

**The
Rambling
Figures
of
Mani Kaul**

WRITINGS & CONVERSATIONS

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**“I feel I have one relation with Bresson,
another with Ghatak. But there is a wide
difference between the two. It is strange that
I have a relation with two persons so contrary
in disposition. I am often trying to figure out
how to strike a chord between the two.
I have absorbed both of them.”**

- Mani Kaul-

How can one mention Robert Bresson and Ritwik Ghatak in the same breath, let alone blend them into one single cinematic vision? While the films of the first are most often associated with constraint and rigor, those of the latter are generally identified with sensuousness and exuberance. While one aspired to free cinema from the influence of theatre, the other hinged his cinematic endeavors on his experience with the Indian People's Theatre Association. Yet for all their differences and peculiarities, Bresson's ascetic studies of penance and grace and Ghatak's epic tales of displacement and dispossession seem to have at least one thing in common: a profound impatience with the conventions of dramatic plot structure. It is this impatience that has fuelled Mani Kaul's ambition to pave his own path through the world of cinema, one that has guided him towards the study of other forms of art, notably of the Indian traditions of miniature painting and Dhrupad music. In these traditions, Mani Kaul (1944 - 2011) found something that he wished to transpose to cinema: an abjuration of the notion of convergence that is ubiquitous in the Renaissance period in western art in favor of a logic of dispersion and elaboration, as exemplified by the improvisation upon a single scale in Indian Raag music, able to transform a singular figure into a concert of flowing perceptions.

Perhaps this particular attention towards subtle shifts and unfolding movements can be traced back to Mani Kaul's childhood. As a young boy growing up in the city of Udaipur in Rajasthan, Kaul was suffering from acute myopia, which for a long time he assumed as a normal mode of vision. When he finally saw the world through his first pair of glasses, he would time and again get up at the crack of dawn to see the city come alive before his eyes in a continuous play of light and colour. Right from his early documentary *Forms and Design* (1968),

which sets up an opposition between the functional tools of the industrial age and the decorative forms from Indian tradition, Kaul made it apparent that he was interested in the possibilities of form over functionality. In his first feature film, *Uski Roti* (A Day's Bread, 1970), inspired by a short story by Mohan Rakesh and the paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, he pared down plot and dialogue to a bare minimum while emphasizing the experience of time and duration and blurring the distinction between the actual and the imagined. In one of Kaul's subsequent feature films, *Duvidha* (In Two Minds, 1973), an adaptation of a Rajasthani folk-tale, the colour schemes, the framing and the editing were directly inspired by the classical styles of Kangra and Basouli miniature paintings. With this radical departure from the prevalent cinematic norms, Kaul established himself as one of the protagonists of the so called "New Cinema Movement," alongside notable colleagues such as Kumar Shahani, John Abraham and K.K. Mahajan, who had also studied with Ritwik Ghatak at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune.

The focus on process rather than product was also central to the work of the Yukt Film Cooperative that was set up by a group of FTII graduates and students in the mid-1970s, in response to the state of emergency that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared across India. Kaul, by then a renowned filmmaker, collaborated on their interpretation of *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1977), based on a popular Marathi play of the same name, which draws out sharp parallels between that dark period of repression and the authoritarian Peshwa regime that ruled over western India on the eve of European colonization. Although the film might appear like a deviance in Kaul's trajectory, its mixture of history and mythology, traditional folk forms and complex visual structures brings into focus some

of the concerns that are central to his cinematic research. His study of Indian aesthetics, folk art and music would become more prevalent in subsequent poetic documentary features such as *Dhrupad* (1982), focused on the legendary Dagar family of musicians; *Mati Manas* (1984), about the ancient tradition of terracotta artisanry and the myths associated with it; and *Siddheshwari* (1989), an expansive portrait of thumri singer Siddheshwari Devi which amalgamates multiple temporalities, geographies and realities. By that time, Kaul had begun his studies of Dhrupad music with one of the members of the Dagar family, Ustad Zia Moiuddin, and derived a number of cinematic approaches from this musical idiom. As critic Shanta Gokhale has noted: "Classical Indian music is to Mani Kaul the purest artistic search ... Just as a good musician has mastered the musical method of construction which saves his delineation of a raga from becoming formless, so a good filmmaker has a firm control over cinematic methods of construction and can therefore allow himself to improvise."

Towards the end of the 1980s, Kaul found another gateway for his cinematic search in the literature of Dostoyevsky, of whom he adapted *A Gentle Creature* and *The Idiot*. Twenty years after Bresson adapted the former into *Une femme douce* (1969), Kaul made his own version with *Nazar* (The Gaze, 1989), whose concert of exchanged glances and delicate gestures unfolds like a musical performance sliding from one

note to another. In search of even more open-ended working procedures, one of the experiments he attempted in *Ahmaq* (Idiot, 1992) and continued in subsequent films was to not let the cameraman look through the viewfinder while a shot is being taken. While fine-tuning the process of precise preparation combined with an embrace of the dissonant and the aleatory, Kaul ventured to let his compositions drift ever further away from linearity and unity, allowing for the expression of multiple flows. "A film should not replicate the rhythms of daily life," he would say, "it should create its own rhythms." Mani Kaul kept on pursuing his explorations until his untimely death in 2011, leaving behind a wealth of films and writings which unfortunately remain all too invisible to this day. This modest publication, compiled on the occasion of the program *Soft Notes on A Sharp Scale — The Rambling Figures of Mani Kaul*, produced as part of the Courtisane Festival 2018 (28 March - 1 April), aims to give some insight into the cinematic quest of this visionary filmmaker through a collection of essays and interviews that were written and published between 1974 and 2008. Assembled here for the first time, they offer us some glimpses of the reasoning behind Kaul's unfading endeavours to "salvage experience."

Stoffel Debuysere & Arindam Sen

An interview in Indian Super Bazaar

Originally published in *Indian Super Bazaar*, January 1982.

Let's start from the beginning. About education, and how you came to be interested in films. The educational aspect first: what did you study?

My childhood was spent in small towns and sometimes in the interior of Rajasthan. My father was in the Revenue Department and he had to do a lot of touring, but there was also one very special thing about my father. He was a very honest Government servant and as a result, all my childhood, all our family experiences, there is this peculiar thing of my father getting transferred. So my mother used to keep half the luggage packed always. It was very terrible for him. Those were the early days after Independence and there was a feudal atmosphere. So the Government officers, the ministers behaved as in earlier days when Rajasthan was a feudal state. I have toured extensively in Rajasthan, in Jodhpur, Jaipur, and Bikaner districts. My education was also peculiar. Finally, my father thought of putting us in some place and that was Jaipur. We studied there in school and then went to college. I was in the hostel because it was impossible to keep moving. As it happens in small towns and more so in my case, the education was rather haphazard.

I was a very quiet kind of child and my eyesight was weak. I wear specs. And I never complained about this to my father. If I couldn't see a thing, I would go close to it. I remember very clearly that if I went to a film, it would look practically hazy. I saw life also like that ... I was very quiet so I never complained. It was by sheer accident that as late as when I was 11 years old ... I remember that year, it was in Mount Abu. By chance we were standing on a mountain top and my sister said: "Look at that road, it runs like a ribbon". Probably because of my weak eyesight, I lacked concentration. I was a very lost child. (In fact, my mother seriously thought that they should take me to some doctor. They thought there might be some problem like retardation or something). So my sister told me what the road looked like, and I just couldn't see it. My father used to wear specs. Suddenly it occurred to him and he took off his specs ... they were, of course, quite powerful in terms of lenses. I wore the specs and it was like a shock. I saw the trees, leaves, rocks, mountains. It was too much for me. Of course I was immediately taken to an optician and given glasses. After that I saw a film called *Helen of Troy*, you remember, it was a Hollywood film with Rosanna ...

That was the first film I saw, as a 12-13 year old, with specs. And after that I just could not think of anything else in my life except films. At that time, I thought I would become an actor. Yes, obviously I had no idea then that a director plays a role in films. It so happened that I continued to toy with the idea of joining films. Another strange thing that happened was that I saw a documentary made by Chidananda Das Gupta.¹ I was probably 15 years old at that time.

Suddenly at that time it struck — the possibility of doing something more in a film. After that I decided immediately that the thing was to direct a film. So I went into this library, the University Library to read books on films. Of course in India, it's terrible, even today, in colleges and universities, there are no books on films. But I found this Rudolf Arnheim book on film.² Only one book in the whole shelf of visual arts. And I think it's the only book in my life that I've stolen from a library. I was shivering when I was crossing the gate. I can't describe those feelings. It was terrible for me to do that. But I did it.

After that I made up my mind. I had my uncle in Bombay who was a director. Mahesh Kaul was his name. He was my father's younger brother. Film was kind of taboo in our house because he didn't do too well for quite some time. My own father was very upset. So when I decided, there were a lot of problems. Finally, I somehow managed to convince my parents and I said I'll go and stay with my uncle. My father wrote to him and I came to Bombay for a holiday. It was my uncle who suggested that I should not join him as an assistant. It would take 7 years to learn what I could learn at the Film Institute in 3 years.

1 Chidananda Das Gupta was one of the pioneering figures alongside Harisadhan Das Gupta and Satyajit Ray in the Film Society movement of India. The three of them founded the Calcutta Film Society in 1947, a landmark event in the history of film societies in the country. Chidananda actively wrote in and edited various magazines related to film society publications. As a filmmaker, he is mostly known for his documentary films though he did also venture into fiction.

2 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (1933) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

At the Institute, for the first time, you must have seen some of the classics of world cinema.

This is what I want to tell you. I can relate this experience with many others in the Institute. There was this other boy from Jaipur. By the time I had done my Institute diploma, I had made my first film also. I went back to meet my family in Jaipur. And this young fellow came, he was my father's colleague's son. He wanted to join the Institute. He finally appeared for the examination and got admitted. The point that I'm driving at is that after six months, I happened to go to Poona. I was also looking for this boy. I wanted to know what was happening to this fellow because he also came from Jaipur. So I went to the canteen and I saw a boy sitting there with a beard, dark glasses and smoking heavily. He was talking of Godard, you know. Just after six months! It took me nearly ten minutes to realise that it was the same boy. I was really shocked ... It was incredible what happened to people in the Institute. They come from all over India. Obviously they also come from states where they have not had such great exposure to cinema. But states like Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, in terms of film, nothing is happening. Such a transformation occurred in the Institute and it's really very dramatic.

It happened to you also?

Yes, the first thing that I saw was *Pather Panchali* (Satyajit Ray, 1955) and I hadn't seen it before. It was as late as 1963 that I saw *Pather Panchali*. It was made sometime in 1956. Of course, I had seen all the Hollywood films that used to be shown on Sundays. Every week I used to see a number of films. My family got more or less reconciled to the idea that this fellow would not listen and they used to let me go and see so many films. Otherwise like a traditional family, we used to go and see 2-3 films a month. But finally I got friendly with the chap who owned the theatre. I used to watch a film 13 times there. In small towns, you have a special box for the proprietor and his guests. I used to go there and see a film every day. Even Hindi films, like I remember Guru Dutt's *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962), a film I still love very much. I have seen it 17 times. Every day I used to go and sit there after college and see films. I wish there were other films I could have seen at that time, it would have made so much difference.

In the Institute also, the biggest exposure was not, at least the development that took place, was not through the academic courses they were teaching. That was very orthodox and very peculiar. Even now it's very complicated, I think. But the Archives! The National Film Archive has everything, all the Russian films, the French New Wave, Italian films, German films, everything is there. By the time you've been there three years, it makes a lot of difference. I would say that even the first year and part of second year was mainly

exposure to films and I used to get very bored with the classes. Because the teachers we had. At that time there was nobody who could have any idea. In fact, even now, I don't think anyone has any idea of what's what in the Film Institute. It's very peculiar. It's not like the established traditional form, like if you want to learn music, you begin in a certain way and you do some established exercises, you practice them. Over here it is different, depending upon the teachers. At that time, nobody had an idea; they were doing some old exercises in script writing and some kind of shooting.

How quickly did your ideas become clear about how you wanted to make films which were so very different from anything that had been done in India? How did you arrive at this very special style of your own that has nothing to do with an imitation of Godard or Bresson?

I was very pleased to read something that sorted out a lot of problems with me. Recently I read an interview with Tarkovsky. I really admire his work tremendously and therefore I keep on collecting anything that I come across. And he said something very beautiful. Somebody was asking him about influences and then he said, "I really keep myself away. If I see that I am making a scene which is becoming like something I have seen, then I like to re-do it." But he added: "Lately I feel that it is becoming like Bergman and I feel it's like a homage to Bergman so I do it." Then he spoke of Bresson: "With Bresson, it's not a question of influence. He's left deep mark on my life and when I make films, I don't think of a Bresson film or a Bresson sequence. I think of Bresson. Because thinking of Bresson helps me to shoot my film."

So it sorted out a lot of problems with me because it is exactly the same case. It's not a question of imitating him. What Bresson has done to him is what Ritwik Ghatak did to me. My ideas became clear to me, not on account of learning or reading books. I think I went through a more or less physical transformation and the man responsible was Ritwik Ghatak. And I can tell you he taught me a lot, I really attach a lot of importance to this. Because I really feel now, that the kind of background I came from, with Ritwik Ghatak, it meant a sort of cracking up. I mean if I go into personal detail, maybe I drank with him or I spent nights with him, on Bombay streets. I always used to be with him. Of course, he was a great teacher and he knew everything about film. Beginning from light, camera, lenses, recordings, everything. He was really extraordinary. But more than that, it meant a complete transformation within me as a person and it's very difficult to describe.

I still regard a book on cinema as very important. A book called *Grammar of Film* written by Raymond Spottiswoode in 1935. There it is written that an artist does more than what he knows. And I think this is an incredible statement. It's a

fantastic statement. Because on the other hand, if you have a very well defined position, if you have very well defined ideas, you tend to execute those ideas and execution is not an artistic activity. To execute something, it's not artistic, it is not art at all.

It's an intellectual exercise.

It's a struggle of an extraordinary nature to create a work of art. Because you are definitely entering into those worlds of which you are not aware. So you are full of anxiety, you are full of nervousness, it's terrible. To make something. But if you know what you are making, the ideas you may have or the intellectual equipment that you might have, is very like an equipment, to my mind. It's not the object of your work. My awareness intellectually is my equipment to do something, to create an object. So if I have some tools to create an object, I may have some intellectual concept or ideas to create an object but I wouldn't consider it as an artistic activity. To illustrate these ideas into film.

Why do you make films?

I think it's like this. I'll try and express it. Apart from various ideological positions that people face at a certain time, there is also a certain sensuousness about life and I think this sensuousness is a very strong element. I am using this word sensuousness in a broad sense. It's a modern word for what classically you would describe as feeling, because it's more, it covers more. It covers everything about people, about nature, about human beings. I think people come into a relation on account of a certain sensuousness and a sensuousness cannot come into existence until the fact does, like a political fact — when I say a political fact, I mean a fact which is constantly changing nature and the nature of human beings. It's a non-sensuousness activity in that sense. But the same political fact can become sensuousness if it is naturalised by various cultural methods. Any particular point in history, any particular political belief, becomes quite natural through a certain kind of mythology, gets mythologised, becomes natural to people. And they begin to respond to that. But at the time of its inception, a fact is not natural to them. So a new idea, therefore, is an idea which is not natural. It's a position or a fact to which you arrive in terms of economics or politics, or living conditions. I feel that today although politically or even industrially, we are very open towards new relations or towards people, but the sensuousness that binds us is still very old. Because the new sensuousness is still not maturing, so the way of relating itself is dated. Relating to anything which is really the aspect of content. What we say is the content in our work which is like our attitude and not just some thematic thing in a film. You may still have that feudal sensuousness

within you of relating to people and things at home and outside. So it lags behind in a sense, the sensuousness always lags behind and anything that is trying to alter this sensuousness is trying to alter something very deep. Because it is almost the structure of your being inside. So suddenly you come across a lot of films which, in terms of information, that is in thematic value, are very progressive. But when you see the actual content of that work which means the real relation or world attitude, you feel this guy is still in the forties. Or somewhere there. Because he is still seeing faces like that, he is still seeing relations like that, he is still responding to emotions like that, and therefore he is creating like that. When he is recording a film, he has certain sounds going up, certain music coming in a certain way, he puts effects in a certain way, he makes a dialogue spoken in a certain way. So ultimately, at least for me, an artistic activity is one that somehow attempts to alter this sensuousness. It somehow tries to bring a new relationship into this sensuousness and drops most of its dead material. There is a lot of dead material sticking in this sensuousness within us. It just goes on because we just can't give it up. We may have a very progressive, intellectual film work, mentally, but there are some very small things that cling in terms of the sensuousness which must have been progressive at one point. And over the course of time, naturalised. I wouldn't be surprised if one of these days reality also gets naturalised. After all, Vincent Van Gogh dies and today he is naturalised to the extent that we have film posters in the strokes of Vincent Van Gogh or Dutch painters. I saw an advertisement which they have painted like him, on a bus. I mean the agony that man suffered to create that form, to break the earlier forms. The classical forms that he broke to create this modern idiom, he had to commit suicide for it.

But it was not a deliberate act, it was something that came from within him, that was a part of his own sensuousness.

Exactly. Therefore I say that it is not as if it suddenly appeared like a flash. But it must have been a whole area of struggle for him — a struggle with himself.

Then I think the use of information, of knowing various things, reading or keeping oneself informed, is to be equipped to struggle. But it is not my job to have an idea and try to translate this into cinema. Because I'm not doing that work. I'll never do it. I don't want my images to be a translation or illustration of an idea that I may have. The worst thing that can happen, is that, because you also try to picture within a certain philosophy, say a certain political philosophy in different ways. Because all of them are trying to tie it and make it a perfect system and all of them are trying to find fault with the others. Every time you are trying to do this and create a well-knit picture, and then illustrating this well knit picture, I think what

you have done, cannot by any standards be considered artistic. Because it has no element of struggle. And unless it has struggle, it loses its effectiveness.

It becomes very difficult when you are dealing with a form like film which involves people, people who work with you and people who are eventually going to see it, to make them see that struggle, make them understand it or have their perceptions altered by it. Do you think that has any importance at all? Whether they can understand or not, are changed by it or not. Are you concerned with what people feel about your films?

Usually, it is said that I am not concerned with them. That's a very easy thing to say because everybody says that this fellow does not want to communicate, this fellow is not interested in an audience. Especially my detractors, they find it very easy to quote it anywhere. Communication, they bring up this word, all the time. On one hand, I would say that communication by itself is nothing. It's only a way of transmitting certain information to something else. But I would again question what is to be communicated and what is the relation it is seeking. Supposing I am communicating with you, what relationship am I seeking? What level am I seeking? As far as the problem of people not understanding is concerned, I'm quoted as saying all the time, I cannot be concerned with it. Because for me it's a special choice. I'm using this word — "special choice" — as true subjectivity. True subjectivity within oneself is spiritual, not the religious sort. It's a choice like that.

Yes, because when a painter paints, when Van Gogh painted, he wasn't painting in order to make people see life the way he saw it. He painted it as he saw it and he painted what he felt in him. And in a sense, that is what you are doing in your films.

There is something that I must state here. It is this that in India, there is a great tradition of say music. A musician is a soloist, it's a very great tradition in India. All music practically is soloist at the moment. There is no attempt at any kind of polyphony, East-West meets etc. Essentially it's a solo performance. There are various schools in music. Since I am working, I would like to call myself a traditionalist in the sense that I am still working with traditions in cinema. I have not tried to dissociate myself and do something which I will call innovative, which has no connection or continuity with people who have done work in cinema already. So when I seek a certain continuity with Bresson or Tarkovsky, I'm not seeking only inspiration. I'm seeking a certain relation with the tradition of

cinema. So I think that this is quite an important development that has occurred.

About the audience, I will say that I am still struggling to create a kind of cinema that would not be subjected to commercial speculation, that I finish my film and I don't know, it flops. Or suddenly it succeeds much beyond my expectations and I'm a big man and get a lot of money, what ever. Over the years, I want to develop my own audience, like when a good musician's audience doesn't come to him, he develops an audience, for himself. There are people who want to listen to him. So before I retire from films, I would like to do this, I would like to have a kind of audience which of course cannot be static, some people will go and new people will come. But I would like to have audiences in various centers. When I make a film, they will want to see this film. I would like to have a steady relation, because they must be aware of my slow development, of changes that occur in me, of the thing that I am trying. And if I have this audience, I also know what is happening to them. I don't want to appeal to a mass of millions, it's not my concern. How can I make a film which will appeal to everybody, people ask. It's not possible. For me, that audience becomes a very special audience. I can understand that audience much more. I can understand that many people much more and they can understand my work much more. Therefore, it presupposes that I'm not going to have some spectacular success. Or a spectacular failure. I have been there for 12 years. People had wished me away quite some time back. Every 3 or 4 years, the rumours spread that I had died! Every third, fourth year. I'm sure there are quite a few people waiting for me to disappear from the scene. It's a very strange thing.

It disturbs them so much that they don't want you there!

No, they ask me how are you going to make your next film. And after a struggle, here, there, after two years I do a film. Again 3 years I will go away, and then they say this fellow has disappeared. Exactly after 6 months I have a kind of resurrection; so it's been like that with me. Very difficult because in 12 years I have made only 4 films. But now it's become easy for me to make films, it won't be so difficult. Already, I have a number of sponsors.

A market for my films outside India is opening up for me. Which is very important because even people in Germany live on account of films being made in France and England. Even people in Germany — it's an affluent country — have tremendous problems. One of the filmmakers of Germany met me in Cannes this year. He won the Cannes award, and is having tremendous problems with making new films. He also told me that *Tin Drum* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) was made by five countries. It's not possible for Germany to finance that kind of film. So it's very good for me, that recently I made a film



for ZDF, which is the second channel in the German television network. It's a 72 minute long film on the desert.³ It's generally based on ethnographic material, but it's construction or object is not to make an ethnographic film. It's an account of desert life, where I used traditions as techniques of living. It's been telecast and I've got reviews which are very good. Really quite good and I think that that should mean more work. Every two years if I get one film from there, and I think I will, looking at the reviews, it will be quite thrilling.

To come back to films. In the context of the whole idea of going to the cinema. Do you think it's necessary not just in India, but anywhere else, to have the big cinema which will appeal to audiences and provide entertainment, as against the kind of films that you want to make? In fact what do you think is the role of cinema in a society at large? Because if everybody were to make the kinds of films which you make ...

No, it's not possible. It's absolutely absurd to say that. I would say that there should be several ways of making films but these several ways of making films must not have several styles, but several traditions. It's possible to do that, I think. Because cinema is very young, although you are already beginning to notice certain traditions in cinema developing. So I think it is possible to develop several traditions and those

traditions must all exist together. The truth is not absolutely in one or the other, but it's in the process of several interacting. You apprehend something about existence itself. I would not absolutise my position nor would I accept as absolute anybody else's position. But what is unnecessary, to my mind, which I don't know how it will be done, is this total unconcerned commercial trash. I just don't understand. It's almost as though they go about looking for some connections with mythology and this kind of cinema. It's like making it sacred in a strange way. I don't just see the connection. I can't see the connection in the manner they are trying to make significant a standard commercial plot with a hero and a villain. You go back to certain epics and you will find there were villains, there were heroes. What does it mean?

On the other hand, I feel that instead of developing the kind of tradition that I'm talking about, what is beginning to happen in the Indian film is the easy way out. Like if I were working with some other art form like painting, architecture, anything. It takes a whole life time. Suppose you are a writer, you can't write one poem or one collection of poems and stop. But today if you make a film, a first film, and if you are more aware than others because you have a cultural background, intellectual, whatever, and go to some festival, you are made socially. And there is this ridiculous thing about film. It's being used like this, to my mind. And it's going to happen increasingly. People who have nothing to do with films, there is no way of stopping them. It's all right, if a fellow wants to make a film, he should. Ultimately, these people will betray their interest very soon and go into another direction in five years time. All these people.

3 *A Desert of a Thousand Lines* (1981)

They may not if they find that they've become 'cult' figures.

It's also possible. But it's very easy. I mean, to use an example, like Rabindra Dharmaraj's case, he died.⁴ He was a very good friend of mine, I knew him for a long time. But it's a fact that if there is any credit to that man, it's because he had shot or recreated a slum — a slum in Bombay. He's known as a filmmaker. He has died unfortunately, and couldn't see his success. But it amounts to this, that if you want to make a film, you have to look for a subject, a theme, then you just make it on that. That's enough. It is not important for them to develop this as an artistic vehicle like everything else. And this can be very bad because it will ultimately, the whole thing, go to commercial cinema if this keeps happening.

But maybe that will make it possible for more people to use film in the way you do without having to struggle as you did, because you have opened the way as well. And once film making gets accepted and easy, at the same time, it will be easier for the other thing to develop as well.

The same people, why don't they take to painting? Or why don't they sing? We have a problem in fact with music, why don't they become musicians? Because they can't. It will take several years!

But they can become filmmakers?

Because no parameters are defined. And its potential has still not been exhausted. Now I hear some of my so-called colleagues, are getting fed up of zoom lenses. I said, my God, I'll be relieved because it's been done too much. This friend told me: "It's like smoking; you never know when you pull out a cigarette and start smoking." So it was like that with him. He told me that he never knew when he started zooming, and that he was very happy he had been able to give it up. So I said it's very good because at least now some people are tired of things like that. It's good that people are really struggling to develop this Indian form of cinema.

Let us consider your own films. I haven't seen your last one but the three that I do know — *Uski Roti* (1970), *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (1971) and *Duvidha* (1973), the three are entirely different in terms of content and style. I'm using very

⁴ Rabindra Dharmaraj completed one feature length film before his demise at the young age of 34, *Chakra* (1981). He died the same year he completed the film and most of the national and international critical acclaim followed posthumously for the film's realistic portrayal of the lives of slum dwellers in Bombay.

straightforward words. Would you like to say something about that?

Yes, first of all, two things I didn't want to do. First, I have no association with theatre. Even today, I see plays, but in my mind somewhere, I have some kind of an allergy to the theatre as Bresson has. If you read his book, it's called *Notes on Cinematography*. It is not available here, but I was able to get a copy from a stray bookshop in Munich. I was desperate for three years. It was terrible because Bresson was giving me a copy in French and I said I can't read French. So he said you wait for the English translation. I really cursed myself. Because he would have given it to me with his signature and I would really have cherished it.

You should have taken it!

I said I can't read French, so he put it back and said that in that case the English translation was coming. I said, "Fine". In this book, he talks about theatre. He had to take a very strict position because he is probably the first big innovator in cinema. So he had to really take place after Eisenstein because Eisenstein worked mainly with montage. Montage also works in connection with theatre because it constructs like that. It treats a fragment in relation to another fragment and yet another fragment and it thinks of creating a reality. Whereas the anti-montage tradition which is being practiced by Bresson, was also to some extent practiced by Ozu and the Greek film maker Angelopoulos. This is a kind of tradition where a shot is treated as a whole, so that you don't have details. If there is a detail, it's a whole detail, it's not a detail of a scene. Things like 'cut away' or 'cut-in' don't exist in our vocabulary, at least in mine. I never repeat an angle. Some people shoot and again come back to it. I have never done that in any one of my films to date. I have just not gone back to the same angle, it's finished for me. I also don't work in the way that people take a general shot, then they take sequences or the same sequence. I also don't take one shot from various angles to see where to cut. For me, each shot is an entire commitment to that shot. And if it is invalid, in my mind it may be changed and I must be in some other place. I have somehow to reach the right place and the right angle and right lens and that's it. That I can do. Beyond that, if it's a failure, it's a failure. But it's an actual commitment, that particular angle and that particular point and it just cannot be repeated. It's a past in time, it's finished. You can't come back to it again. You can only go to a new position. In this, you have to treat the shot not as a part but as a phase so that you get rid of this idea of working in space. You work more in time. So it's like phases, it's not like parts of a space with which you can destruct your time. It's the time that you handle directly. You have to construct a kind of a phase. And there's a very big difference because it causes all kinds

of differences in taking and shooting. So two kinds of this association that I had very much in my mind were there right from the beginning. One from the theatre, the other was from neo-realism. In that sense, even Mr. Ray who is quite critical of my work acknowledges that I am the one who has not followed his tradition.⁵ Probably I am the only one. Because I never could associate myself with the kind of idiom that Mr. Ray developed, although I like his work very much and I must say I have a great regard for him; despite differences with him, I really feel he is a very great filmmaker. And Ritwik Ghatak who was very deeply associated with theatre, was perhaps responsible for this development. Although I do not take to theatre, but I consider Ritwik Ghatak's film *Komal Gandhar* (1961) the best film made in India today. I honestly feel that if there were a dispassionate audience and if every filmmaker in India was asked to give one film from his entire career, and they all sent their best films, I would give Ritwik Ghatak's *Komal Gandhar*. Nobody would be able to match the kind of quality and level that he has achieved in that film. It is just incredible, what he has done in that film. For him it is no more a question of either recording reality or constructing space in that manner. In this sense, Ritwik Ghatak was probably the first filmmaker who introduced the idea of epic. He spoke about it in his interviews and he spoke to us also — Kumar Shahani has also been doing work on that.⁶ The idea of an epic, true epic form, where at many levels things are developing in time, with many characters, there is no one narrative plot on one hand and on the other hand there is no preoccupation with the phenomena as it is or its details, lyrical or whatever. There is no engagement with reality like that. I think that this transcending that Ghatak had in his films, I associate it, myself, more with Bresson. Therefore, I chose a medium which will raise itself mainly on the images by themselves and on sound by itself and not borrow their idiom from another discipline. In that sense, my first film is quite an extreme film. Well, I saw it recently, the first film that I had made, I must have been 27 years old at that time. I was quite frightened, it's unrelenting ... this quality I probably still have but in a different way. It really

5 Satyajit Ray accused Kaul of reducing human element to faces and minimal gestures. In *Duvidha*, Ray noticed a self-indulgence that he deemed incompatible with any sort of self-discipline. Ray called Kaul cinema anaemic, in his exact words, "Kaul's wayward, fragile aestheticism has led him to the sick bed". Satyajit Ray, 'Four and a Quarter' (1974), in *Our Films, Their Films* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009, 100-7).

6 Kumar Shahani was a close aide of Kaul who graduated the same year from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune under the tutelage of Ritwik Ghatak. Shahani, also an ardent admirer of Robert Bresson, assisted him in *Une Femme Douce* (1969). Satyajit Ray's critique of Shahani's *Maya Darpan* (1972) was in a similar vein as that of *Duvidha*. While the general critical tendency has been to look at the films of Kaul and Shahani as a cluster, it is important to be mindful of essential differences between the two filmmakers symptomatic in Kaul's inclination towards the Classical music form of *Dhrupad* vis à vis Shahani's liking for *Khayal Gatha* or in their contrasting notion of ideology.

looks as if it's a total disregard, it's too much to watch that film. It's quite a thing to see your own film like that. I was terribly obsessed with this idea that there should not be a trace of theatre. Therefore no trace of characterisation, there is no trace of psychology of characters. It should be direct sculpting in time. For me, there is a very big difference. It's like a plastic art, it was not a performing art. Cinema is like plastic art for me. It is required to be a performing art, the way theatres are made, the way people come in, it is not like a plastic art. That's a very big problem when you talk of theatre, big theatre. The big theatres, Hollywood style, which have now been broken down. For instance, in Paris, it is really great when you go to old time big places which are now three or four places. That's what it should be! Why should a theatre like 'Eros' exist? It should be five theatres.

Yet you took for your second film, a play?

Not only that. For the first time, I took a story from Mohan Rakesh.⁷ And for the fourth film I have again taken the text of a writer. You want me to explain why?

Yes, because in wanting to get away from theatre, you still took for your second film a play that existed. Written for a theatrical performance.

Yes, that's true. There is something interesting I'll tell you about this paradoxical relationship. If you have read André Bazin's book *What is Cinema*, there he speaks of this very paradoxical relation. If you haven't arrived at a form which I don't think that film as yet has arrived at, a form where one should make a film without any basis whatsoever. Just like one could make a painting without any basis in any other art form, or one could sing without a basis in literature, I think cinema still hasn't arrived at that level. And I can say safely because at the end of the same interview with Tarkovsky, he says: "I wish I could film a man's life for 30 years and then make a film of just 12,000 feet." It's still so difficult that he feels, he is such a great filmmaker, that he has to work with actors and with lights and whatever. I feel that as a kind of beginning towards real cinema, the beginning can only be made if the other art forms which have been in a sense corrected into film, are given their identity back. So what is happening is that many films are being made which are based on theatre or literature or on folk stories.

7 Mohan Rakesh was one of the major figures of the *Nayi Kahani*/New literature movement in the Hindi vernacular from the 1950s. Alongside Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, he is one of the most important modern Indian playwrights. For his first two feature length films, *Uski Roti* (1969) and *Ashad ka ek din* (1971), Kaul adapted two of his writings, a short story and a play that went by the same name.

Every time, in order to make a film, cinematic, as they say, what they would do is, they would try to adapt that literature to a kind of form where they distort literature. So for me, it has a really very important meaning — to form a relation with an art form but in a manner where I am not distorting the actual thing.

I took Rakesh's *Ashad Ka Ek Din* primarily because I thought that play was more like a text. A written text rather than a play. I have also used poems, short stories, even essays but I try to retain them in their original form, without disturbing them, so that I can know what I am, what my film is. This has become really clear to me in my last film. By the time I make a few more films, I should be able to make films more directly. Because my own work is becoming far more clear; informing this relation with other arts, if I am able to preserve them, and clarify my own attitudes. But if you make a kind of a mangled thing where you distort this and you distort film also, you reach a third dramatised peculiar film. It is very important, therefore, if possible inherent too much trouble! paradoxically for me, to work in real cinematography, to work in a relation without becoming a parasite on the material that I have. If I become a parasite, I shall not only destroy myself, but I will destroy the thing that I'm parasiting on.

In that case, why shouldn't people just read Muktibodh⁸, why should they see it?

This is a most significant question and I have always wondered why people don't ask me this question. Because I really feel that I am quite clear, when I approach say literature or any form, I really want to see how much I can do truly in a cinematographic way. Not in a way which should destroy both cinematography and the work that it is based on. Because in any relation, this is the problem. That if you understand or accept the independence of that to which you are relating, then you give yourself independence and freedom. But if you rob that independence or if you try to distort the thing which you are working on, then you lose your own independence. It's true of any relationship. You have to accept above all the independence of literature from cinema or the independence of theatre from cinema. So it's very clear in my films, you can see theatre quite separately, literature quite separately, they are very clearly apart. So that relation will reflect on myself. It will make me know how much I can do. You will be surprised to know I didn't write a script for *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. I had the text in front of me and I worked on location. I'm not in the

habit of going to locations and working out, which I detest; I go to a location so as to be in that location, feel that location and then I shoot. I am deciding where the camera, which lenses, where the actors will be, what will happen, everything will be decided there and then. So it's very surprising that with the help of true literature, I am able to get rid of this idea of writing a script. There was only the text. That text I compiled at one place — exactly as the writer had written it. I gave it to all my crew members. I said the script is not there, you have to work on this text now. I am working on this text, which is more or less the relation which I am seeking with something outside me. I can assure you that there will come a time when I will seek a relation outside say, the location. I'll go to, say, a factory and make a film. After all these exercises that I have done I'm beginning to think this that if today I'm left on the road. I can form a relation with it. Because I have those means for which I don't have to write a script, where I place my camera, what will happen, how do I construct. For me, that 's the object. Just like this is a literary object for me. I tell an actor also to treat a word like you would treat a chair. Or treat the chair with the same significance as I treat this word. A word is also something you are relating to, a chair also when you sit on it. It's something that you relate to. There is no difference for me between the two. The word and the chair. It doesn't make the word less, it only makes the chair more. I told an actress that there's no difference between your face and a tree for me. I said your face is like a landscape and so is the tree. But she thought I was trying to reduce her to a tree. I said on the contrary, I'm trying to look at a tree like I look at you. Then she was pleased. I think you will realise that my films happen like that.

They do. One last thing. It's very interesting that after a film based on the theatre *Ashad Ka Ek Din* and then another on a literary work, now you want to make one on music.

Yes, I'm doing a film on music.⁹ Yes, it's very strange that in fact I'm trying to form relations with traditional art forms and claim to be a monographer. You will say that I should not be wasting myself on these texts. But this is a paradox and I think it is a legitimate one. Soon I will have learnt a lot. In about 3-4 years time, you may find me shooting a film on the road.

8 Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, like Mohan Rakesh was instrumental in infusing Hindi literature with literary modernism in the 1950s. While Mohan Rakesh worked mostly with forms of prose and plays, Muktibodh was a Marxist poet who experimented with elliptic forms while being attentive towards society's many structural hierarchies. Mani Kaul's film *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* (1980) draws upon biographical aspects of Muktibodh's life while his poems act as an anchor to the film's narrative.

9 *Dhruvad* (1982)

In conversation with Udayan Vajpeyi

Bombay, October 1991.

Extracts from *Uncloven Space: Mani Kaul in Conversation with Udayan Vajpeyi* (Quiver Books, 2013), translated by Gurvinder Singh from *Abhed Akash, Mani Kaul Se Udayan Vajpeyi Ki Baatcheet* (Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Film Development Corporation, 1994).

In the European canon, I am attracted to four figures: Dostoyevsky, Tarkovsky (barring his last two films), Matisse and Robert Bresson. Despite being very different from each other — and the differences are quite vast — these four are terribly important to me. I feel as if there is something for me in these four. One of my students once said that these four seemed to converge in *Nazar*. He imagines that all four suddenly reveal themselves in the film, even if the film is mine, and evidently their presence is under the surface. I wonder what could be common among these four? And I think that these four artists were working against the ideas of perspective and convergence. Perhaps this was their method of working, of perceiving things. With all of them, Dostoyevsky especially, you will see a style of writing that does not subscribe to a world that strives for convergence. His writing is of the kind where, in his novels, he is able to open up myriad worlds.

How do we rescue experience? That is my question, because the experience of film is a very intricate thing. The fear of having no meaning scares people. After all, what is the meaning of music? Someone plays a few notes, someone says a few words, someone pulls a few strings ... What does this mean? But there is meaning. However, meaning is such a thing that is created and then destroyed. It is not something permanent. It is created, and then it ends. It will emerge again with a new face. For a balanced condition, the existence of meaning is essential, but meaning is continuously created. It is not such that it will stand by you, ready to be deployed, through your life. It keeps getting created.

Bresson's school is like Cézanne's — highly constructivist. Cézanne would create a painting by applying one stroke, then another, then a third over the second, and they would develop such a beautiful sense of light, one stroke at a time. Gentle strokes one after the other ... first, second, then the third, and in every painting an unparalleled expression of light emerges (he was so remarkable that when standing near a mountain, he would see blue light). By 'constructivism' I mean the act of building, so you make one thing, then build another over it, then one more ...

Broadly speaking, the definition of structure is also this — one element over another, then a third thing stuck to the second. If you remove one part, the entire structure will be damaged, though it would be unfair to give such a limited definition to structure.

Bresson's films are a unique example of construction. Construction is also married to his philosophy. You would have seen in his films ... a door opens and a man walks through it. He enters through one door, appears from a second, descends from a third door and exits from the room. From a fourth door, he goes out of the house. He returns ... opens the door, enters, and when he is inside he opens a cupboard, takes something out and places it on a table. In other words: a man in the labyrinth of the world in which we all are stranded. Someone, it could be anyone, breaks free ... For example, that girl in *Une Femme Douce*. The meaning of 'freedom' here is death. Death is essential. I don't mean in every film. But still, the donkey in *Au Hasard Balthazar* and the girl, Mary, in *Une Femme Douce*, have both achieved grace.

Bresson wrote *Notes on the Cinematograph*. He talked about how a film gets made and what makes it possible for a film to speak. In that light, he talked about juxtaposition. Suppose there is a shot that cannot find a place for itself ... a shot that is not able to express itself. You should change its position. And I have seen this. Remove it from where it was originally, extract it from that place, and place it three shots ahead. Suddenly it will start expressing a lot. He felt that if there are two colours — red and blue, they are not looking good together, then keep them slightly apart and bring orange closer. The expression will change. I mean, in the proximity of shots or in their juxtaposition lies a meaning, a thought. He gave this a lot of importance. In putting all this together, there appears a constructivist philosophy to his method. He employed non-actors whom he did not allow to act. He considered acting in cinema as out of place as a real life horse on the stage!

The way Bresson is connected to Cézanne, I perceive that I am connected to Matisse, especially in *Nazar*. Just as Matisse had great respect for Cézanne — he even bought one of his paintings, which hung in his house for thirty-five years — in that same way, I respect Bresson. It is very difficult to pin down any direct affinity between Cézanne and Matisse, apart from a few of their paintings. They were two very different people, but there is a deep association between them. Matisse's practice was that of the figure. He arrived at the figure directly; he would not construct it. He was greatly influenced by Chinese paintings in this regard, where the figure was created with a single stroke. Here there was no need to construct ... He wrote himself, that in the end he had become so anarchic that he had forgotten the use of colour. He couldn't understand how to apply colour in a painting! So, you could say, the inner connection that Matisse had with Cézanne ultimately saved him.

I recognize that I have one such connection with Bresson. Also with Ritwik Ghatak. But there is a great difference between the two. It is a strange thing ... my affinity with these two men who are antithetical to one another, even as I continue to try to strike a chord somewhere between the two. I have completely absorbed the two men.

I was so close to Ritwik Ghatak, but I never liked the dramatic stylisation he employed in his films. I used to ask him, why do you take it to such a high pitch? But Bresson's vision accepted reality, and also created reality. It was not the imposition of some other discipline. At that time this is what I understood, and still do to some extent. What the discipline of cinema is, we don't know. What is cinema? We don't know this, but what we do know is that it is dramatic. We know that it is painterly, it is musical, it is literary. Therefore keep these things out. Perhaps what remains is cinema. In this at least there is a beginning to understand what cinema is. It is not much but one could begin here. With this sense, if an image reeked of some other discipline, I would throw it out of my notebook. I would also say this to Ritwik Ghatak: "This kind of melodrama that is present in your films, it is very moving. It really touches me." Because of that, my mind veered away from Satyajit Ray's realism for the first time. Still, I don't know why I didn't like theatrical elements. I have never liked those elements. Now though, after having worked and worked, in making *Idiot* I find myself using my relationship with Ghatak in some strange way, even if there is nothing quite theatrical about it. To express it is very difficult. To create a coherence between these two different inspirations, Ghatak and Bresson is very difficult. It is very difficult because those two worlds are just completely different.

All my life I have tried to find different ways to do away with a linear narrative. This is why I was interested in documentaries. I find the documentary form very interesting, and within it the poetic documentary — the way I made *Dhruvad*, *Siddheshwari*, *Mati Manas* ... all of which you might call documentaries, but it would be inaccurate because they should be referred to as poems. In my own way, I have tried to bring poetry, documentary and fiction together. We would call it non-linear narrative. I have a great disdain for the linear narrative that exists, even if it is complex, even if there are many characters, even if it has a large canvas ... but the spine is a linear narrative, and if I remove that and the entire thing falls like a pack of cards, then there is no point. I think there is a bug in your mind that demands that it should start from here and finish there. It is the bug of linear narrative. The experience of life is not like this.

At the Flaherty

New York, 9 -11 August 1994.

Discussions following screenings of *Uski Roti* (1970) and *Dhruvad* (1982). Originally published in *The Flaherty. Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema*, edited by Patricia R. Zimmermann and Scott MacDonald (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[L. Somi Roy, one of the programmers of the 1994 seminar, introduced Mani Kaul's films.]

Welcome to this evening's program. We're going to be showing a film by the Indian director Mani Kaul, called *Uski Roti* (the English title is "A Day's Bread"). It's a film Mani Kaul made twenty-six years ago, when he was a young man of twenty-five. He had just completed his studies at the Film Institute of India.

India, as you know, has the largest film industry in the world; its films are seen from Morocco to Indonesia (and sometimes in New York!), but the majority of the films tend to be formulaic. You all know the Indian musicals, the melodramas, and so on. The new Indian cinema started in the late sixties and early seventies, and *A Day's Bread* was one of two or three films that can be seen as the beginning of this new development (another was *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) by Mrinal Sen, who had been working with political films and was influenced by the French New Wave and a third was *Ankur* ("The Seedling," 1974) by director Shyam Benegal. In comparison to what had been going on in the Indian film industry, most of these new Indian films were trying to be socially conscious while still appealing to a large audience.

The artistic integrity of this new Indian cinema was expressed in a couple of different ways. First, this cinema was rooted in particular regions. You have the Bengali cinema (Satyajit Ray, a precursor of the new Indian cinema, is the most famous instance), and you have cinemas from the many other regions (and languages). Shyam Benegal and other new Indian filmmakers made films in the Hindu language, which is the language of the Indian commercial cinema, but tried to deal with new themes and reach a new audience. Another precursor of the new cinema was Ritwik Ghatak, an unsung master of Indian cinema, at least in the West (and especially here in America). Ghatak was also a political filmmaker who derived his film technique from the theatrical tradition of Bengal. He became the vice principal of the Film institute and was tremendously influential on a group of young Indian filmmakers, including Mani Kaul.

A Day's Bread caused quite a bit of controversy when it was first seen in India. It represents a departure in many different ways from what had been considered Indian film up to that point. It is a non-linear, non-narrative film based on a very short story by Mohan Rakish, who wrote in Hindi. The film does not have English subtitles, though there is very little dialogue. It's about a woman in a village in the Punjab who every day walks from the village to the highway with her husband's lunch, his daily bread. He's a bus driver who drives by a couple of times a day. He spends little time at home, and doesn't seem to care much about his wife (he has a mistress in another town, and does a lot of drinking with his buddies). One day the wife misses the bus and is distraught — after all, he provides her livelihood, and she's a traditional good Indian wife. This is when a lot of things begin to happen in her head, and the film is very much about the interior of her mind. The filmmaker starts commenting on her past in flashbacks, and she starts having fantasies.

Mani Kaul told me several things about the style of the film that I'd like to share: *A Day's Bread* is a film about time, and Mani Kaul deliberately plays with very extended shots. The film is about waiting; it is deliberately slow.

Also, he used only two lenses in shooting this film: a 28mm lens and a 35mm lens — basically a wide-angle lens and a long lens. He did not employ the normal 50mm lens. At the beginning of the film, he employs the two lenses in the traditional way: that is, when you want a universal focus to bring all the action into play, you use a wide-angle lens with great depth of field, and when you want to get into more introspective material, you use the long lens and shorten the depth of field. But later on, when the flashbacks and the woman's fantasies come into play, he switches the lenses, so you're no longer sure what is actually happening and how much is fantasy or the filmmaker commenting on the past.

[*A Day's Bread* is shown and Kaul takes questions afterward.]



Mani Kaul: I don't want to talk about this film. [laughter] It's so many years ago.

George Stoney: What was the *plot*? We had no idea what was going on!

Kaul: When I made *A Day's Bread*, I wanted to completely destroy any semblance of a realistic development, so that I could construct the film almost in the manner of a painter. In fact, I've been a painter and a musician. You *could* make a painting where the brush stroke is completely subservient to the figure, which is what the narrative is, in a film. But you can also make a painting stroke by stroke so that both the figure and the strokes are equal. I constructed *A Day's Bread* shot by shot, in this second way, so that the 'figure' of the narrative is almost not taking shape in realistic terms. All the cuts are delayed, though there is a preempting of the generally even rhythm sometimes, when the film is a projection of the woman's fantasies.

My way of looking at women has changed over the years, as you will see in my later films. But it's not as if I saw this woman as pathetic. Indian women are very close to the idea of tradition, and this woman's actions implied much more than her just being subservient to *him*. Really, there is no plot at all in the film, except what Somi explained.

I was living as a 'paying guest' with a family at the time I made *A Day's Bread*. At a dinner with a group of people, the man in the family was 'explaining, "Mani Kaul has made this film where there is a woman who goes to the bus stop and waits ..." when his wife interrupted to say, "William, you're telling them the whole plot!" [laughter]

I must say, the idea of non-narrative has stayed with me all these years, and the closest to a conventional story I've made is a three-hour adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* which itself has a narrative that goes haywire in terms of what we recognize as 'development.'

Seminarian: The film is stunning to look at. Could you talk about the process of composing the images?

I believe the camera is not something you're *seeing* through; it's the way your body extends into life. This is what I teach my students (I should tell you that they make very different films than I make; I never encourage them to make my kind of films). I want them to understand that when I move, I move differently; and when I sit, I sit differently. You have to learn to hold the camera with your rhythm, and not just have an idea in your head and try to illustrate that idea. You have to understand this, even when a cameraman is physically shooting the film. We all create differently, precisely because everyone's body extends differently. Your movements are like a dance.

I sincerely believe now that I can make a film without looking through the camera. In fact, I have a project in mind where I won't allow my cameraman to look through the camera. Looking through the camera obviously was important to me when I made *A Day's Bread*, because at that time I *thought* about organizing space. Since the European Renaissance, we have been trained to understand that organizing space, and especially a sacred space — a church or a temple — is what creates a sense of attention and therefore time. But now I believe that I should in fact place myself *in time*, and into a certain quality of attention, and let the space become whatever it becomes. It doesn't interest me anymore to compose my shots, to frame them in any way. I wish to place myself in a particular sense of *time* and let *space* be, or grow. Nothing can go wrong — I know that — nothing can go wrong. When I shoot now, I have only a brief script. The film unfolds on the spot as I shoot.

Even when I am editing, my shots have mobility. In a film I will show you

later there was one shot that traveled through all the reels. It was in the first reel first; then it went to the second, to the seventh, to the fifth — finally it found a place! And I know that when the shot finds a place, it has a quality of holding you. The position is its meaning.

Seminarian: When you were shooting *A Day's Bread*, did you mentally picture the shots and then teach the actors and the crew how to go about making those shots? Or did the specific shots come along as you rehearsed?

Kaul: With *A Day's Bread*, it was strange. I had a dream. In the dream, I saw a filmstrip lying on the floor, and on it I saw *all* the shots. So I had a very strong sense of what I was going to do.

But even at that time, locations were very important for me, as important as the actors. When I go to a certain place, like when I came here (the 1994 Flaherty Seminar was held at Wells College in Aurora, New York), immediately the location itself automatically suggests certain images and movements.

At that time, I used to *think*, then go to a location. But now I don't want to think. I don't want to think, "Now *this* is the scene; therefore she should be in the foreground and somebody should be in the background." Actually I've never done that kind of thing, not even in *A Day's Bread*.

Seminarian: Despite your unstructured, intuitive approach, you're still making feature films, which usually require a lot of organisation. What kind of relationship do you have with your crew and with funders. I'm imagining you on location with everyone going crazy ...

Kaul: No, no, no. I have a wonderful relationship with my crew; they love working with me. Really! Funders, I don't know. [laughter]

This question has been repeated for the last twenty-five years: how have I continued to raise money to make films like this? It's a big mystery. But each time, I am able to raise the money, and every year I make this kind of film. I've had no problem in finding funds. I can't explain this to you. I tell you, I know of no other similar situation, at least in my country.

[The discussion continues after the screening of *Dhrupad*.]



Kaul: In *Dhrupad*, I tried to give a straightforward introduction to the music of the two musicians you see in the film. It is a music without notation. In a sense, it is not even possible to notate this music; it is too complex. There are continuously ascending and descending tones, and it is impossible to say that these tones follow this or that note. The tones are always traveling in the dissonant areas *between* notes.

I was especially interested in how the Indian musicians transmit the tradition of their music orally. A student can study this music for years and never write a sentence in a notebook. You can only learn the music by continuously listening and practicing until you begin to elaborate it in your own way. The secret of the survival of the traditions of Indian music is deeply linked with opening the disposition of the disciple, the pupil.

I'm very closely associated with the family in the film, and one day I was sitting with Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar, the elder musician, and four students, who were singing a phrase that he had sung and had asked them to repeat. One by one, the four sang the phrase, and then he asked me, "What do you think?" I told him they all made mistakes: in some sense they changed the phrase that he had given them. He asked me gently, "Did you notice that they made different mistakes?" I said, "Yes, they made different mistakes." He said, "Well, the only crack through which you can look into the nature and disposition of the pupil is how he insists upon making a certain kind of mistake. Far from getting impatient with him, you should try and understand why he repeatedly insists on making *that* mistake. When he is *not* making that mistake, he is imitating me, and he's nobody. When he's making the mistake, he's himself, and you must build on *that*."

In this music, individual musicians must express their own individual selves as they are. That's the secret of this tradition: if you wrote down phrases and forced people to learn only a certain way of playing, the tradition would die.

Another anecdote: Nancy Lash, an American disciple of Ustad lived in a village for five years in order to be close to Ustad's ashram. She was very devoted. Every day she wanted a lesson. She would say, "Ustad, lesson!" Ustad would say, "No, I've spoken to you today, I'm not going to speak again for fifteen days — you keep on practicing." It takes time to adapt a lesson into yourself.

Nancy had a habit, as many new students do, of plucking *chikari* — a sound you make when you complete a musical phrase — much too often. When the young students play, their playing does not have that continuous ring that you hear when great masters play, and there's a void. The student tends to play this other sound excessively, to fill the void. For some, it's very difficult to get out of this habit.

So he sat there, hearing *her* make this sound all the time. But he remained silent about it, waiting for her to realize what she was doing. After two months, she said, “Ustad, I have this bad habit.” He realized that if he said, “Yes, you’re playing the rhythm notes too much,” her whole attention would go towards controlling this problem, and her main music would suffer. So he said, “No, no, Nancy, it’s fine! There’s no problem.” Then next time, she says, “Ustad, I do this *too much*.” And he says, “No, no!” Every day that month she says, “I have this habit; I must get out of it!” And he says, “There’s *no* problem. You don’t have to get out of anything!”

Then, after a month, she stopped speaking about her compulsion. For fifteen days she said nothing. Finally, she asked, “Do you think I do it too much?” And he said, “Yes, I think you do.” And it was corrected forever, and her main music was never disturbed.

Seminarian: Would you talk a little about the importance of meditation in preparing to play the music, or perhaps to shoot film?

Kaul: I’ll tell you something, if you don’t mind. This word ‘meditation,’ which is mystified in the West, has no meaning in India. There is simply a question of attention, of a quality of attention. The word *dhyān* literally means attention. There is a dichotomy between Being and this quality of attention. Being cannot free itself from certain sorrows; it cannot free itself from its past, or from problems and unhappiness, because Being is full of them. The idea of transcending them and reaching a state where there’s no sorrow is all a dream. You can talk about it, but until the end of your life, your sorrows will pursue you.

However, *attention* can be free. The quality of attention can be free. The teacher transforms that quality of attention — of listening, of talking, of seeing, of feeling, of touching — until there is no sorrow, no fear, no anger, no desire. In this music, and perhaps in some of my films, one has this quality of attention.

Seminarian: I wonder if you would like to comment on the more political visions that we’ve been seeing in other films this week, visions that are angry at times, and that are desirous of shaking up or disbanding an established order.

Kaul: I’m very proud of the fact that I make my kind of film. But quite a few of my friends in India make political films, including films in which people are angry. I sometimes help with these films in ways I can. It would be horrible if we had

to make only one kind of film. *All* that is happening is real, and *everything* desires expression. All kinds of engagements are valid and legitimate as long as they keep within a certain discipline and reach certain truths of perception. They’re perfect. No problem. I enjoy films that are completely different from mine.

Michael Grillo: I’d like to ask about the innate cultural implications of basically a Western technology: cinema. I don’t mean simply the traditional history of cinema, but rather its language: the optical system inherited from the Italian Renaissance, and the narrative system based on nineteenth century novels. Given your cultural background and the nature of what you are making, where do you run up against the limitations of these culturally loaded technologies? And how do you resist them? Somi described one instance — your use of lenses in the opposite-of-conventional way — but are there other instances where you turn this Western cultural language into your own vernacular?

Kaul: I speak English, but it’s not my language, and so I am liable to make mistakes while using this language. While I’m speaking, I’m not consciously following any grammar, but there *is* a very strict grammar to English and my slightest mistake will be detected, and you’ll know I don’t know English completely. It is my opinion that cinema is *not* a language, whereas Indian classical music *is* a language. Why do I say that? There are strict grammatical rules concerning Indian music, and if a musician goes off, his deviation will immediately be evident. But while he sings, he’s not concerned with that grammar at all, even though it is *so* strict that the slightest mistake would be detected. He goes into an intuitive singing, which is absolutely correct grammatically *and* perfectly subjective. This I would call a language. Cinema is nothing like that. Cinema is information, and in particular films, information is saturated or, as is true in my films sometimes, rarefied.

It is true that the camera is a product of the European principle of perspective, of convergence — which is basically an optical illusion, because in reality parallel lines *don’t* converge: you can shut your eyes and walk and you won’t come to a convergence point. During the Renaissance, the idea of convergence produced great work. The same is true of Western symphonic music, which is very beautiful (and in a sense, convergent), and of narrative film, which creates climactic ‘convergences.’ Earlier chronicles and epics didn’t have the convergences that modern narratives do. And it is perfectly legitimate if young filmmakers would rather explore non-narrative ideas. In fact, it’s a tragedy that we don’t yet have an instrument that can deal with the non-narrative forms we have in our hearts.





Explorations in New Film Techniques

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The newness of a work refers to the subjective originality of the filmmaker and tradition to a more collective acceptance of certain norms. Their relationship embraces a legitimate contradiction which all valid attempts in art forms must seek to resolve. An engagement which is strictly modern/new will become not only sterile, but also corrupt its usage of the traditional if it remains enamoured with the more superficial aspects of folk culture. An inversion of the stated position can also reach an absurd point when the strictly traditional begins to use half-scientific truths to induce a modern sensibility in the orthodox area, when, in actual fact, it is in need of no such justification.

Folk material for me, therefore, is not just a distortion of classical culture; its function (rather than its origin) is well-entrenched in the environment from where it springs. Folk literature is unlike present day urban literature, which is in keeping with or in revolt against classical culture; and it is difficult to reduce folk literature to any 'humanistic' generalities. In fact, since it is devoid of such 'serious human realism' in its treatment of problems, folklore sometimes appears childish to educated minds.

The thematic (or the ideological) aspect of folklore undergoes varying stresses of sociological change and yet its formal structure not only manages to remain constant but relevant to the changing ideas it contains. Concepts and events, which would be one personal mass of expression in an urban poem, can suffer and even lose their entity within its three translations; the notion of *scheme* in such a poem is not distinct from its *chronological* order. Whereas in folk material the horizontal axis is impermanent, the axis of events being placed in a chronological order; while the events by themselves, being reducible to a more undebatable dialectic (such as *man/woman*; *east/west*; *up/down*; *inside/outside*), are placed in the vertical schematic axis. Each is superimposed exactly upon the other (Claude Lévi-Strauss). The need to comprehend and use schematic designs will be discussed elsewhere.

After working on two films, (*Uski Roti* and *Ashad Ka Ek Din*), which were based on middle-class urban literature, I was introduced to folk material through the writings of Vijaydan Detha (who works in the village of Borunda, near Jodhpur

in Rajasthan).¹ Before I proceed to explain my own cinematic pre-occupation, it must be immediately admitted that half of the possibilities I have explored in connection with the film (*Duvidha*), would have remained latent had I encountered folk material in its original form. The writings of Vijaydan Detha intuitively integrate (rather articulate) both the earthly authenticity of the narration (in the sense of performance) and the original structural relations between the events. What perhaps baffles and upsets an urban reader is the basic impossibility, the incredibility of the physical reality which Vijaydan uses so as to arrive at a commonplace, actual experience. A careful study of his works will reveal that this extra-physical phenomena (of ghosts etc.) is resolved neither by belief nor by disbelief; but it is resolved by a third answer such as would make belief/disbelief redundant. This leads him to treat that incredible physical situation in the most natural way possible and, fortunately for him, it enables his writings to escape the burden of two stilted extremes: the one, where a particular natural image, in its attempt to be realistic, has no 'inner dimension'; and the other, where a general unreal image overloads itself with symbolic meanings and fails to 'live'. In essence: an impossible question that does not contain an answer would be resolved by neither accepting the statement nor rejecting it, but by providing an answer that no longer contains the question.

This may lead us to presuppose that in such a situation the relationship between the question and the answer ceases to exist. In a sense, this is true. But whenever a question is answered, it implies that the answer has *satisfied* the question and the experience of the subject who faces such an answered question would also be of one of satisfaction, emotional or intellectual. This satisfaction acquires the nature of play, where infinite questions are resolved by infinite answers and the progress made, in the realm of understanding, confines itself to the known. It is not my intention to underestimate the widening experiences of the known as much as it is to propose that

1 Vijaydan Detha was a noted novelist hailing from the Indian state of Rajasthan who was active from the 1940s through to the dawn of the new millennia. While his literary contribution remains diverse, he is best known for his remarkable folk tales. Mani Kaul, after his tryst with the urban modernism of Mohan Rakesh in the first two feature films, adapted a short story by Detha in *Duvidha* (1973).

the realm of the unknown must be taken into account in a direct way, rather than just through intuition. I, of course, assume that the contradiction between the known and the unknown will persist for all time to come, mainly because each exists to the negation of the other.

Therefore, whenever the question has not been seemingly answered or satisfied by the answer, it is possible that the answer might actually *displace* the question. Here the activity no longer remains a play; in fact, it amounts to a transformation. The subject in whom the question had raised the doubt is not left satisfied on that level but raised a step up to view the level at which it appears curious, so that it no longer applies to him. The cessation of the question is an answer not to the question but to the subject who experiences such a question-answer situation and who will, therefore, either be transformed or cease to accept the basic equation. The trend in urban art forms *not* to answer questions and merely to state the problem perhaps arises from this need to transform the subject, rather than satisfy the subject's increasing pool of inertia. We notice that the urban mind begins by arranging the particularities of physical experience and further attempts to arrive at its abstracted (subtler, non-physical, intellectual) forms; whereas the folk mind constructs from an already abstract material and reaches, mainly through performance, the anguish of particularity. For Vijaydan Detha the material becomes complex: his folk background provides him with an unreal structure, and his contemporary sensibility cannot but help wanting to reveal realistic meanings. The contradiction between the unreal and the real stretches itself into his methods, to arrive finally at one experience: where the cessation of all contradictory movements is the *proof* of understanding. In fact, the non-availability of a proof presupposes the existence of contradictory things.

Oppression is the unresolved state of tension that gives rise to major expression in man. The authenticity of expression seems to emerge in proportion to the degree in which oppression is imperative to the subject. Perhaps one of the first examples found of this oppressor-oppressed relationship is the bison and the cave man. The cave man painted the oppressor (bison) in its might and power, crouching and attacking, in order to bring it ritually under his control. The act of painting itself was the measure of his control. It did not matter to him if his fellow-hunter had superimposed another painting on his own. The subject of his ritual was the bison: it meant life or death to him! It may be noticed in passing that quite a few 'committed' artists in India either depict the oppressor in a totally 'non-imperative' manner or otherwise in a manner of ridicule which ironically enough betrays their fear of the oppressor.

However it is oppression that forms the major body of Vijaydan Detha's work. It is quite a coincidence that I should discover in one of his stories a theme that has gone into the making of a

right third film by me, for it seems logically to follow the other two which have already dealt with the subject of 'oppression' in relation to women in India. In my films the problem becomes two-fold. Firstly, there is, of course, the social environment of the city and the village (*Uski Roti*) or the court and the valley (*Ashad Ka Ek Din*), plus the male dominance that extensively oppresses women in India; the other and more complex element is the subjective problem of the woman herself, who is being laid waste by her own idealism and who will not accept the relationship with her male as being oppressive. This element, her own choice, or rather her obstinacy (which even stems from ignorance, as some of us would like to believe) creates a visible column of strength in her person. In a sense, idealism begins with self-abnegation and achieves its mark only by effacing the personality of its subject. It is in the face of such horrible exploitation of this innocence, leading up to an end which embraces a series of tragic fragments, that the need for transformation emerges on our sensibility. Some of my colleagues would have me believe that the end of this tragic life (which is not even death) is incomplete and a transformation of the woman must be shown in the film: she must revolt. I myself fail to see the connection — it is not the character on celluloid that needs a transformation; it is the audience that must be transformed, even in a little measure.

It is possible that the suggested transformation of the character might completely sentimentalize (or falsify) the end and so even out all the guilt stored up in the hearts of my audience; it is also possible that the absence of such a transformation might inhibit the growth and change of stimulating factors. Neither of these positions can by itself have any absolute significance; most likely its relative significance would depend on the time and place it is related to, (for example, the transformation of the sailors in *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) in early communist Russia or *Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) after the defeat of the Fascists in Italy). Of course, in times when an external circumstance of no 'overwhelming consciousness' exists, it is difficult for the filmmaker to determine the nature of the contradictions that are prevalent.

Similarly in the choice of a theme it is possible that the film maker himself is a parasite living on the theme of his film — that is, his treatment of the theme is not further reducible to fundamental contradictions; and, instead of providing an exposition, the film may end up in just some form of entertaining or sentimental rubbish which, though engaging in itself, is actually a barrier in the path of understanding the significance of the theme. Major themes based on prostitution, poverty, epidemics and repression are, in fact, the most difficult to handle because they can be easily exploited.

Before proceeding to explain the present film (*Duvidha*) with which I am pre-occupied, I would like to revert to two of my

other films. Both the films (*Uski Roti* and *Ashad Ka Ek Din*), the one based on Mohan Rakesh's short story and the other on his play, are contemporary in their mode of thinking. The discipline in these films emerged mainly from cinematic means. In taking up certain limited aspects of cinema and bringing them in relation to the theme, all other factors (like acting, decor, mise-en-scene) were neutralized to realize the possibilities of the limited experiment.

To demonstrate: confining the film to two lenses (28 mm and 135 mm) and making them represent the actual and the mental life of the waiting wife in the beginning of the film — I mean, the wide angle provided a universal focus or the extra actuality of the cinematographic image and the long focus a critical range of sharpness or a certain dream quality. Having faithfully established this as a norm, the lenses were gradually freed of the strict representation — they were crossing each other in the middle of the film where the distinctions were blurred — until in the end the representation was reversed, with the result that the actual return of the husband almost appears as a hallucination (without my resorting to any gimmicks or theatrical devices). This slight edge of disbelief in the reality of an actual return of her husband gives rise to an ambiguity, almost necessary for a scene to redeem itself of the physical covering and reveal the conceptual meaning.

The orthodox mind may discover nothing new in the technique; it might be for him just another case of *employing* the technique to demonstrate a theme. Whereas for me, it is not just a question of finding technical means, but of discovering such a technical arrangement as would sustain itself without the factors of conventional (natural) acting, decor or mise-en-scene. In that, the technique is not subservient to the meaning, nor is it independent of it (the meaning); it is neither the cause of the meaning nor its effect. So that the moment itself is its own meaning. Without it, the cessation of the contradiction between the meaning and the form, which is the proof or actuality of experience cannot be obtained. Anyhow this particular example is one of the many things attempted in the film.

Arriving at fixed seven distances (from the camera to the object) in respect of the particular lens being used was for example another experiment. 'Distance' of course has its history in cinema. When Griffith used the close-up most effectively for the first time, he changed the distance and created the use of another volume; all earlier works were confined to medium or long shots. The unconscious growth of the tradition of long shot, mid shot, close-up is of utmost significance for the cinema. Every filmmaker must necessarily attach emotional/intellectual significance to these vague divisions in order to shoot a film. What we have done is only an extension of this system by choosing first one lens, (it was 28 mm) and beginning from its closest range to arrive at seven fixed variations.

Each volume growing into another, changing, making an interval in between, (like 1.4 feet to 2.8 feet to 4 feet to 7 feet to 10 feet to 15 feet and so on). All the characters stood at one or other of these distances, moved from one distance to another and so with the camera. Of course the important thing was to discover a *group* of distances and repeat a similar group under a different improvisation at various points in the film. This also facilitated the allusions to past sequences.

Other experiments in terms of location, faces, objects, etc. were conducted in the same film (*Uski Roti*). I must admit that this first film was mainly a visual pre-occupation in my mind.

In *Ashad Ka Ek Din* the experiment was confined to the inter-relationship of theatre and cinema; naturally to the dominance of the *word*. The whole play was pre-recorded after its division into sound cycles (of measured rhythm) and played back at the location. Other variations of acoustic change were also used from areas that would reproduce dead-flat sound to the echo quality, finding a state in between. Here the main thing with which we were preoccupied was the significance that an element acquires in the total structure. The techniques are not gimmicks inasmuch as they do not involve any disrespect for historical development: all that we used was an extension of what had been used for naturalistic purposes — and all naturalistic methods employ varying techniques as an accompaniment to create an *ensemble*. This has to be distinguished from that 'undifferentiated' vision of reality where every element is understood as contribution — and (even) independently of the meaning it may be required to state. If a meaning *contains* a method, its inversion is also true: a method contains a meaning — a quality demonstrated in the paintings of children where objects invariably remain in a state of non-differentiation (Eisenstein: *Film Form*)². Only, in the case of children, the intention cannot be specific, since it is involuntary. In the case of Paul Klee and Picasso (who were once accused of painting like children), the expression is fully controlled, and, therefore, directed to subtler forms and meanings.

The third film, *Duvidha* (unlike the first two, which were financed by the Film Finance Corporation) has been made with the help of my friends. It was because of Akbar Padamsee's Workshop³ (which was part of the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship

2 Twelve essays written between 1928 and 1945 that demonstrate key points in the development of Eisenstein's film theory. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: essays in film theory*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (New York / London: Harcourt, 1977).

3 Akbar Padamsee, along with M.F.Hussain, was one of the two most important postcolonial painters from India. Padamsee set up the Vision Exchange Workshop in Bombay, 1969 with the aid of a Nehru fellowship. Kaul collaborated with Padamsee on two films, *Forms and Design* (1968) and *Duvidha* (1973). Kaul cast Padamsee's daughter Raisa in the role of the bride and used his 16mm Bolex camera with a 16/86mm Switar Zoom lens and his Kodachrome film stock to shoot the film before blowing it up to 35mm.

Scheme) and Rupayan Sansthan of Borunda⁴ that the plan of making the film could be realized. Akbar, apart from being an exceptional painter, is perhaps the only genuine artist-theoretician we have and naturally the fertile environment of the workshop (which springs both from his work and thinking) means a great deal to all of us. The discipline in this film acquired a much more comprehensive meaning. Folk material, as stated above or elsewhere, provides a schematic design, apart from the chronological order of events that it follows. In the schematic design, the representation of an event is reducible by graphic or oral means to such a generalised degree that a common denominator is finally discovered as the basic norm from where all particularities spring. The combination of such as interior/exterior not only remains at a graphic level which is quantitative, but extends itself to the qualitative aspect of the film. Rather it is a denominator which converts itself into graphics as also into a meaning, pertinent to the thematic movement of the film. To demonstrate: a ghost enters *into* the room of the girl, a child is conceived (*is in* the womb), the actual husband returns and questions the ghost's impersonation of the husband. The child is born (*comes out* of the womb). The villagers take the ghost and the husband *outside* the village where a shepherd, through a kind of fundamental genius, puts the ghost *into* or *inside* the drinking leather bag. The bag is dumped *into* a well. The husband and the villagers re-enter the village. The husband re-enters the bride's room. And here the tragic quality of the bride, who was in love with a ghost, or with the impersonation of her own husband, emerges. This feeling is due mainly to the cessation of the exterior/interior relationship with the actual husband.

The use of colour in the film has been, therefore, subjected to light and dark areas, not only within the frame but also in the order of sequences. Following the shots determined by IN and OUT situations, the sequences appear against black or white (night or day, so arranged). Unlike the usual practice where two colours put together naturally create a separation, without the need for white, grey, black tonalities separating them, in this film the colours have not been moulded extensively (evened up by lighting) from the way they presented themselves under a certain lighting condition. In a sense, it makes us notice the colour in a sharp way, and without creating either an atmosphere conducive to the filmmaker's thinking or a psychological state, wherein the colour represents the inner life of the character. In short, the colour is made to belong to its fact of physical condition. (This should not be confused with the idea of the setting being realistic in the

contemporary sense. In fact, the film belongs to a period). It is necessary to add here that intellectual or emotional meanings ascribed to colours, cannot have any rigid/ absolute interpretation. (Red, for example, may not suggest violence all the time; it may often mean joy). It is a context that gives rise to a meaning. This would suggest that a colour may represent an emotional bias, but this bias cannot become the reason for using that colour. This would amount to a super imposition of non-existent meanings upon the quality of colour.

The arrangement of the colour that was attempted in *Duvidha*, was brought about by what really belongs to inter-relationships of colours, rather than by personal logic. Since we know of contrary and complementary colours, imbalance and balance can be controlled — in other words, a structure can be built. Even the proportions have been already worked out by great masters. If green is suddenly introduced after an excessive use of red and in twice the quantity of red, a kind of 'settling' would be effected. But if the film abstains from using green and goes to part of the green (which is yellow + blue; as red is posited against the other two primary colours combined into green), let us say a yellow inclined towards orange rather than green, the shift would cause a whiter tonality and a mildly warm feeling. In much more complex relationships than the example can speak of, *the colours would be meanings*; they would neither *become* meanings nor *represent* meanings, for in both these cases the use is figurative rather than actual. While on the other hand, whenever the subject matter of the film rises to be the meaning, it will also be total and complete: the colour, in such a situation is 'absent'; its assertive quality is absent. When the form and the object behind it, which are actually one, appear separated in expression they should in that separation acquire total and independent existences. For only then the true experience which neither belongs to the *sensuous* nature of the form nor to the *intellectual* quality of the meaning, (but to both) and is yet intangible and beyond analysis which the materialists mistake for 'mystical' or the 'meta-physical' — but which is actual and real is born.

I will end here by drawing a strange parallel between the discovery of Eisenstein of some major elements of montage and the division of consciousness of the universe perceived in the *Bhagavad Gita*⁵. In Chapter XIII, *shloka* 15, it speaks of three categories which are permeated by the *purusha*⁶. They are away and near, immobile and mobile, interior and exterior. In Eisenstein they have been almost replaced by his vision

4 Rupayan Sansthan of Borunda was an archive set up in 1960 by its founding fathers, Vijaydan Detha and Komal Kothari, to preserve and disseminate aspects of folk culture in Rajasthan and surrounding regions, the western parts of the Indian state.

5 *Bhagavad Gita* is the sacred text of the Hindu religion which pans out as a conversation/dialogue between a prince and his charioteer on the ethics of war and rightfulness. It is an excerpt from one of the two grand Indian epics, *Mahabharata*.

6 Purusha from Sanskrit translates to "man". The context here though is bereft of the gender dimension, to be understood more as the man in mankind.

of montage or the cinematic totality as close shots and long shots, pieces of graphically varied directions; pieces resolved in volume with pieces resolved in area, pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness. (Cf. 'Cinematographic principle and the ideogram' in *Film Form*).

It is Eisenstein again who credits the oriental mind with 'monism' of ensemble, where the elements do not accompany each other but are brought into function as elements of equal significance whose balanced juxtaposition must lead us into that precious experience of the undifferentiated mass of consciousness.



The Director Reflects ...

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A flow between beings and things, camera and recorder. A flow, becoming.
Irreducible but specific in being individuated. Indescribable (beyond words)
images and sounds flow, quiet and pass through continuous and the discontinuous.

No 'framed' beginning followed by a pan away or a tilt up. The *immobile* (is never
framed) remains intangible to the end. The immobile available only within a flux.

For movement rather than for saturation in space.

The *shift* is not felt before it passes away. What slips between shifts is material for
the cinematograph. The movement within a shift.

Points, lines and planes. Objects and figures. Table, flower, animal, man move in
and out. Compose the flight of a shot on how points, lines and planes cross the two
vertical and the two horizontal edges of the cinematographic formats. A certain
way of crossing these boundaries is a way of the film.

Crossing the art of periphery.

A face as a point.

A face as a line.

A face as a plane.

Renounce the notion that beings and objects appear from somewhere (even from a beginning) into world-space and are destined to disappear from it. Space extends and returns to itself. Its return marks the intensive phase.

Distances make links. It is meaningless to work in one or two distances and create perpetual homogenous planes. Only multiple distances go beyond the terrible habit of long, mid and close shots. Film directors mould and sculpt empty spaces.

We neither follow the relay nor the synchronous: only asynchronous rhythms, pre-empting or delaying the stress between image/sound and players.

Light: the voice of the cinematograph.

Whisper: keyed light.

Do not light up the path of the actor.

We neither follow the relay nor the synchronous: only asynchronous rhythms, pre-empting or delaying the stress between image/sound and players.

Light: the voice of the cinematograph.

Light above all.

Light persuades us of a space (for a location), creates a *certain* context.

Upon the actor who is a part of an ambient whole, light falls incidentally.
It makes accidents on his face and body.

Movement guided by light.

Angle guided by light.

An Indian realisation:
of space as unconscious and endlessly extensive, of time as conscious and
endlessly extensive.

Time as attention.

Attention as rhythm.

The invisible shape of the film.

Keeping attention as against building memory.

Error as effort of the invisible.
Among those pursuing earlier schools, the goal is to achieve the 'error' or the
involuntary in spatial terms. By design or accident. Bresson reaches its limit
through endless retakes. That is until the moment manifests *itself* despite
all design (including the design the actor may harbour).

No retake: a solution for those who proceed in temporal terms. Create variations
on the same event by changing actor's interpretation, camera angle, movement
and instruction in general. By the time it is time for a new take, *time* has changed.
This pre-supposes that we do not work to reach absolute solutions to our artistic
problems or desire to fashion ultimate films.

Incompleteness, a modern idiom amongst the arts today: striving against the industrial and electronic habit of a given whole.

Actors turn and move, use hands and face, use objects and costumes in a *certain* manner while handling certain words. Make the actor go through the words in his mind, in silence and change his movements. Further, let the actor attempt the new movements without the help of the 'silent' words. Here you may break the link between the actor and the director. Make the actor's choice evident.

Observe the actor while not shooting.

Actor may spread emotion on her face as if the face were a plane. This emotional plane may recede to a point: an eye. Between the eyes, across, a line may appear.

Bring the camera on the verge of turning into a mirror.

Actors need to struggle for days in order to discover a 'constant' feeling for a film. The feeling neither belongs to a *type* nor to a *state* (of being). The constant feeling takes on free shapes in different contexts.

Through a gesture you cannot express a feeling.
A feeling may express itself in gesture.

There is no way that may enable you to do it. By doing it you may find the way.

Therefore, as Bresson says, to make movements this or that way in order to express this or that feeling is absurd in the cinematograph. The cinematographic actor does not impersonate. He individuates. Discarding behavioural baggage she is capable of change within a shot.

Work against habits. Make their eyes move rarely. Mix lip movements with the movements of their eyes. Move their eyes when head and body are steady.

Learn to inflect a fleeting moment.

Directors hold more habits than those held by actors and technicians.

Conceal the essence of a cut.

Significance: only in retrospect.

Cutting at angles and curves. Cutting *into*.

Variation in place of retake. Only takes. Varied takes.

The choice of the angle upon an event, a face or an object 'fixes' a certain emotional quality. There is however never one absolute angle and, yet there is a limit to the number of allied angles for that event, face or object.

The traditional training of widely changing angles between shots is not meant to create newer 'movement-images'. It is only meant to establish the geography of the location, remnant from realism.

While cutting do not eliminate the random.
On the contrary embrace the accidental (error).

Cut into the real — that is what I meant when I said ‘cut into’.
Every new take is a ‘new’ take. The retake a belief in the eternal.

Cutting moving sections to a whole. Cutting flowers into free (but specific)
becoming — overtime. We say cutting 1, cutting 2, cutting 3 ... and not take 1, take 2,
take 3 ... of the same shot.

The film is unified (enjoys a secret unity) through what it is made up of:
its material. And not ideas. Different materials later cut into different ideas.
First the material nature of filming — where we approach the surface from inside.
Second, the material itself, sensation with both a body and an apartness.
In filming we produce *that* material and not execute ideas. Third, filming is
weaving, textures (*texere* to weave), things and beings;

interweaving for cutting into future movements. The visual verging on the tactile.
Abandon the converging parallel lines — perspective between two parallel lines
does not exist for a blind man. Fourth, the filmed material is made up of various
consistencies, various sizes and shapes, arrangements and distribution.
Mental material, in a psycho-analyst friend’s vocabulary.

A swift pan, rising into an upward crane movement. A delayed pan.
A pre-empting pan. (Pan disintegrates when she enters or when she enters pan
disintegrates.) Pan to neutralise trolley direction in order to make one edge of
the format steady and the other expanding ...

Silence: intuitive and sudden as the unexpected intervention of
the drum in a Noh play.

The secret of movement: it creates itself.

On Robert Bresson

Originally published in *Robert Bresson*,
edited by James Quandt (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario, 1998).

An effortless encounter brought me face to face with him. I had imagined meeting him. I thought he was a phone call away. I carried a phone number for Bresson. With the help of Henri Micciollo, I phoned him. He set a time. He was casting *Le Diable probablement*.

On the Champs Elysées, on the third or fourth level of a building, the space was divided by glass walls. Young men and women stood in a line that inched towards a figure that could be seen behind seven transparent layers. An alchemist of medieval aspect. Almost. He stood up each time the “model” approached.

A production hand wondered what we (Henri Micciollo, Lalitha Krishna and I) were there for. Before long Bresson noticed us.

“Gesture comes before meaning,” Bresson said in English in answer to a question about his repetition of takes. The mechanism was a trap, which at the end must disappear. These words never left me afterwards.

You find followers of his films, at least one in every country you change upon. Yet you come across not one who has entirely renounced the “actor,” or acting for that matter.

Semblance to Bresson turns into appearance and not into nature; the posture is made meaningful before it attains meaning. The more intellectual the film, the more caricatured. How on earth can the profound find a “posture?”

If one were to attempt to follow or imitate my master, it would be impossible to do so entirely; therefore there is no danger in it, at least in the initial or formative years of one’s work. The difference between the master and your imitation of him, the subtle difference, the exact distance/angle of the disparity, will lead you to understand thing about yourself. The natural incapacity to imitate someone else perfectly leads to a realization of your own inner and original strivings. All the so-called “mistakes” in following/imitation the master are the first crevices that will open into a chasm of difference between his work and your own. Your imagination then becomes your own. Like the master, but different in that it makes possible your unique expression of emotion as documentary.

The Rambling Figure

Lecture given at the Institut Français in London, 16 April 1999.

Originally published in *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures, 1998-2001*, edited by Larry Sider, Diane Freeman and Jerry Sider (London / New York: Wallflower Press, 2003).

Before I explain how music plays a role in my filmmaking I will begin with a brief description of Indian classical music as practised in Dhrupad, a tradition I have followed for years. The form of an Indian *raag* is quite different from all Western musical structures. A raag is an elaboration (improvisation) on a scale. It is improvisation, but unlike jazz where one may change scales, a raag must continue to improvise and develop, in one word 'elaborate' upon a single scale. Beneath the scale lies a specific movement between chosen tones, a certain continuous/discontinuous sequencing that leads to a particular and even a unique figure of the raag in question. Most scales that Indian musicians practice have been traditionally laid down. Over hundreds of years changes in these known scales have taken place as a few historical texts suggest. However, the changes have been slow and few. Established scales are now often mixed to forge sundry raags but an entirely new raag scale is hard to come by. Which is paradoxical to say the least. A raag is not dependent upon the standard tones of a given scale. It is hardly a question of inventing a new melodic order of ascending and descending tones. The particular figure of a raag is characterised by diminished and/or augmented tones and, more than that, to how each of these tones is approached. A certain scale may therefore produce three to four different raags. The displacement of a tone from its consonant position is minimal but significant enough to alter the whole nature of a raag. But what really is a raag?

Nobody has been able to completely define the figure of a raag. It is an intangible musical sense that goes beyond the tones that make the raag. It arises from certain tones but once established becomes independent of them. A raag in this sense is almost like a being within a body. A being which is borne by body, when awakened, goes way beyond the confines of body. The figure of a raag is therefore not a musically constructed object, it is a musical being that is to be evoked (traditionally invoked) before it will reveal itself or permit the musician its elaboration. For this reason, Raagamala paintings and literary descriptions that attempt to visualise the nature of Indian music present a raag as a being in human form.

Every raag has been linked to and is sung or played at a specific time of a stretch of one and a half hours or less of day or night. Legend has it that at these particular hours a raag awakens from hours of slumber. Like human beings the raags follow nature's own cycle of waking and sleep. There are distinct morning, afternoon, evening and night associations with raags that adept musicians and audiences carry in their heads.

A way to respond to a raag being sung or played in Dhrupad technique is to listen to the particular silence the concert gives rise to. Different raags create different kinds of silences. Almost like how silences in different spaces are naturally different from each other — silence in a house is different from silence on an abandoned path. Like the two sides of a coin, Dhrupad is made up of tone and silence. It might seem strange to suggest that one should go to a musical concert to listen to silence. But that is the truth of a Dhrupad experience; its fullness will be appreciated only if one begins to relate to both tone and silence, particularly to a kind of pervasive and a whole silence that stands above the tonal expression. A togetherness of tone and silence carries the listener to the figure of the being of a raag.

This idea of figure is crucial to my films, and in order to adapt it to cinema I have for a long time unsuccessfully fought the requirement of writing scripts for film productions. I have had trouble raising money for films because if you don't have a script, you simply don't get the money. I wrote scripts and went against them as the film found its own shape. The method of working towards a figure is different from that of working towards a construction.

The philosophy behind construction in art arose in Europe and spread all over the world to arrogate most other existing forms, that is, most other earlier forms existing outside of Europe. Words like 'construction' and 'structure' have had a distinct pre-history in Europe so that they did not materialise into schools of thought by displacing earlier European forms but by developing from them. Forms existing outside of Europe were confounded by the emerging modern methods of 'construction: deprived of their own independent philosophical

progression into modernity, though it might be stated that in their present depleted state they appear to repeatedly strike new paths of relevance.

As is well known it was the discovery of perspective that altered the world. Perspective was discovered in the discipline of painting but had an overriding impact on practically every aspect of existence on the planet. Perspective brought about a complete change in music, literature, architecture and of course in painting. In the beginning it had a brilliant effect upon human relationship with space — it opened up spatial dimensions for secular appropriation, an apprehension not known in the medieval and ancient epochs. However, soon after its discovery it turned into a powerful tool that would alter universal geography. It, for instance, would lead to cartography and make colonisation feasible. Colonisation would in turn become one monumental aspiration for a universal appropriation of space. No artistic principle has had such widespread repercussions in diverse existential fields. Only hundreds of years after its discovery was perspective found to be an oppressive means of production, an oppressive means of creating art and thought.

Through an illusion of uniting ground and figure, perspective was able to separate or isolate the object in space. By a paradox of realism the foregrounded object found itself floating free of the middle and background though an illusion of a continuous link between the three planes was firmly established. The coming together of these planes as one 'reality' (as opposed to the iconic separation of ground and figure) brought with it a whole tradition of visual representation that severed our ties with the tradition and techniques of *presentation* of a figure. A foreground, a background and a middleground gave rise to first intimations of true orchestral music making medieval plain chants and polyphonies concise. It changed the narrative of the Italian chronicle that never knew convergence or climax in narrative movements — the new narrative brought with it a single termination to all events. This notion of convergence wherein argument and counter-argument were poised in opposition of each other and fought a battle to reach a point of resolution has, despite efforts by modern artists and philosophers, never since left humanity. So deep runs the course of perspective in the human psyche that it appears well nigh impossible to conceive of a single event not shaped by that converging movement. Many of the popular screen-play experts are led to believe that this particular shape of narrative is something eternal, handed down from the ancients, as something that forms a 'biological', heart of storytelling. Nothing is further from truth. There are quite a few cultures that even today enjoy narratives that are replete with distractions of song and dance and do not much care for that tense movement of events heading for a climatic close.

Quite a few of the modern painters, to my mind, essentially grappled with the closure perspective enforced upon human vision. Some of these painters destroyed the object they painted in order to establish a world not directed by perspective. It was evident that the sensuousness of an object would manifest itself at a given moment from a single angle of view. But if you go around an object, incorporate aspects of different perspectives and heap them upon the object, you destroy the sensuous relation with the object. The experiments of Matisse were in this regard remarkable as he continued to respect the presence of a single-angle-moment and at the same time escaped the fault of the eye that sees parallel lines meet at an illusionary point of convergence. Artists like Picasso who took to African art and Paul Klee who probed Persian miniatures or Matisse who discovered the ease of Oriental art, were all investigating traditions that prospered before the formidable development of perspective. Modern movements in art obviously did not succeed in creating a new order of things. If anything they have left art and artists with fewer answers than before, certainly fewer than those that have accumulated (and are accumulating by the day) by the exercise of critical theories. One may now see a whole festival of film/video, painting, sculpture and mixed-media installations as a single illustration to the critical ideas of heads that put the event together. There may be no more different (and independent) artistic works at such a festival than there are different commodities in a supermarket. Whereas the hope we have had in both art and masses converging at a single venue has run dry, sponsors of art, in the manner of politicians and often in collaboration with them, continue to flog the dead horse — they commission art to make it fall within the parameters of a theoretical assignation. It is with a transformed new language of representation that perspective now continues to enable an appropriation of intellectual space. Not merely a mathematical construction any more, the contemporary form of perspective is able to find extensions into an international market. Our mind and our eyes, our ears are totally determined by the single principle of appropriation.

Developments in technology, including those in the field of the digital image and sound, are contained within the framework of perspective, which means within the framework of a narrative that has at its heart one purpose: control, control of space, of the mind of the viewer, reader or the listener. All the unsolved mysteries (such as audience response) are being critically solved when in reality the audience has turned its back on art. Between the producers and the 'consumers' no development is possible now because the narrative itself never sees the light of the day unless it achieves the status of a premeditated object of consumption. It never forms that active subjective relationship where space will be left free to become what it will.

A useful example which is analogous to perspective's growth is the presumption of modern medicine to carry the myth of absolute cure on its shoulders. The promise to reach a cure on solely pathological grounds is based on that same model of assumption of 'precise' pathological resolution which leaves no space for the patient's mind to actively participate in the ailing issues of the body. Doctors often dismiss mental interventions of a patient's disposition as purely 'made up: even arbitrary, and, in a way unrelated to the pathological evidence, the complication of which is the stuff of modern medicine. Ironically as medicine progresses on its path of scientific research a whole history and a vast experience of human mind is systematically disabled. And even for suffering that is labeled as singularly mental, modern psychoanalysis imagined it was possible to finally relieve humanity of its troubled head through several analytical procedures that will open up hidden impulses and expose the mischief behind a camouflaged intent. Most psychoanalysis obviously proves what it already knows. W.R. Bion, a British analyst, was an exception in being the first analyst who abandoned the model for cure for analysis. In an attempt to grasp the pain of the patient he even found it necessary to suspend understanding, memory or desire before he listened to the patient. Pain in this case is not an event that must be brought to a resolution by application of perspectival analysis which promises a possibility of normalisation for the patient into an average mental health. The abnormal in the patient, for all we know, might turn out to be a stirring that has remained untraced in the 'normal' beings. Leaving certain extreme medical conditions it is not a question of bringing pain to an end. It took an immense civilizational enterprise to emerge from the hallucinatory practice of 'acting out' maladies and cures by shamans and their patients to arrive at cultural realisation that pleasure is no different from pain when it comes to grasping how nature goes back and forth in order to nurture growth.

In the expression of eroticism in some of the old temple architecture, literature, music and texts sexuality was invented in a form that makes what is available to us today seem barbaric. 'Available' is a good word since availability of sex in films, videos, novels and magazines or as Anton Reijnders, a friend, suggests 'availability' itself might be the driving force of our age. In the area of the erotic it has certainly misplaced the meaning of the dual paradigm of union and separation. Separation is pain and carries the potential of reflection or thought so it has been made sentimental and forsaken for acts of union meant to play on modern anxiety of reaching a climax. This anxiety of a whole civilisation to reach climax is a puzzling phenomenon that has fallen upon us. It is repeatedly perpetrated in the powerful entertainment world where sexual activity must proceed to a convergence as one and only object of relationships. In certain traditional Indian

philosophical texts you come across a play of eroticism, right from the moment of a baby's suckle on an erect nipple to the amoral amours of boy Krishna, to be a source of nourishing knowledge. And this has been destroyed. Above all for Indians. The evocation has been destroyed, the inarguable feeling of relationship and love has been destroyed. We are now left with intolerance as our new passion.

One such destructive procedure to filmmaking has been the writing of the screenplay. Screenplays are of consequence to commercial film industries; they can orchestrate the narrative developments in a controlled way, guide the structure of the film to control the audience, and of course control the money at the end of it all. Here it is not just a question of a narrative reaching a climax but of manufacturing a blueprint of events that keeps at bay the natural random developments that arise at the moment of making the film and can disrupt the perspectival path. Writers do not orchestrate every little detail into the structure of a screenplay but what they do is more paralysing for the development of cinema: they create a significant tangle of events that will reduce images and sounds to become *ideas* for images and sounds. A perfectly controlled execution on the shooting floor does the rest — it creates an insular object for ingestion regardless of what life, through accidents, might aspire to suggest at the moment of filming. Even accidents are permitted within the framework of a marketable 'property' (a word Hollywood uses for screenplay). They cannot accept that in cinema one may relate to an image in a thousand ways and to a sound in a hundred thousand ways. If I were to write in a script that "snow is seen falling through the window pane" and further describe particulars, you may still shoot the event in a way not suspected by me. The way you shoot will not be an interpretation of the script but a new significance that endows upon the event a changed quality of attention and meaning. For all we know the new filmed material might negate the thesis of the script. And create a *necessary* new thesis. But if you shoot in the way it is written in the script you would be caught in the old trap. You will shoot the window and the snow in a way that *names* the objects as 'window' and 'snow' and not, say, whiteness beneath glass. But even 'whiteness beneath glass' is not an image for it persists in naming the image. The image as it will freely become is not an 'image of reality but reality of image' (Godard). It is indescribable, unnameable, a thing not inspired by an idea but one that gives rise to a hundred ideas.

And I'd like to illustrate this difference by speaking of how I like to teach film. I discourage students from writing scripts even if finally they will or will have to write scripts in the so-called real world. Before they come to that it is less material for them to get involved in writing scripts than boldly relate to sounds and images.

Before I get on with the question of writing a script a strange parallel appears in my mind just this moment: the teaching of Dhrupad compositions (songs) by the great Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar. The words and letters in a composition are expected to be ultimately bound to the progressive beats of a specific taal (a rhythmic cycle) which at the end of a cycle return to the first beat. The Ustad expected disciples to not begin learning a composition by closely adhering to the division of beats. He would rather the student first loosely appreciate the inner form of a composition and only slowly grasp the relation between the number of beats in which the number of words/letters were meant to be sung or played. The objective of reversing the conventional procedure was to get the student to respond to the unique sensation of tones and their expanse before they get bounded by the cyclical rhythm.

Images and sounds in cinema and video have a life of their own in their pre-verbal existence where they have not yet attained the status of an utterance but are as if utterable, a distinction best described by Gilles Deleuze in his two books on cinema. Robert Bresson repeatedly stressed his dependence on the quality of sensation a sound or an image struck him with before they reached a meaning. And as he was able to demonstrate in his films there was no need to locally intensify (with ideas) a single sound or an image in order to make it acquire meaning — on the contrary it will be the juxtaposition of these pre-verbal bits that will eventually reach new meanings. Instead of a plan to execute what a screenplay describes, let's say, "a bus passes by", it might be more revealing of the moment of our engagement if I choose to shoot the colour red pass by — and that will be different from, say, the top of a bus pass by. And yet different from a road and a bus pass by, quite different from a cloud and a bus pass by. It is the shock and surprise of a moment that decides how an image or a sound will be invented. And if one is able to faithfully follow these shocks and surprises random developments seem to offer one is able to report on a sense of a whole contemporary life today, instead of inventing ideas and subjecting cinema to illustrate what a whole contemporary life today is about. It is common knowledge that painters work without the predetermination of a script — they might sketch and plan but the work itself engrosses painters to a point where they become oblivious of the fact that they are at work, that they themselves are painting.

Many of the films that use technological innovations are still confined to a shooting of objects where every object is named. You can see that a chair is a chair; a table is a table, a face of a character is the face of that character. But of course a chair will remain a chair, a table a table and a face a face. It is, however, the sensation of a chair, of a table and of a face that takes one beyond the verbal (or the named) chair that can be read into the image. In the presence of a truthful sensation alone you will not be able to name the object. As an exercise in reorienting

the minds of students the first thing I ask of them is to enter a space with the camera and shoot in a way that for reasons of volume, angle, light, contrast, movement and other variations such as texture or material, I should not be able to decipher that the image is a part of a classroom. I'm not able to say that that is a bottle on the floor. I'm not able to say that that is a notebook lying on the table. Go close, take an angle, align yourself to a kind of light that I'm not able to name the object, that it actually becomes an unnameable sensation. You then say to yourself, "Treat this as a part object": And when you withdraw from it, or lay bare that it's for instance a notebook, you stop. You make all your shooting within a space range where objects lose and gain their names. And I find that the drill opens up a new field of cinematographic action. It's no longer a question of "a notebook is lying on the table." That kind of description means nothing. If I were to shoot the blue lines on the notebook, if I were to shoot a corner of the notebook, is it still a notebook lying on the table? A script will not just inhibit this development but also block a further progress of understanding similar questions in the realm of duration. Again, a duration has no potential of creating a whole unless the image or the sound is first able to realise its quality of sensation in time. In films based on scripts an idea behind an image or a sound, rather than the image or the sound itself, dominates sensation or at best makes sensation serve the idea. The next leap into employing duration as a creative principle is not made.

Writing a script is not making a film. I certainly don't think that scriptwriters make films. The claim that a master like Fellini or Antonioni is a 'renderer' of a script is a vulgar one. It's such a particular vision we speak of when we speak of these filmmakers. It's such a particular point they have reached in their relation with the objects of sound and image. A script does something completely different. It organises significance on paper and in words. In a finished film one can immediately make out whether the images and sounds were produced out of the practice of cinema or out of a highly premeditated structure of a script. I cannot imagine a film like *8 1/2*, which had four scriptwriters including Fellini, to be a rendered script. And in fact the most boring character in that film is the scriptwriter. The director in the film struggles against the producer and the scriptwriter to freely make his film. While the director in the film never made his film, Fellini completed a masterpiece.

It is the screenplay that created Hollywood and at the same time disabled the independent filmmaker. So how are other film industries going to make films outside of the hypothesis framed by the Hollywood film? It's strange that the only country that has as yet survived against the Hollywood film is India. As opposed to Europe, where you have American films occupying something like 70% to 85% of the European exhibition outlets, in India 93% of exhibition is held by Indian film and it's just 7% that goes to Hollywood films.

I believe that it is this tradition, this very enigmatic tradition of figure, of its elaboration, of a capacity to elaborate and emotionally engage people in that elaboration that is behind the popular Indian culture as it is behind the classical one. Every time you create a new variation you emotionally engage people in an altogether different way and create a whole new narrative. You create a narrative that goes deeper and deeper as it develops, as it elaborates on that figure, quite like the figure of the raag I spoke of at the beginning.

The Indian mind seems to have struggled long to adapt itself to perspectival development. Like the world today it is also obsessed with the notion of climax and with commodification of emotions but in a way which is more mechanical than serious. It doesn't mind a complete fragmentation of the narrative; one reason why the presence of climax can be seen as implanted. In most Indian films climax often arrives too suddenly, out of a mere pacing up of scenes, out of a quantification of emotions. It continues to remain false to the traditional Indian sensibility. No argument and counter-argument lead up to a climax. Even classical Indian music is not spared of the climactic syndrome. Both vocalists and instrumentalists (particularly sitar players) depend upon speed to stimulate music to a climax. Towards the middle of a concert one sadly sees these musicians getting frantic for a manipulation of a climax! Apparently labels such as 'the fastest Sitar player in the world' are proudly owned.

Normally when we think of a narrative we think of perspectival development and when we think of a non-narrative we think of something which is formless, which moves in episodes and sort of disperses outside the membrane of events. It may move intensely into something but does not develop into a junction.

It was in a Sanskrit text called 'Dhvanyaloka' that I fell upon a beautiful description of how narrative expands through perceptible sequence that lies between literal meaning and its transformation into suggestion. When I can see a literal episode suddenly turn suggestive, I can see the sequence of its development — a narrative elaboration without the perspectival development.

The word 'dhvani' which literally means 'sound' was used by its author Anandvardhan (ninth century, Kashmir) to suggest 'suggestion'. The word 'alok' stands for 'light' — so, in a literal sense the name of the book 'Dhvanyalok' should be read as 'Light on Sound' but in the sense it is intended it is 'Light on Suggestion'. The grammarians before Anandvardhan gave the name dhvani to sounds of speech that are heard; the word dhvani carried a denotation of something that reveals. Just as ordinary sounds reveal (or if you like, evoke an atmosphere), the sounds of words in a poem open up a world lying beneath them. Anandvardhan carried the notion of dhvani further and

made it poetry itself. Amongst many variations described by Anandvardhan one of them suggests a parallel to the reverberation of a bell. The last sound of reverberation that enters the orifice of ear is likened to the last wave that reaches the shore:

The Nyaya-Vaisheshikas regard sound as a quality set up in the ether by the conjunction and disjunction of matter. This quality spreads from its place of origin through ether in all directions, as waves spread out from a stone dropped in a pond. Just as the wave which reaches the shore is wave produced, not stone-produced, so the sounds of speech which reach the ear are sound produced. (*The Dhvanyalok of Anandvardhan*, Ingalls, Masson & Patwardhan, Harvard University Press, 1990).

Following the Indian genius for and obsession with categorisation (kind, type, class, sort, variety, breed, manner, style, caste are all numbered, including for example the famous 84 erotic postures) the basic two types of dhvani are further divided into four categories. Of the first where literal sense is unintended, one is where literal sense is from the inception 'utterly rejected' for it to at once take off into being suggestive; the other is where literal sense 'synchronises with an different meaning', a suggestive one. Of the second where literal sense is intended but as showing the way to something other Anandvardhan describes two varieties: one where there is no interval between the literal and the suggested meanings and another where there is an interval between the literal and the suggested meaning. What is of crucial importance to me is the presence and absence of interval. It is the presence of an interval that creates a passage between the literal and suggested planes and it is the absence of interval that implies a passage-less transformation of a literal plane into a suggested one. It may be stated that the author does create sub-divisions that go beyond the broad division spoken of here.

What is the purpose of suggestive meaning? I believe it concerns the basic part and whole relationship where whole is always absent. If you want to literally present the whole, i.e. physically present it, the whole will be reduced to an ideation of reality. But this is what is flooding the market. When a sound is made more sensational, more realistic, it actually becomes less real for the reality of sound is in its sensation. Even if the sensational is intended making it locally sensational it will never have the effect one may otherwise achieve by certain juxtapositions. We always hear how they tried to make a scene more real, a sound more real, a battle more real, a sexual sigh more real. What does that mean? It means more literal. If it is only intensified it will not be taken to another plane, that of suggestion. And unless it is taken to a suggested plane, it cannot create feeling or thought. Thought and feeling can be produced if we set up a relationship between part and whole — a

part object that signifies the whole. That's when it resonates, that ultimate meaning, with sounds, the suggestion which was physical in the first place.

The reason why technology dates so fast is because it's always stuck to the literal plane. Rapid changes in technology are deceptive since they move from one literal intensity to another. But that is precisely why people put hope in the ever changing literal quality of sounds, literal quality of pictures, literal quality of narratives as they hit the market and find them stale when the next upgrade is ready to replace the old. Technology hardly ever gets to a suggestive plane, in fact the question of the suggestive has begun to be thought of as antiquated.

In my experiments with teaching film I have encouraged students to think in terms of haiku rather than regular narrative-based shorts. A haiku is obviously shorter. The particular quality of haiku that appeals to me is the treatment of an event. Basho who gave haiku a profound philosophical turn and raised it above the anecdotal explained very little of his writing methods. What he said about the form of haiku is something fundamental to the discussion here: "Mind goes, then returns". If the mind goes and converges upon an object it takes the form of that object and does not return. If the mind returns it will return to itself, to nothing, to an emptiness. In other words when mind is situated in itself it is a nothing, it is what it is in deep sleep for example. In a way mind itself comes into being when it objectifies, either in imagination on account of a journey into the external environment. In itself it casts no presence whatsoever. Unlike the Western model where the act of objectifying must take the shape of an external entity as a construction, the Eastern model grapples with the figure of the journey itself, the figure that takes shape in going to an event and returning back to itself. That is precisely what a haiku is. It should be clear why only a handful of poets today succeed in writing haikus. Most of them end up in sentimental and descriptive 'condition of human being or environment' kind of obvious haiku. Haiku is not a happening in space — haiku is situated in time. It is the interval between the lines that creates a haiku — a question of perceptible and imperceptible sequence. First, there is something; something else happens, and a third thing comes to pass ...

The problem of visually conceiving a film is an enormous one. The idea of the visual overtakes everything as it also confines cinema to action. The form of haiku provides freedom to the filmmaker. Habits die hard. Even for a haiku film students often imagine the visuals first and then want to find out what sounds to use. The visual dominates. From the point of view of the history of perspective and its cultural ramifications it is legitimate

to think in terms of the visual or the action to make a narrative possible. In such an approach sounds are meant to intensify the visual material. Sound appears to support the active narrative and only sometimes creates independent dimensions.

For one of the exercises with students I decided to proceed from sound first. I chose one of the twelve students to take the tape recorder and record ten minutes of sound. Anything that fascinated him. Four or five sounds. that would last in all for not more than ten minutes. The sounds were brought back to the class. The question was to find a second student who will follow the first, who can in a way respond and take the whole movement further — whoever offered to come in as the second had to listen carefully to the first rushes of sound and then forget about it to create his/her own associations. In the end the class listened to the sound rushes of about 120 minutes. Already a narrative was emerging that needed to be edited and articulated. Once the class was able to seize upon the essential narrative then each of the students could freely edit his/her part. The project began when there was no narrative in mind, there was no story. There was nothing. We didn't know where we were heading, what was going to happen. Later all that we did was hear the recorded sounds. And some of them were strange. A condition I had placed was that whoever records first must not reveal the source of his sounds. At times it was difficult to understand what was heard. An air conditioner, a pipe? And the student who had recorded would laugh because it was something totally different. So the complexity of sound is its ambiguity if freed from a literal (visual) source. Water can be recorded in a way it will never sound like water. Foleys, for example, as post-production synch-sound effects are equally interesting because one can create them from a source different from what is shown on the screen. Somebody seen walking in crutches may be accompanied by the sound of the rowing of a boat. Such associations with sounds different and even opposed in meaning produce a third association, at its best a suggestion.

How wonderful it would be if I could suggest to my producer that I'm going to make a film at particular locations with particular people and begin the project by recording sounds. Later, perhaps, I might start editing sounds or let them be, see something in their relationships or work on where they to lead me. If sound cannot serve the ultimate purpose of feeling and thought for a film, it is of little use. If a sound stands by itself it has no meaning. Sound must give itself up for cinema. Camera must give itself for cinema. The editing cuts must give themselves up. Everything must give itself up for that sound, the dhvani. The ultimate meaning, resonating or reverberating at the back.

We hear and see and feel and then think

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Bresson: I am a painter. And perhaps it is there, precisely, that you find your idea. For I am scarcely a writer. I write, yes, but I force myself to write, and I write — I realize — a little as I paint...: that is to say that I am unable to write a continuous strip. I am able to write from left to right, and thus to align some words, but I cannot do it for a long time, or in continuity.

Godard: To make cinema, precisely, one has no need to do that. It is the cinema in itself that constitutes the strip. One has it from the start; one absolutely no longer needs to concern oneself with it.

Bresson: Yes, but then you are speaking of the general composition of the film. As for me, when I write, I write as I put colour: I put a little on the left, a little on the right, a little in the middle, I stop, I start again ... You see: it is not at all a strip that I write. So, a film is made somewhat in this way. That is to say that I set some things at the start, some others at finish, others still in the middle; I took notes when I thought about it — every year, or every two years — and it is the assemblage of all that that ended by making the film, as colours on a canvas end in assembling to give the relations of things with one another.¹

I was younger then and in LA for a week and bumped into, if I may call him, a Hollywood producer. In minutes he asked me,

“Do you have any property?”

“Not in the US,” I replied.

“Does it matter where?”

The exchange took a strange turn, I thought. It was true, how did it matter where one’s property was.

“Back home I do have a small property,” I continued.

“Where’s back home and what’s a *small* property?”

“Oh, it’s one of those small row houses in a place called Jaipur in India.”

“A house! Man, I was talking about a script.”

Not for nothing property was about control.

- A painting need not begin with marks, it can begin with a sketch, a plan. Why not a film?

- A painting does not have to begin with a script.

A musical piece may begin with the musician humming, not a description of how the musician plans to hum. The visible and even invisible marks on a canvas belong to the plastic realm. In cinema however the required descriptive passages in a script evoke an *idea* of the image and not the image, an idea of the sound and not the sound. How is the idea of an image different from the image?

The idea of an image must proceed with what is nameable, where subjects, objects, situations and their emotional/intellectual content are nameable. Where the dramatic or for that matter the epic unfolding of harmonies and conflicts must find representation in forms of the nameable. In other words where subjects and objects (and therefore situations into which they are woven) will represent ideas other than what is material to the sensuous existence of images and sounds as far as the camera and recorder are concerned.

A tree, for example, will stand for itself in front of a camera and nothing more, unless the filmmaker decides to invest an idea into the tree. Investing an idea into the tree (whether it makes the tree beautiful or ugly) is above all a way of ‘denaturing’ the

¹ Jean-Luc Godard and Michel Delahaye, “La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson,” *Cahiers du Cinema* 178 (May 1966).

tree. The cinematic image of the tree is not more than a preverbal sensation, or as Gilles Deleuze would say it is a sign that is 'utterable' but not an 'utterance' yet. The very tree that stands for itself will begin to reveal its own unique meaning when it finds a suitable position in a given set of (standing-for-themselves) images. This thought also corresponds with the ideas of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who proposed that in language "the value of any term is ... determined by its environment ... Concepts as well as purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others not."² In other words, in a given construction, a term will by a change in its position change its meaning.

Accordingly, in cinema the meaning (or the nameable idea) is not the cause of an image, rather a set of images is the cause of meaning for each image. Such an image that has not been produced from a single or multiple ideas will give rise to a numberless ideas. What is true for a tree in cinema (or the 'cinematograph' as Bresson would have it) is also true for a human being. Unlike the actor who would seem to represent another being (the character s/he is playing) the cinematic being will above all stand for her/himself and in the progression of a sequence of events *in time* (and not by any local 'visual' expression in space) reveal the enigma s/he is made of. An actor will only act out an enigma of a character foreign to his own being. So, a tree that has been cast wrong will present the same impediment for a film as a human being cast wrong. For the unrehearsed cinematic being or object is indeed a molten material of sorts that will solidify to a mould of its own making during the course of the film. No film ever successfully fought a wrong cast. Since the filmmaker is engaged in unlocking the depths of beings and objects as they will exist in cinema, it seems impossible to notate a procedure in a script that will in the end will only be realized by the making of the film.

Like a painting a film may have to undergo a hundred layers and take different turns and before it reaches a final surface. A sketch or a plan for a painting is a proposition that must be violated in order to let the real painting emerge. You make a diagonal mark and cross it out with another opposite diagonal mark, make other vertical and horizontal marks and suddenly a plane comes into view. But these planes begin to disappear (as did the initial marks) as the painting discovers its own emerging individual and enigmatic figure. Many of those developments that a painting must undergo are buried beneath what is seen as its final shape. Many of the colours and brush strokes will remain hidden. They were steps necessary

to reach the final moment but they are no longer seen (unless you x-ray a painting and unearth its history). I should like to think of a film script as such a mechanism, a series of disconnected observations that allow me to veer away, to change course of a sailing film away from the wind, to respond on the spot to the sea of humanity I face.

Now, a simple or complex execution of a script into a film will only make a film that can be 'read' (a word critical community has relished) as a script, not as a film. Its appreciation is naturally an appreciation of the script. Of the intentions laid down in the script. The intentions subsequently carried out by actors, by the director, the cameraman, the recordist, the editor and the producer. Not to forget the intentions of those who fund the film in the first place.

- What do you intend to say in your film?

- I do not know. (I will understand as I make the film, I presume).

Well, normally that is not the answer. One hears a number of filmmakers entering into a polemic of assertion and defence to prove what they intend to say. Ultimately even strong words do not define passions and the film speaks for whatever it is worth. However, a script becomes important to the chain of events that constitute the life of a film. A script can enable you to prepare a synopsis. A synopsis can enable a three line verbal account of the film. (Apparently the practice of inventing a three line verbal account for films began in Hollywood. If you could not describe a film in three lines it would never work at the box office!) The three lines impose a unidirectional development on the film and presuppose that there will no divergence(s) on the way, i.e., on the way to the point the 'story' is headed. And if the three lines can contain the possible elaboration of the film then a certain sense of unity will be assured. When eventually the film is set to enter the market the advertisers, journalists and critics (at least the reviewers) clamour for clear information as to what the film is about, what does it intend to say, in order to prepare the familiar capsules for screen/television guides, newspapers and magazines. There is at work in all this a process of reductionism that the script initiates to further propagate, reproduce, multiply, spread ideas and transmit forward the popular wave of a new film which is on the move in the market.

If the arts, including the film, are expected to speak of our experience of a certain contemporary *whole*, I am sad to report that there is more divergence in our lives today than there is convergence (as was available during the Renaissance and later during the era of Colonisation and Socio-political Revolutions), there is more fragmentation than unity, there is in fact more a rule of the random than of rules. If you can

2 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966).

afford not to follow the rule, you may not. It is hard to understand how randomness or the random nature of such events can be scripted. It is not surprising that filmmakers of different kinds have stressed upon the need to improvise; their desire to encounter and deal with the moment as it arises, to recognize such images and sounds in the environment, is in fact a response to the environment in which a film is being made. When it is possible to isolate images and sounds where the immediate developments in reality are included at both external and internal planes, the filmmaker is grounded in an awareness of her/his own resources that is different from the skills of those that are able to execute a well written script.

It seems reasonable why those who fund films, (who are naturally responsible for private or public wealth), must in the first place know what the film is about. The question that remains to be answered is if writing a conventional script is any legitimate solution. At the end, after the show is over, the film fades and along with it the accompanying ideas and issues fade too from market's memory. Things begin to look dated. If you go back to certain ideas and issues that have already found their way to the screen you will in all likelihood be told that that has been done. Bring something new. Bring a new idea!

A work of art will never date. It may belong to and speak of a certain history but how can it date?

In truth Robert Bresson too wrote screenplays. These are not available in bookshops and it is difficult to speculate as to what length he went in fixing the plan for a film on paper. He did say, "My movie is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real object I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected on to a screen, come to life again like flowers in water."³ The only copy of a Bresson script I once came across was made on large rough paper by the cyclostyling process from the sixties. It was a copy of the unrealized project *Genesis*. Part of the descriptions of animals at the Creation ran as follows in the script:

"He (Adam) startles a flock of birds the size of a thicket and frightens out of a cluster of trees some large quadrupeds of different species who run away from him. These animals are shown very rapidly. The earth rings out with the fluttering of wings, cries, footsteps, gallops — all more or less furtive."⁴

3 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977).

4 Robert Bresson, unpublished cyclostyled copy of the script *Genesis*.

A later account by Bernardo Bertolucci of what happened before the actual shoot of *Genesis* graphically describes the kind of discrepancy that may arise between a script and a possible shooting of the film. Dino de Laurentiis, the Italian producer, "had gone to the studio and witnessed huge cages containing wild animals arriving in pairs: two lions, male and female, two giraffes, male and female, two hippos, male and female, etc. A few hours later, Dino told Bresson that he was excited to be the only producer on earth able to bring the elevated Maestro down to earth, to produce a film with real production values ...

'*On ne verra que leur traces sur le sable* (One will see only their footprints in the sand),' Bresson whispered to Dino. An hour later he was fired."⁵

This was in 1963. Bresson abruptly left Rome to abandon the work on *Genesis* and "to cut short idiotic discussions and desecrating obstruction."

At an elementary level there are only two possibilities: either the literal meaning of an image or a sound is intended or their literal meaning is not intended. When the literal meaning is intended the only way images and sounds will become resonant with an ultimate content is how they are juxtaposed in certain sequence — in other words, how they come together in *time*. But when the literal meaning of images and sounds is not intended the violation of the literal meaning will take place in *space* so that the literal images and sounds would have to be altered to other metaphorical and metonymic images and sounds. For reasons of certain historical developments the second option has dominated the course of cinema, and, it is this option that lends itself well to the organisation of a script and to the demands of an industry. However, great cinema has often taken place when filmmakers of merit took to the first option. It is here in the field of such innovation that filmmakers often experience discomfort in the business of script writing. For in itself a literal meaning of an image and sound will evoke nothing at the level of a script. If a tree is a tree and meant to suggest nothing more, it is both difficult to write such a script and worse to read. At best a script of that sort can serve the filmmaker as a series of notes that will guide him through the film.

5 Robert Bresson, edited by James Quandt (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario, 1998).

When we consider the cultural resources of different continents the problem of writing a script poses an enormous question. India, for instance, has in many ways protected its improvisational knowledge through the centuries. These are reflected not only in performances of classical music, dance and theatre but in folk songs, dance and rituals, and, above all in the mainstream film industry, in what has lately come to be known in the west as Bollywood. Of course the mainstream film industry not just in Mumbai but in other centres such as Hyderabad, Chennai, Thiruvanthpuram and Kolkata must be sufficiently organised to have offered such a stiff resistance to the Hollywood fare for years now, it is nonetheless a cinema that celebrates its power to improvise. The scripts here play a role but not in the way they do in Hollywood. I dare say that this must also be true of most Asian cultures where oral

traditions of passing knowledge to future generations had a parallel effect on sustaining the power to improvise, innovate and invent on the spot. It is known that decline in improvisation in classical western music is directly linked to a sophisticated growth of writing notation for orchestral compositions and reproducing notated concerts in performances. So, when it comes to serious cinema in Asia, the local and foreign funding agencies demand a neatly conceived script. Doubtless, that this procedure inevitably creates a certain kind of cinema, for instance often ideological and at the same time removed from the local genius of a people. I am not speaking here of the commercial viability of these projects but of their qualities as cinema. In my own case the films I could make with meagre scripts, more in the spirit notes, brought the best out me.



Beneath the surface: Cinematography and Time

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The object of this article is to provoke debate on a basic cinematographic contradiction: a plethora of films across the world continues to fashion awe-inspiring cinematographic spaces (stunning visuals), however, only a few are able to realize a simultaneous and direct experience of cinematographic time. With the current epidemic of special effects, the awe-inspiring space has taken a turn for the worse — we appear headed for an immersion into an immaterial world.

As opposed to what has been presumed as the obvious (that space/time is an integrated vehicle that makes cinema move) space and time in cinema are separate entities, destructive of each other when one is absolutely privileged against the other; and often requiring a system of relay between them for the two to significantly come together.

A film unfolds in space but at the same time in time, too. It is, however, usual to think of cinema as a visual and not (also) an art in and of time, as a temporal art. The meaning and feeling in films centre on what is organized for the eyes and ears with what is seen and heard in a way that leads more to the production of space than to a realization of time. Time in such films is a thing just present there; intarsia entrenched available as a result of a progression of events, as a consequence of, as something absent and only directly experienced. It is rarely present and directly experienced as a revelation of multiple durations conscious in the way it's found in music.

Obviously cinema cannot aspire to the condition of music, which is primarily a temporal discipline. Cinema is an equal mix of movement and time. The question this debate hopes to raise is how movement and time have developed as independent elements in cinema and if they have sought a unique cinematographic resolution for every film.

How does cinematography figure precisely in this debate?

Movement (of the object being filmed or the camera itself) is in every respect a part of space. "Motion Picture" is nothing but a translation of spatial fragments that build an illusion of movement. Movement reinforces space — it is space.

Temporal elements such as "rhythm" in a narrow and "attention" in a broad sense, only serves to impart specific shape to movement, they place movement in a time frame (for instance for a narrative). However, a movement that happens in a passage of time does not necessarily ensures a simultaneous, unhindered experience of duration. On the contrary, camera is often a slave to "action" that develops narrative/non-narrative spaces and is rarely able to establish a life of its own — it will not, for instance, tilt or pan away by a logic of its own independent rhythm and attention in relation to the whole film. At the most camera movement is meant to enhance features of "actions" in the narrative. The paradox is: tied to the action the camera does not open the spatial field to an experience of time, freed from action the camera damages the narrative itself.

Most films do not encourage a direct awareness of the passage of time. Such awareness alienates the viewer from involvement with what may be characterized as the emotional depth of the field of a narrative. The distance forces the viewer to look at and reflect upon the mode of the narrative-for instance, if the film is made in melodramatic idiom the viewer will be forced to look at the melodramatic mode of narration. Obviously, for that moment of alienation, the melodramatic movement of the film will not carry the viewer away into melodramatic emotions. For a "regular" mainstream film this distinction can be a disaster but for films that attempt a wider cinematographic perspective it is indispensable. There are number of examples in both mainstream and independent cinema where the extraordinary use of technique of alienation has opened the audience to the "times" the films were exploring. It is this temporal alienation that makes films self-reflexive-precisely in the manner that a highly engaging theatrical performance becomes self-reflexive when the play, using (theatrical) alienation technique is suddenly seen as happening on the proscenium. The presence of alienation distances a narrative from its performance. In an ultimate sense, the way music is about music, theatre is about theatre, painting is about painting, and cinema is about cinema.

When nothing moves time does.

Again we have a paradox: it is only when the object and the camera are immobile (without motion) that we make an entire contact with duration. An immobile apple on an immobile table, filmed by an immobile camera offers an ideal situation for an experience of a passing of duration.

The material reality of life and cinema, is however, more complex than the ideal apple situation is able to illuminate. Experiments where the camera is held static upon an object for hours (refer to Warhol and others) will remain isolated as unrepeatable examples, but ones, that prove the position of our thesis. It tells us what lengthy takes in certain films do: a visual, however visual will not sustain itself beyond the time required to “read” that visual. Beyond that read limit the visual stimulus embodied in the images is exhausted after which it makes the viewer conscious not of space visually organized bit of a time shorn of visually resulting into a certain bland saturation in the head. The films that use prolonged takes are in effect attempting to introduce a direct apprehension of time by “killing” the visual. It appears to be a painful route to discover and employ time in cinema, a kind of cinematographic blood-letting. Unfortunately, it’s a procedure that makes it “given”, because it equally robs the cinematic moment of its fleeting sensuousness. Lay and even enlightened audiences find such subjection to empty time unbearable- they wait for its termination or remain disconnected to the film.

Ironically, shorter durations appear to help maintain the visual illusion (and, therefore, the excitement) and prevent a sequence of visuals from being sucked into the formidable black hole of time. Unfortunately, short durations are only able to sustain a series of distractions rather than grow into a mature attention. This is precisely how the contemporary consumerist campaigns operate where playful distractions battle with eternal absence of the real substance, where the consumer shall never realize that ultimate object of consumption. Advertising signs continue to beckon the consumer on to an unreachable horizon. As virtual technology takes hold of cinematography to control and manipulate visuals on an “inhuman” scale we are set to enter into an age of dense, opaque and endless space.

The immobility of the object and the camera we spoke of in reality implies a state of neutrality between the two. In other words, if the camera and action of begins and objects retain (the intangible) neutrality despite their extensive/intensive dimensions, we should have a flow of duration seeping through an ellipsis between images and sounds. The word “neutral” may on one hand signify that which is not visually expressive, not sharply expressive and on the other hand also that which is expressive, even sharply expressive without hiding the fact of being so. Bresson described cinematographic image as empty or “ironed out”, drained of intention. Jean-Luc Godard and his cameraman Raoul Coutard on the other

hand made their first film exuding breathless expressions but one that continuously carried out a police-convict chase in which nothing much happens.

In that case of Bresson the empty shot does contain a sequence of action corresponding to a narrative moment but these actions do not do more than make a mechanism for a particular shot, or what he called a “fragment”. A mechanism is a series of actions that non-actors go through following the fragmentation of the narrative development. Opposed to the technique of *mise-en-scene* where scene, scenery, set, setting and actor’s movement relate to a whole intentional environment (as in Eisenstein), Bresson’s single shot present itself as fragment (often with only hands, feet, door, faces, bodies, etc.) of an intangible whole not displaying any particular intention. The players are required to perform these actions without an effort to interpret or impose content upon the mechanism. Bereft of “intention” (on the part of characters and the camera) the mechanism is not driven by facial or for those matter authentic psychological motivations. The mechanism itself contains no intention at all. It is the ellipsis between fragments, the difference between fragments which finally conveys a sense of intangible intentions. That difference becomes a specific relation between the two fragments when bridged in the head of a spectator. Not on the screen but in the head of the spectator making him or her subjectively active participant. Cinema itself then appears a hub of multiple intentions in conflict with each other like music.

However, even with non-actors and non-acting it is hard to go through a series of actions without a trace a personal incentive. Bresson, therefore, waited for an “accident” or an involuntary delivery of lines and gestures, for a moment that will happen by chance and not by design.

“The image must exclude the idea of image” (Bresson)

Cinematographically speaking a cameraman can only contribute to a film that strives for cinematographic time if he treats the objective reality as a reality of sensation, rather than a visualization of verbal descriptions, worse, conceptions. Sensation is a preverbal condition of cognition and speaks of no intentionally. A sequence of sensations and the difference between them certainly leads to meanings and conceptions. It would be unthinkable for instance to light up a scene for Bresson where the angle position and quality of light contain a deliberate or sharp expression.

Bresson evolved the technique of “fragmentation” in order to discard the traditional method of “representation”. In a word, fragmentation meant the creation of unique fragments that produce meaning only upon juxtaposition whereas representation involved variations on the principle of *mise-en-scene*.

Whereas a fragment does not stand for a meaning on its own but lights up on contact with another fragment, the mise-en-scene of any kind builds a master plan and details through an execution of certain known and verbalized intentions within the framework of a master shot. The only intention that is a decision to place every fragment in a definite position in a given sequence of fragments. For purposes of cinematography it would mean that the image achieves an emptiness of a sensation through lightning and exposure, through contrast and diffusion.

The idea of the image is produced from the use of a pre-determined reading of the image, whereas an image, pure and simple, is one that is forming but not yet formed. For Bresson, just a fresh angle made things more visible than a whole lot of light and color and sound and fury. Only neutral images were able to create the “irrational interval” on juxtaposition, transform the two to make the intangible ellipsis between them speak. Bresson’s image are radically different from “the rational interval of Hollywood and of Eisenstein’s dialectical montage”

Opposed to the popular conception that mainstream films must present graphic narratives in which the structure of events is fully and clearly explained and the broad premise of the film is firmly in place, there are innumerable examples of successful filmmakers who have dared to make the audience experience the mysteries of the uncertain, the unknown. Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* is one prime example of how the director repeatedly fought the temptation of succumbing to the compulsion of explaining the intention behind the central act of the film: the invasion by the birds.

In a letter to Hunter (the screenwriter for the *The Birds*) about his first draft (13 November 1961) Hitchcock writes, “I’m concerned whether anything of a thematic nature should go into the script. I’m sure we’re going to be asked again and again, especially by the morons ‘Why are we doing it’”. And in a memo on the second draft (20 December 1961) he notes “People are still asking: ‘Why do the birds do it?’”

It appears that there is till this day no definitive explanation as to why the birds in this famous Hitchcock film attacked the Bodega Bay community. Or even why they attacked the human beings at all? Whenever Hitchcock was offered explanations to authenticate the irrational bird assault, he was, in the end led to use his directorial eraser to wipe out every explanations, writes Bill Krohn. Hitchcock deleted all explanations that the writers, the producers and he battled in earlier draft versions of the screenplay. These have been detailed in the book *Hitchcock at Work*.¹

Among others, these explanations were: a) a minor suggestion in the Du Maurier story that the Russians may have (during and because of the Cold War) poisoned the birds, was dropped on; b) that Castro (and enemies of America) might have launched a “bird revolution” persisted until the second draft of the screenplay, and carried lines like “Birds of the world untie”! You have nothing to lose but your feathers” was eventually struck out by Hitchcock in the third draft; c) the ornithologist, Mrs. Bundy’s claim that mankind insisted on making it difficult for life to exist on this planet and Melaine’s response, “May be they are tired of being shot at and roasted in ovens”, was removed from the script at later stage; d) a scene in a church where a priest, moments before the first bird assault, quotes from the Ecclesiastes about vanity and vexations of the mind in all things and that nothing would last was present in the original synopsis but never made it to even the first draft of the screenplay; e) the attack was a “natural thing” as the Da Maurier’s book briefly suggests, a blind instinct that raced through the whole species and took over the birds, was dropped after much debate.

The last word: “It appears that the bird attacks come in waves with long intervals between (either ‘in between’ or ‘between them’). The reason for this does not seem clear yet”, was the only explanation the director was able to muster.

The fact that Hitchcock refused to explain the “why” of the bird assault led to a film that courted a series of events that were suspended in a state of being uncertain, undecided and even doubtful. Such mysterious situations evoke anxiety and apprehension and prepare the audience for an experience of fearful suspense that naturally follows. The compositions of a frame and movement in and between shots are not enough to create a suspended emotional condition- it is the experience of a duration abnormally contracted or equally abnormally expanded relative to its routine existential/empirical experience, which makes attention suspend itself in time. The duration spans across shots as something continuously present, as a whole curve in time, made of intangible materiality yet emotionally palpable. In this respect it is revealing that Bill Krohn also explodes the myth that Hitchcock was a stickler for following the screenplay and executing storyboards into cinema. Through extensive documentation available on his films and through his collaboration Krohn is able to establish that Hitchcock was not the “control freak” he is made out to be; he never rigorously followed the pre-visualization techniques centering on the famous Hollywood storyboards; more often than not scenes were still being written as he shot his films; he himself admitted that the first rule of making cinema was “flexibility”; he never nailed down his cameraman to the storyboard drawings; and, that Hitchcock’s own claim of sticking to the script to the script and storyboards was a

1 Bill Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2000).

fashionable desire to protect an image of a perfectionist in Hollywood show business. Ironic as it may appear, the production company ordered a set of drawings to be traced from the production stills after the film was complete in all respects for the publicity of *North by Northwest*.

To a filmmaker like Hitchcock the storyboards would have been more useful in understanding the precise quality of juxtaposition between images and not in their visual power to conceptualize; the invisible inner path that rides the flow of duration and connects across shots to germinate a whole feeling, is the real source of creating tension in the unfolding of an event in a film.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his books on cinema, *Movement-Image* and *Time-Image* was the first to discover Yasujiro Ozu (Japan) and Robert Bresson (France) as two modern filmmakers who explored the unknown realm of “time-image” in cinema. Cinema before World War II was, according to Deleuze, dominated by “movement-image”.²

Not paradoxically Ozu’s cinema finds its time image through a denial of camera movement (of pan, tilt, zoom and later tracking) and an adoption of the static shot with the camera placed

on the tatami. The camera lens faces characters from fixed angles and produced headlong or profiles or three-fourth views of face, torsos and bodies. The near symmetrical and, therefore, neutral frames are further marked by a clear (even if developing) geometry between colors and shapes, in the interiors and the exteriors. In terms of lighting Ozu’s cameraman often creates a dark vignette around the frame (particularly for the interior scenes) where the visual surround (upper and lower regions of frame) shade off into darker tones. The result of this entire cinematographic regimen makes the actors movement gain a clear significance. The direction and the velocity of these movements, in characters an extraordinary humanity. Apparently, at the shooting script stages of a film’s production, Ozu often emphasized directions where he drew arrows at angles in which characters moved and interacted with each other.

Seeking a semblance of nature in cinematography making space “natural” does not reveal the nature of space we have in mind for the film. It indeed remains a mere semblance of nature rather than an unfolding of nature itself. Like natural acting, natural photography too appears rehearsed but at the same time posturing as unrehearsed and spontaneous. There are reasons to fear a future where galloping virtual possibilities of image-manipulation begin to posture as natural, as nature.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989)

Filmography

Shradda - 1965, 15'

Yatrik (The Traveller) - 1966, 20'

Homage to the teacher - 1967, 3'

Forms and Design - 1968, 10'

During and After Air Raid - 1970, 10'

Uski Roti (A Day's Bread) - 1970, 110'

Ashadh Ka Ek Din (A Monsoon Day) - 1971, 143'

Duvidha (In Two Minds) - 1973, 82'

Puppeteers of Rajasthan or The Nomad Puppeteers - 1974, 18'

A Historical Sketch of Indian Women - 1975, 19'

Yukt Film Cooperative (Mani Kaul, K. Hariharan, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, Kamal Swaroop), *Ghashiram Kotwal* - 1976, 107'

Chitrakathi - 1977, 18'

Satah Se Uthata Admi (Arising from the Surface) - 1980, 114'

Arrival - 1980, 20'

A Desert of a Thousand Lines - 1981, 72'

Dhrupad - 1982, 72'

Mati Manas (Minds of Clay) - 1984, 92'

Before My Eyes - 1989, 23'

Siddheshwari - 1989, 90'

Nazar (The Gaze) - 1991, 124'

Ahmaq (Idiot) - 1992, 184'

The Cloud Door (part of the series *Erotic Tales*) - 1995, 26'

Light Apparel (part of the series *Danish Girls Show Everything*) - 1995, 4'30"

Naukar Ki Kameez (The Servant's Shirt) - 1999, 104'

Bojh (Burden) - 2000

Ik Ben Geen Ander (I Am No Other) - 2002, 70'

*Een Aaps Regenjas (A Monkey's Raincoat, part of the series *Het Uur van de Wolf*)* - 2005, 51'



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Images taken from *Uski Roti* (cover, p. 11 - 18), *Dhrupad* (p. 19 - 21), *Mati Manas* (p. 22), *Duvidha* (p. 27), *Nazar* (p. 44).
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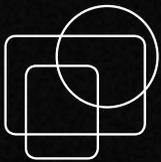
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