29; art gallery cinema and, 28; in Bresson's films, 46, 164–65; in Byzantine iconography, 46, 160–61; in Dreyer's films, 140–41, 162, 163–66; expressionism and, 140–41, 160; Gothic art/architecture and, 160–62; naturalism and, 140, 160; sacred art and, 171, 172; Transcendent and, 160; transcendental style and, 178; Worringer and, 160, 163–65, 173–74; Zen and, 46
abundant means (*moyens temporels riches*), 22, 173–74, 177–85
acting: in Bresson's films, 89, 93–94; in Dreyer's films, 153; in the everyday, 93–94; in Ozu's films, 42, 49–51, 55, 70, 94; in slow cinema, 16, 42. *See also specific actors*
aesthetics: Bazin, André, 175; boredom and, 20–21; Bresson and, 47, 113, 119–22, 123, 127, 130–31; Byzantine iconography and, 175; distance and, 20–21; Dreyer and, 136; emotions and, 110–11; generalizations, 172; Huxley, 172; Leeuw, Gerardus van der, 172, 175, 182; neorealism and, 7; Ozu and, 51, 63, 127, 131; primitive-classical dichotomy, 172; Rowland, 172; Scholasticism, 119–22; stasis and, 77; Tarkovsky and, 7, 8; transcendence and, 37, 182–83; Warshow and, 140; Worringer and, 140, 157, 160, 172; Zeki on, 6
Les Affaires publiques (1934 film) (Bresson), 85
Agel, Henri, 189n10
Akerman, Chantal, 9, 16, 26, 32 fig.
Akibiyori (*Late Autumn,* 1960 film) (Ozu), 41, 48, 49, 50 fig., 51, 58 fig., 64, 78–79 fig., 94, 184
Alexandrian School, 88
alienation: Bresson and, 44, 87, 99–100, 102, 104–5, 112, 120, 144; disparity and, 99–100, 132; Dreyer and, 144, 154; sacred solitude, 101 fig., 102–4; Sémolué on, 99–100; sickness, 100; slow cinema and, 10, 21; social solitude, 100, 102
Alonso, Lisandro, 16, 32 fig.
Ambience (2020 film) (Weberg), 21
Amengual, Barthélémy, 123
American Gigolo (1980 film) (Schrader), 22
Anderson, Roy, 32 fig.
Andrei (film character), 24 fig.
Andrei Rublev (1966 film) (Tarkovsky), 8
Angelopoulos, Theo, 9, 12, 14, 16, 32 fig.
Les Anges du péché (1943 film) (Bresson), 85
Antonioni, Michelangelo, 4, 7, 9, 21, 26, 32 fig., 41, 80, 134
après-guerre generation, 49, 62, 64, 65
Aristarco, Guido, 153

Aristotelian logic, 3–4, 25, 89
Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (1985 film) (Lumière & Lumière), 10–11
art gallery cinema, 9, 28–30, 31, 32, 32 fig., 185
art house cinema, 1, 9
art museum cinema, 10, 33
artistic tradition, 113, 120, 122–27
artistic-religious expression, 38–39, 42–43, 76, 81, 169, 174–77, 185
asceticism, 87, 112, 141, 143, 156–57, 169, 172
Asian art and culture. *See* Oriental art and culture
Atsuta, Yushun, 49
Au hasard Balthazar (1966), 115
Au hasard Balthazar (1966 film) (Bresson), 115
Au hasard Balthazar (1966 film) (Bresson), 87
Augustine of Hippo, 117
austerity, 10, 22, 135, 169
An Autumn Afternoon (*Sanma no aji,* 1962 film) (Ozu), 15 fig., 49, 50 fig., 51, 59, 68–69 fig., 72–73, 74–75, 80
The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family (*Kohayagawa-ke no aki,* 1961 film) (Ozu), 51
aware (Zen mood), 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 76
Ayfre, Amédée, 42, 67, 70, 85, 89, 111, 117, 133–34, 149, 180, 189n10

Baillie, Bruce, 41, 184
Bakushu (*Early Summer,* 1951 film) (Ozu), 51, 52, 57
Banshun (*Late Spring,* 1949 film) (Ozu), 4, 49, 50 fig., 63, 72, 77, 130 fig.
Bartas, Sharunas, 32 fig.
Basho, 56
Battleship Potemkin (1925 film) (Eisenstein), 5
Bazaine, Jean, 67
Bazin, André: on artistic-religious expression, 175; on Bresson, 85, 93, 116; on cinema, 25–26, 28; Dreyer and, 144; influence of, 30; neorealism and, 7, 21, 25; on realism, 176, 178; on religion and art, 175–76; on Renoir, 95; surveillance camera and, 25; on *Umberto D* (1952) scene, 4–5
Bell, Clive, 38–39
Belson, Jordan, 29
Benning, James, 30, 32 fig.
Bergman, Ingmar, 7, 59, 169
Bergson, Henri, 5, 7
Bernanos, Georges, 95
Bicycle Thieves (1948 film) (De Sica), 25
Blow Job (1964 film) (Warhol), 22
Blyth, R.H., 45
Boetticher, Budd, 41–42, 70, 72, 134
Bordwell, David, 14
boredom, 8, 18, 20–21, 31
Boredom and Art (Haladyn), 8
Brakhage, Stan, 29, 32 fig., 184
Breaking the Waves (1996 film) (Trier), 22
Bresson, disparity and, 116, 191n45
Bresson, Robert: acting, 93–94, 119; aesthetic tradition, 119–22; artistic tradition, 122–26; beyond pretexts, 130–32; camerawork, 94–95; cinema of inaction and, 30; comparisons to, 35, 41; delayed cuts, 9, 13 fig.; disparity, 97–108, 191n45; doubling, 16, 98–99; Dreyer comparison, 166 fig.; editing, 95–96; everyday, 70, 88–97; film analysis and, 37; flat line readings, 22; French resistance to, 47; *Imago Dei* (Image of God) and, 127–30; imprisonment metaphor, 118 fig.; influence of, 22; ironic mode of, 98, 104–5, 191n45; Jameson on, 7; middle ground action, 70; on music in slow cinema, 14; music use, 14, 22, 96–97; non-acting, 16; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; offset cuts, 12, 22; overview, 85–88; Ozu comparison, 2, 47, 70, 95, 112–13, 119, 131; personality and, 93, 111–13; photo, 86 fig.; planimetric composition, 22; plot, 92–93; pretexts (subject matter), 111–12; prison cycle films, 44, 86, 114–19; prison metaphor, 114–19; protagonist features for veneration, 124 fig., 125 fig.; Resnais and, 169; Scholastics and, 47, 119–22; screens, 89, 94–95, 97; solitary figure against empty environment, use of, 129 fig.; stasis, 108–11, 109 fig.; on style, 7; Tarkovsky comparison, 7–9; theological tradition, 114–19; Transcendent and, 42, 131 fig.; transcendental style (term) and, 41. *See also* Bresson filmography
Bresson filmography: *Les Affaires publiques* (1934), 85; *Les Anges du péché* (1943), 85; *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), 87, 115; *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1944), 85; *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), 41, 87, 129 fig.; *Une Femme douce* (1969), 87, 115; *Les Dames du*

Bois de Boulogne (1944), 85, 87; *A Man Escaped* (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé,* 1956), 86, 88–89, 90–91 fig., 92, 94, 96, 97, 98, 102–3, 105–6, 108, 109, 115, 116, 117, 118 fig., 180; *Mouchette* (1967), 87, 115; *Pickpocket* (1959), 2, 13 fig., 16, 22, 86, 98, 103, 105–7, 107 fig., 114, 118 fig., 125 fig., 126, 127, 166 fig.; *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (*Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1962), 24, 87, 88, 92, 96, 102–6, 103 fig., 108, 109 fig., 114–17, 124 fig., 129, 131 fig., 144 fig.; *Une Femme douce* (1967), 87
Brief Encounter (1945 film) (Lean), 98
Brown, Ken, 29
Brüggemann, Dietrich, 21–22, 32 fig.
Buñuel, Luis, 32 fig., 41, 69, 80, 134
Byzantine iconography: abstraction and, 46; abundant and sparse means, 174, 177, 179; aesthetics of, 131; artistic-religious expression, 175; Ascension mosaic, 128 fig.; Bresson and, 43, 122–27, 129 fig., 157, 164–66, 166 fig.; Bresson/Dreyer comparison, 166 fig., 166–67, 177; *Christ Pantocrator,* 36 fig.; Dreyer and, 157; everyday and, 88; features of, 124 fig., 125 fig.; focal points, 172; frontality in, 81; *Imago Dei* and, 127–30; Madonna and Child icon (Tikhvin Monastery), 44 fig.; Transcendent and, 38, 171, 172; universality of, 131–32; Worringer on, 160–61

Café Lumière (2003 film) (Hou), 22
Calvinism, 2, 114, 115, 116, 119–20, 128
camera angles: close-up angles, 12; cutaway angles, 12; high angles, 145; long angles, 145; low angles, 66, 145; nonfrontal angles, 52; oblique angles, 14, 139, 145; over-the-shoulder angle, 12; perpendicular angles, 72; right angles, 14, 52, 154, 165; as screens, 94–95; single angle, 12, 72, 95; two-shot angles, 8, 12; wide angles, 12
camera movement, 3, 10, 14, 21–22, 144, 145
camerawork, 22, 42, 69–70, 89, 94–95, 108, 145–46, 153
Carrez, Florence (actor), 124 fig., 131 fig., 144 fig.
Cavalier, Alain, 17–18, 21, 26, 32 fig.
Ceylan, Nuri Bilge, 16, 32 fig.
chiaroscuro, 52, 139, 145, 151, 152 fig., 154, 165
Christ Pantocrator (mosaic), 36 fig., 132
Chronicle of a Summer (1960 film) (Rouch), 26
Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach (1968 film) (Straub), 26
Le Cinéma et le sacré (Agel & Ayfre), 189n10
cinema of inaction, 30
City of Sadness (1989 film) (Hou), 14
classicism, 40, 43, 82, 171–72
Clement of Alexandria, 125 fig., 127
clock shots, 59
Close-up (1990 film) (Kiarostami), 18, 19 fig.
Cocteau, Jean, 28, 29
color use: in Byzantine iconography, 174; Kandinsky and, 172; light and color movement, 28–30; Ozu and, 46, 54, 59; restrictive, 16, 46
Conrad, Tony, 29–30, 32 fig.
contemplative cinema, 7, 9, 18
Coomaraswamy, Ananda, 39, 43, 53, 62, 113, 120–21, 157
Costa, Pedro, 1, 9, 16, 32 fig.
coverage, minimal, 3, 12
criticism, 37, 39–40, 85
critics, 35, 36–37, 47, 54, 87, 112, 119; spiritual universality and, 38
Crude Oil (2008 documentary) (Wang), 26, 30

Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne (1944 film) (Bresson), 85, 87
Daniel-Rops, Henri, 167
Davies, Terence, 29
Day of Wrath (*Vredens dag,* 1943) (Dreyer), 136, 142, 148–53, 150 fig., 162, 165–66, 166 fig.
De Sica, Vittorio, 4, 4 fig., 7, 8, 25, 26
dead time (*temps mort*), 9, 18
The Death of Louis XIV (2016 film) (Serra), 28
decisive action: abundant and sparse means, 179; Bresson and, 83, 96–97, 107 fig., 116; disparity and, 70–76, 97–107, 108; Dreyer and, 74–75, 142, 143, 147, 150 fig., 151–52, 154–56, 158 fig.; emotions and, 110; everyday and, 74; Milne on, 75; other film styles and, 80; Ozu and, 71, 74–75, 76 fig., 83, 96–97; in religious films, 181–82; stasis and, 75–77, 108; transcendental style and, 21, 22, 77; transformation and, 107–8
delayed cut, 3, 9, 13 fig., 18

Deleuze, Gilles, 1; cinema of inaction and, 30; on image editing, 3–4, 28; influence of, 3, 25; introspection, 6; Tarkovsky and, 6–7; time-image concept, 5, 28
DeMille, Cecil B., 181, 182 fig.
Denis, Claire, 16
density: human density, 70–74, 97–98, 104; spiritual density, 71, 74, 98, 104
Deonna, Waldemar, 43
Deren, Maya, 28, 29, 32 fig.
dialogue: Bresson and, 42, 98, 108; Dreyer and, 141, 163; images preferred over, 14, 30; Ozu and, 59, 72; use of, 36, 42
Diary of a Country Priest (Bernanos), 95
Diary of a Country Priest (*Journal d'un curé de campagne*) (1951 film) (Bresson), 24, 41, 86, 87, 89, 95, 97–100, 101 fig., 105, 107, 108, 116, 128 fig.
Diaz, Lav, 1, 11, 16, 21, 32 fig.
direct cinema, 26
disparity: alienation and, 99–100, 132; Bresson and, 82–83, 97–109, 103 fig., 116, 191n45; decisive action and, 70–76, 97–107, 108; defined, 3, 70–71; Dreyer and, 142, 143, 147, 150–51, 154–57, 155 fig., 163–64, 167, 191n45; emotions and, 77, 97, 110; Gothic art/architecture and, 122, 163–64, 164 fig., 165 fig.; necessity of, 178–79; Ozu and, 71–75, 73 fig., 82–83, 98, 191n45; Protestant art and, 167–68; transcendental style and, 21; unity and, 70–71; Wholly Other and, 99
dissonance, 12
distance, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 96, 105, 126
Dog Star Man (1963 film) (Brakhage), 29
Dorsky, Nathaniel, 12, 32 fig.
doubling, 16, 98–99
Douglas, Bill, 29
Douglas, Gordon, 11
Draves, Scott, 29
dream (oneiric) cinema, 29
Dreams Money Can Buy (1947 film) (Richter), 28
Dreyer, Carl: asceticism, 156–57; Bergman and, 169; comparisons to, 35, 41, 135, 142, 145, 147–49, 153, 155, 156, 164, 166 fig., 166–67; contemplative cinema and, 7; disparity and, 142, 150, 155 fig., 191n45; everyday, 141–42; expressionism and, 41, 136, 138–41; film analysis and, 37; Gothic art/architecture and, 157–67, 164 fig., 166 fig.; hostile environments, 44; ironic mode of, 191n45; Kammerspielfilm, 136–38, 138 fig.; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; Osten on, 194n20; overview, 133–36; photo, 134 fig.; stasis, 143, 158–59 fig.; Tarkovsky comparison, 7–8; Transcendent and, 42; transcendental style, 141–43. *See also* Dreyer filmography
Dreyer filmography: *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag,* 1943), 136, 142, 148–53, 150 fig., 162, 165–66, 166 fig.; *Gertrud* (1964), 136, 143; *Master of the House* (*Du skal ære din hustru,* 1925), 137, 139, 143; *Mikael* (1924), 136, 137, 138 fig.; *Ordet* (*The Word,* 1955), 22, 23, 23 fig., 42, 74, 80, 136, 142, 153–57, 155 fig., 158 fig., 158–59 fig., 162, 166; *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1928), 41, 136, 143–48, 144 fig., 146 fig., 164 fig., 194n19; *Two People* (*Två människor,* 1945), 136; *Vampire* (*Vampyr,* 1932), 139, 140 fig., 166
Driver, Sara, 29, 32 fig.
Du skal ære din hustru) (*Master of the House,* 1925 film) (Dreyer), 136, 137, 139–40, 143
Dulac, Germaine, 28
Dumont, Bruno, 15 fig., 16, 19, 20 fig., 21, 32 fig.
duration: Bazin on, 7; Bergson on, 5, 7; durational cinema, 30–31; introspection and, 6; short duration takes, 52; stasis films, 183; surveillance camera, 25
Durgnat, Raymond, 40, 87, 180

Early Spring (*Soshun,* 1956) (Ozu), 48, 64
Early Summer (*Bakushu,* 1951 film) (Ozu), 51, 52, 57
Eat (1964 film) (Warhol), 184
Ebert, Roger, 21
editing: Bresson and, 42, 89, 95–96, 165; Dreyer and, 165; in the everyday, 95–96; minimal coverage, 12; movement-image editing, 4; non-rational cut, 4; offset edits, 12; Ozu and, 51, 54; as temporal means, 36; time-image editing, 4; use of, 36
Eisenstein, Sergei, 5, 7
Electric Sheep (2005–200? computer program) (Draves), 29
Elephant (2003 film) (Van Sant), 26, 27 fig.
Eliade, Mircea, 37, 40
Eliade-Wölfflin method, 40, 52, 80–81

emotions, Dreyer and, 146 fig.
empathy: abstraction and, 160, 163–64; abundant means (*moyens temporels riches*), 173, 177, 178; Bresson and, 145; Dreyer and, 142, 145, 148; everyday and, 179; naturalism and, 160, 163–64, 173; stasis and, 77; use of, 17, 92, 135
Empire (1964 film) (Warhol), 30, 184
emptiness: in Ozu's codas, 57, 59, 65, 66 fig.; in Zen art and culture, 56, 63
Epstein, Jean, 29
Eustache, Jean, 9
everyday: acting, 93–94; Bresson and, 90–91 fig., 116; camerawork, 94–95; defined, 67, 69; in Dreyer, 141–42, 150; editing, 95–96; overview, 88–92; in Ozu, 68–69 fig., 70; plot, 92–93; realism and, 67, 69; soundtrack, 96–97
Evolution of a Filipino Family (2004 film) (Diaz), 21
experience: expression and, 185; form and, 77, 79–80
experimental cinema, 28–29
expressionism: as abstraction, 140–41; comparisons to, 42; Dreyer and, 41; transcendence and, 169; Transcendent and, 185; in *Vampire* (*Vampyr,* 1932 film) (Dreyer), 136, 139, 140 fig.

Fall of the House of Usher (1928 film) (Epstein), 29
Une Femme douce (1969), 115
Une Femme douce (1969 film) (Bresson), 87
Fiennes, Martha, 31
Film Culture, 183
film festivals, 9, 32, 32 fig.
Fischinger, Oskar, 28, 29
Five Dedicated to Ozu (2003 film) (Kiarostami), 30–31
Flaherty, Robert J., 7
Flanagan, Matthew, 26
The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice (*Ochazuke no aji,* 1952 film) (Ozu), 57, 60–61 fig., 65
focal points, 166 fig.; Bresson and, 164–65, 166 fig.; Byzantine iconography, 172; Dreyer and, 162, 163, 165–66, 166 fig.
Fog Line (1970 film) (Gottheim), 22, 30
form, experience and, 77, 79–80
4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days (2007 film) (Mungiu), 12, 15 fig.
Fra Angelico, 113
Frammartino, Michelangelo, 16, 30, 32 fig.
Frampton, Hollis, 29, 184
Fricke, Ron, 30
frontality, 52, 80–81, 95, 123, 126, 132, 166, 171, 174
Fry, Roger, 39, 111
furyu (Zen moods), 63, 65, 67, 76, 112

Gehr, Ernie, 29, 184, 185
Gerry (2002 film) (Van Sant), 26
Gertrud (1964 film) (Dreyer), 136, 143
Godard, Jean-Luc, 29, 94
Good Morning (*Ohayo,* 1959 film) (Ozu), 47, 51
Goodbye to Language (2014 film) (Godard), 29
The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964 film) (Pasolini), 41, 80
Gothic art/architecture: abstraction and, 160–62; Bresson/Dreyer comparison, 166 fig.; disparity and, 122, 163–64, 164 fig., 165 fig.; Dreyer and, 43, 157–67, 164 fig., 166 fig., 167, 177; spiritual art and, 157; unity and, 121
Gottheim, Larry, 22, 30
Gray, David (film character), 139, 140 fig.
Green, Eugene, 32 fig.
Green, Eugène, 21, 22
Gröning, Philip, 30

Hadewijch (2009 film) (Dumont), 15 fig., 21
haiku, 56
Haladyn, Julian Jason, 8, 21
Hanoun, Marcel, 22
Hara, Setsuko (actor), 49, 50 fig., 57, 73 fig., 76 fig., 78–79 fig., 130 fig.
Hauser, Arnold, 43, 161, 176–77, 189n8
Hausner, Jessica, 21, 32 fig.
Hellenism, 43
hierophanies, 6, 37, 40, 111
Higashiyama, Chieko (actor), 73 fig.
Hirayama (film character), 72–73, 75, 77, 80, 107
Hiroshima Mon Amour (1959 film) (Resnais), 4
historical non-narrative films, 26, 28
Hitchcock, Alfred, 11
Holy. *See also* Wholly Other
Horei (film character), 73, 75
Hou Hsaio-hsien, 14, 16, 22, 32 fig.
Huillet, Danièle, 9, 16, 32 fig.
human density, 70–74, 97–98, 104
Humanity (1999 film) (Dumont), 19, 20 fig.
The Hunters (1977 film) (Angelopoulos), 12
Huxley, Aldous, 172

I Was Born, But . . . (*Umarete wa mita keredo,* 1932 film) (Ozu), 47, 51, 74
iconoclasm, 120, 128–29
Ida (2013 film) (Pawlikowski), 12, 16, 21–22
Imago Dei (Image of God), 127–30
immanence, 42, 189n10
impressionism, 42
Into Great Silence (2005 film) (Gröning), 30
ironic mode: of Bresson, 98, 104–5, 191n45; of Dreyer, 191n45; of Ozu, 72–75, 73 fig., 98, 191n45
Italian Neorealism, 7, 32 fig.
Ivan's Childhood (1962 film) (Tarkovsky), 8
Iwashita, Shima (actor), 50 fig.

Jameson, Fredric, 7
Jancsó, Miklós, 9
Jansenism, 85, 115–17, 119–20, 127, 129–30
Japanese culture, 45–47, 55, 191n45
Jarmusch, Jim, 32 fig.
Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975 film) (Akerman), 26
Jia Zhangke, 32 fig.
Joan of Arc (film character), 150 fig.
John (film character), 142, 153, 154–56, 155 fig., 166
Journal d'un curé de campagne (*Diary of a Country Priest*) (1951 film) (Bresson), 24, 41, 86, 87, 89, 95, 101 fig., 128 fig.
Jung, Carl, 37, 38

Kael, Pauline, 2, 17–18
Kammerspiele (chamber plays), 136–44, 138 fig., 147, 149, 153–54, 156
Kammerspielfilm, 137, 139–40, 143, 153, 156
Kandinsky, Wassily, 172, 178, 185
Kawei (film character), 72–73, 75
Kiarostami, Abbas, 16, 18, 19 fig., 30–31, 32 fig.
Kickasola, Joseph, 7
Kim Ki-duk, 16, 30
Kohayagawa-ke no aki (*The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family,* 1961 film) (Ozu), 51
Kore-eda, Hirokazu, 16, 22, 32 fig.
Kunstwollen, 189n8
Kurosawa, Akira, 46

La Sapienza (2014 film) (Green), 21, 22
Landow, George, 184
Lassalle, Martin (actor), 125 fig.
Last Days (2005 film) (Van Sant), 26
Last Year at Marienbad (1961 film) (Resnais), 4
Late Autumn (*Akibiyori,* 1960 film) (Ozu), 41, 48, 49, 50 fig., 51, 58 fig., 64, 78–79 fig., 94, 184
Late Spring (*Banshun,* 1949 film) (Ozu), 4, 49, 50 fig., 63, 72, 130 fig.
L'Avventura (1960 film) (Antonioni), 4, 26
Laydu, Claude (actor), 119, 129 fig.
Lean, David, 98
Leeuw, Gerardus van der, 39, 172, 174–75, 182–83
Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948 film) (Ophüls), 98
light and color movement, 28–30
Light Sleeper (1992 film) (Schrader), 22
Liu, Jiayan, 26
locations, 60–61 fig.
Lone Fisherman (*sumi-e* painting) (Ma Yuan), 54, 56, 56 fig.
long take technique, 5 fig., 8, 9, 11
The Long Day Closes (1992 film) (Davies), 29
Los Olvidados (1950 film) (Buñuel), 69
Lourdes (2009 film) (Hausner), 21
Love's Refrain (2001 film) (Dorsky), 12
Lumière, Auguste and Louis, 180
Lynch, David, 32 fig.

Ma Yuan, 54, 56, 56 fig.
Maciunas, George, 183
Madonna and Child icon (Tikhvin Monastery), 44 fig.
Mâle, Émile, 161
"Malerei mit Zeit" ("painting in time"), 29
Malick, Terrence, 29, 32 fig.
A Man Called Peter (1955 film) (Koster), 181
A Man Escaped (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé,* 1956 film) (Bresson): acting, 94; decisive action, 105; disparity, 102–3, 105; doubling, 98; editing, 96; everyday, 88–89, 90–91 fig.; grace and, 106, 115, 116, 117; imprisonment metaphor, 86, 118 fig.; plot, 92; soundtrack, 97, 105–6; spiritual progress, 180; stasis, 108; Transcendent and, 109
mandala direction, 29, 30–31, 32, 32 fig.
Maritain, Jacques, 113, 169, 171, 173, 180
Marks, Laura, 26
Marte (film character), 150 fig.
Massadian, Valerie, 32 fig.

Master of the House (*Du skal ære din hustru,* 1925 film) (Dreyer), 136, 137, 139, 143
McLaren, Norman, 29
meditative cinema, 30–31
meditative realism, 28
Méliès, Georges, 180
Meshes in the Afternoon (1943 film) (Deren), 28
middle ground action, 70
Mikael (1924 film) (Dreyer), 136, 137, 138 fig.
Milne, Tom, 56, 59, 75
Mitry, Jean, 30
Mizoguchi, Kenji, 7–8, 32 fig., 41, 169
Molander, Gustav, 153
mono no aware (sympathetic sadness), 62, 63, 65, 66, 76
Monod, Roland (actor), 94
monomorphic films, 183
montage, 7, 17, 25
Mother and Son (1997 film) (Sokurov), 21
Mouchette (1967 film) (Bresson), 87, 115
movement-image editing, 3–6, 28
moyens temporels pauvres (sparse means), 173–74, 177–80, 181, 183–85
moyens temporels riches (abundant means), 22, 173–74, 177–85
mu concept, 56, 57, 59, 63
Mungiu, Cristian, 12, 15 fig.
Munk, Kaj, 153
music use: Bresson and, 96–97; diegetic/non-diegetic music, 14, 21; non-diegetic music, 21–22; Ozu and, 96–97; as slow cinema technique, 14; *Stations of the Cross* (2015) (Brüggemann), 22; transformation and, 108
My Childhood (1972 film) (Douglas), 29
My Mountain: Song 27 (1963 film) (Brakhage), 184

Nanook of the North (1922 film) (Flaherty), 7
narrative digression, 9, 11
Nativity (2011 installation) (Fiennes), 31
naturalism, 42, 160, 165, 172, 173–74
nature: in Ozu's codas, 66 fig., 71; in Zen arts and culture, 63–64
Neoplatonists, 45, 123
neorealism, 7, 28
New Romanian Cinema, 12, 32 fig.
Noda, Kogo, 49
non-narrative cinema: art gallery direction, 28–30; combined directions, 31; diagram of, 31–33, 32 fig.; directions of, 25–30; mandala direction, 30–31; surveillance camera direction, 25–26
Nostalghia (1983 film) (Tarkovsky), 9, 23–25, 24 fig.

Ochazuke no aji (*The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice,* 1952 film) (Ozu), 57, 60–61 fig., 65
Ohayo (*Good Morning,* 1959 film) (Ozu), 47, 51
one-corner style, 54, 56, 56 fig., 57
oneiric cinema. *See* dream (oneiric) cinema
Ophüls, Max, 7–8, 98
Ordet (*The Word,* 1955 film) (Dreyer), 22, 23, 23 fig., 42, 74, 80, 136, 142, 153–57, 155 fig., 158–59 fig., 162, 166
Oriental art and culture: aesthetics of, 131; Byzantine iconography and, 122; continuation in ritual, 62; individuality in, 53–54; in Ozu filmography, 44; primitive art comparison, 45; Transcendent and, 45–46
Oshima, Nagisa, 64
Osten, Gerd, 194n20
Ostrowski, Mark John, 32 fig.
Otto, Rudolf, 37, 82
overabundant means, 180–83, 182 fig.
oversparse means, 183–84
Oxhide II (2009 film) (Liu), 26
Ozu, Yasujiro: actors, 49–51, 55; Bresson comparison, 2, 47, 70, 95, 100, 112–13, 119, 131; camera view, 51; career of, 47; character portrayal, 48, 55, 59–62, 72, 80–81, 94; chiaroscuro film effect, 52; close-up angles, 52; collaborators, 49; comparisons to, 35, 41; compassion, 71–72, 74, 75; conflict forms, 48–49, 57; conservativeness of, 46, 64; as contemplative cinema stylist, 7; cut on motion, 52; cut without coda, 52; decisive action, 75–76, 76 fig.; disparity and, 71–75, 73 fig., 191n45; early films, 47, 52; editing of, 54; eternal now (*ekaksana*), 59, 63; everyday, 68–69 fig., 70; family-office cycle films, 44, 48; father-daughter conflict, 49, 50 fig.; film analysis and, 37; frontality, 80–81; *furyu* (Zen moods) of, 63, 65; influence of, 22; ironic mode of, 72–75, 73 fig., 98, 191n45; Japanese resistance to, 47; last films, 51–52; light comedy scenes, 52; locations, 59–62; Mizoguchi and, 169; *mono no aware* (sympathetic

Ozu, Yasujiro *(continued)*
sadness) and, 62, 63, 66; mother-daughter conflict, 49, 50 fig.; *mu* concept, 57, 59, 63; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; offset edits, 12; one-corner style, 57; Oriental culture and, 44; Oriental tradition and, 46–47; pacing cut, 51; personal life of, 53; personality of, 52–55, 66, 81; photo, 46 fig.; physical action, 52; pillow shots, 9; post-war period, 51; repeated compositions, 14; restrictions, 70; ritual concept, 51, 59–63; settings, 57; *shomin* genre, 47; *shomin-geki* concept, 47; shot alphabet, 62; shot sequence pattern, 57; silence, use of, 56–57, 66 fig.; stasis, 76 fig., 76–77; still-life codas of, 58 fig.; Tarkovsky comparison, 7–8, 9; techniques of, 51–52, 65–66; time-image editing, 4; tracking shot, 51–52; Transcendent and, 42, 46, 52, 130 fig.; transcendental style of, 41, 66–81; variation in, 62; western comparisons to, 81–83; Westernization and, 47–49; Zen and, 43, 47, 52–53, 55–66, 56 fig., 58 fig., 65–66. *See also* Ozu filmography; Ozu's codas
Ozu filmography: *An Autumn Afternoon* (*Sanma no aji,* 1962), 15 fig., 49, 50 fig., 51, 59, 68–69 fig., 72–73, 74–75, 80; *The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family* (*Kohayagawa-ke no aki,* 1961), 51; *Early Spring* (*Soshun,* 1956), 48, 64; *Early Summer* (*Bakushu,* 1951), 51, 52, 57; *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (*Ochazuke no aji,* 1952), 57, 60–61 fig., 65; *Good Morning* (*Ohayo,* 1959), 47, 51; *I Was Born, But . . .* (*Umarete wa mita keredo,* 1932), 47, 51; *Late Autumn* (*Akibiyori,* 1960), 41, 48, 49, 50 fig., 51, 58 fig., 64, 78–79 fig., 94, 184; *Late Spring* (*Banshun,* 1949), 4, 49, 50 fig., 63, 72, 77, 130 fig.; *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo monogatari,* 1953), 48 fig., 58 fig., 72; *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku,* 1957), 65
Ozu's codas: action and, 58 fig.; as decisive action, 74–75, 76 fig.; disparity and, 71; final codas, 65, 66 fig., 76; *furyu* (Zen moods) in, 63; in last films, 52; Mount Fuji shots, 63, 184; *mu* concept and, 57–59; music use in, 97, 105–6; stasis and, 75–76, 147; in *Tokyo Story,* 66 fig.

"painting in time" ("Malerei mit Zeit"), 29
Panofsky, Erwin, 121–22
Parajanov, Sergei, 29, 32 fig.
Parrain, Philippe, 162
Pasolini, Pier Paulo, 9, 32 fig., 41
The Passion of Joan of Arc (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1928 film) (Dreyer), 41, 136, 143–48, 144 fig., 146 fig., 164 fig., 194n19
Paths of the Soul (2016 film) (Zhang), 30
Paul the Apostle, 114
Pawlikowski, Pawel, 12, 16, 21–22
Pereda, Nicolás, 16
personality: Bresson and, 93, 111–13; defined, 52; Dreyer and, 135, 139, 148, 152; of film-makers, 41, 134–35; influence of, 111; of Ozu, 52–55; stasis and, 42
Peterson, Will, 56
Pickpocket (1959 film) (Bresson), 2, 13 fig., 16, 22, 86, 96, 98, 103, 105–7, 107 fig., 114, 118 fig., 125 fig., 126, 127, 166 fig.
Pietà of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, 1444–1466 oil (Quarton), 165 fig.
pillow shots, 9
planimetric composition, 14, 15 fig., 21
planimetric photography, 14
Plato/Platonic idealism, 37, 43, 114
Plotinus, 37
predestinarianism, 115
pretexts (subject matter), 111–12
primitive-classical dichotomy, 42–43, 171–72
primitivism, 40, 42–43, 45, 51, 81, 104, 121, 169, 171
prison metaphor, 114–19, 118 fig.; Bresson and, 42, 44, 86–88, 92, 102–3, 118 fig.
Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc (*The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 1961) (Bresson), 24, 87, 88, 92, 96, 102–6, 103 fig., 108, 109 fig., 114–17, 124 fig., 129, 131 fig., 144 fig.
The Prodigal Son (1901 film) (Zecca), 180
Psycho (1960 film) (Hitchcock), 11
pure cinema, 25, 28, 33

Le Quattro Volte (2010 film) (Frammartino), 30

realism: Boetticher and, 41; comparisons to, 42; Pasolini and, 41; spiritual art and, 175–76; Transcendent and, 67, 69, 71
Reggio, Godfrey, 30, 32 fig.
Reichardt, Kelly, 16, 32 fig.
Reinhardt, Max, 137
Religion and Culture (Maritain), 173

religious experience, 36–37, 45
religious films, 36, 180–83, 182 fig.
Renaissance art, 43, 44 fig., 174–75
Renoir, Jean, 41, 95
repeated compositions, 14, 15 fig.
Resnais, Alain, 4, 7–8, 169
Reygadas, Carlos, 21, 22
Richie, Donald, 46, 48, 51, 53–54, 57, 59, 63, 191n45
Richter, Hans, 28
Riegl, Alois, 189n8
The Rise of Louis XIV (1966 film) (Rossellini), 26, 28
ritual concept, 59–63
Rivers, Ben, 16, 32 fig.
Rocks and Bamboo (Yuan dynasty painting) (Wu Chen), 170 fig.
romanticism, 42
Rome, Open City (1946 film) (Rossellini), 28
Rosenbaum, Jonathan, 8–9
Rossellini, Roberto: as contemplative cinema stylist, 7; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; observational cinema and, 31; *The Rise of Louis XIV* (1966 film), 26, 28; style of, 41; Tarkovsky comparison, 7–8; transcendental style use, 42; *Viaggio in Italia* (*Voyage in Italy,* 1954 film), 4, 26, 28
Rouch, Jean, 26
Rowland, Benjamin, Jr., 172
Rowland, Richard, 194n19
Ruttman, Walther, 29
Ryu, Chishu (actor), 49, 50 fig., 62, 69 fig.

sabi (Zen mood), 63
sacred art, 37–38, 171, 189n10
Samsara (2011 film) (Fricke), 30
Sanma no aji (*An Autumn Afternoon,* 1962 film) (Ozu), 50 fig., 51, 68–69 fig., 72–73, 80
Satan's Tango (*Sátántangó,* 1994 film) (Tarr), 5 fig., 11, 21
Sátántangó (*Satan's Tango,* 1994 film) (Tarr), 5 fig., 11, 21
Sato, Tadao, 72, 80–81, 98
scholasticism, 45, 119–22, 123, 130, 157
screens, 89, 94–95, 97
Sculpting in Time (Tarkovsky), 8
second-generation slow directors, 9
Sémolué, Jean, 70, 99–100, 105, 147
Serene Velocity (1970 film) (Gehr), 29, 185
Serra, Alberto, 16, 28, 32 fig.
Seven Men from Now (1956 film) (Boetticher), 134
Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors (1965 film) (Parajanov), 29
shomin genre, 47
shomin-geki concept, 47
short duration takes, 52
silence: in meditative cinema, 31; Ozu's use of, 56–57, 66 fig.; Transcendental style and, 185
silent films, 22
Silent Light (2007 film) (Reygadas), 21, 22, 23, 23 fig.
Simon of the Desert (1965 film) (Buñuel), 80
Singer, Ben, 12
Sitney, P. Adams, 28, 183, 184
Sivan, Avishai, 26, 32 fig.
Skoller, Donald, 180
Sleep (1963 film) (Warhol), 97, 184
slow cinema: criteria for, 10; defined, 10–11; delayed cut, 13 fig.; modernity and, 8; planimetric composition, 15 fig.; slow directors, 32 fig., 33; slowness criteria, 10; Tarkovsky's segue to, 9; techniques, 11–16
smash cut, 18
Smith, Harry, 184
Snow, Michael, 29, 32 fig., 41, 183–84, 185
Sokurov, Alexander, 16, 21, 32 fig.
solitude, 101 fig.
Sontag, Susan, 2, 85, 86, 87, 92, 96, 98–99, 111, 149
Soshun (*Early Spring,* 1956 film) (Ozu), 48, 64
sound use, 14, 46, 96–97
Soviet cinema, 17
sparse means (*moyens temporels pauvres*), 173–74, 177–80, 181, 183–85
spiritual art: definitions of, 171–74, 180, 185; Gothic art/architecture and, 157; of Middle Ages, 161; stasis and, 111, 184–85; themes of, 22
spiritual density, 71, 74, 98, 104
spiritual expression, 169, 171
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring (2003 film) (Kim), 30
Stamper, Ben, 32 fig.
stasis, 3, 108–11; art gallery cinema and, 29; Bresson/Ozu comparison and, 83; decisive action and, 75–77; defined, 75; in Dreyer, 143, 150; faux use of, 22; other film styles and, 80; oversparse means (stasis films), 183–84; in Ozu, 76 fig., 76–77, 78–79 fig.; reduction to, 42; stasis artists, 29; stasis films, 183–84; *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962 film) (Bresson), 109 fig.

static camera, 26
static frames, 11, 12
Stations of the Cross (2015 film) (Brüggemann), 21–22
Still Life (1966 film) (Baillie), 184
Still Walking (2008 film) (Kore-eda), 22
stop motion, 28
The Story of My Death (2013 film) (Serra), 28
Straub, Jean-Marie, 9, 16, 26, 32 fig.
Strindberg, August, 137
structural cinema, 29, 183
style (term), defined, 40
sumi-e painting, 54, 56 fig., 126, 172
surveillance camera, 25–28, 32 fig.
Suzuki, D.T., 46, 63–64
sympathetic sadness (*mono no aware*), 62, 63, 65, 66, 76
Syper, Wylie, 40, 161, 163, 176, 178

Tarkovsky, Andrei: as aesthetician, 7; Bazin and, 7; Bresson comparison, 7; Deren comparison, 28; duration, 7; as film-maker, 6–7; as the fulcrum, 6–7; Jameson on, 7; long take, 8; music use, 14; narrative digression to dead time, 9; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; Ophuls comparison, 7; on style over content, 7; on time, 17; time element, 8–10; transcendental style, not interested in, 22–24
Tarkovsky filmography: *Andrei Rublev* (1966), 8; *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), 8; *Nostalghia* (1983), 9, 23–25, 24 fig.
Tarkovsky Ring, 32 fig., 32–33
Tarr, Béla: film length, 21; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; slow cinema techniques and, 16; slow time, 18–19; Tarkovsky and, 10; on time over narrative, 25
Tarr filmography: *Sátántangó* (*Satan's Tango,* 1994), 5 fig., 11, 21; *The Turin Horse* (2011), 5 fig., 11
Taste of Cherry (1997 film) (Kiarostami), 31
tea ceremony (*cha-no-yu*), 67
temporal means, 173. *See also* abundant means (*moyens temporels riches*); sparse means (*moyens temporels pauvres*)
temps mort (dead time), 9, 18
Ten Commandments (1956 film) (DeMille), 181, 182 fig.
theatrical cinema, 32, 32 fig.
theological issues, 35, 38, 114–19, 169, 171
Thérèse (1986 film) (Cavalier), 17–18, 21, 26
third-generation slow directors, 9
Thomas Aquinas, Saint, 121–22
Through a Glass Darkly (1961) (Bergman), 2
Tillich, Paul, 166–67
time concepts: Deren/Tarkovsky comparison, 28; eternal now (*ekaksana*), 59, 63
time perception, 17, 59
time-image principle, 3–6, 21, 28
Tokyo boshoku (*Tokyo Twilight,* 1957 film) (Ozu), 65
Tokyo monogatari (*Tokyo Story,* 1953 film) (Ozu), 48 fig., 58 fig., 66 fig., 72, 73 fig., 75, 76 fig.
Tokyo Story (*Tokyo monogatari,* 1953 film) (Ozu), 48 fig., 58 fig., 66 fig., 72, 73 fig., 75, 76 fig.
Tokyo Twilight (*Tokyo boshoku,* 1957 film) (Ozu), 65
tracking shots, 51
transcendence (term): Ayfre on, 189n10; defined, 38, 191n51; Warner on, 191n51
Transcendent: defined, 38; expression of, 39, 185; Ozu and, 42, 46, 52; reality and, 67; in Zen art and culture, 45–46
transcendental (term): defined, 37–39; definition 1, 37; non-functionality of, 37
transcendental art: criticism and, 39; defined, 38
transcendental style: defined, 35, 185; defining of, 35–36; Dreyer overview, 141–42; faux uses of transcdental style, 22; Madonna comparisons, 44 fig.; mechanics of, 21; uniqueness of, 169, 171
transcendental style, rethinking of: abundant and sparse, 177–80; art gallery direction, 28–30; boredom as an aesthetic tool, 20–21; Deleuse influence, 3–6; directions of, 25; final definition, 185; final thoughts, 31; mandala, 30–31; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32, 32 fig., 33; overabundant means (religious film), 180–83; oversparse means (stasis films), 183–84; retreat from stasis, 158–59 fig.; Schrader writes a book, 1–2; slow cinema defined, 10–11; slow cinema techniques, 11–16; surveillance camera, 25–28; Tarkovsky influence, 6–7; Time element, 8–10; viewer's perspective, 17–19; where it fits in, 21–25
transcendental style (term): defined, 40–41; usefulness of, 37; working definition of, 41–44

transformation, 107–8
Tree of Life (2011 film) (Malick), 29
The Trial of Joan of Arc (*Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1962 film) (Bresson), 24, 87, 88, 92, 96, 102–6, 103 fig., 108, 109 fig., 114–17, 124 fig., 129, 131 fig., 144 fig.
Trier, Lars von, 22
Trolle, Boerge, 153, 194n20
Trotta, Margarethe von, 16
Tsai Ming-liang, 11, 12, 16, 26, 32 fig.
Tsukasa, Yoko (actor), 50 fig.
Turrell, James, 29
Tuttle, Harry, 10
Två människor (*Two People,* 1945 film) (Dreyer), 139–40
Twenty Cigarettes (2011 film) (Benning), 30
24 Frames (2017 film) (Kiarostami), 31
24 Hour Psycho (1993 art installation) (Douglas), 11
Two People (*Två människor,* 1945 film) (Dreyer), 136

Umberto D, 1952 film (De Sica), 4 fig., 4–5, 26
Une Simple Histoire (1959 film) (Hanoun), 22
unity: art and religion, 174–75; disparity and, 70–71; Gothic art/architecture and, 121; *Imago Dei* and, 127; Japanese culture and, 49, 71; oblique orientation and, 163; religiousness and, 43; of transcendental style, 81; universality and, 77, 80; in Zen art and culture, 65; in Zen arts and culture, 63–64
universality: divergent cultures and, 67, 132, 133; Eliade-Wölffin method and, 80; emotions and, 77; expression and, 111, 141; form and, 88, 122, 127, 131, 133; grace and, 116; Ozu and, 47; representation and, 41, 81, 122; spiritual universality, 35, 174, 180; style and, 40; tradition and, 113; unity and, 77, 80

Vampyr (*Vampire,* 1932 film (Dreyer), 136, 139, 140 fig.
Van Sant, Gus, 26, 27 fig., 32 fig.
veneration, 124 fig., 125 fig., 126, 174
vestibular cinema, 26, 27 fig.
Viaggio in Italia (*Voyage in Italy,* 1954 film) (Rossellini), 4, 26
viewer's perspective, 17–19, 19 fig.
Viola, Bill, 29
Virgin and Child (1520 painting) (Master Michiel), 44 fig.
Viridiana (1961 film) (Buñuel), 2
Vision (2009 film) (Trotta), 16
Visitors (2013 film) (Reggio), 30
visual flatness, 14, 52, 95, 108, 124 fig., 126, 141. *See also* planimetric composition
Vogel, Amos, 29
Voyage in Italy (*Viaggio in Italia,*1954 film) (Rossellini), 4, 28
Vredens dag (*Day of Wrath,* 1943) (Dreyer), 136, 142, 148–53, 150 fig., 162, 165–66, 166 fig.
Vredens dag (*Day of Wrath,* 1943 film) (Dreyer), 136, 142, 148–53, 150 fig., 162, 165–66, 166 fig.

wabi (Zen mood), 63
Walker (2012 film) (Tsai), 26, 27 fig.
walking/wandering films, 26, 27 fig.
Walsh, Michael, 30
The Wanderer (2010 film) (Sivan), 26, 27 fig.
Wang Bing, 26, 30, 32 fig.
Warhol, Andy: *Blow Job* (1964 film), 22; *Eat* (1964 film), 184; *Empire* (1964 film), 30, 184; everyday films, 70, 80, 184; non-narrative cinema diagram, 32 fig.; parodies, 134; *Sleep* (1963 film), 97, 184; stasis films, 70, 97, 184; style of, 41
Warner, Langdon, 55, 191n51
Warshow, Robert, 148–53
Watts, Alan, 55, 59, 63
Wavelength (1967 film) (Snow), 29, 183–84, 185
Weberg, Anders, 21
Weerasethakul, Aprichatpong, 16, 32 fig.
Welles, Orson, 4, 8
What Time Is It There? (2001 film) (Tsai), 12
Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie? (2001 film) (Costa), 9
Wholly Other: communication with, 52; culture and, 83; decisive action and, 106; disparity and, 99; duration and, 6; everyday and, 97; expression of, 39, 40, 133; man's relationship to, 185; Otto on, 37; religious films and, 181; stasis and, 76; transcendental definition and, 37–38; transcendental director and, 23
Wiseman, Frederick, 26
Wölfflin, Heinrich, 40, 52, 80–81
The Word (*Ordet,* 1955 film) (Dreyer), 22, 23, 23 fig., 42, 74, 80, 136, 142, 153–57, 155 fig., 158–59 fig., 162, 166
Worringer, Wilhelm, 140, 157, 160–61, 163–65, 172, 173–74

Wu Chen, 170 fig.

Yellow Movie (1973-infinity) (Conrad), 29–30
You Are Not I (1981 film) (Driver), 29
yugen (Zen mood), 63

Zecca, Ferdinand, 180
Zeki, Semir, 6
Zeman, Marvin, 115
Zen arts and culture: Bresson and, 157; defined, 55; frontality and, 132; *furyu* (Zen moods), 63; individuality and, 53–54; *mu* concept, 56, 59; nature in, 63–64; Ozu and, 43, 45–47, 52–53, 55–66, 56 fig., 58 fig., 65; ritual concept, 59–63; stasis films and, 184; tea ceremony (*cha-no-yu*), 59; unity of experience and, 63; variation in, 62
Zhang Yang, 30
Zhengfan Yang, 32 fig.
Zorns Lemma (1970 film) (Frampton), 29