

SPEAKING DIRECTLY: SOME AMERICAN NOTES, LAST CHANTS

FOR A SLOW DANCE (DEAD END), CHAMELEON:

A STUDY OF THREE FILMS BY JON JOST

by

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following paper concerns three early feature length films by the independent filmmaker Jon Jost. These films are Speaking Directly: Some American Notes (1974), Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End) (1977), and Chameleon (1978). In its broadest sense this thesis is an attempt to define certain trends in Jost's early filmmaking career in the hopes that a better understanding of his work can be developed.

Purpose

If we are honest we will realize that every essay is a kind of experiment, a testing of theories and practices; and this essay is no less. Each film is unpacked, albeit limitedly, and various elements are analyzed. However, in a broader sense this paper's movement is toward a kind of synthesis; one that seeks connections between what is present on the screen and the larger world in which the film is situated. Under a strict phenomenology the processes of production are of no concern, but this paper observes looser constraints. Jon Jost is a filmmaker who is concerned with the means of filmmaking, including economic and political means, as well as the means of the language of film itself. It is a synthesis between these discourses and these seats of power that is sought. In Speaking Directly Jost posits many ideas that usually lay hidden within normal filmmaking processes. These ideas concern us, as

viewers, watching films, our expectations, and what is up there on the screen. Through Speaking Directly Jost seeks to make connections between the film, with which he has made in order to speak, and the larger concerns of U.S. economics and politics, particularly in the context of the Vietnam conflict. The next film considered is Last Chants, which appears to be much less political and more concerned with aesthetics. Last Chants, a narrative, is a subtle deconstruction of Realism; an interesting process considering that the film remains fully narrative while "baring the device" at every turn. At a cursory glance it would appear that these two films are concerned with singularly different aspects of filmmaking, but in fact the themes developed in Speaking Directly undergird those of Last Chants and vice versa. It is with Chameleon that Jost brings those themes together in a more obvious manner. Thus this thesis rounds itself out with a discussion of Chameleon in light of Speaking Directly and Last Chants.

Where do we go from here? If we are not seeking a single all encompassing meaning infused into the films by some author-god, then what do we seek? In its simplest form we seek exactly what can be (is) gained by independent cinema. In other words, the question that lies behind this study is why choose these relatively unknown films instead of a Hollywood or popular art film? The answer lies more in a kind of struggle than a mere difference. This struggle is against the strictly regulated contexts of exchange, namely the economic and the ideological, which are the bedrock of the dominant contemporary cinema. It is here we examine these films and see their value, a value beyond these strictly regulated values. As Stephen Heath has said:

The relation between the film-text and the viewer is the prerequisite for political cinema. Alternative practices are alternative in so far as they transform the relations of representation *against* representing, against the universalizing conditions of exchange.... (242)

Therefore we must seek out these representations. Many studies have sought to find alternative methods within dominant structures of filmmaking practices by focusing upon a particular director here or there, but inevitably they always fall short of their goal. It may only be within the structures of independent cinema that we have the best chance to locate alternative practices, although, this does not guarantee those practices exist merely because a budget is low or distribution is by the filmmaker. However, because of Jon Jost's position within the world of independent film (including his practices and his political views of cinema), we can be confident in our search. We must be careful not to engage in a kind of journalistic affair, rather we must seek out the films themselves, keeping our understanding of Jost's low budgets in mind, and find what is there for ourselves.

Why Jon Jost?

Without a doubt Jon Jost is an interesting filmmaker, but given his low profile in the world of filmmaking, even avant-garde filmmaking, why should his films be the focus of study? The reason may lie exactly in this low profile. To be an independent filmmaker is to work outside the mainstreams of commercial filmmaking and avoid many of its trappings. However Jost does more than work outside Hollywood, he is committed to making feature

length films with small crews and extremely low budgets; so low that one of his most recent films, All the Vermeers in New York which cost approximately \$250,000, had a higher budget than all his previous films put together (see Appendix A). In a sense Jost is an independent filmmaker's filmmaker. He is staunchly committed to the process of low budget filmmaking because it allows him the freedom to produce films according to his own methods and purposes. Similar to Godard, Jost makes films with essentially no script to begin with. This approach to filmmaking is too risky a proposition for Hollywood producers to support. However, there is more to Jost's films than that. Throughout his films he is concerned with the relationships between film, audience, and larger cultural structures. To do this it is necessary for Jost to maintain a distance from Hollywood *and what it represents*. It is precisely within those mainstream structures, Hollywood or otherwise, that real debate is stifled and re-shaped for commercial ends regardless of what the content may have started out to be. This may explain why films such as Network and The Player become Hollywood favorites even though the underlying theme of these films is a harsh criticism of the world they portray. It also explains why Jost's films are not seen by many; not only are his films often harshly critical of mainstream practices, they are also hard to define according to normal categories. He also chooses to retain distribution rights.

If this is not enough to convince us that Jost is worth our attention, a complete retrospective of his work toured North America and Europe in 1991. His films are slowly gaining recognition, especially in Europe, which is

not a big surprise. A number of critics have noticed that Jost holds a special place in the world of independent filmmaking. For example:

Jon Jost... must be among the most independent, least commercial filmmakers in the contemporary cinema. (Coursen 58)

Jon Jost has built a body of work that is among the most distinctive and inventive of the last 20 years. What other American filmmaker of his generation has ranged so widely and effectively through the possibilities of experimental and modernist filmmaking? (Hogue 14)

A defiantly independent and politically radical filmmaker... he has yet to receive a fraction of the attention he deserves. (Rosenbaum 1978, 34)

Jost is a great filmmaker utterly free of the shackles that cultural imperialism imposes on toilers in cinema. (Holm 27)

To propose Jon Jost's Speaking Directly... as the most important American Film of the early 70's is to do more than affirm the value of a particular film.... (James 71)

And if we desire more, Godard gave great praise to Jost's work saying:

He is not a traitor to the movies, like almost all American directors. He makes them move. (Rosenbaum 1982, 60)

Clearly we cannot make our judgements based on other's opinions, but those opinions do point to a need for closer attention to Jost's work than has previously been afforded. Ultimately, the films must stand on their own merit regardless of what others (including Jost) has to say about them.

However, this paper is not about proving the worth of this particular study; that must be a conclusion made by the reader. This author merely hopes that the value of the three films discussed will become evident through that discussion.

What Shall We Find?

Even in many counter-theories and so-called progressive notions about artists and artistic endeavor there lies a mystical undercurrent that is pervasive and deeply entrenched in the "theology" of Romantic creativity. This theology places the artist in the enviable position of a prophet, who is a light to his or her generation and is above normal moral standards. The Romantic artist is seen as working alone, struggling with inner passions and artistic materials, to produce glorious objects for aesthetic contemplation. There are two fundamental problems with this theology: first, there is the lack of acknowledgement of the numerous people involved in any artistic process. These people range anywhere from set designers for theater and film to mine workers providing raw material for paint, sculpture, celluloid, etc.. Second, there is the artist who is an individual, yet must still be seen as constituted within social and ideological processes. Thus, artistic *creation* can better be understood as artistic or cultural *production*. This subtle shift in key words moves us away from the idea that art is made through individual isolation and suffering toward the reality that art is situated fully within a larger culture of ideologies, processes, materials, and other factors. The artist is surrounded by this same culture which provides the very means by which

art can be produced, even revolutionary art. This issue is what we find at the heart of Speaking Directly: Some American Notes. Throughout the course of the film the idea of Romantic creation is pushed aside in order to present what a film really is. Jost, through Speaking Directly, explains his position in the world, both in relation to himself as a U.S. citizen (specifically white, male, European-American) and in relation to the audience. The center of this positioning is the film itself which is constantly under attack. A better explanation may be that it is the more traditional *expectations* of what a film *should be* that are under attack. A significant number of these traditional expectations are wrapped up in our concepts of Realism.

Alongside and following Romanticism, Realism has been one of the most prevalent objectives in art, particularly in filmmaking. Realism, as an historical movement, came in the middle of the Nineteenth century and "[i]ts aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life"(Nochlin 13). In classical filmmaking practices this is still a central goal. However, there are also present in current practices two secondary but equally important factors. First is the ability and intent of classical filmmaking to present mythical, simplistic stories as though they were real. This is accomplished partially by the second factor, that is the ability and intent of classical filmmaking to hide its "device." This is what Last Chants is concerned with. Last Chants is unlike a fantasy or myth, and it is more concerned with the common perception that filmmaking is largely a process of hiding and effacing the very means by which it is present. This effacing is more than a mere "suspension of disbelief"; it is at the heart of filmmaking intentions, a part of the process of

making films. Last Chants subverts, at the moment of intention, those very processes by telling a story and yet deconstructing that "telling" in subtle yet constant ways.

In Chameleon we have a story of an artist who, though not the main character, is of primary concern because of his place within the narrative. This positioning creates the ability for Chameleon to pose a kind of synthesis between the Romantic ideal attacked in Speaking Directly and the Realist ideal attacked in Last Chants. Here we have a story that is about the true nature of artistic production, including the broader art-world of the artist, and the deconstruction of that story through stylistic choices and other means. This process allows us to posit a connection between what is happening on the screen with how the film itself was made, including our role as audience. This paper seeks connections toward a greater understanding of filmmaking within the broader context of art and artistic processes by focusing intently on three films that appear to be concerned with these very issues.

CHAPTER II

SPEAKING DIRECTLY: SOME AMERICAN NOTES

History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. (Joyce 34)

Speaking Directly: Some American Notes is Jon Jost's first feature length film and in many ways it is the foundational film upon which his later films rest. To consider it a feature film is an interesting distinction, considering that the designation "feature film" is produced by and located within institutional structures that Jost opposes. These structures will be made more clear as an unpacking of the film progresses, but even on the surface Speaking Directly is not an ordinary film.

Of primary consideration is the central preeminence of Jost, as a subject, within the film. The purpose of such a stance is not merely the occasion to "speak directly", that is what happens in one sense, but ultimately to foreground his position as filmmaker. However, in discussing this film, and two others by Jost, it is not the purpose of this paper to conduct an auteur critique. Though this may be impossible to avoid completely, and I am not intending to avoid it as such, my desire is to unpack this foregrounding of the filmmaker and his work.

At the center of the film resides the theme of our Western ideology of the individual artist. Since the age of Romanticism there has been a noticeable conflict between art and life and this conflict has grown along with

the growth of capitalism and industrialization. Simply put, Nineteenth-century Romanticism as an ideology, and capitalism as both an ideology and a system, have shaped our current ideas about the individual. Ironically, individualism is seen as a necessity for the artist in light of and in opposition to the very forces that provide and produce such individualism. This belief, though a contradiction, is deeply rooted within the fabric of our culture:

The time, the present is at every point uncondutive to art, to music - how then is it possible to create music of really high artistic order without breaking free of one's time, without firmly and actively renouncing it? (Lukács 65)

This conception of individualism and the isolation of the artist has led to a belief about being an artist that is held by both artists and non-artists. This is the idea of the artist as something other than an ordinary mortal. The artist is seen as someone who must work alone in an almost insane and detached manner, devoid of normal social interaction and opposed to normal social values and practices. Thus, the artist is ultimately not subjected under the same forces or "rules" that mere mortals are subject to. However, the problem is that such ideological forces keep the true nature of artistic isolation from being considered and understood.

By placing himself at the center of his film Jost is able to show the true nature of his isolation within a capitalistic society as both an ordinary mortal and as a filmmaker. He does not deny the hostile forces that keep driving him to the fringes of mainstream U.S. culture, but he desires to show those forces to be tangible and concrete forms of power that place him in a position

of contradictions. These contradictions will become apparent as we look more closely at the film.

Speaking Directly opens with a rapid montage of three images, the contents of which are imperceptible because of their brevity. This montage is followed by a crudely fashioned title of white letters on a black background that states: *oregon & montana, 1973*. The title is followed by another montage consisting of an audible beep, a close-up of an ear along with the sound of a yelling voice, and finally a close-up of an eye. Next, we are given the title: *some american notes*.

Thus the film and its argument begins. It contains an argument because Speaking Directly, rather than being a narrative, is overtly didactic in its presentation. The crux of the argument will come later, but for now, if we take a closer look at the opening, we will discover elements that are crucial to an understanding of this film.

The first three images appear before us in such rapid succession as to be perceptible only as images *present*, not as images *content*. We are allowed physiological and pre-conscious viewing processes but have been denied the conscious with regard to the image's representations. Closer inspection reveal each to be a still frame: the first is a close-up of a penis penetrating a vagina, the second a close-up of a nose, and finally a close-up of a tongue sticking out at us.

Whether these images are symbolic is hard to say. The flash-frame of the penis and vagina may symbolize a procreative power hoped for, via the choice of form and ethos, through which our filmmaker will *speak*. It is as though the film is trying to break through the seemingly impenetrable barrier

of the old ritual: classical narrative cinema. Yet, we can only see it as a flash-frame without understanding its content. Therefore, by being denied the level of consciousness which regards cinema as representation we are brought to a different level of consciousness which regards cinema as a constructed product. This, according to a neo-formalist position, is one of the central considerations of original art. In a sense, Jost uses this to prime us for the rest of the film.

This priming process quickly becomes clear when we are presented the introduction of the film. First we see Jon Jost standing in a field, in long-shot, with a clapper in the foreground. When the clapper is clapped we see an "X", which has been physically scratched on the film frame to coincide with the sound of the clapper. The screen cuts to black, then back again to the same image we saw before. Jost gestures to himself, then to the camera, then to an object in the background. He repeats the gestures while saying, "Me, you, it. I am here; you are there; it is where it is."

These actions and words are significant, for the *action* of this film is one of *situation*. With this simple opening we are told and shown what the parameters of the film are, namely: I, director; You, audience; There, the world (which also means specifically the United States of America). This opening brings into question the situation of the film itself, for the film is "not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, for more or less define purposes" (Tagg 3). We have a film that is a window between Jost and us, for he points to us and says, "You." However, this same action, especially in relation to the first few seconds of the film highlights this impossibility. Not only does the scratched

X on the film surface bring the film's construction to the foreground, but we as an audience are made to recognize (even simplistically and undefined) ourselves as an audience by Jost's gesture. We are "uncovered" as it were, for better or worse, to sit as active accomplices in this "project." We are like the audience at the beginning of Godard's Le Mépris who become the subject of the camera, no longer the unsuspected *voyeurs* in our safe theater.

It is true that to make an audience aware of itself is not new. Neither is highlighting a film as a constructed object. In these respects Speaking Directly may merely be another modern art film taking its cue from a long history of aesthetic preferences. However, the question lingers: what is the significance of foregrounding the director, the audience, and the film itself? As a deconstructive method, such foregrounding may only lead to more confusion. In his book about the practices of deconstruction, Jonathan Culler points out a potential problem in self-reflexivity when he states:

The possibility of including the text's own procedures among the objects it describes does not...lead to a presentational coherence and transparency. On the contrary, such self-inclusion blurs the boundaries of the text and renders its procedures highly problematical....
(Culler 139)

The question then arises, why foreground the film's procedures if this may only lead to a blurring of the boundaries? Precisely because the basic cinematographic apparatus is loaded with ideological effects. A film is a finished product with exchange value both materially and ideologically. The production of such a product is made possible by a variety of factors, not least of which is the camera (at the crux between the profilmic event and the

finished film) and the screen (at the crux between product and audience).

What is important is the realization that blurring the boundaries of the film for the purpose of making clear the materiality of its production may not be a blurring but a shifting from concealment which leads from delusion to a kind of truth or enlightenment. We might call this process a *knowledge effect*:

Cinematographic specificity thus refers to a *work*, that is, to a process of transformation. The question becomes; is the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a "knowledge effect," or is the work concealed? (Baudry 40)

The remainder of the film's introduction both broadens and narrows the focus of the film. While Jost stands in the field a female voice-over (there are usually two other voices besides Jost's, a male and a female) says, "Word," as Jost gestures again. The voice then says, "Syntax: a structure for language." Jost draws an imaginary fish-like symbol in the air which is scratched on the surface of the film as he "draws" it. A red card is placed in front of the screen completely blocking our view (or creating a new view, that of a red card). Jost speaks:

The forms by which we speak with one another, each form with its own limitations. If we speak with each other through one of these forms it is because we share a common situation. This voice speaks to you because, in all probability, you are American. If these ideas speak to you it is because, in all probability, you share some of these characteristics: Probably you are white, probably you spring from the middle classes, probably you are in, or have been to college. Each of these is a language system. A language, not of words, but also a language of values, of behavior patterns.

The broadening of the film's scope is the inclusion of language or communication as a whole. The narrowing begins with the description of the audience. This narrowing does not exclude any potential audience, rather it is a recognizing of *probabilities*. More important this description draws attention to the concreteness of language. That is: language is situated within historical boundaries, used by real persons for real ends, and intrinsically tied to class. Ideas are dependant upon material conditions and this relation is structured and systematic. In other words, thought and consciousness are bound within and emanate from concrete material activity and the capacity to reflect on this activity (Marx & Engels 47). This clearly grounds the film as a material and ideological product. Thus we are denied any impulse to see this film as above historical and perspectival determinants, or to see its reflexivity merely a style unaffected by social and historical factors. As Janet Wolff states:

Works of art . . . are not closed, self-contained and transcendental entities, but are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values and conditions of existence of those groups, and their representatives in particular artists. (Wolff 49)

The necessity of specific historical practices and social groups does not, however, relegate the artist to a nothing, a non-entity. It is only by seeing the artist as a real human being within a real society made up of real and concrete forces, both physical and ideological, that we can understand the nature of artistic labor. Wolff brings the audience into the picture as well. As an audience, we help to produce these lingering ideologies through our part in acting out and thus substantiating specific historical practices.

The red card is lowered to reveal that Jost has approached the camera, moving into a medium-shot. Jost again speaks to us:

This is a movie, a way to speak. It is bound, like all systems of communication, with conventions.... Some of these conventions are necessary.... But some of these conventions are unnecessary, and not only that, they are damaging to us; they are self destructive. Yet we are in a bad place to see this, we are in a theater.

Jost reaches out toward the camera and pulls down a black card which covers the camera lens. This leaves us in darkness to wonder what these damaging conventions might be. We are also confronted with a dilemma; that is, we are in a theater. The dilemma arises not because being in a theater is inherently wrong but because there are limitations that are difficult or impossible to get around. These limitations are not only the expectations we bring with us into the theater but are inherent in the process of a language confronting itself. What Richard Rorty says about philosophy, we in light of this dilemma might say about film: Cinema is an unfortunate necessity (Rorty 145).

I have dwelt on this introduction because both the deconstructive procedures and the parameters of object/subject matter behind Speaking Directly are crucial to its message. Our ability to understand the scope of the film's introduction is closely tied to our understanding of the film as a whole. For what has been presented is a foundational position which states that the language of film is bound up within social structures, that film is socially produced, and that film is ideological in nature. If we take this further we will discover that every film, and our ability to understand films, is in many

ways already determined and made possible by prior structures (Culler 95). The implications are centrally and deeply infused within the very fabric of this and every other film. Essentially, the forces that work on and through the film are the same forces that are present in all labour. There is no division, "no radical opposition between art and work" (Vazquez 63).

Typically filmmaking has succeeded in continually hiding its *work*. As many have argued, the mainstream, or classical Hollywood cinema, is built upon this denial. What is then produced is a medium that (in a crucial sense) denies its own truth; a truth that is denied with the right hand while the left hand aggressively exploits this truth for further gain. Therefore, when Jost speaks to us of conventions, he is talking of more than aesthetic concerns. The conventions of filmmaking include a whole range of materials, processes and procedures, standards, creative and mundane actions, as well as ideas both new and old about filmmaking practices and filmmaking as it relates to our society as a whole. Within these conventions we must include viewing habits inherited and learned through our culture, our experiences of watching films.

Two intertwined ideologies that affect both filmmakers and audiences alike are the beliefs that artistic labor is fundamentally distinct from other kinds of labor and that the artist is fundamentally distinct from other human beings. The power of these beliefs arise through the elimination of labor's specific character under capitalism (Marx 296-7). In this situation the works of artists, because they are not fully integrated (for various reasons) into capitalist relations, are seen as ideal forms of production. Artists are seen as free in a way that other laborers are not (Wolff 17). The concept of the artist as

someone who works alone, detached from society and its values is nicely summed up by Thomas Mann's character Tonio Kröger:

The artist must be unhuman, extra-human; he must stand in a queer aloof relationship to our humanity... you might say there has to be this impoverishment and devastation as a preliminary condition... It is all up with the artist as soon as he becomes a man and begins to feel.
(Mann 98)

From the opening of the film Jost has situated himself concretely at the center of the film in order to demystify the myth. He stands before us gesturing and speaking about his understanding of the world. This may seem to pose a dilemma, for by doing so Jost has foregrounded his position as "maker" and shows himself to be a kind of "outsider" producing his art on the fringe of society. Is this not a contradiction? The dilemma is actually one for the audience because it is now up to us not to entangle his position with more common notions. The degree to which this film succeeds is partially due to the degree to which we see through this ideology. We must understand that there truly is a kind of isolation presently influencing artists. This isolation is not transcendental in nature, but is in fact deeply rooted within the forces of our advanced capitalistic society. The rest of the film explores this isolation.

The concept of artistic labor being fundamentally different than other labor, as though it were inspired by the divine, is obviously tied to the above ideology of the artist. Mayakovsky summed up and attacked this myth (which he called the Black Mass) in light of that "eternal" example of the divine art, poetry:

Our chief and enduring hatred falls on sentimental-critical Philistinism... This facile Black Mass is hateful to us because it casts around difficult and important poetical work an atmosphere of sexual trembles and palpitations, in which one believes that only eternal poetry is safe from the dialectical process, and the only method of production is the inspired throwing back of the head while one waits for the heavenly soul of poetry to descend on one's bald patch in the form of a dove, a peacock or an ostrich. (Mayakovsky 11-12)

Speaking Directly challenges this myth in several ways. Through the processes by which the film acknowledges the audience, two things happen. First, we become more aware of our viewing actions, thus seeing the film as an *object* that we view. Second, we are shown elements of the film's construction, thus grounding the film in material practices. The titles also affect this grounding, particularly: *oregon & montana, 1973*. This title leaves no doubt of the film's geographical and historical specificity. Scratching on the surface of the film, showing the clapper, placing cards in front of the lens (not to mention Jost himself pulling one down "over our eyes"), and calling "language" into question all accentuate the film as a made object. These elements add up to help cancel out any notion that the film might be a sublime extension of an asocial genius absolved from normal rules of social intercourse, or one governed by divine inspiration and exempt from the moral and material obligations of ordinary mortals.

What then is this isolation mentioned earlier if not our culture's Romantic notion of the suffering artist? With closer examination we find that Romanticism veils the true suffering and marginalization of artists within the social structures of our industrialized society. With the rise of capitalism rose the idea of the individual. This helped pave the ideological

path for the notion of the artist as individual who works alone and seeks only beauty and truth. As industrial labor grew, increasing the alienation of the worker from the product, artists were seen as lights in a dark world. Their labor was an external outpouring of personal forces from *within*. The art object was considered the most personal object of labor. Along with this shift in ideologies came the loss of patronage because artists were no longer within any clear social class. This is particularly true for artists (and filmmakers) who seek to work independently from the more mainstream structures of production and distribution.

Such isolation is more than that of the artist in particular, it is also the isolation of the human being within a society that sanctions and supports reprehensible actions. These actions are primarily the seeking and maintaining of power through exploitation of others. For Jost, this will be clearly summed up in the United States involvement in Vietnam.

The film moves on to *part one* where Jost talks about his world. He speaks of life made up of mostly mundane things. As we hear him speak we see an extreme close-up of a glass being filled with Coke(?). This shot is reminiscent of the coffee cup being filled with coffee in Godard's Deux ou Trois Chose que Je sais d'Elle. The film shows us where Jost lives in Oregon, near Cottage Grove. This situates Jost in a specific time/space position. Next, we see a film loop of bombers flying over a Vietnam landscape. These images continue to repeat as a male voice recites "facts" about the Vietnam war. Concurrently, a female voice tells a first person story of Vietnamese woman's horrible experience in the midst of the war. There is obviously a disparity between these two recitations, a disparity of values, one being information

valuable to military operations (and nightly television) and the other the unspeakable truth of human suffering under the boot of war.

It is here that we catch a glimpse of the film's project. This project is, in its simplest form, the deconstruction of the concept "American." For Jost, there are two distinct worlds connected to this term "American"; the world of Cottage Grove Oregon and the world of the Vietnam war. And yet, as this film will explore, these worlds collide. More precisely, these worlds interconnect via a myriad of threads producing a multitude of contradictions. The substance of these threads are pulled from a variety of experiences. Later in the film Jost will say that the technical base (camera, film, projector, etc.) for his filmmaking is linked to the same industrial structures that produce the technical base for Vietnam and maintain the Vietnam conflict. Art is collaborative in materials and in ideas. Jost finds that he cannot escape his links to social structures, but he can foreground his technical base, hopefully producing an "actualization of the work process, as [a] denunciation of ideology, and as [a] critique of idealism" (Baudry 41).

These two worlds (of here and there) are the first in a series of pairs upon which the structure of the film is organized. Essentially the film works through a dialectical process comparing and contrasting a number of conflicts centered primarily around Jost and his experiences. The voice of the Vietnamese woman speaks to us from an experience that we cannot understand (even more so if we are male). She holds a position of an *other* that is culturally, ideologically, emotionally, and brutally distinct from the rural U.S. experience. And yet, there is a level of connection, one that one may be able to grasp even in a truncated fashion. That level is the one of our

mutual humanness, however universal we may consider it. It is on this level that we begin to truly grieve her situation. This is further emphasized by our knowledge of the United States' involvement in Vietnam. Vietnam is both a symbolic and a real set of contradictions. These contradictions are repressed and smoothed over within most mainstream media, even in films in which Vietnam is a central story element (MacCabe 191). For Jost, these contradictions will become more personal as he examines his position in the world as a U.S. citizen and as a filmmaker.

The next contrasting pair continues the geographical theme by showing us the *Home (home)* of Jost and *Home (America)*. We are presented in more detail where Jost personally resides. It is a cabin somewhat secluded in the woods beside a babbling stream. He admits that this Thoreau-like existence is more theater than truth, though it is closer to Thoreau than most. (This includes the assumption that Thoreau represents a more ideal existence.) This lifestyle may seem to support the position that the artist has been "increasingly conceived of as a person with no institutional ties whatsoever," a position this film will ultimately deny (Wolff 27). We see a montage sequence of chopping down a tree and splitting firewood. Jost says that the steel in his ax is made of Swedish steel. The man who sold it to him said all the good American steel has gone to Vietnam.

The section *Home (America)* begins with a map of the United States of America. The map develops before our eyes through animation as a voice-over tells us many facts about the United States' geography, i.e. highest mountain, rivers, cities, etc.. Next is a montage of images taken from U.S. history such as people, places, and paintings. Two male voices recite a list of

words denoting people, places, dates, and events. A female voice defines the word "nation": noun... a people... a country... a government of a sovereign state... territory... etc.. As she finishes we hear one male saying, "... Kent State... MIA." The power of these images and words is tied to our experiences as U.S. citizens. They are part of the social fabric in which we are woven. Unfortunately these words become easily categorized and shelved away as abstract entities occasionally seen or heard on our television sets and apparently distinct from lived experience or modes of production. These words and images increasingly become hollow and ultimately produce an undead language existing with a zombie-like disposition. Michael Bakhtin has said:

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. (Bakhtin 292)

After a 360 degree pan of Monument Valley (with sunlight refracting in the lens), we are presented more of the same kinds of images and information about the United States. A female voice-over defines "culture," then "economics," and finally "imperialism." The section finishes with a male voice saying that as the United States weakens in its imperial, political, economic, military power, it may become more aggressive domestically and elsewhere.

The force in the pairing of Jost's personal home with his homeland, the United States of America, is of one lifestyle against another, one

definition of the self against another. In a simplistic sense it is Thoreau against government, a position Thoreau (and now Jost) found himself in both philosophically and physically. However, it is more complex than this. Perhaps we should say it is one lifestyle *along with* another, the result being a kind of dysfunction. The whole of the United States is too great and varied to accept lock, stock, and barrel (to use a phrase from weaponry). As we are quickly taken through the overview of the United States, we realize that so much is linked to so much else. Our culture, our economics, our politics, our military, our ideologies are inextricably fused together. Even the steel in Jost's ax (a tool that helps him "escape" megalopolis) is of lesser quality because of a war being fought against an enemy that would supposedly destroy the ability for Jost to live his lifestyle, a lifestyle that opposes the war. This is the beginning of a schizophrenia that is described more fully later in the film.

In a similar but different direction, the pairing is between the reality of a tangibly lived experience and an abstract concept of the United States and what it means to be a U.S. citizen. It would be naive to consider that a few images, some words, and definitions constitute an adequate summary of the United States. It would also be naive to believe that in a few brief moments we can understand the complexities of Jost's home. Thus, Jost has as much trouble in telling or showing us his life as he has of showing us our "America." Experience is too complex to be sloganized, and yet Jost (and ourselves) are bound together in many ways, for better or worse, via this "America." This is part of the commonality through which we speak with one another, but more than this, it is part of how we define ourselves as

"Americans." There is a great power for us in these images of U.S. history (not yet equally herstory) and culture. Each segment of the film, though incomplete, are *pregnant moments* similar in strength to Brecht's theater or Eisenstein's cinema (Barthes 1977, 73).

At this point the film becomes more intimate with the pairing: *People I know (directly)* and *People I know (indirectly)*. We are confronted with two kinds of people who are defined by the kind of relation they have to Jost. These two kinds of people foregrounds a knowledge relation and power relation that might best be described as friends vs. political leaders. Consequently, the presentation is different for each group. This difference has a much to do with the nature of the relationship as with Jost's own ideology and the medium of film itself.

In order to present the people he knows directly Jost begins with his mailing list and correspondences, then his family and finally his neighbors and friends. His letters are shown by using pixilation and his family is shown with a photograph. As we see his family a pencil points to his father, who is in military dress. Jost says he thinks of him as "the war criminal." We see other photos of friends whom Jost describes and comments about how well he knows them. Then we see Jost's daily surroundings and the people who inhabit them. There is the man at the mini-mart, the path to the Martin's house, Jost's dog, his filmmaker friend sitting in a café, and Richard, who did his astrology. This section quickly switches to more of an interview format. This change coincides with an emphasis upon those individuals who are more intimately part of Jost's life. Once again we see a clapper signaling the beginning of the shot and a "X" physically scratched of the surface of the film

as the clapper is clapped. There is a young girl on the porch. Her name is Erin and she is the daughter of Elayne, the woman Jost lives with. Jost describes Erin and then asks Erin to describe living with Jost. "Sorta easy," she says. Next is Bill, Jost's landlord, then Dennis, a graduate student at the University of Oregon. Dennis "overrides" Jost's intentions and tells the film's audience to protest this film and burn it because Jost is obviously a charlatan since this film is about the futility of communicating. Dennis gets up and walks off the screen in protest. This may be the most obvious moment of deconstruction within the film, for we are not only told that the film is a hoax, but we are told actually to destroy it.

The people that are "indirectly known" are Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. We see black and white photographs as two voices tell us about them. The emphasis is placed upon the fact that these two figures are only contrived media abstractions; nevertheless, they hold concrete positions of power. As Barthes has argued, "Every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent," and the reality of this relationship has profound implications in this context (Barthes 1981, 76). However, not every referent is wholly evident within its photograph.

We have to see that *every* photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place. (Tagg 2)

We must see that these distortions are not merely the product of an adjustment of a lens or choice of photographic format, but include a process of "retelling" the referent with specific intentions.

Then we are shown film footage of the Vietnam war as we hear President Nixon exhorting the U.S. public not to be ashamed of the United States. This is an ironic re-telling of the role of American television in shaping the ideologies of the viewer. Typically television is given the credit of bringing about the discontent of the American public with the Vietnam War by bringing the realities of the war into their homes. However, this same medium was used to continue the war and support for the powers that waged the war, thus making the role of television highly problematic. In a sense, television shows us the world as through a huge billboard. It continually expresses its ideas without allowing us to see what might exist behind that wall (Wilson 394).

Several dynamics are going on here. At the juncture of this pairing between the personal and the contrived, between the real and the abstract, is a kind of schizophrenia. No matter what style is used (cinema vérité, reflexive cinema, etc.) the friends and family of Jost at the very moment of presentation have now become abstract to us. It is impossible, even with an infinite length of film, for us to interact with his friends as he does. Therefore, in the process of showing us the reality of some people and the mediated construction of others, the film has mediated all of them. Yet, the fact remains that some people, namely the President, hold positions of power that we are unable to hold and control, and that their mediations are fixed and professionalized, unlike Jost's friends whom presumably we could meet

if we drove to Cottage Grove, Oregon in 1973. Also at this juncture is Jost himself, who finds that on one level he can make choices about whom he associates with and at another level he cannot by the very fact that he is a U.S. citizen. Nixon and Kissinger are related to all U.S. citizens, and have some power over all U.S. citizens, yet add to U.S. history in ways that are antithetical to many fundamental beliefs held by these citizens. In other words, Jost is such a citizen caught between two realities he would like to keep separate, but finds both intertwined emotionally and physically into his very being. He cannot escape any of these relationships in any total manner.

The next pairing is *Elayne (you) montana* and *Jon (i) oregon*. As the film moves in closer and becomes more personal, it begins to self destruct. Jon and Elayne (Jon's lover) try several time to record Elayne's section, but they fail repeatedly for various reasons, particularly because Elayne does not wish to speak spontaneously about herself and Jon. She does manage to get out a few thoughts about the impossibility of men and women to be truly compatible. The fourth try is not spontaneous. Jon has written out Elayne's part for her; thus it is not really her part, but Jon's. However, what she reads is very personal. Eventually she still "fails" and hands the mic to Jon as she says he can say it much better than her. Again the film is wholly Jon's. Cut to black, then Jon steps in front of camera with Elayne. He says their relationship is important to the two of them and not to the audience. He says we should be concerned with our own "you and i" relationships.

One might think that Jost is now pandering to a simplistic and relativistic position regarding relationships: their relationship is unique to them so he won't try to explain it. But more is happening here. Stopping

short is both an existential necessity and a moral choice. There is only so far that cinema can go with regard to reality. To go beyond that point (wherever it may be) would constitute an abandoning of cinema and entering the world of experience. Essentially they have reached the limit of cinema; anything beyond that is a charade made up for the camera. Morally, it is a question of boundaries.

The second half of this pairing appears to be the center of the film thematically. Here is where we are presented Jon Jost in relation to his world and to his film in a more concrete and systematic manner. The scene begins with an image of Jost standing in a field silhouetted against the sky. He recites a personal history of facts. He speaks more subjectively about his being socially and politically alienated from mainstream life in the United States. He walks off the screen and eventually the camera zooms out to reveal that the image we have been seeing is a reflection in a mirror that has been placed on a easel in the middle of a field. Jost says the world is fragmented and disconnected, but he knows it is also connected. In other words the world appears disconnected, but in fact it is tied together as though each thing and each action clings together via a myriad of cords. His ax being made of Swedish steel is an example of this web of existence. The camera pans over the field and sunlight reflects on the lens. He talks about being outside U.S. life, yet he also knows he is an U.S. citizen. He talks of going to prison for refusing the draft. He says these conflicts inherent in being an "American" is where he becomes schizophrenic. The camera tilts down to reveal a bloody body (with fake blood) lying face down on the ground. He talks about the horrors of life, namely Vietnam, which, he further states, is not the problem

but a symptom. The camera pans over to Elayne who is running the sound equipment. There is a tremendous pressure in filmmaking, he states, that makes him irritable and tense. This tension is then made worse by the fact that when he does make a film someone somewhere is being exploited. Vietnam is a *real symbol* for this exploitation and for the forces that maintain this exploitation through military, economic, and political means that are made necessary and possible within capitalism.

Much of this scene is plainly evident to us. The mirror is a common enough metaphor for the movie (or television) screen. The reflexive nature of the presentation (showing the tools of production) are also common and have been highlighted to various degrees throughout the film. And the Vietnam war has been presented earlier to us in the film, besides being culturally well known. The crucial tension is between the two realities. On the one hand is the reality of *A Geography (here), Home (home), People I know (directly), Elayne (you)*. On the other hand is Vietnam and all that keeps the war a viable entity, namely abstract/concrete political figures, national and multi-national corporations, and ideologies at all levels of society. If we can neatly place Jost in the first category of the "here and personal" then we find no great problem for Jost. However, as the camera pans from the bloody body to Elayne running the sound recorder, a correlation becomes evident. The recorder is a sign of the technology which not only allows for (is absolutely crucial to) the making of the film but also is a sign of the exploitation inherent in industrial capitalism. Jost now finds himself at a place that at once rejects the *powers that be* and yet must use what they produce in order to make this film which is about that rejection.

The pairing of Elayne and Jon highlights various deeply rooted problems and contradictions in communication. These contradictions render Elayne speechless (within Jon's film) and render Jon deeply troubled even though he forges ahead with his film. But this gendered pairing is not merely about Jon and Elayne, for a crucial issue of cinema (and representation in general) is the dichotomy between male and female as discussed in the next pairing of *Woman (you)* and *Male (i)*. Although an exploration of this issue may not appear to be directly at the heart of Speaking Directly it is at the heart of both the Elayne and Jost pairing and of the problems of defining oneself by positive and negative terms. We are shown images of women taken from popular culture such as advertisements. A woman's voice recites a definition of "woman" apparently taken from a dictionary. Jost's voice speaks to us of his inadequacy to understand women or woman-ness because he is not a man. He says he can only know about women through what they say and do. This raises a well known and crucial implication: if much of what one knows about women comes through the media sources provided by late capitalism, then one's understanding will be flawed. Jost must also assume that the ideology of woman, as expressed in all the media, will affect how a woman perceives herself and therefore how she may express herself. Jost assumes if he were a woman, he would know what it means to be a woman. However, he as woman would be filled with as many contradictions as is the production of this film (and as he is himself). This draws into question Jost's ability to even hypothesize a change in his apprehension of the film and the significance of its sexual codes (Showalter 25). In light of the film's self-deconstruction he is limited because he is unable to "read as a woman"

(Culler 43-64). However, the distinction made between male and female argues for reading the film as more than a straightforward argument. It is a locus of converging concepts, not least of which is gender difference. As Barthes has adeptly argued, a text is not some holy document flowing from the mouth of some author-god containing an absolute hold on truth. A text is a point of many intersecting lines of meaning, rendering the text more complex and multi-dimensional than usually perceived or intended (Barthes 1977, 146).

Cut to title: *Male (i)*. Close-up of a hand (a man's hand?) vigorously rubbing a penis, apparently masturbating. This is followed by an overhead shot of a male torso, naked with genitals exposed. We hear a female voice define "Man." Jost says that we tend to define ourselves by our sexual organs; thus, he is a male because he has a penis. This sets him apart from women in such a way as to deny him an understanding of what it means to be a woman, but he realizes there must be more than this because he sees himself as more than a creature with a penis. Although this section is relatively short, it highlights the incredible differences between maleness and femaleness, thus exposing Jost's inadequacy to use either his body or film to express femaleness without contradiction. If being male is defined as against being female, which he cannot understand, then how can he understand being male? Also, it is because of having a penis that Jost and thousands like him were summoned to Vietnam. This is a huge contradiction that furthers Jost's schizophrenia.

Up to this point Jost has found himself under the weight of contradictions that threaten to tear down and destroy his film at every turn. From here the film takes a crucial step. This step is the contrasting positions

of the filmmaker and the audience. We are shown a field, framed by the camera lens and thus already endowed with meaning and expectations (Baudry 44). A watch ticks loudly and gets louder as the scene progresses. From the distance Jost creeps up to the camera, almost hidden at the edge of the screen, almost completely cut off, banished into nothingness (Barthes 1977, 70). He takes out a small black rectangle and places it over the lens, totally blocking our view. Here we are shown his one source of power, his one recourse in the face (or in the midst) of these contradictions to manipulate his medium. He can decide to obstruct or block our view completely by effectively shutting off the screen to us. But as we shall see, this is not Jost's final solution. After the screen is made black, there appears (through pixilation) a host of filmmaking equipment: typewriters, shot sheets, film cans, etc.. These things are accompanied by an audio montage of voices saying that there is no possibility for any real exchange between the filmmaker and the audience because the audience is silent, unable to speak back. The screen becomes white (the true color of the screen) and a red stopwatch is placed in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. This shot continues silently unchanged (except for the second-hand of the stopwatch) for five full minutes.

If we had not yet reached the moment of the "death of the author," this would seem to be that moment. We have been handed over the film, so to speak, and given the opportunity to create our own film. We have become the "destination" of this film (Barthes 1977, 148). But is it at the cost of the death of the director? As the seconds tick away we soon come to realize that

our position before this blank screen is not one of power but of helplessness. The screen stays blank, unable to express our input.

The irony contained within the whiteness of the screen comes from a shift in understanding meaning. We have been lead to believe that meaning resides in the audience and how each of us as individuals, bringing our whole selves to the viewing process, interprets what we see. What happens when we see a white screen devoid of any apparent content? Here is our chance to express ourselves freely and openly, but we can only sit and wait for the screen to give us something different. It appears as though we are impotent, but this is not the case. The point of the white screen is to show that our power must reside someplace other than placing ourselves on the screen. We cannot cross the threshold of the cinema screen.

The final section is a postscript. Jost speaks to the audience as he stands in a field surrounded by much of the equipment that was used (and is still being used) in the making of this film. This equipment is like the sound recorder (Nagra) we saw in a previous scene, a sign of contradictions. Umberto Eco has stated that "a sign is always an element of an *expression plane* conventionally correlated to one (or several) elements of a *content plane*" (Eco 48). It is the "conventionally correlated" aspect of the sign that concerns us here. How are these images and words correlated to their contents? How are these mechanical objects of filmmaking correlated to what we are seeing? Eco further states that in order for a sign to be a sign it must be able to lie (Eco 7). Here is the crux of the issue: to what extent have we bought into a lie? If, in our set of beliefs, the film's technological base is considered neutral, if the audience is considered neutral, if the filmmaker is considered

to be working outside of social structures, then the ability of signs to lie is very great indeed. In short, the locus of meaning does not reside solely within the visible images on the screen but within the film as a whole, including its basis of production fluctuating within the web of late-capitalism.

The first image of the final section begins underexposed. As Jost speaks, the iris is opened up by increments to reveal the scene. Jost says that our tendency is to veil the true nature of things, but we must reverse this if we hope to have any impact in our world. He tells us that the things surrounding him do not really tell us what went into the making of the film. They do not tell us the story of people around the world in factories and mines that were exploited in order to make the equipment. Even a low-budget film outside the margins of mainstream filmmaking practices does not escape these facts. He tells us that the film we are watching cost around \$2,000-\$2,500 to make and he thanks all the people who helped him make the film. He says the value of the film rests in us the audience, in what we do with it. Our power is in action not in reception alone. The blank screen can do nothing for us nor we with it. It is in our actions beyond the film beyond our position as audience that our strength resides.

A song plays and we see a montage of many of the images already shown throughout the film. Fade to black.

How then is this film foundational? Of course we can only guess at and try to identify its force within Jost's later films, but there are significant issues raised that we can clearly consider foundational. First is the definition of film as a product that contains elements of languages and is materially produced within historical boundaries for specific purposes. Jost's later films

exhibit an awareness of themselves as objects. Second is the attempt to define the filmmaker, but this is also broadly theorized. Again, we will see in Jost's later films an undercurrent that always seems to be pointing at Jost (or filmmaker) behind the film's facade. Third is the definition of the audience who is seen as a constant present, indeed a present that must be there in order for this film to have any true power. The foundational force of Speaking Directly comes by means of its working through those "conventions" of cinema that Jost mentions at the beginning of the film. It is in light of these conventions that we should consider all of Jost's feature films. More significantly is the fact that all films should be seen in light of these conventions if we are to understand how films in general play an important role in maintaining the contradictions that are openly displayed in Speaking Directly.

CHAPTER III

LAST CHANTS FOR A SLOW DANCE (DEAD END)

You all know that our director favors modern methods, but we must not forget that classic equals modern. (from Band Apart by Godard)

The Film

Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End) (1977) is the third feature for Jon Jost. The story deals with a man named Tom who drives a pick-up truck around the state of Montana. He claims he is looking for work but does not appear to want work. He drives home, argues with his wife Darlene, and leaves again. He has various encounters with people, including a one night stand. The story ends with him killing a man on a secluded country road to steal a few dollars. The plot structure tends to be episodic with country music filling the gaps between the episodes. This is Jost's second narrative feature. Angel City (1977) is his first. However, Last Chants represents a move toward a more realistic mode of representation. Rather than directly addressing the audience about the nature of filmmaking, government, or communication, Last Chants works within a narrative structure that greatly limits direct didactic capabilities. This does not exclude the possibility of incorporating issues raised by Speaking Directly: Some American Notes, but those issues are presented in a more sophisticated manner. In essence, Last Chants represents

an attempt to work through the dilemmas posed by a medium that, to a great extent, veils the material and ideological capital required for its very existence. Much of the following chapter will be an unpacking of that process.

The Natural Movement

The "natural movement" is Realism and the naturalness of this movement is constituted within social practices and necessities. To reread a book or to re-watch a film is to begin a process of seeing behind this movement and cutting it short. This is not to deny Realism as a valid construct but to understand it as being only one of several possible impulses within a work. As a means of entering the the film Last Chants, a focus will be assumed: Realism. The question then arises: what is the real and what is the false within (or outside) this film? There are dividing lines between the filmmaker and the film, the audience and the film, and the audience and the filmmaker. Therefore, we know that Realism is not an untainted presentation of the world as though the audience merely looks out a window. However, classical narrative practices frequently rely upon audiences having what we might call "Realism expectations" in such a manner that Realism and reality are seen as the same. Speaking Directly confronted these expectations in a specific pedagogical manner, but here we have a narrative structure that poses severe problems. Narrative is the world of the other; it is designed *by its nature* to be other than the audience and the filmmaker. Narrative is someone else's story and does not seem to include the filmmaker or the audience. Narrative is also typically subservient to realistic filmmaking which is, in itself, a veil. How then can the audience or the

filmmaker enter into the film without destroying it? This is precisely what Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End) attempts to explore. In my exploration of Last Chants I will rely upon the methods of Roland Barthes which he demonstrates in S/Z. The value of Barthes' method is the emphasis upon combining micro and macro approaches to such a degree that no single, all-encompassing meaning can be fixed. Barthes also is concerned with bourgeois ideological conventions found in art and literature. This concern is important in my study of narrative because narrative structures typically rely upon common bourgeois ideological conventions of narrative in the name of Realism. These conventions are found as frequently in film as in any other art form.

The Process

An unpacking is an unusual process when it is displayed, "natural" when it is hidden. Most obvious to the reader will be the similarity of my form of unpacking to that in S/Z by Roland Barthes. The following unpacking does owe much to Barthes. However, film is a different medium than literature. It is impossible to duplicate the film on a piece of paper (a more astute unpacking would require another film to accomplish the work). By necessity much is left out for it could not be put in; hence the need to see the film. Furthermore, the film *as it is on paper* has been broken up into parts that are not always drawn along the most obvious dividing lines. Therefore much of this chapter is not an argument *per se*. To see a work of art as a combination of parts that make up a whole is a crucial process. However, we must be prepared to see many more parts than we might have

presumed and we must see these as being parts of each other: overlapping, undulating, conflicting, alive. Philosophy claims the whole rules the parts, but it is practice that proves them equal.

What is it that Barthes was doing with Balzac's Sarrasine? It may be better to ask, rather, "What is he doing with us?" for Sarrasine remains unchanged but we have moved. This movement is a process by which the *plural*, in this case a somewhat hidden plural of the text is made manifest. What Barthes attempts to accomplish is something different than the traditional structuring of the text does. This structuring is the kind that arise when the reader tries "to see all the world's stories in a single structure" (3). However, to seek the plural in the text is to seek a kind of mobilizing process. This mobilizing is primarily of the reader who now finds him or herself far more active. "To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it" (5). Within this process comes the tearing down of the illusion of textual completeness, that illusion that sees the text as closing neatly and tightly like a lock ensuring only one primary meaning (Lesage 478).

In a similar manner to Barthes in S/Z, I use five codes to explicate the text (in this case the film). These codes are not "levels" but reside side by side in a "more or less" relationship. And for the purposes of this paper a sixth code has been added.

What are these codes? HER refers to the hermeneutic or enigmatic code; that code which moves the story forward by setting up enigmas in a multitudinous fashion and then revealing or suppressing them. SEM refers to the semic code which allows us to label and define persons, places and

things adjectivally. ACT refers to actions. These actions are usually simple and ordinary. Even when such actions move beyond the ordinary, action codes prescribe expected limitations upon *potential* actions. REF refers to the referential codes; our science of knowledge; that knowledge which we hold to be true about people, places, things and actions; e.g., the world is round, Kennedy was assassinated, and possibly even racist beliefs. Thus, referential codes are historically and culturally situated. SYM refers to the symbolic code, the most "slippery" of the codes. It may be best to think of the symbolic codes as psychoanalytic codes. A psychoanalytic encoding of a text is typically found in the play of themes and motifs within that text and between that text and others. According to Julia Lesage, "These symbolic structures are extremely fluid and do not reflect social rituals and expectations as obviously or as directly as the referential, semic, and action codes do" (Lesage 494). This code in particular can be entered in a multitude of places and is much more debatable than the others. EXP refers to the expressive code. I added this code to Barthes five codes as a means of highlighting the self-reflexivity of texts including the ability for texts to show their tenuous position as texts. It should be pointed out that these codes are always present in one form or another with certain codes taking precedence at times over others. Thus a text is in constant flux whereby codes are constantly giving and taking from each other, playing off each other, and supporting each other.

Unpacking

(1) Titles flash on and off in color on a black screen. An image slowly fades in, but is unclear at first. It consists of grayish streaks moving vertically top to

bottom of screen with no foreground or background or three dimensional space. • REF. The world of neon signs: Advertisement. •• HER. Enigma. ••• ACT. Movement; not yet linked to any specific noun.

To Begin

This is by nature a highly self-conscious moment. It is unavoidable, even desirable, yet an obstacle to be overcome and be forgotten, left by the side of the road and shunned. It is desirable because it is a doorway, the first of the enigmatic codes (at the level of narrative) and the action codes (at the level of the filmic construct, if we desire to take it that far). In other words: the film has begun, what comes next? A narrative film's beginning must soon be forgotten because it is a moment where narrative does not yet reside. It is like first looking upon a painting in a museum. One walks toward the painting, at first seeing it as it hangs on the wall and then seeing into the frame, into the world of the work. It is this "walking toward" that the narrative must quickly eradicate. The success of Realism is by an act of extradition.

Opening Into A Void

The opening shot of a realist narrative must necessarily be ambiguous. The movement of the pavement (or is it the camera?) produces an abstraction of almost mesmerizing grey streaks flashing from top to bottom of the screen. It is difficult to decide whether this image constitutes a second enigma or if it is part of the first (not even considering the film's title). It is a reference of tremendous instability. The image's instability comes from our being unable

to categorize and define its parameters of reference. Thus, this first shot has deconstructive power without being visibly deconstructive because of its placement in the film's structure; we will wait and see the outcome.

(2) Sound: "Uh... take whatever... we're on the road again..." We hear the sound of a truck engine and the film crew filming. • EXP. To make. •• REF. The world of filmmaking. ••• HER. The enigmas of levels; narrative verses narration; object boundaries.

Art Cinema Narration

The intrusive "author" is incompatible with classical narrative principles, although it is not incompatible with realist cinema which can accommodate both. To tear into any narrative fabric can foreground the filmic construct and the concept of the author. The narrative fabric is the most significantly hidden element of classical narration, thus, to expose its threads is to remove the narrative from the realm of fantasy. The narrative is foregrounded as a construct that now takes on a life of its own both as a narrative, which it still is, and as a product. To foreground a narrative's construction is not to negate the narrative, but to uncover a real element(s) of that narrative for specific reasons. These elements are deconstructive in nature and every narrative lives in a tenuous position regarding its physical foundation.

Though not as of yet Jon Jost, the "author" of this film is specific enough. To foreground the author is to include a host of convictions about authors (convictions with real historical trajectories and powers) into the

narrative fabric. This injection, while a part of exposing the film's construction, is, none the less, an unperceived ideological force already present before the film and unquestioned by the audience. Therefore, to foreground the author is not necessarily an act of ideological deconstruction, but may, in fact, merely continue and support the dominant ideology. In this way Art Cinema does not lead to real change, rather it relies upon convictions formulated in the earlier stages of capitalism and promoted more so in this period of late-capitalism. By now the intrusive author, like unresolved gaps and hand-held cameras, has become a common part of our cinematic experience and is held to be as much a part of realist cinema (witness the influence of television news) as it is of Art Cinema.

(3) Sound: (very faint) "Aren't we starting?" (loud) "Do you want me to now, start? Am I supposed to start now? You said thirty seconds. I didn't hear anything from then..." (more faint voices) • HER. Where is the beginning of the film proper? Who is speaking? •• EXP. To make.

Hesitation

The soundtrack displays the tenuous nature of its own construction. The film's narrative seems unsure of its own beginning as though it may fly apart at any moment. In fact the film's construction begins before the interior narrative begins and between these two antitheses is the beginning of the film's story. Already there is a weaving of codes (voices) that may be too complicated to explicate because it keeps folding back on itself.

(4) "... Okay" He then begins the opening monologue about getting his life together because life seems to go by so fast. His voice is somewhat grating to the ears. He also has a somewhat maniacal high-pitched laugh that comes out at various moments. • ACT. To tell one's story. •• SEM. Vocal quality; what kind of man? ••• SYM. Contrast and Combination of aural and visual; life going by too fast.

(5) Camera tilts up to reveal a country highway going away from the camera. (The camera may be mounted in the back of a truck) The land looks like Montana or Idaho. Cars go by in the other direction. • REF. Location. •• SEM. Connotations of "Country." ••• SYM. The past.

The Past, The Present

We see a landscape, rural, indeterminate yet evident, moving away from us, split down the middle by a highway. We are moving, as the camera moves, into unknown territory. More significantly we are moving away from a past that is growing distant. Thus we have "jumped" into a narrative without a beginning. This is not to say that we cannot identify the beginning of the film as its beginning, we can. The narrative, on the other hand, does not begin neatly after the opening credits end. Rather it is part of a continuum constantly moving, constantly changing, constantly in the present. The past can only be referred to (usually by the characters) but cannot fully enter the narrative. The past is an enigma that may be alluded to but cannot be known by us, except cryptically. Art Cinema relies upon this present-tense foundation, for it is the harbinger of chance. The present-tense brings

about an instant past (always occurring) and an unknowable future, unable to be foreshadowed properly.

(6) Sound is rough; we can hear the wind in the mic and the rattles and squeaks of the pickup. Voice sounds hot. • EXP. The audio is countercommunicative to the diegesis. •• REF. filmmaking. ••• SYM. The world of making as against the world of presenting.

Poor Quality Audio

Is it poor quality? Or is it the right quality? To hear wind in the mic and the sound of the truck almost drowning out the character's voices would normally indicate a problem with the soundtrack. However, this "problem" invests the film on three levels. There is no doubt that the quality of the sound creates a kind of realistic impression, an impression formulated out of the need to match elements of the film. The audio is an aural compliment to the rough and dry landscape, to the dirty truck windshield (seen later), and to the quality of Tom's voice and vocabulary which is rough and crude. The second level is within Art Cinema mode of narration. The audio draws attention to itself because its crudeness cannot be allowed within the classical narrative mode of production. We are faced with the film as a film. However, our drive to find a realistic narrative eventually negates the Art Cinema aspect of the audio. Most viewer's tendency is to take the realist position and allow the film to reach us most significantly at that level until elements of the Art Cinema mode of production demand attention, possibly by negating the realistic cinema, but usually by being consumed by the realist

tendency. The final level is that of the film's low-budget. The audio signals us to place the film within low budget parameters and thus understand a crucial aspect of the film's construction. The audience is led back to the film as constructed object requiring a minimum of physical and economic capital to be produced and distributed. We realize that with any fewer resources there may not have been any film at all.

(7) He talks of drinking beers and gettin' laid. His (Tom) wife Darlene didn't like his lifestyle. He has two kids, but he never wanted any. • SEM. Character; Tom is "naturally" being developed. •• HER. Exposition.

Exposition

For any narrative there must be some exposition. Here Tom is constructing a past and present that is a "setting of the stage." Piece by piece we are introduced to Tom, his lifestyle, and his relationships. A conflict is also being established for us: Tom's lifestyle verses that of his wife Darlene and their two kids. At this point in the film we may wonder if Tom is truly the film's protagonist. In our drive to secure a classical narrative we struggle to find a redeeming quality in Tom. As of yet there does not appear to be one.

(8) Camera pans right. We see the landscape moving horizontally right to left. Sunlight refracts though the lens. • HER. Showing. •• EXP. Being found out.

Sunlight on the Lens

The very nature of filmmaking rests upon the manipulation of light. Filmmaking cannot reside in the dark but must, through the necessities of its own processes, reveal and uncover the world. The goal of classical narrative is to hide this process by presenting it in such a manner that it is taken as natural. Thus the "life" of the film becomes hidden by association with its object (the profilmic event). To reveal this process while revealing the object is to undercut our expectations regarding the role we must play as viewers. In other words, we are confronted with the fact that there is another reality (that of the film itself, before being a narrative) that must be present, so a false reality (that of the diegesis) can be in place. The classical narrative audience by nature must accept the false reality as the only reality. Thus, light on the lens can be seen as part of an attempt to create a new audience.

(9) Tom says he's been driving this country for two months looking for work, but there's no jobs. First he says he's desperate then he says he's not. He says Darlene has been getting on his back: "When are you gonna get a job Tom?"

• REF. Economy, the difficulties of looking for work. •• SEM. Class. •••
ACT. To look for work; To not look for work.

Economic Situation

The stage is further elaborated. The landscape is rural and dry. The aural quality is poor, which signifies low-budget filmic construction. The language Tom uses is working class and rural. Up to this point the film has created a world that we might suspect is not easy to survive in. There is no

thriving metropolis, no universities filled with society's elite, no great industry, no promise, little hope. The fact that jobs are hard to come by merely cements our suspicions. Even though there is no presentation throughout the film of an alternative or antithesis to Tom's situation, this film is about class struggle to some degree, if that is not the main focus.

(10) Cut to image of Tom driving truck. Shot from the hood of the truck through the front windshield. We see only half of the truck's cab interior (the side Tom is on of course). Sunlight refracts through the camera lens. The truck is an old "working" truck common to life in America's small towns. • HER. Visual introduction to the protagonist; the linking of voice and face. •• SEM. Kind of truck: Class. ••• REF. Midwest America.

The Weave

The weave has been present long before we entered the theater. What is this weave? None other than all that is constituted by and passes through the film. The placement of the protagonist upon the film's visual tableau adds to the weave's tightening and expansion. Referentially, we have a well-worn pick-up truck in a landscape (already shown) inhabited by a white male who is talking about himself. The truck, with its dirty windshield and noisy engine, weaves several codes into the film's fabric. This process is motivated by the sequence of images and actions but finds its voice in the paradigmatic possibilities of those images. It is a kind of jumping out of the text and then back in again. The degree to which the audience can see the images presented as having meaning is the degree to which the audience can construct a story.

However, to see the galaxy of paradigmatic potentialities is to see that story as much thicker, much fatter than a mere sequence, more than a story.

(11) Tom says he loves Darlene but he also says, "Christ she can put shit in his face. It's not like she's starving." He also says he put two thousand dollars in the bank for her and now it's gone. "Well, shit, small man can never get ahead no matter what you do... shit." He sings a bit. • REF. The poor will always be poor.

The Small Man

The economic situation is further elaborated. Tom is poor and out of work and he does not see a light at the end of the tunnel. He is in no position to effect his plight for the better because of the basic rule: the small man can never get ahead. This is further substantiated by the landscape he travels through, which is expansive but barren.

(12) Camera zooms out and pans left to reveal a silent passenger riding with Tom. Passenger is a male with longish hair (Tom's is short) and looks younger than Tom. • HER. Unknown character; Delayed exposition. •• SEM. Hair length connotes age.

Delayed Exposition

Who has Tom been talking to? Before we saw Tom we may have assumed that his was a voice-over, as though he were telling us a story that happened to him in the past. Once we see him his voice becomes part of a present tense story, but his talking still does not seem unusual. He may be

talking to us, a convention we can accept because it is a part of film language, or he may be talking to himself. The delayed revelation of the passenger allows us to hypothesize each of these possibilities (or more) and their potential consequences within the narrative present and future. The delaying process is the control of the narrative by the film's structure. There is no need to delay the exposition at this point other than to reveal the power of choice behind the camera and thus to present a contrast between the profilmic event and the filmic event.

(13) Tom starts talking about a girl. An eighteen wheeler passes by and the noise almost drowns out Tom's voice. Tom curses the truck. • REF. Low-budget filmmaking. •• SYM. The world of control and the world of chance.

Uncontrollable Forces

In both the world of low-budget filmmaking and long-take scenes, the world becomes less controllable during the moment of shooting. There are no sound stages or back lots and we suppose there is no one to halt traffic. Frequently there is not enough money to afford multiple takes. Therefore the filmmaker must be content with what s/he gets. Most of Jost's films are already heavily improvised with regard to the scenario and the acting. The truck's creating too much noise presents a situation for the actors to deal with until it passes. This situation fits with the narrative environment and could be considered both referential and symbolic. However, it may fit more concretely within the world of the film's construction, thus competing with the narrative for power in a very real sense, since the narrative is effectively

halted until the truck passes. The truck crosses over from one realism to another and back again as it supports and undercuts its presence within the narrative.

(14) Tom complains about women. Passenger politely agrees. Tom says he can "smell pussy a mile away." He asks passenger if he has "pussy at home."

• ACT. To complain about women. •• REF. Men and women. ••• SEM. Tom as objectifier.

Character Development

Within the common narrative the typical protagonist may act out such attitude's toward women but it is not common for the "hero" explicitly to express these beliefs. Therefore, this film is developing an atypical leading character. Tom's actions and expressions block our "natural" attempts to identify him as the protagonist. At this point we may begin to hypothesize about Tom's end. Will he change through some existential or spiritual awakening? Will he be a pathetic figure, doomed from the outset, who's story we follow to its inevitable, ugly conclusion? Whatever we surmise, we must see that Tom is more than a victim of an economic situation. He is also a conduit for cultural beliefs that have spanned social classes for centuries.

(15) Camera pans left to show only the passenger. Passenger says he doesn't think of girls that way. Tom says the passenger is a "funny," meaning

homosexual. Tom sings, "I have received your yellow roses." • HER.

Shifting visual focus. •• ACT. Singing; this song will reappear in (107). •••

REF. Homosexuality.

(16) Passenger says everything is dry and burnt up around here. If it doesn't rain soon, people are going to be hurt. Tom says he doesn't see that. Passenger says you've got to be blind not to see it. Tom finally gets mad and kicks passenger out of his truck. • REF. Location, economic situation. •• ACT. To eject passenger. ••• SEM. Manliness; Power.

Economic Horizon

Tom's plight is widened to include many more people. Tom's refusal to see the context in which he lives further develops his character. However, this reference may encompass more than the narrative. The film itself may reside in a very tenuous economic position, holding onto to ability to exist by the narrowest of margins. This apparent wasteland that Tom drives through is very similar in texture to the world of independent filmmaking where the filmmaker's independence comes through much difficulty. By the end of this film we will be told how much it cost to make.

(17) Cut to shot of passenger on roadside walking toward us The camera (mounted again in back of truck?) pulls away from the passenger down the highway, gaining speed. The film quality of this shot is poor (very grainy). • HER. Character exits from diegesis. •• REF. Neo-Realist filmmaking.

The Grain of Neo-Realism

Low budgets do not always allow for high quality film stock or exact tolerances in processing. This is one more reason that low-budget features do not gain much of an audience, especially in the light of ever increasing high

budgets and slick special effects. However, Italian Neo-Realism has taught us to accept poor film quality, including image and sound, as an acceptable and sometimes preferable means of creating a realistic portrayal of the world. The question remains: can a film that uses these techniques (and because of these techniques) in late-capitalist America have a political impact similar to *Roma, città aperta* in post-war Italy? The answer is probably no for many reasons, not least of which is the unavailability of many film stocks.

(18) Music begins on the cut. Simple, guitar, country/folk music (performed by Jost?) about being on the road a long time and wanting to see his woman.

- REF. Country Music.

Non-Diegetic

The style of the songs fits with the style of the film. It is a folksy and simple country song. Interestingly, the song is in contrast to the Tom we have seen so far. He longs for "pussy" wherever he can get it rather than longing for a wife to love. We may then see this film as being a kind of anti-western in genre. The contradictions between the song's tender words and Tom's character accentuate the contradictions between our expectations for the typical protagonist and the film's actual protagonist.

(19) Camera slowly tilts down to show the road as in opening shot. This shot holds awhile as the music plays. • HER. Closure.

To Close

The closing of a scene comes easier than does its opening. We are led to expect closure, but such a movement is never complete. To close is to signal an end, of course, but also a beginning and a question. We are told the scene is over, finished, through, but why here, why now? If it were a matter of us turning our heads away... but we do not. This closure is an imposition. Our habits, however, are firmly in place and we do not cringe or cry out at such a closure. We expect it and wait for what awaits us. Thus realism is still fully intact and the film can continue (for it will).

(20) Cut to hand grasping door knob and opening door followed by a repetition of the same shot. • REF. Alternate methods of narrative construction. •• ACT. To enter the house, to come home. ••• HER. Change in location. A new enigma: what place is this?

Alternate Methods

Using jump cuts or repeating the same image twice in a row creates something other than a typical realistic representation. The use of such techniques does not produce the kind of references the viewer associates with a known reality in the same way as does a long shot of a barren landscape or a long take of a conversation. Immediately we are aware that another method of story telling is beginning. This immediacy is not born solely out of the juxtaposition of the shots but also through a history of filmmaking that includes distinct methods and practices for different purposes. These two shots begin one of the most obviously manipulated segments of the entire

film. The abruptness of this change comes on the heels of the first segment, and though the first segment is manipulative (what film practices aren't?), it is rooted more clearly in realist film practices. This change also proposes the potential for similar changes throughout the film and therefore we are *told* to be more than passive viewers.

(21) Move to interior of the house. Music still playing. Shots of Tom entering house. Darlene (we assume) sees him. They embrace. Various shots of interior - a messy floor, a kitchen sink, through the window of kids playing, etc. The house is a low-rental-type residence. • SEM. Lower class.

Life on the Frontier

Much truth can be derived from observing the physical situation in which people live. The residence exudes semic codes of a particular strata of economic conditions. The place is not squalid; it represent an attempt to live as best as one can on little or no income. There is no glamour or beauty. The shots are dark and underexposed, producing a muddy reddish and brown tone. The shots themselves are presented as if to say "here is the kitchen," "here is looking outside," etc.. Life out west is much less of an ideal than is often shown to us through other films that claim to be realistic. It is neither heroic, in the sense of the classic western film or novel, nor is it idyllic, in the sense of a Walden Pond. "Go West!" rings hollow when compared to these images.

(22) Music ends. We hear Tom and Darlene talking as we still see various shots of the house interior. When we do see Tom and Darlene, the sound is

not the same. It's not out of sync, but, in fact, there are two different conversations. One we see; the other we hear. • ACT. To talk, and act of "catching up." •• SYM. Seeing/Hearing.

Juxtaposition

There is a correspondence between image and sound. The quality of the sound matches the image quality and the conversation on the soundtrack imitates the style of the silent conversation on the visual track. There is not a true opposition between image and sound, rather, something more like a dialectical orbit never fully opposed, never fully synchronous. As a whole, this juxtaposition refers us to Art Cinema narration techniques. We are not surprised by this construction because we have already been somewhat primed for these techniques. Suppositions abound: Has this scene been shortened with only the best of the images and sound used, though mismatched? Are we hearing the characters' thoughts but not their conversation. Is this planned? If yes, then what does it mean? The last two questions are probably the most relevant. The film has not presented us any information that would make us assume this scene is anything but intended. Certainly a low-budget film will impose a number of limitations on the filmmaker, but we must believe what is before us is there on purpose rather than by accident unless we are led to believe otherwise. Therefore, this juxtaposition may best be seen with regard to its symbolic level of connotation. This level is much more *slippery* than other levels and it is often where we "read into" the film more than is there. It is important to know that the Art Cinema narrative tactics used do not necessarily

undermine the realist-cinema narrative. While unpacking this scene by way of the symbolic we can still be very much inside a realist narrative as well as and Art Cinema one. The reason for the possibility of the double presence of Art Cinema and realist-cinema narrative is twofold. The symbolic coding of a film can be independent of any other coding. Therefore, the symbolic coding may present certain Art Cinema elements while other codes may present realist or classical cinema elements. Also, Art Cinema narrative structures have gradually been incorporated into more mainstream filmmaking practices to such a degree that Art Cinema structures are relied upon as a way to make films interesting and salable.

(23) They move off to the bedroom. Another song begins - a solo voice (Jost?) "Rumpled sheets upon the bed..." The tone of the song is melancholy and loving. Screen goes black until song ends. 10-15 sec. • ACT. Of sexuality. •• SEM. Love.

Sexuality

All of the five codes can be present in the presentation of sexuality and lovemaking. Clearly there are certain action and hermenutic codes that are usually truncated throughout narrative representation. A mere embrace, a walking to a doorway, a black screen, music. Nothing more need be shown. The song is very tender and this lends a loving tone to the scene and to our assumptions about their relationship. Given the manner in which Tom talked about Darlene in the first section, this tenderness raises questions: Is Tom two different people, saying one thing around men and acting another

way around women? Is this even Darlene? Is this a time of reconciliation? Is this a farce that both are living?

(24) Cut to bathroom interior. Cut is abrupt. Darlene at bathroom mirror putting on makeup. Tom is at the bathroom door. We see the back of Darlene's head, but we see her face in the mirror. We also see Tom in the mirror in a well organized composition. They look at each other via the mirror. When she turns to look at Tom the camera pans right to show both characters. • REF. Art History, Woman in Mirror. •• SYM. Tom and Darlene's relationship.

The Answer

The harshness of the cut from the tenderness of lovemaking to the glare of the bathroom undermines any tenderness that might have existed. It is a visual cue as to what the answers might be to our questions. Up to this point the narrative has concerned itself with the development of Tom's character. We know his attitude to his wife Darlene, but she has been presented to us through Tom. Until she speaks we do not know it is her to whom he has returned, though we may have surmised as much. Darlene has been an enigma; now she speaks.

Woman in Mirror

The history of art: the theme of women before mirrors (looking at themselves or at us) retains its power and its complexity through the build up of a kind of visual residue. By way of centuries we have come to see women

and mirrors as living in a kind of symbiotic relationship, drawing their strength from each other. The composition of this shot places Darlene at the center of the screen. She is placed in the middle of the bathroom, presiding over it as though she were ruling her domain. We see her doubly as before the camera and as reflected with Tom in the bathroom mirror. Tom barely enters the room only for a moment and stays mostly at the door, never quite in the room. It is her domain; her right to rule before the mirror is secured (forced upon her?) by the history of representation.

(25) The camera is placed high in the corner looking somewhat down on the characters. • HER. The Voyeur.

The Voyeur

We stand in the corner on the toilet trying to stay out of the way. We are where we should not be, trapped by Tom at the door and captivated by Darlene's expressive anger. We look back and forth between each character following their reactions. It is as though we hold the camera trying to capture every nuance of Tom and Darlene's argument. We help these two actors create this long scene of confrontation. We watch. This produces a tension between realism and Realism. On the one hand there is an immediacy in the use of hand-held camera and in being a voyeur. This is not a glamorous scene; in a sense it is charged with life, unlike some of the more stylized sequences yet to come. Yet we are aware that a scene is being produced, thus calling into question the audience's ability to suspend its disbelief.

(26) Bathroom is simple, white, cheap. Sound is stark, no music. Lighting is simple. • SEM. Class. •• SYM. The space/The characters.

(27) This scene is one take, color. • EXP. The Long Take.

The Long Take

There are at least three meanings infused within this process. The first is the meaning of realism. The long take is a real-time process, as though it was continuing for fear of missing something. The use of a long take often comes from the hope that truth (the reality of things) will become evident if given enough time. All must be seen. The camera must not stop. Second, there is meaning in the very undercutting of this realism. The long take is a kind of inherent deconstruction that becomes more deconstructive the longer the take continues. There are two "realisms" against the long take. The history of cinema is the history of editing; the physical process of cutting the film into short segments. On the other side of this history of editing is the history of viewing films. Audiences have been taught, by sheer force of numbers, to accept the edited sequence as being more realistic. The long take shows its "seams" because it denies them. We have also been taught to accept the edited sequence as truth, in part, because of the evening news. The world, the ultimate reality of things, is neatly divided up for us into easy-to-digest shots, each of which contains its meaning on its surface (as does an advertisement) and within its context (as "filler" between advertisements). The long take denies this kind of packaging and thus denies this kind of truth. We are drawn into the process of the scene rather than the world of

the narrative and see the single take as the filming of two actors who overact through their improvisation. The final meaning is then the world of Jost's filmmaking process which is low-budget. He must use single takes because they are cheaper than several set-ups. This is the "final reality" with which the filmmaker, the actors, the small (one-two person) crew must contend. This scene, then, is about more than Tom and Darlene. It is about the nature of filmmaking outside the academy's high and expensive walls. The long-take becomes symbolic for the real limits of communicating through film.

(28) Darlene informs Tom that she is pregnant. She faces Tom and this puts her in a close-up relative to us. Tom gets mad at her for getting pregnant. He says its her responsibility to take those little pills. He claims she does it on purpose. • HER. Setting up the need for a response. •• ACT. Evasion.

Pregnant

The enigma raised by this situation (How will Tom respond?) has largely a semic answer. In other words, Darlene's statement only partially develops the narrative's momentum. However, it creates within the narrative the possibility for a kind of adjectival encoding of Tom. Tom's response is, within the narrative, more significant than Darlene's pregnancy, for we do not know for sure if she is really pregnant or if Tom is the father. Tom's response to her statement is designed to evade guilt and responsibility. Therefore the power of Darlene's statement within the narrative resides in Tom's character development.

(29) She threatens divorce. He threatens to leave. • ACT. To threaten. ••
HER. What will happen?

(30) We can hear the camera throughout the scene; obviously it's not
blimped. • EXP. Self-reference, making. •• SEM. Low budget. ••• REF.
Towards narration and the "real." Potentially symbolic: narration/narrative.

Camera Noise

To allow the camera's own noises to be heard is a great sin according to the gospel of classical narrative principles. The camera has not been muffled (blimped) in order to keep it quiet. Though faint, the sound of the camera signifies the whole process behind the scene's production. Much like the camera's filming itself in Speaking Directly, this action brings the narration into the narrative, blurring the lines between the two. There is a deconstructive thread present throughout the entire scene that subtly undermines the "reality" of the pro-filmic world. An un-blimped camera is more common in low-budget filmmaking because blimping a camera is an added expense. So we are drawn doubly backwards into that fog, that no man's land, that space between narration and narrative and even further back to the objects of production which lie behind the very possibilities of the film's existence.

(31) The dialogue does not sound heavily scripted. The actors slightly but constantly stumble. • EXP. To act.

Improvisation

Jost often has his actors improvise entire scenes and situations. When this technique works, and it usually does for Jost, there is a sense of realism even when the improvisation is obvious to the audience. This is because it works on at least two levels. Improvisation has the potential to produce more realistic dialogue because it is the so-called "natural" outpouring of the character as developed by the actor. On the other level, if we know about this process, improvisation can be seen as an outpouring of the actor and thus there is a sense of being on the edge of experience as though the actors were walking a tightrope. Improvisation more closely simulates life, according to an "in the moment" definition, which is at the heart of Realism. And yet, inherent in this process is a deconstructive force. To act is to lie.

(32) "So what are you going to do about it?... or are you going to be the old Tom...? If you're going to do nothing then I'm going to do something." • HER. Setting up a question that must be answered.

(33) Cut to black. Country/folk music plays. • HER. What is the answer?; the hanging enigma.

The Hanging Enigma

What is the answer? The cut to black becomes the answer with a second viewing for the black of the screen is of the night into which Tom flees. But until we know this, the cut presents two enigmas. One is the enigma of the answer/non-answer. We expect Tom to give an answer to Darlene verbally (a simple, "Well, then, I'm leaving."), but the cut take us

away from the scene before we get that answer. Second, there is the enigma of the blackness, which carries with it the first enigma but moves even farther from the sight of the plot. We do not know where we are; we do not know what to expect; we do not know what this means regardless of its relation to Tom and Darlene's argument. In essence this cut creates a gap, a simple narrational device used by the plot to create an interesting story. If Tom has left Darlene it would be quite easy to show him leaving, but to stall creates tension. Of course, on a second viewing this is not a gap at all but an answer, for we know the cut to black has the answer infused within it.

(34) Song is about promises being ashes that crumble to the touch. • REF. Rural American philosophy. Love.

(35) The screen stays black for quite some time... • HER. continued enigma.

(36) ...then we see road signs in the night light up by the trucks? headlights. The camera is shaky. • HER. Being "On the road" is a partial answer to the enigma. •• ACT. To travel. ••• EXP. Shaky camera.

Shaky Camera

The camera appears to be hand-held or mounted on something that is not steady. A shaky camera is different from a hand-held shot. A shaky camera has less apparent intention behind it and therefore is seen less as a result of artistic practices than of something else. What this something else might be is not specifically known, but it could be argued that low budgets and limited resources constrain filmmakers to get what they can when they can

get it, shooting and hoping for the best. There is another meaning, the tradition of news reels as against mainstream cinema. The smooth, articulate movements of the studio films lack the immediate "experience" of war time film footage. Studios have never been able to capture the sense of "being there" on the battleship or in the plane. Thus, in our culture, we hold a special place for the realism of the shaky camera.

(37) We see the back of a Mayflower moving truck lit up in the orange glow of the headlights. One road sign reads Butte. • REF. Location: Montana. •• HER. Answer to enigma becomes more clear: Tom escapes Darlene. ••• ACT. To escape.

(38) Entering city. Street lights and traffic and neon signs. • SEM. City at night.

The Import of Meaning

Every image, of whatever it may be, carries within it a seemingly endless amount of information. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but usually it is worth much more. As an example, if we have before us an image of a desert we have before us all that a desert means. This includes everything that has been said about deserts, all our experiences of deserts, and all the uses images of deserts have been put to, including the one before us. Therefore, the city at night before our eyes imports a tremendous amount of information into the fabric of the plot and story. Our rightly choosing and differentiating between the various knowledges comes from our ability to see these images appropriately within the context of the surrounding film, and it

also depends upon upon our knowledge of the subject beyond the bounds of the film. In other words, the force of the narrative channels the various connotational meanings fused within the images, sounds, words, music, edits, etc., presented before us. The images still contain all their meanings but the strength of the narrative and its context encourage us to accept certain meanings as more likely than others. Here the lights (even very few) of the city convey all that a city is at night and those meanings lead to further meanings about life in such a place and life in places other than cities. A web is built (or is already in place) and some of the strands lead ever outward while others may, in fact, lead back to the film.

(39) Screen goes black. Cut to Oly beer sign in tavern window. Shot is out of focus. • HER. Destination. The "old Tom."

(40) Cut to black and white shot of interior of some "hole-in-the-wall" cafe. It is daytime. Tom sits in the foreground next to a big, hippy-type, man. The camera looks down the counter in a deep focus shot. Tom is reading the paper. • SEM. Greasy diner. "Hippy." •• REF. Small town America. ••• HER. Tom has left Darlene. The enigma is fully answered.

(41) Throughout the scene the camera does not move and there is a double exposure image of the cafe's "cafe" sign showing through the characters. The sign is also in color (red) whereas the rest of the image is in B&W. • SYM. Color/black & white. •• EXP. Double exposure.

Double Exposure

There are double exposures throughout film history, but what of them? Dream sequences, ghosts, dissolves, and flashbacks have all used double exposures. However, as we well know, it takes an "unusual" moment within a film to get away with such techniques and still stay within the bounds of realism. This is not happening here. There is an intentionality behind this double exposure that seems to purposely undermine the film's world and draw us back to its construction. The scene is ordinary enough that any tricks of cinema are blunt intrusions, but is this an intrusion? The degree to which we desire to see this film as realistic rather than as *theater* is the degree to which we can be confused by such techniques.

(42) The sound is rough and "natural." • SEM. Naturalness.

(43) Tom smokes. He reads a story to the man next to him about a letter which says a man wanted his wife to lie in a tub of cold water for forty minutes so that she could pretend to be dead when he made love to her. • ACT. To read tabloid. •• REF. Sexuality. ••• SEM. Cheap tabloid.

(44) The man next to Tom says that's garbage; that the entire paper's garbage, made up in the back room by some guy who's got nothing better to do. He says the paper is put out by the government to pacify people. • REF. Government, communication theory.

(45) Tom asks if the man lives here. "No, who'd want to live here?" • REF. Knowledge of small towns. Economic situation.

(46) He goes on, "Animals have their trip together... They do what comes natural... Quit reading that stuff and do what the animals do... hump." • REF. Life philosophy. Sexuality. •• SEM. Hippy.

(47) Tom asks if the food is good. "Yes." "You eat here often?" "No, but I know it's good." • ACT. Small talk, insignificant actions.

Insignificant Actions

In the cinema life is made up of significant actions, or so we have come to believe. For the most part we enter media stories at crucial moments in character's lives when their actions have become narratively significant. Such actions become significant because the person is important (a president, a scientist, a spy) or because apparently insignificant people (a housewife, a student, a mechanic) have been thrust into important situations (salvation of the family, the lover, the world). Life is made vicariously heightened and exciting and apparently fulfilling to a mass audience who have come to despise insignificant actions. However, it is the presence of many insignificant actions (often unnoticed) that make significant actions, especially fantastic actions, appear as though they are naturally produced. Insignificant actions are usually sprinkled throughout most films in order to produce an apparently realistic backdrop upon which significant actions can make their play.

(48) Tom says he's just passing through, looking for a job. Man says everybody's looking for a job. Heard of any? Tom says no, ain't nothin'.

Nothing that he'd want to do anyway. • REF. Broader economic situation.

•• HER. Partial answer to Tom's inability to find work.

(49) Tom ask if the man works. "No, I live off the government." "The paper?" "No I'm in another bureau." "How'd you do that?" "I just hang out and go to school, let the government pay for it. Somebody else's taxes. I'm tired of paying taxes." • SEM. Hypocrite.

(50) "Student, huh?" "Well, occasionally." "Is that a good deal?" "Yeah, better than the army." "I wouldn't know about that." • REF. Military; another way of life alongside Tom's.

Alternative Lifestyles

The mention of different life styles bring a specificity to Tom's life. Within the course of the film we are given four alternative ways of life: the student; the military; labour in the mines; and to wander. Tom is not given any more options and thus his choices, his destinations are limited. The military has been an only option for many who have wished to leave their rural existence, furthering a patriotism seen through much of rural America. Thus we are drawn to Tom's position more clearly and see his desire for a kind of individuality. This brings other possibilities into the text; it is part of the weave. A richness of the text develops when the world of the work extends beyond its boundaries. This extension creates a realistic world by allowing us to hang layers of meaning upon these other possibilities and thus imagine the film itself extending beyond the horizon and becoming real.

(51) "They're paying me more than when I was in the army." "Huh, just to go to school." • REF. Student.

(52) "Hang out and chase girls." "Lots of girls?" "Yeah." "Are they willing?" "Willing as they can get." • SEM. Maleness. •• REF. The ideal life.

Male(ness)

Throughout the film Tom defines himself by his actions. He is intent to thrust his maleness outward. His sexuality is a focal point of his existence. By his mere reference to women and sexuality we build a picture of his character and his apparent emotional needs. The force of his exertions belie an insecurity suspected behind the U.S. image of being male. This insecurity was explored within Speaking Directly. In Speaking Directly the mere fact that a man has a penis and a woman does not becomes symbolic for the roles and actions human being perform and are assigned; only men were drafted for Vietnam.

The Flow of Meaningless, Anodyne Data

Like insignificant actions, meaningless data infuse the story with a sense of realism. Attention to detail has been a hallmark of Realism and is usually woven like small threads throughout the fabric of the film. When a scene is built upon these threads it has a quiet strength. One might define this part of the weave as a kind of countercommunication replete with false and hidden threads. But, in fact, it is communication par excellence, for it the voice of truth making the more significant actions ring with truth. Simply

put, it is science. Many of the great nineteenth century novels appear as almost scientific descriptions of their worlds with a slight narrative to hold the pieces together, e.g. Madam Bovary.

(53) Dissolve to interior of a tavern. Scene is in color with hand-held camera.
 • HER. Location change: What place is this? Why here? •• EXP. Hand-held: the unseen third person. ••• SEM. Hand-held: Cinema Verité.

Truth

What is this cinema of truth, this *cinema verité*? Usually *cinema verité* is the unseen third person point of view in narration. To visually express a scene through the use of a hand-held camera is to convey a subjectivity within a narrative that otherwise seems objective. To use the photographic analogy is to see cinema as a means of recording the real world "out there." Every film student knows that this so-called objective recording is subjectively inspired and thus the objectivity of the "process" is inherently in doubt. To use, or somehow create the sense of a hand-held camera, is to somewhat unveil that subjectivity. In other words a personality is given to the cold science of cinematic replication. However, this personality remains behind the camera and thus is an unseen third person there, but not there; pointing to the "beyond" of cinema, to that land behind the screen, never fully manifest.

(54) Tom and a woman sit the bar. A country song starts playing. We can hear the noise of the tavern and Tom talks with the woman, but their

conversation seems to be only a part of the overall noise in the place. • HER.
 What/who should we listen to? •• EXP. Sound draws attention to itself.

Countercommunication

As long as the narrative is given primacy over all other voices countercommunication will be seen as an unwanted threat to the narrative. We are pulled away from the forces that brought us here and subjected to cacophony of warring voices. The pulling away is accomplished by the mechanisms that produced the narrative in the first place, thus a dissonance arises between the narrative and its producer. We find ourselves trying to follow a story by means of a system of production that is struggling with its own schizophrenia. We can only hang on.

(55) The camera starts on these two and then begins to wander around the tavern looking at pool players, juke box, etc. • REF. Tavern. •• EXP.
 Personality of the camera.

(56) The lighting is mostly high key and is often too dark to see much detail throughout the tavern. The colors are also somewhat muddy. • SEM.
 Natural lighting. Low-budget.

(57) The scene is in one long take. • EXP. The long take.

(58) Song: "A face is like an open book..." • SYM. Irony.

(59) After wandering around the tavern the camera returns to Tom and the woman. The song fades out and we focus on their conversation. • HER. Answer to (54).

(60) Tom wants to bed her down, but he is also edgy. Tom tells her his problems. She says something about him putting down the drinks and Tom gets upset. He says that maybe he doesn't like women telling him how to drink. She says she's just being playful. She kisses him. She fixes her makeup. They talk a while. • REF. Sexual politics.

(61) "You make me feel like a real lady... you're real gentle, Tom." He then gets her name wrong. • SEM. Tragicomedy.

(62) He says let's go to your place. • ACT. To propose sexual intercourse. •• REF. Sexual politics.

(63) It is hard to hear everything of their conversation because the noise in the bar is too loud. • EXP. Non-diegetic sound making itself diegetic.

A Shift in Forces

Again we are faced with countercommunication, but by now something different has happened. Apparently by sheer will power the bar has become a part of the narrative. Or it is now the non-narrative that has the stage and the narrative is the intruder. Certainly a shift has taken place. What has been an annoyance is now in control, deciding whether the narrative will be allowed to speak, or no.

(64) Screen fades to black, we still hear dialogue for a few seconds. • EXP.
Non-synchronized editing. •• SYM. Fantasy.

Lingering Dialogue

For audio from the previous scene to continue for a frame or two is to provide a smooth transition, a sound bridge, but to dally for seconds is to do something entirely different. It is like a lingering of memory, or a daydream where the world has been closed out and only the words carry meaning. It is a world of fantasy where what we see and what we hear are not linked together with the kind of solidity we have come to expect.

(65) Cut to black and white image looking down a stairwell. Tom and Mary walk up the stairs toward us. Their images are ghostlike (double exposure) Their voices are full volume. • SYM. Time/timelessness. •• SEM. Ghosts.

(66) Cut to black. Fade up to black and white image of apartment interior. • HER. Location for sexual intercourse.

(67) Tom and Mary are in the bedroom. We can see their legs on the bed through the doorway. The bedroom light is on. There is a TV in the living room playing. The TV's image is in color (another double exposure). It is at about the same place their heads would be if the wall was was not there. • ACT. Sexual intercourse. •• SEM. lower class apartment. ••• EXP.
Double- exposure. •••• SYM. Heads/T.V.

Television

By placing the television and the character's heads in such perfect proximity a symbolism ensues. The visual proximity allows for a loose interpretation of the television to represent a kind of consciousness for the characters. The incorporation of television onto the film screen has a long tradition of not only conveying human experience but of relying upon the power of television as symbol. Our experience is "run through" with the existential and religious force of television.

(68) The TV's volume is up and there is a talk show playing, possibly the Tonight Show. • SYM. The world of T.V. as the world of reality.

(69) We hear lovemaking from the other room. • SEM. Un-Glamorous.

Grit

We all have heard the sound of nails of a chalkboard or steel on cement and felt the ensuing chill up the spine. We have seen dirt on a windshield and blood on a face. There are moments when life seems more real. We have all experienced the grit of reality impose itself upon us in such a way as to make our experience seem more "immediate." In the world of film lovemaking is the ultimate culmination of glamour and sensuality. It is frequently the moment when music, photography, and beautiful people make fantasy seem real. However, the "reality" of sexuality is so stereotyped within mainstream filmmaking practices that true sexuality has become difficult to present. To not make such a scene play as romance and fantasy is like dirt on the windshield. Although the characters make love in the other

room, only partially visible, and in long-shot, their actions are thrust at us as though they were more real, more true to experience.

(70) The entire scene is in one long take, and the camera does not move throughout. • EXP. The long-take.

(71) After several minutes the light in the apartment changes (a slow dissolve, but the camera did not move). Sunlight comes through the living room window. It is morning. • SEM. Timelessness. •• EXP. The dissolve is not connected to the objects we see.

Dissonance

As it is when the sun's light changes when the clouds pass by, our characters act in a world of disconnection. We saw them walk up the stairs as ghosts, not attached to the world they apparently inhabit. Now the light is the ghost. It is unattached to their world and impels us to seek a possible symbolic meaning, but none readily comes forth. We are drawn to the film's construction, not so much as a process of representation, but as a means of manipulation. Just as the light is manipulated for a purpose we do not know, the story of these characters is a manipulation. It is theater; it is a lie.

(72) Tom gets out of bed. The same TV show is running, in fact it has never stopped. Thus the time of the TV show is different than the characters. • EXP. The T.V. becomes an unfixed object. •• SYM. Television/reality.

Fixation

In both the stair scene and in this one, the camera remains motionless. It is fixed solidly in place, yet it reveals the illusion of life around it. Nothing seems fixed in place. At any moment a wall might disappear or another character might suddenly appear. The television is like a specter arching over the minute reality of Tom and Mary. It is the "ever present." The reality of the characters comes into question. At what point are they more real (or less real) than the the world around them? Should we trust their existence? We desire a kind of intransience in the world of the film. To call it into question is to undermine our expectations and subvert many notions of realism we may have held.

(73) Tom calls Darlene from the bedroom phone. He smokes a cigarette. • REF. Sexuality; smoking after sex.

(74) "Did I wake you up? I just called to see how you were..." Tom and Darlene get into an argument. "Listen, Dar, I love you. Can you understand that?" They argue more. Mary walks through the room and around the apartment. She sits by the TV. • HER. Mary has become an outsider in her own apartment. •• ACT. Her movements are those of an outsider seeking someplace to be or something to do.

(75) "I didn't know, someplace in Montana. They all look the same." • REF. Rural America.

(76) They argue some more and he hangs up. Mary asks who that was. Tom says it was his boss. Mary pushes him some more. Tom angrily says it was

his wife. Mary gets upset. Tom gets upset because Mary didn't seem to care the night before. Mary says she didn't know he was married the night before. She didn't think it was her place to ask. Tom says, "I don't suppose." • HER. Revelation for Mary. She now knows what the audience already knew and what she probably suspected.

(77) The light changes again, darker now. • EXP. This change potentially distances us from this scene, thus keeping us from deeper emotional contact with the characters. •• SYM. Light/dark. External evidence of internal struggle.

Symbolism

Do we infer too much. Symbolism is the "loosest" category we have. It is subject to the most debate and it is subtly present throughout many an artwork. To say the change in light represents a kind of struggle for the characters is to posit a connection that may or may not be there. To argue for a symbolic presence often consists of pointing out the potential connections and trusting others will agree. The better the argument the more solid the symbolism seems to be, but the power of the argument may be smoke and mirrors. Yet, the symbolic is not lost under the weight of relativism, for it is a product of tacit understanding for the audience requiring flexible methods rather than science.

(78) Tom asks "Are you gonna get all upset now?" She says it matters to her. Tom says, "Don't pull this high and mighty bullshit." TV is off. Light changes again. We can hear a car go by outside. They sit a minute or two.

Mary gets up. Tom gets up. "Thanks." "Yeah, sure, anything." "I'll see ya."
 "Yeah." "No hard feelings." "No." "Be careful." • ACT. To leave (to flee).
 •• REF. Sexual politics. Tom's (men's) desire for sexual intercourse without
 emotional commitment.

(79) "Hope you find a job." "So do I. So do I." Tom leaves. • REF.
 Economy. •• HER. Sending Tom back out on his quest.

The Great Presence

For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Throughout the film there are a multitude of references to Tom's economic situation. For him, it is not merely poverty but a playing field that is economically defined; in this case, it is desolate. We could easily see Tom's economic poverty as representing his spiritual poverty, but this interpretation may go too far because Tom suffers as does everyone else in his world. Jobs are hard to find for everyone and the jobs that are available are not desirable. The initial "action" is the economic situation or force that permeates everything. The opposite reaction is Tom's life. However, we must be careful not to suggest that all of Tom's life directly results from his economic surroundings, for he is responsible for his actions; yet his actions are "channeled" by larger forces which allow him only so many options. For a film to deal with economics creates a sense of realism because economics are not usually considered an important factor in most films. An audience may be surprised by such an emphasis. Characters are frequently seen as somewhat distinct from their class; no matter what class the main characters are from, the characters are

good if they have middle class values. To make the hero poor is typically a choice of targeting audiences rather than a critique on the basis of class.

(80) Music begins, another country song. • SEM. Western. Heartbreak.

(81) Mary walks around apartment and then sits on the edge of the bed. • SEM. Heartbreak.

(82) Fade to black. Holds on black a few seconds. • HER. The pause. Indication of transition.

To Pause

It is time for another scene to begin, but heaviness hangs in the air. Films cannot provide the kind of stopping places that are found in books. There are no chapters to stop at to resume another day; a film must continue under normal viewing circumstances. Films do give us pauses, by presenting following an action scene with one that unfolds slowly so we may catch our breath, but this is not a true pause, rather a diversion. Here we have something much closer to a pause, a black screen. Yet this pause is forced upon us for we do not *decide* to stop here. The film still dictates its course and we merely follow.

(83) Cut to early morning (or evening?) shot of small town street with sunlight on store front. The streets are empty. Camera angle is tilted. • SEM. Desolation. Ghost town.

The Real West

Largely this film is about mythologies and the inability of myths to fully manifest themselves in reality. A traditional protagonist (even an anti-hero) is missing from the story. Also missing is a goal-oriented quest of some kind. Even more striking perhaps is the absence of any ideals in the world of Tom. Montana is a site of the traditional American West. However, whatever this West has become in American lore, it is not present within the diegesis. There is no romanticization of Tom, Darlene, work, play, or anything else. Life in the film proceeds without heroes and without hope, only the expectation of imperfect sexual encounters and poverty. Tom appears to be striving for some semblance of a kind of U.S. ideal of male virility, but the world that surrounds him lacks glory. It is empty and desolate. He seeks life in an impotent world.

(84) Cut to another shot of street with Tom standing in medium shot facing camera. We see only from his shoulders to his knees. Hands in his pockets, he stands there awhile then walks off screen. Camera pans left and we pick-up Tom as he crosses the street walking away from us. He is alone. • ACT. To trace out an non-prescribed course. •• SEM. Aimlessness.

Free Will

Within the loose genre of Art Cinema, the protagonist is not bound to a pre-described course defined by a specific problem which must be overcome and a specific love interest who must be won. Love and goals may be present, but they do not have the kind of force found within classical norms. The

course of the protagonist here is generally an aimless one. We do not expect the film's hero to end up in a specific place carefully prescribed by the plot, instead we gather up the traces left by the protagonist. These traces may be definable or not, may be obvious or not, may exist or not. We try to piece them into a coherent whole that contains meaning, but we may go too far. Our habit is to expect meaning. Thus we search for it. But we may create coherence and import meaning where there is none.

(85) Cut to clouds in the sky illumined orange by sunlight. Looks like sunset, but is probably morning. • SEM. Beauty.

(86) Cut to long shot of sidewalk, shot in deep focus, with a row of shadows cast by parking meters. • SEM. Emptiness.

The Canopy

Arching over the mundane is an unfathomable beauty. Within every world there is a "worldview" containing answers to the greatest questions of humankind's significance. We may desire for Tom to look up and see the beauty that surrounds him, ponder such display and count himself luckier than he supposed. Yet what is this beauty? Is it not an ungraspable vapor almost taunting those below? Tom's world is the world of empty streets and poverty. There is no God in his world. This heavenly display becomes merely a reminder of humankind's feeble attempts to create heaven on earth. In other words, the beauty in the sky ceases to become a curtain behind which God resides; it is a sham.

(87) Cut to close-up of Tom with warm sunlight on his face. A country song is playing throughout. Tom looks around and then walks out of screen. Background is tilted to the left. • SEM. Western Man. Alone. •• ACT. To wander.

Western Man

The Western male is the alpha male, the demigod of U.S. mythology. Consequently this man is alone, as gods must be. To live (or seek to live) such a myth is to be alone. All other males are competitors and females goal-objects. The mundane actions of work do not contain enough heroism to be profitable to such a man. Thus he strikes out for new territory where a chance to prove his rightful inheritance can be demonstrated. From John Wayne to Sylvester Stallone, the ethos of the western male permeates our society, eventually becoming a burden to those who face everyday reality (especially economic reality).

(88) Shot of Zip Auto Service building, shot from across the street. Shot is tilted to the right. Cut to interior of public rest room. Tom walks out smoking a cigarette. Cut to close-up of urinals with water running. Shot is very dark. • REF. Reality is made up of mundane acts. Low lighting: Low-budget filmmaking.

Mundane Actions

Within the genre of Realism mundane actions have prevailed. The worker doing his or her task, whether it be washing floors or milking cows,

became the scene of "life." There was something to be seen within those actions that spoke of a reality closer to the reality sought after. There is an immediacy and a grit to such actions; dirt on the hands and sweat on the brow. Even more mundane than these actions are those of basic functioning: eating, sleeping, and shitting. Life does not become any more real than this within a materialist universe.

(89) Music ends. last beat on shot of urinals. Silent, only the hiss of the film.

• EXP. The hiss of the film. •• SEM. Loneliness.

The Hiss of the Film

It is like the edge of a lithograph where a line of ink is left from the stone. It is there and it is part of the picture, but not as the picture. It is something else. At what point do we say the film begins here and ends there? The hiss is not part of the film in a traditional sense; it is an intrusion. But it is there, not as the world beyond the film, but not as the film either. It is a trace of the process on the edge of the film, at the margin, calling us to the film as object but still calling us to the film, not the process.

(90) Cut to image of the big Glacier General building with sunlight on it. • SEM. Capitalism.

(91) Cut to closer shot of same building that emphasizes the sign. • HER. The seme of capitalism is thrust at us. We can only wonder at its significance.

(92) Cut to intersection, no traffic. We look down at pavement. A pair of legs walk across the street (Tom's?). Shadow of a car goes by. • ACT. To wander.

(93) Cut to landscape going by as though shot out of a car window, probably from Tom's truck. Similar shot as in the beginning of film. Long take. Silent. We see a lumber mill. Cut to a beautiful shot of sunlit clouds in a long take. • REF. Montana. •• HER. Linked to first scene; could this be the last scene? ••• SEM. Beauty.

(94) Cut to an extreme close-up of tacky postcards. A hand pulls it off revealing another postcard, then another. Hand takes one with a cowboy riding a huge Jackrabbit, turns it over, and writes to Darlene. • SEM. Rural American culture. •• ACT. To write to someone.

(95) Still in ECU (was there a cut?) we see a series of wanted posters. Tom turns each one over and reads about each criminal out loud. These people are all men, mostly murderers. If the man was only a swindler, Tom doesn't seem to be interested. • HER. Foreshadowing. Why this? A correlative enigma emerges: Are we to see Tom as like these criminals? Is he a killer, or going to kill? •• SEM. Criminal(s). American West: the wanted poster.

(96) Country song starts. We no longer hear Tom, but we continue to see the posters. • SEM. Western.

(97) Cut to close-up of a rabbit being butchered. Head and legs are cut off on a stump. The legs keep twitching. Blood of the stump. • ACT. To butcher. •• REF. Rules of the Game, Weekend. ••• SYM. Life/death, to kill/to be killed.

Other Texts

At any moment another text (film) may enter the present text. Eventually all texts will enter, most enter indirectly, via the web of reality of which this film is only one point (made up of a myriad of smaller points). Each film is an intersection, more like an Arc de Triomphe with many roads coming toward and going away from it. The so-called "plural of the text" rests largely upon this assumption. The killing of the rabbit is not only a moment of reality pushed into our faces, but it sends us toward at least two past films both concerned with wealth, society, and class. However, this film does not explicitly entice a correlation between the films. We may merely make the sighting and move on, or we may wish to see symbolism in the images. Such variability is a consequence of the plural. Symbolically the killing of the rabbit leads us toward death, specifically the death of Fred (who we see later). There seems to be a connection between these two deaths but that connection may be only hypothetical because the symbolic coding is very loose.

(98) Fade to black. • HER. An ending is always a beginning. The final act begins.

(99) Cut to Tom driving his truck truck down a country road. Trees on either side. Camera is in back of truck looking forward. We hear the creaking of the truck. • ACT. To drive, linked to; to wander. •• SEM. The truck creaks; minute details of tactile experience: Realism.

(100) Tom turns down another road and stops behind a car on the side of the road. A man walks away from that car (the hood is up) and says howdy to Tom. Tom says, "You got trouble?" • SEM. The good Samaritan.

(101) Camera is hand held. The camera "gets out" of the back of the truck and approaches Tom and the other man as Tom gets out of the truck. • SEM. cinema verité: realism. •• EXP. The personality of the camera.

The Construct

It is one thing to be self-reflexive, to show how codes are manipulated for effect. It is another to show how a film is physically made. Although we do not see the filmmaker we are more than aware of his presence. As the camera is taken out of the back of the truck it is as though we, the audience, are being lifted up and carried closer to the action. This is not the first time in the film that similar effects have occurred; light on the lens shows the light source and the direction of the camera.

(102) Man says, yeah, you know anything about foreign cars? The car is an old Volvo wagon, rather beat up. • REF. The difficulty of figuring out foreign cars. •• SEM. Run down car: lower-class.

(103) The man tells Tom that the car won't work. He says he bought it for his wife and drove over from Butte to pick it up. Tom says, "You're from Butte?" They are both from Butte and the man owns a service station there. • HER. Character development: man has a family. •• REF. Montana. ••• SEM. Comradeship.

(104) The man asks if Tom still works in the mines? "I used to" says Tom. • REF. Kind of available work: the mines.

(105) Fred (the man) says he doesn't know how to work on these foreign cars. Tom says, "I might have the right tools." • REF. Maleness: to have the right tools.

(106) Tom asks if Fred has a family. Fred says he has two boys. He'd like to get back to them because he was going to take them fishing. • HER. Making Fred human before he is murdered. •• SEM. Family man.

To Be Made Human

Soon Fred will be killed by Tom for a few dollars. Before Tom can take the action of murder Fred must be made human. Human? Is he not already human, a man before us. Yes, but not entirely. A figure up on the screen is merely the compilation of a number of semes. We look at a character's clothing and manner of posture. We hear his voice and see his actions, but we do not see a human for he is still terribly incomplete. When filmmaking practices rely upon killing many characters such, characters are given very limited semes. The limited number as well as the kind of semes attributed allow only for a partial human to be killed. When this is true, in real life killing becomes easier and more acceptable. As soon as Fred says he has a wife and kids, he becomes too human to kill properly. This becomes a key element in whether this film is viewed as a tragedy or not. Of course, Tom hears and sees the same semes as we do.

(107) Tom walks back to his truck. Camera leads him. He starts singing the song about receiving yellow roses. Sunlight on lens. He opens the truck door and takes out a pistol that he places in the back of his jeans. He waits for a car to pass and laughs nervously. He walks back to Fred and says he has no tools.

- HER. The song signals, through previous use (15), that Tom is not what he appears to Fred. Entrance of the gun. •• REF. "Here is a revolver."

The Gun

Although the image of a revolver refers us to revolvers and their use, we can also see this as part of the Hermeneutic code. By producing a revolver the scene suddenly changes. We do not yet know why Tom gets the gun, but the ambiguity of Tom's reasons creates a tension in the light of our understanding of guns. Thus the image of the gun is not merely an image equivalent to the word "gun," but it has both the strength of our knowledge about guns and the strength of the context in which the gun is revealed. What we have is more than "here is a revolver." A revolver's image is never truly in isolation within the context of a film; therefore, such an image instantly becomes part of the motion of the film, producing or answering enigmas.

(108) Tom then says, "It's time. I guess it's a good a time as any. Fred I've got something to tell ya." Tom pulls out the gun and points it at Fred. Fred backs up. Tom says, I have to have your money. Fred pulls out his wallet and gives Tom his money, not much. Tom says he needs this money because it is now all he has left. Tom has no job and he is not going home again. Tom

believes Fred has money because Fred said he has a service-station of his own. • HER. Use of the gun; motivation: economic situation. •• ACT. To hold-up. To be held-up.

(109) Tom then takes Fred on a walk into the woods. Tom says he is going to tie Fred up. The camera does not follow them. It stays on the road. Tom has Fred kneel down. Tom then shoots Fred twice and walks back to the road, wearing Fred's baseball cap. He closes the car hood and nervously whistles as he gets in his truck breathing hard. He sings the song again and drives off down the road. • ACT. To murder. •• SEM. Banality.

Death

Throughout the history of art, death holds a prominent position as the place for heroes and great tragedy. Within film history we might study the treatment of death for example, comparing how John Ford treats death compared to Howard Hawks. Typically death is depicted within the context of rituals (religious or otherwise) that try to sum up the occurrence. Ford preferred traditional funeral services in his films, Hawks the existential rituals made up by friend or "buddies." However, within the tradition of Realism death contains a banality that strips it of sentiment or "meaning." Death is death, the cessation of physical life that is all. It may be tragic, but such sentiment is one's own personal choice. Fred is murdered in long-shot and in the shadows of the trees. Therefore we are allowed a distance that makes death come suddenly and seem empty. Fred is shot by Tom, he dies, and Tom leaves in his truck--that is all. By having made Fred human the

film makes the death more personally tragic as we can imagine the suffering of his family, but this is small compared to the complete banality (no last words or cries for compassion) of being shot for a few dollars by the side of a dirt road.

(110) Dissolve to black and white shot of Tom driving truck. Shot is through the front windshield of the truck in a medium close-up. Tom looks somewhat nervous but shows little emotion. • ACT. To flee.

The Mask

From the beginning of the film we have been encouraged to guess at the real world behind the screen. There has been a tension between narrative and narration, product and production, etc., that seems to allow us a glimpse of the "world beyond." However, that world cannot be present for it does not exist anywhere on the screen. If it is on the screen it is now part of the film and no longer the hidden world. This is one of the tricks of so called Art Cinema. We believe we see the truth, but it is only the film. The cinema screen has become a kind of mask. This tension is mirrored in the character of Tom. Throughout the film we see what he does and hear what he says, hoping to see behind his face into his mind. We wonder why he acts the way he does and what he is thinking, but finally we fail. This shot is the summing up of our struggle. In context it comes on the heels of Tom's killing Fred for a few bucks, a death shown as brutal and abrupt. We know Tom has no money. He appears to be spiritually poor as well. We strive to find clues for his actions. What would lead a man to kill? What has led Tom

to kill? Staring back at us is the blank face, the mask of Tom from which we gather no answers. In other words, the film ends by leaving us with the biggest enigma of all.

(111) Country song plays about people fixin' to die. • SEM. Rural American philosophy. American West.

(112) Windshield is dirty and trees reflect in it. • SEM. The "facts": banality.

(113) Shot holds for longer than the song. Long take. When the song ends the image holds for a couple of minutes as the credits are shown and then even longer before fading to black. • HER. To end.

To End

As with the beginning the ending is a highly self-conscious moment in the film. Yet, it is because of the belief in the primacy of the first viewing that the ending is an ending. Typically to end is to banish the film into the past, into "the was." It is a signal to seek out the next film to consume. Certainly an ending is a kind of seal forever closing off the object from a further existence upon a particular continuum. We know a film does not last forever on the screen; thus we expect an ending. In fact we seek an ending as a doorway into the meaning of the film. The last line, the last image hold a sacred power over the film as though this summed up or moralized what has gone before. However the end or the edge, of an aesthetic object is not the only doorway into its meaning and it may not be the best. An aesthetic object contains a multitude of such doorways. Every seme, action, reference;

essentially every connotation, whether it has a physical or psychological basis, is an avenue into (and out of) the object. Thus *to end* carries with it centuries-old baggage that need not be so heavy if we attend to the object as a site of intersections running through and reaching out to a myriad of other such cites. *To end* is certainly a self-conscious moment, but it need not be the end of our inquiring .

(114) Some of the titles on the screen tell us how much the film cost (about \$2,500) and how long it took to make, and where it was made. • REF. The cost. •• EXP. A made object.

The Cost

Why this? Throughout the film we have been confronted with many occasions to seek out the forces behind the images. There seems to be little need to tell us the cost, for it is already apparent that it is a very low-budget film. The need for telling us the film's cost comes from the larger context of filmmaking as a whole. Low-budget filmmaking is typically the world of the independent filmmaker. However, if we look at most independent films we realize that a budget of \$2,500 is so unusually low that it seems impossible for such a film to exist. Most extremely low-budget films have budgets of at least \$100,000 or more. In mainstream feature filmmaking a budget of six million dollars is low-budget. The power of these numbers resides precisely in the fact that filmmaking, and consequently the ability to use the language of film, is a privilege for only a few moneyed individuals (still mostly men) who have the ability to get investors for their projects. Hollywood (for lack of a

better word) thrives on us believing that films are gifts to us produced at great sacrifice and effort for our benefit. Hollywood also thrives on producing products whose means of production are so far out of reach from the ordinary mortal that we are all relegated to the act of consuming only. By announcing that his film costs only \$2,500 (the price of a used car) Jost has slashed through an impenetrable barrier and shown us that filmmaking can be a language for us all.

CHAPTER IV

CHAMELEON

Professionally marginal artists... encounter an excruciatingly trying problem. As each year passes, their studios grow increasingly crowded with paintings that no one wants to buy, starkly visible evidence which reminds them daily of their inability to win (or regain) acceptance of their work... some grow despairing of ever achieving a modest degree of success, or of finding a new style as salable as their previous one, and quit painting. (Levine 306-7)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine some iconic mobilization within the film Chameleon (1978). All of Jost's films are about reality; what is real about the world we live in, what is the true nature of things including the film we are watching. However, as Bill Nichols has pointed out, "It is not reality up there on the silver screen but iconic signs that re-present reality" (Nichols 11). Yet the fact remains that not only are these signs constituted within the film by the filmmaker, they are also infused with meaning by the audience. In essence, signs are produced by the audience as often as they are produced by the film. This two-fold process, a flux between film and audience, varies between film to film and audience to audience and even for a single viewer, from a first viewing to a second. The degree to which a film allows or encourages an audience to see more than is commonly expected, is

the degree to which that film facilitates the creation of the "writerly text" (Barthes 1974, 5). The writerly text is what we produce as readers, not an actual physical construct. No film (or book, painting, symphony, etc.) can be truly writerly and still be considered comprehensible. However, a film can encourage the writerly within the viewer by mobilizing its signs in such a way that, though the film is readerly in nature, it is not firmly fixed within classical norms. Chameleon is such a film. By beginning with a narrative and by using generic styles (*film noir*, art cinema, cinema verité), Chameleon sets up certain expectations within the audience. Those expectations are then undermined for the purpose of self-reflexivity. Therefore, this is a cinema that can be read as both classical and non-classical. Chameleon is able to present a story, comment on the telling of that story, and even further, comment on a person's ability to produce a film that can tell a story. In this way Chameleon is a film that incorporates more fully the project began by Jon Jost with Speaking Directly: Some American Notes and Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End). To begin we must highlight this "project" of Jost's and then examine the film Chameleon.

The Need for a Synthesis

With Jon Jost's films Speaking Directly: Some American Notes and Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End) we are confronted by at least two crucial sites of discourse. The first, and probably the most obvious, is about the nature of film as a medium. The second, which is defined clearly in Speaking Directly, is about the nature or position of the filmmaker. Speaking Directly is the most didactic of the two films and, though it also speaks about

the nature of film more clearly and directly than Last Chants, it is primarily concerned with the position of Jon Jost, its maker. Through the film Jost speaks of his position in the world, especially in the double sense of being an American (U.S.) through association and experience and also in relation to the process of being a filmmaker. This process, he states, is related to the very structures and ideologies he is trying to unearth and overcome by making the film. Thus, Speaking Directly is as much about contradictions as it is about anything else. Last Chants, being a narrative, would seem to fall back into the structures of the apparatus derided in Speaking Directly. This is not the case because Last Chants subverts "normal" viewing expectations in such a way as to deny any links to more common methods of filmmaking and the business of cinema proper. However, by being a narrative, even with its "subversive" methods, stylistic choices, and an extremely low budget, Last Chants has difficulty *directly* addressing its position in the world and, more specifically, in the world of cinema. It is at this crux, the dialectic produced by the juxtaposition of Speaking Directly with its didactic impulses and Last Chants with its narrative impulses, that we find the need for a kind of paradigmatic power. Such a power could retain a narrative structure while making more evident the nature of artistic creation. It is here that we should examine Jost's Chameleon.

Chameleon, made after Last Chants, retains the narrative impulse found in the earlier film, but it more directly addresses the position of the *artist* in the world, as does Speaking Directly. To do so it must, at some level, examine its own existence as an *art object*. However, by rigorously maintaining an overarching narrative structure it is not possible for Jost as

maker (or Chameleon as film) to address the audience in such a manner as he did with Speaking Directly. This is the limit of film narrative, where even a direct address to the audience is usually in the form of voice-over narration or an *aside* and thus not part of a truly a self-referential cinema. This kind of audience address seen in voice over maintains its narrative impulses without ever giving the illusion of "stepping across" the threshold of the screen or pointing to the true cinematic apparatus. In order for Chameleon to concretely confront the issues raised in Speaking Directly and Last Chants (not to mention all of Jost's films) while maintaining itself fully as a narrative, it must combine the content of the first with the style of the second. Although this is oversimplified, it is in fact what Chameleon does.

The Film

The story of Chameleon consists of the business dealings of a character named Terry over several days in Los Angeles. Initially he coerces an artist named Jack into producing some forgeries (silk-screen prints) for a dealer named Vince. After meeting an old friend (Annie) for a few minutes he then meets a rich woman (Beverly) who is interested in buying art. However, she is not interested in the prints, but she would like some cocaine for her new gallery exhibit/party of "photorealism." Terry agrees to bring her the cocaine. He then takes off to the desert in a small plane to meet Emmett and purchase the drugs. He kills Emmett (apparently) for the drugs and returns to Los Angeles and the gallery exhibit party. After the party Terry and Vince return to Jack's studio where, after discovering that Jack has refused to do the

forgeries, Terry beats up Jack (possibly kills him) and then flees the studio with Vince.

By including Jack, an artist, at the beginning and the end of the film, Chameleon has included in its content a clear possibility (an inevitability) of commenting upon the artist's position within U.S. culture and in relation to his/her art. Although the overall narrative focus is primarily on Terry, who is obviously the main character, the fact that the story is "bookended" with Jack creates a structural context within which the rest of the story should be seen. Of course we also must understand the "telling" of this story as more than a mere sequence of actions, but also having a style; in this case a style similar to Last Chants. We must ask, "Why tell this story, this way?" An unpacking is called for and a good place for us to start is with the first scene which, not incidentally, is the most important. (Note: I have divided up the film into ten scenes for the purpose of analysis. A synopsis of this division is found in Appendix B.)

The first image of Chameleon is an overhead shot of someone (Jack) pouring red ink onto a silk-screen and spreading it smoothly over the screen which is then lifted up to reveal the print. Over this *artistic process* made manifest we hear a voice (Vince's) saying, "It's really beautiful Jack. It's really beautiful. It's really nice to see something put together."

At this stage, even before we see any characters or are able to construct a story, we are presented very crucial information. Before us is a silk-screen print being produced. On the one hand this is a simple action code: how to make a silk-screen print. However, we clearly recognize that there is more to this first image than a mere lesson in print making. The beginning of a film

is always a naked event; strange and exposed; striking in potentialities and yet limited to the extreme. It is because it comes where it does in the film that it has a power unlike most other images in the rest of the film. We can only guess at the image's possible specific meaning until we "re-read" the film. However, by including artistic processes, presumably performed by an artist, within the first image and thus within the diegesis we may posit potential relationships between potential characters and these processes. Simply put, the making of art will play a part in the story. There is another more subtle contextualizing taking place, that is, between the viewer and the film. This is accomplished by making more evident that the film itself is a constructed art object with various properties.

Although Chameleon retains a somewhat "smoother" surface than does Last Chants it is neither a seamless narrative nor a polished presentation. We, as an audience, are made to confront our act of watching and constructing the film throughout the entire viewing. This is largely accomplished by the plot's subverting our viewing expectations about style, narrative construction, production quality, and image selection. The plot cues us to pay closer attention to these processes and thus see the film as a product of labor and choices. We inevitably question the choice and potentially "larger meaning" of the content, or story proper. In an ideal context it might be true that we could keep these two planes of plot and story separate (or at least keep the plot "invisible"), but given the precedents established by this and Jost's other films, his writings and interviews about his filmmaking, and our own gathered knowledge of film history in general, Chameleon must be seen as a film that seems to confront its own existence by

expecting us to see a connection between the plot (including the very physicality of the film) and the making of art within the film. Even the existence of the film itself relies upon the need for an audience as much as it needs celluloid and thus is in constant danger of dying. This double tension between object and content and life and death is at the heart of the film. Jack's can be understood as reaching out beyond the narrative boundaries of the film to the world of art, including its objects and participants, which includes ourselves watching this take place.

Jack's Art World

As Jack finishes the printing process he takes the print and hangs it on the far wall of his studio. While he does this he says to Vince, "Sometimes I wonder... you don't sell'em." Vince replies, "Look, Jack, you know, you've been in this long enough, things don't just sell. You know that. You've got to have a name. It's names that sell." We also see that the studio Jack works in is not glamorous and neither is Jack. In fact it is dark and grey, a basement with fluorescent lighting and cold concrete floors. His materials are simple and his clothing is cheap. We are a long way from a chic art studio filled with exciting young talent on the verge of their "big break" or chic old talent well established in their posh and influence. We also are confronted with an artist who produces works of art but has no place to sell them, even with a gallery dealer standing next to him. And thus we have begun to enter the world of Jack--his art-world. Let us take a closer look at this exchange between Vince and Jack. Vince has already said that it is nice to see something being put together. This may imply a distance between his business and Jack's. Vince

would more often see finished products rather than the making process. We might assume that because Vince runs a gallery he is primarily concerned with moving product and making a profit, and we would be right. Vince's interests therefore lie less with the actual struggles of an artist than the salability of the artist's work. In fact the work of a dealer or distributor plays a conflicted role in the life of an artist because of these concerns which often lead distributors to deal with artists and their art on a basis other than artistic merit (Becker 94). The other side of this coin is the tremendous effect dealers have on artists' reputations. Thus we have Jack's dilemma. In order for Vince to sell Jack's work, Jack's name must have currency. The only way for Jack's name to become lucrative is for Vince to give Jack the break Jack needs to produce such a name. Such is the dilemma for many artists. Art objects must be distributed in order to gain acceptance and eventually historical importance, yet what does not have a reputation is not distributed. It is a vicious circle (Becker 95).

This vicious circle is Jack's situation. From here the story takes an interesting turn. The purpose of Vince and Terry's visit (we have not yet seen Terry) is to ask if Jack will produce some forged silk-screen prints for Vince's gallery. When Jack is asked he becomes angry and turns to Terry, who has stayed out of the conversation so far. Jack says he does not want to do that kind of work anymore even though he is suffering financially. Terry tells Vince to look at some of Jack's prints while he and Jack talk it over in the back room. The illegality of producing forgeries is of concern for Jack, but we suspect that there is more to it than breaking the law. To produce a forgery is to prostitute oneself; it is to use all the skills and talents one is capable of

while producing an object to which another's name is assigned. For Jack, who is struggling to sell his own work, this is an insult and a debasement.

As we posit connections between Jack's situation and the larger context of art worlds, it may not be implausible to extend this dilemma to Jost himself. As we have seen in Speaking Directly and Last Chants Jost is committed to low budget filmmaking. With a cursory examination we can see that his films tend to look much less marketable than others, consequently, he may actually desire higher budgets than he or his films can generate. For both Jack and Jost an increase in budgets and distribution might be available if a change in commitment, and thus conscience, were to occur.

We should pause here a moment and further consider Jack's position in the world as an artist. All that we know of him comes through what has been presented to us so far. Certainly he is a marginalized individual, but we need to be careful as we hypothesize about that marginalization. If we take Western culture's romantic notions about the outsider artist and apply them to Jack, we will have read too much into the film. It is true that Jack struggles to sell his work, is under pressure to compromise his conscience, and works in a dark studio (echoes of the cold attic of some Russian novelist). But his struggle, as presented to us, is largely external. He needs money because he cannot sell his work and he cannot sell his work because he does not have a "name." He is not a misunderstood genius or an artist/prophet who must get his message to a world that does not want to hear his message. Jack is a man caught in the web of economic and political structures which shape the nature of his struggle to survive and sell his wares. Therefore we can posit that his "deeper" struggle, if there is such a struggle, comes more from his

artworks piling up in his studio, a constant reminder of his "failure", than from anything else.

While in the back room Terry confronts Jack more forcefully. Terry says that Jack owes him "six bills... that ain't nothin'." Jack takes some dollars out of his pocket and tries to hand them to Terry, but Terry counts them and says "That's not six." Jack tries to barter his way out by asking if Terry wants a painting or some dope. Terry indignantly tells Jack that Jack does not sell him dope, but that he "couldn't get six cents for one of your things." Jack calls Terry a "cocksucker" and Terry demands his money. Finally, after realizing his hopeless situation, Jack gives in and agrees to do the prints. Terry takes Jack's expensive automatic pistol and decides to keep it as collateral until the prints are done. Then Terry and Vince leave Jack alone in the studio where he quietly drinks from a large bottle and appears increasingly alone because the camera slowly moves backwards away from him. Jack has become a quiet and small individual in a large and dreary studio.

Film Noir

The pressure has mounted on Jack to the point where he must finally, grudgingly consent to doing what Terry wants. Blackmail is serious, but the situation has not truly changed for Jack. He is still in the same basic position he has always been in, having to make choices between what he would like to do and what he must do to stay alive. What is crucial about the increase in tension between Jack and Terry is the manner in which it is presented, namely in a *film noir* style. Several shots earlier we had some glimpses of such a style when Jack was talking to Vince. Jack stood in the extreme

foreground scraping ink off his printing tools while he talked to Vince who, in the background, was visually framed by the tools. This kind of melodramatic visual emphasis clues us in to the kind of character exchange taking place, an exchange that becomes increasingly strained as the style becomes more overt. It is when Terry confronts Jack that the visual style almost takes over the scene and causes the characters' actions and verbal exchanges to become subservient to the film itself as a kind of parametric¹ narrative process.

The use of *film noir* is virtually textbook: low-key lighting, strange camera angles, distorted images, etc.. The back room is darker and the lighting is harsher with exposed lightbulbs creating an almost eerie atmosphere. As Terry confronts and blackmails Jack, the camera angles and frame composition change. Unlike most scenes in Jost's films this one relies on a series of distinct shots often held for one line of dialogue and then cut to another shot as a character responds. This heightens the feeling that the characters are almost subservient to the process of the *film noir* stylization rather than the story. When Jack asks if he can get Terry some dope or a painting, the image of Jack is a "choker" shot, an old *film noir* standby where the camera, using a wide-angle lens, gets so close to the character that the character's features become distorted. A light has also been placed behind Jack's head to create a high contrast image. The crowning shot of the scene is when Terry takes Jack's gun as blackmail. Terry has just insisted that Jack give Terry the money Jack owes which is followed by a reaction (and choker)

¹ Parametric narration is the process by which style becomes the most significant element of the film. Other elements become subservient to the style which "creates patterns *distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system*" (Bordwell 1985, 275).

shot of Jack. Jack looks down as though he is beat and the camera slowly tilts down following his gaze to a table in front of him. This is where the gun is resting. As we see the gun we hear a single ominous piano chord and we see Terry's hand grasp the gun as he says, "Collateral." The camera does not stop here. It continues to tilt until it is upside down as it follows the gun up to Terry's face. The use of this shot creates a sense of imbalance and disorientation and the inclusion of the gun comes as a shock as well as heightening the tension and upping the stakes for Jack. However, the fact that Jack has made forgeries before and owes Terry six hundred dollars keeps him from being an innocent victim. This kind of character development, along with the unusual frame composition, low-key lighting, unusual camera movements and dialogue produce a decidedly *film noir* atmosphere.

However, more is happening in this scene. Although many elements of *film noir* aesthetic principles are present this scene in particular, the film as a whole is not truly *film noir*. Once we move beyond the first scene the film takes on a different feeling -- one that uses a variety of film styles in a manner similar to Last Chants. The first scene itself also moves beyond *film noir* by using that style in a somewhat heavy handed manner. The best way to describe the first scene may be to refer to films such as Godard's Une Femme est une Femme. In Godard's film there is a direct contradiction -- a "neo-realist musical" as he called it. And yet this kind of clashing contradiction is not exactly what is happening in Chameleon, for the apparent story of the film aligns with the style more closely than in Une Femme est une Femme. What is happening is a combination of style and content in such a way as to be the right combination but turned melodramatic, even to the point of being

humorous. More precisely, it is as though a particular style has suddenly been imposed upon the characters and the camera so that the narrative has now become about characters acting out a *film noir* world -- one character reluctantly (Jack) and the other precisely to his own benefit (Terry). The question that arises from this observation is, Why?

Cinema As Cinema

What purpose, if not for purely comic or parodic reasons, is there in foregrounding the style to such an extent that it takes over the film and reduces the characters to pawns? The answer lies in understanding Chameleon in the light of Jost's "project" and the general project of other similar filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard. We well know that in all of Godard's films, "The director constantly reminds the spectator that he is not watching life but a spectacle" (Whyte 9). This is also true with all of Jost's films, including Chameleon, and one reason why it can be fruitful to view Jost in the light of Godard. We must also view Chameleon in light of Jost's other films, namely Speaking Directly. In Speaking Directly Jost, on his way to making the connection between his ability to make a film and the war in Vietnam, discusses the relationship between the audience and the film, including the necessary conventions required to "speak." These connections include common narrative principles of plot construction, story subject matter, special effects, and everything else modern audiences have come to expect from the cinema experience. As Jost points out, many of these conventions are damaging to us for they hide the true nature of things, a nature that is wrought through human action and suffering. If we apply

these ideas to Chameleon we will be led in primarily three directions. The first is "outside" the film, related to the larger forces within a capitalistic society including the specific forces and restrictions in and around the cinematic process (more specifically those in and around Chameleon). Second we are led to consider the "surface" of the film itself and how it challenges the dominant conventions of film/audience relationships. Finally we are led directly back to Jack within the world of the film and his struggle to survive economically and, by the end of the film, physically.

Outside

The so-called "outside" of the film is a tricky place because we never truly see it in the film. But it is a helpful category as it brings us back to ourselves before the film and the film before us. In other words, the outside directly includes the audience as well as the means of production. In Speaking Directly the "outside" world of the film has already been discussed. To put it simply, according to Jost, one significant aspect of Western societies consists of huge corporations and huge governments controlling huge systems (capitalist-industrial-military-etc.) on the one hand and real human beings and their lived experiences on the other. These two worlds are constantly mediated in such a manner as to hide the true nature of both. Inherent within Western societies are some vast and penetrating contradictions, not least of which is this veiling of truth. For Jost these contradictions are located within the concept of being an American (specifically a U.S. citizen) by definition. On the one hand being an American (in this context) means living on soil that is geographically U.S. and living in

relation to people who also live on the same soil. On the other hand, being a U.S. citizen is seen in light of ideological and political reasons. It is the ideological and political which ultimately situates Jost within structures that govern the making of his films (the exploitation of resources and humans to produce the materials needed to make such a film) and ultimately lead to links with horrible human suffering in the name "American" (as expressed through the Vietnam war and other atrocities). But we can get more specific than this. As we begin to see Chameleon as a made object we are led to see it as a product of labor and limited resources. In both Speaking Directly and Last Chants we are told how much each film cost to make in dollars. The dollar amounts are so low it seems a miracle these films were made at all. Because Chameleon has the same "feel" to it as Jost's other films we should assume that Chameleon was made according to, and within, the same restrictions of budget. This kind of economic restriction (the simplest kind) drastically limits the filmmaker in terms of production capabilities and distribution possibilities which can and usually do remove such films from the mainstream bourgeois market, leaving only the art-house market (increasingly bourgeois) and the showings at a university campus or no showing at all. Thus, by seeing the film as a made object, we, as an audience, are made much more aware of our unusual position, namely we are among those rare few who would ever see the film at all.

Surface

The processes or place which a narrative film encourages us to see it as a made object circulating, albeit limitedly, in the world is what we might refer

to as the film's *surface*. It is here we may posit a mediated movement between the character's struggles within the film (namely Jack's) and the struggles of the film's maker (Jost). We should, however, be cautious about dividing a film up into different distinct elements claiming "content over there and style over there", etc.. As Godard has said, style is merely the outside of content and content the inside of style (Roud 13). We may wish to separate them for the sake of argument, but in reality they are inseparable. (Within the usage of this essay *content* refers more directly to the "world of the work" than to a particular "meaning.") When we speak of the surface of the film we are largely talking about the relationship between what is presented and how it is presented, where the "surface" is the how, but is concretely linked to the what, and vice versa. Or, in other words, we may describe the surface as the objective nature of the plot where it no longer becomes confused with the story. As Jost says in Speaking Directly, those structural forces which give rise to the surface refer to the "forms by which we speak with one another" and to "conventions" -- "some of these are necessary... But some of these conventions are unnecessary, and not only that, they are damaging to us." In essence what Jost is trying to uncover are the truths veiled behind the cinematic commitment to realism and all that is associated with realism. In the case of cinema it is what Godard in Vent d'Est attacks as "the bourgeois concept of representation." In more typical films the content is sealed off from any world beyond itself because the surface of the film is a carefully calculated construct designed to be as seamless and smooth as possible.

We should note that the act of making a seamless and closed film is as much the doings of the film's audience as it is the filmmaker; in fact, it precludes the filmmaker's actions. Realism in cinema comes as much from audience demands as it does from any kind of advertising or marketing ploy. Marx has written, "Consumption produces production... because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed" (Marx 91). So it is with styles and genres, heroes and heroines, villains and scapegoats. So it is with bourgeois cinema. There is a regularity in such production (sometimes called standards) and consequently a correlative regularity of consumption of those products, including artworks. Regularity is demanded by receivers so as to produce a stable universe where change is carefully calculated. Such a regularity, especially over time, will eventually create various expectations for the consumer. Bordwell has pointed out that in most synchronized sound films, shot duration is based upon the length of the spoken line; characters get their say (Bordwell 1985, 75). Over time audiences become used to this practice and come to expect it so much that breaking this "rule" may leave audiences bewildered. More significant are the expectations placed on cinema as a whole to provide an an emotional "slice of life." Western filmmakers have been very willing to make such films, thus completing (or starting?) the cycle of expectations. Thus, the outsides and surfaces of films become inseparably linked to each other.

Chameleon is not an anti-cinema film, nor is it a film that rails against the hypocrisy of Hollywood. The surface does not try to overthrow the content, rather it resides along with it, informing it, refreshing our perception. When Terry confronts Jack, the film remains fully within a

narrative context, in a relatively closed universe, in a small world of artist, dealer, and hustler. In fact the entire film remains a narrative presented in chronological order, using relatively realistic characters and realistic acting. What is different is that Chameleon does not try to hide its various processes. As with Speaking Directly and Last Chants it turns inward on itself as though it were saying "this is what I am." By doing so the film cues us to question our expectations. We begin to see the characters as fake, as actors, and the film as editing, sound, camera, etc.. And yet, we still watch the characters and follow the story. Once again we confront the content, or world of the film.

Meaning and Contrast

To see Jack's world more fully we must turn to a contrasting scene. In scene six Terry arrives at Beverly Jameson's luxurious home. The walls are made of glass which not only denotes wealth, but highly contrasts with Jack's dark windowless studio. When Beverly opens the door she and Terry hug each other. She lets him in and offers him a drink; he drinks Perrier. Both walk outside and sit in the sun. Terry picks up a tanning reflector which he holds under his chin. While they were in the house he has already offered Beverly an opportunity to purchase some "discovered" prints. These prints are (of course) the ones he has "commissioned" from Jack. While outside, Terry tells Beverly how his hairdresser told him he looked jaundiced and might have cancer. Beverly shows concern and then Terry again presents the idea of buying the prints. He is on his best behavior, telling his little story as an attempt to "soften" her up. However, she says she and her husband are into a new kind of art, *photorealism*. Not only does this new art seem to be

the latest thing, but her astrologer has confirmed her interest. Beverly would also like Terry to pick up some cocaine for her as she is having an opening reception of this "new" art and wants her guests to be happy. Terry obliges and says she can pay him later. As he leaves he gives her a necklace and says, "No stings attached."

Beverly and her husband (whom we never see) are "patrons of the arts." The contrast between her and Jack is interesting. The couple's wealth is of prime consideration, which should come as no surprise to us, but we can see that her reasons for buying art are different from what many viewers would like many to think. Just as Jack does not fit our concept of the ideal romantic artist neither does Beverly as a romantic buyer. Art is not a window into the soul for her; rather, art is fashion and investment. She is after the latest thing to show off, and her astrologer has as much or more weight in her decision making as do any aesthetic or moral considerations. In fact Terry is both Beverly's drug connection and her art connection, which produces an interesting correlation between art and drugs. Not only are the two characters' worlds incredibly similar within this film, but art is purchased as much as a kind of drug as anything else. In her world art is not marketable unless it is new and "hot," the latest avant garde thing. Therefore art is purchased by wealthy people in order to constantly reestablish their position in the world and their self-esteem. So much for Jack.

Beverly and Jack's relationship is a pessimistic version of Hegel's master and slave. In this case Jack produces for the rich but does not gain in self-knowledge nor does he put himself into an "absolute spirit." He is thus denied a chance for redemption; he is a beaten down man. Terry is the

middle man, playing off both. The differences in his relationships with Beverly and with Jack clearly show Jack's struggle. Terry threatens Jack because Jack can give Terry nothing except a product to sell to the rich. Beverly can give wealth to Terry if he can give her what she wants, if not art then drugs. But there is also a distance between Jack and Beverly that appears permanent. It seems that Beverly will never know an artist's true struggles. In this sense Chameleon makes a connection to the wider cinema going public and cinema as a whole. As long as we do not see the connections that lie behind a product (any product, but in this case, film in particular) it becomes very easy to believe the various ideologies which encourage us to see the mystical where we should see the concrete; to see religion where we should see truth; to see national pride where we should see oppression; to see the product where we should see labor.

Photorealism, Cinema Verité, Truth

Scene eight is a combination of shots at night through the windshield of Terry's car as he drives and talks to himself. These are intercut with shots of the gallery opening of Beverly's photorealism show. The driving begins with Terry talking to himself, saying, "Watch out Terry... You're not human... The muttering man's got a song for you." The gallery scene begins with a close-up of Beverly. She has an unusual expression (pained?) on her face and when she moves off screen a lifesize black and white portrait of her with the same expression is revealed hanging on a white wall. We hear applause. The camera then reveals the gallery filled with people mingling about with drinks in their hands. When we periodically come back to Terry driving his car, he

talks of being a gorilla and says other strange things. It is important to note that Terry is also at the party, where he has brought the drugs for Beverly. The gallery scene looks as though it has been shot in one long hand-held take except for the occasional cut to Terry in his car.

There is an interesting filmic process occurring. The show is of *photorealism* and the manner in which the show is being filmed is *cinema vérité*. The camera loosely follows Terry around the gallery as he talks with different people setting up deals and doing business. Being hand-held the camera creates the feel of "being there" and capturing the moment. The acting is also naturalistic, probably achieved by improvisation. So far it would seem that the scene supports the claims of the exhibit by being true to nature or reality, a kind of cinemarealism of photorealism. But this is not the case for two reasons, the first being the placement of a *cinema vérité* camera style in the midst of a film that is not wholly of this style and the second is in light of Jost's other films or his "project."

We must see this scene within the context of the entire film. As we have witnessed, the opening scene plays with a *film noir* style. Other scenes rely on a more *art cinema* narrative style, delaying our understanding until well into the scene. Some are more conventionally constructed. Placing a *cinema vérité* style in the midst of the film does not produce a typical *cinema vérité* effect; rather, it merely intensifies the foregrounding of the filmic artifice. This is further enhanced by the inclusion, necessarily, of the main characters (Terry, Beverly, Vince, Jack, Annie) in the scene. We have already come to view them as characters created by actors and thus the *cinema vérité* style is at odds with what we know to be true. We can also see that the images

of Beverly cannot truly reveal her true nature. It is still a mere facade. Similarly we find a contrast to the shots of Terry driving his car. As he drives, he rants and raves in a humorous but ultimately disturbed psychological diatribe. *Photorealism* is unable to capture this level of human existence and thus falls far short of its apparent claims. In order for *photorealism* to truly work it needs an audience to believe in it. Beverly certainly believes in *photorealism*, yet the fact it is *her* photograph on the walls probably influenced her investment.

Second is the the use of this style in light of Jost's other films. Chameleon is very similar to Last Chants regarding realism. Throughout Last Chants there is a tremendous tension between realism as a style and realism as an ideological construct. In Chameleon we also have this tension. It is created by the juxtaposition of different styles in relation to the story. The different styles do not allow the audience to become planted firmly in a coherent world; rather at every turn they are confronted with new ways of looking at the story. The audience must shift their interpretive skills and expectations throughout the film and thus they are continually drawn back to the film as a construct rather than as a window onto the world. Clearly this "drawing back" is what Speaking Directly encourages in a more overt manner, but the process is wholly present within Last Chants and Chameleon as well. The questioning of our position as audience in front of a physically constructed object is a large part of Jost's project. In light of this, we can see his including the exhibit of *photorealism* as a kind of joke.

This "latest" thing called *photorealism* is used in the film as part of the commentary on Beverly and her wealthy position in society. In a new sense,

it is now being used as a kind of inside joke about the nature of art, the nature of audience expectations, and the empiricist strain in philosophy. There is a double articulation of this tension present within the film. The first is the already mentioned situation of the film as a construct and the art present within the film (first Jack's art, now the art exhibit). Art is made. This is clear. A gallery show or exhibit is where art is often first viewed. In an ideal world this is also where it magically appears for the rich to purchase. However, in the art dealer's world, it is merely the site of purchase. The struggle behind this sight is cleverly diffused in a cloud of romantic ideologies. The second articulation is the Hume/Kant split, or in other words, the passive/active perceiver division. We know the film is a physical construct, but we must also see the film as a construct made by the viewer as well. Certainly there is something there on the screen with its own distinctive traits; to deny this is to fall into a simplistic and useless relativism. However, our willingness to see the film either as something that has been made or as something that is a magical window on reality is as much a construct as is the film. Simply put, our ability to understand a film as a product has a much to do with seeing the film as being made by somebody for some purpose.

The Bottom Line

In scene ten, the last scene, Vince and Terry once again show up at Jack's studio. This time it is to pick up the silk-screen prints. At the studio is also a friend of Jack's, Nick, a construction worker from Philadelphia. Vince stays in the outer room with Nick as Terry and Jack go into the back room to

make the exchange. Jack says he does not want Nick to know what has been going on so he would like Terry to just take the prints and go. He hands Terry a tube with the prints rolled up inside and says Terry can pay him later. Terry is suspicious and decides to look at the prints. When he pulls them out of the tube they turn out to be blank sheets of paper. Terry asks if this is some kind of joke, and Jack says he told Terry he was not going to do the prints but Terry pushed him too far. Jack says, "Look, my life is color, form, the shape of things. You pushed me. You took my gun but I meant it." Terry takes Jack's gun and beats up Jack and after threatening Nick with the gun leaves the studio with Vince.

The film has come full circle. Jack lies on his studio floor left for dead, surrounded by broken paint jars. Again the style moves beyond *film noir* with its overly stylized presentation similar to scene one. Jack said his life is color, form, and the shape of things. When Terry beats him up we do not see the action; rather we are shown Terry tipping over a paint jar with his foot. Then we see a series of abstract colored images that are both beautiful and violent. Finally we see Jack lying on the floor surrounded by spilled paint and broken jars as Terry picks up his hat and walks out. It is as though Jack's life has flashed before his eyes in all the forms, shapes, and colors that he mentioned earlier. Noting the stylization of this episode is important, but more is happening here. From the first image of the film onward we have seen Chameleon as an exploration of what art and being an artist is. The bottom line is something decidedly other than the romantic notion of artist as someone outside of society and art as some kind of prophetic catharsis beneficent to the society which it criticizes. In fact the world of the artist is

much more than form, shape, and color. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Jack believes (or at least calls upon) this romantic notion, placing himself above the basic necessities of the art market. He says he hates the game others play; he despises Vince for not selling his works, he hates the gallery exhibits, and he tries to protect himself from Terry by saying his life is art. The degree to which we understand Jack's marginalization as an artist may not be the same as he understands it. Ultimately reality strikes him down and shows him the truth. This is not to say that reality is good. What is important is to see it as reality rather than believe it to be other than what it is.

Chameleon is a tragedy in regard to its story. However, it is a triumph if we see it as more than merely a story. With Speaking Directly Jost presented a series of connections between himself, the world he lives in, the film he has made, being a U.S. citizen, and the war in Vietnam. At the end he stated that the true power of the film, its political power, lies not with the film, but with us the audience. The more it is able to mobilize, the more we allow ourselves to be mobilized, the greater the film. If we see the connection he makes between making such a film and the war in Vietnam, then we have begun to understand the true nature of cinema. In Last Chants Jost takes on the realist aesthetic by both presenting an incredible realism while undercutting that realism throughout the film. Now in Chameleon Jost has both presented the difficulties of being an artist within the world of the film and encouraged us to see the film as an art object by undercutting the various stylistic choices under which the characters act out their roles. This double process of foregrounding and connecting the film's surface with its content

confirms the achievements of Speaking Directly, with its didactic impulses, and Last Chants, with its narrative impulses.

Conclusion

In and of themselves color, shape, form are flimsy shields against the market's onslaught. For Jack they are hopelessly inadequate against Terry and Vince. There is no truth in them, neither is there truth in what is made of them. In relation to cinema, but applicable to any art form, Peter Wollen has stated:

The cinema cannot show the truth, or reveal it, because the truth is not out there in the real world, waiting to be photographed. What the cinema can do is produce meanings, and meanings can only be plotted not in relation to some abstract yardstick or criterion of truth but in relation to other meanings. (Wollen 129)

For Chameleon then the project has not been to show what is manifestly true about the world but to mobilize meanings. By incorporating classical narrative styles and genres it is a film that can posit meanings directly contrasting with those classical norms. In this way Chameleon is a film that does not deny or destroy cinema, as countercinema, rather it proposes alternatives. These alternatives do not spring merely from the contrasting of styles but also by examining the very processes of artistic creation in such a way as to make connections normally denied by classical film narrative.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

But no painting of value is about appearances: it is about a totality of which the visible is no more than a code.
(Berger 202)

Through our examination of three films we have seen that there are several issues at stake, not least of these is the artist's position within our culture. In the final analysis, what may be of most significance is the audience's position. At the end of Speaking Directly Jost explains that film's power must reside in the audience -- what the audience takes with it and uses to transform society. Therefore, the film's totality is much more than merely the images up there on the screen; the screen is only an extremely limited and already politicized site of exchange. As Jost says in Speaking Directly, our ability to see what a film is and hence what an audience is becomes very difficult. We are in a theater because we bring too much baggage with us. What is most amazing is our disposition toward effacing ourselves from the "picture." This process is connected to other processes like identification, suture, seamless editing, etc., but it is ultimately a political process directly linked to larger social forces. In Speaking Directly Jost states that the film equipment which surrounds him does not show what lies behind the making of the film. He states, among other things, that people worked in factories and in mines to produce raw material for his film. Filmmaking processes are

typically designed to eliminate such knowledge from view. Since people have been exploited in order for a film to be made and presented, the audience then find itself in a position of being exploiters because it now plays a part in the film's production. This complicity presents a serious problem, not only because the forces of the medium are usually aligned to keep us unaware of what we are heartily participating in but also because we pay money for that participation. Although this complicity is more explicit in Speaking Directly, we have seen an uncovering of this process in both Last Chants and Chameleon. Through Last Chants we are presented a deconstructed narrative that undermines its own realism, thus exposing our expectations of the "real." In Chameleon many of these same deconstructive elements are present. The film's story includes an artist's struggles within a larger art world to legitimately sell his prints. This important part of the story encourages us to look for human labor that is typically veiled behind the surface of art objects (and films). The value of Jost's films resides in the productive actions of the audience taking what they can from the theater and using it constructively to transform their communities. What Jost creates is more than a mere aesthetic effect designed to produce an aesthetic experience. However, as we have seen, we must also examine these film's aesthetics in order to uncover this active purpose within Jost's project.

By discussing Jost's relation to the Romantic ideal of artistic creation, we confronted not only a crucial element of Jost's work but one of the most pervasive and probably most damaging ideologies within Western culture -- that of individualism. As we have seen within these three films the artist is only one of many persons involved within the artistic process, and both that

process and the artist are situated within social and ideological processes which are much larger than the art world alone. Even in Chameleon, Jack's art world is much more than color and form. His ignorance of this plays a significant role in his downfall. Yet because of his failure the audience gains a better understanding of the true nature of artistic production. In both Speaking Directly and Last Chants we observe that what an art object (in this case the films themselves) loses in transcendence, it gains in concreteness. That concreteness is not simple. Rather it is a complex product of complex forces -- economic, social and ideological forces. And though concreteness may at times seem mundane when compared to the Romantic ideal, it is not a lie.

It is through our examination of how Jost's films deconstruct Realism that crucial elements of this artistic concreteness are unveiled. Realism is largely the product of audience expectations. Thus we face the need to understand our position before the cinema screen. Realism is where so called scientific objectivity and Romanticism meet. We come to expect that what we see is real and what is presented is all there is to see. More than this we believe that what is up there on the screen, even if it is a fantasy (what is not?), magically appears before us. The making of fantasy is removed from any context other than a Romantic vision. In Last Chants we observed these notions being attacked at every turn. Every scene and every shot evidenced the workings of others not seen but very much present; the narrative still cohered, different but present. In Speaking Directly filmmaking is placed directly on the screen in a much more didactic fashion. However, this film also concludes that what is real about the film can never be fully shown on

the screen in a tangible manner needed to produce real change -- that must come from the audience after it exits the theater. Thus a significant thread that runs through and binds these films together is Jost's calling the audience out of their passivity to move them toward an activity born in the knowledge of their true situation before the screen. And that situation includes exploitation on both sides of that screen.

APPENDIX A

FILMOGRAPHY

- 1964 City (short)
- 1967 Leah, Traps (shorts)
- 1968 13 Fragments & 3 Narratives from Life (short)
- 1969 Susannah's Film (short)
- 1970 Fall Creek, Flower (shorts)
- 1971 Primaries, A Turning Point in Lunatic China, 1,2,3, Four, Canyon (shorts)
- 1972 A Man is More Than the Sum of His Parts/A Woman is
(short)
- 1974 Speaking Directly: Some American Notes (feature)
- 1977 Beauty Sells Best (short), Angel City, Last Chants for a Slow Dance(Dead End) (features)
- 1978 Chameleon (feature)
- 1980 X2, Two Dances by Nancy Karp, Lampenfieber, Godard
(shorts)
- 1981 Stagefright (feature)
- 1983 Slow Moves (feature)
- 1986 Bell Diamond (feature)
- 1987 Plain Talk & Common Sense (Uncommon Senses) (feature)
- 1988 Rembrandt Laughing (feature)
- 1990 All the Vermeers in New York, Sure Fire (features)

APPENDIX B

CHAMELEON: SCENE SYNOPSIS

(1) In Jack's studio where he produces silk-screen prints. Vince, an art buyer/dealer, and Terry, our main character, have come to see Jack. Vince proposes (to Jack) that Jack should make some forged prints to sell in Vince's gallery. Jack becomes very upset and turns to Terry. He says that he does not do that kind of work anymore. Terry takes Jack aside and eventually blackmails Jack by both reminding Jack about some money he still owes Terry and by taking Jack's pistol which is a collector's item. Jack says he will do the prints. Vince and Terry leave the studio. Jack remains quietly in the studio and pulls out a partially empty bottle of booze.

The camera work and the dialogue become increasingly stylized the closer we get to Jack being blackmailed. The shots look very *film noir* (to an almost comic extent) and the dialogue becomes more stilted and made of heavy one-liners. The lighting is natural and low-key rather than naturalistic and the audio quality is "impure" rather than clean and controlled. This impure audio is a combination of classical techniques, such as dubbing and layering, but is used to create the effect of an unmixed, single mic kind of effect. Clearly this is due in part to the use of only one mic sometimes. Purity of sound is a created phenomenon rather than a truly natural one.

This scene includes both exposition and the inciting action. We learn about Jack; he is an artist; he is hurting for money; he has done forgeries before; he has past dealings with Terry (who he owes \$600.00); he has a conscience; he drinks. The blackmailing tells us something about the nature of Terry as well as being the inciting action (or the disturbance on the previously un-disturbed stage).

(2) Terry and Vince talk outside on the sidewalk. Vince is worried about Jack doing the forgeries. He says he could smell booze on Jack. Terry tells Vince it will work out fine. Vince mentions to Terry that Beverly Jameson (who lives on Quail Drive) is in the market for some cocaine and might be interested in purchasing some of the work they are trying to get Jack to produce. Vince would like Terry to go and see her and maybe "Kill two birds with one stone,

or maybe three." They laugh. Terry gets into his car and drives away. Vince walks away from the camera and two joggers run by on the street.

The location looks like Los Angeles. The shot is one take, unlike the overtly edited Scene One. Audio quality is again impure rather than clean and carefully mixed.

(3) Terry drives his car through a section of Los Angeles (we assume). As he drives he listens to a tape recorder that sits on the dashboard of the the car. The tape is of Terry casually talking about the many things he has to do and the many people he must meet. Essentially this is his "day planner."

The camera is very obviously hand-held by the operator who must be sitting in the passenger seat of the car. The audio is again untraditional and impure in tone. Of note is the very long duration of this scene which is one take.

We learn about Terry. He has a network of "contacts" who he keeps juggling to his financial interest; he is a hustler. From the tape we learn that he reads bit of popular books in order to have interesting things to say to the various people he deals with.

(4) Terry meets Annie, an old friend who he has not seen in ten years, on a hilltop overlooking the city. He gives her a necklace and she gives him a little lizard that she had just caught; she says "Two of a kind." They talk about what has happened in their lives. Terry says very little about himself. Annie tells of her ex-boyfriend who "flipped out" over their breakup, went to Vietnam, and got himself killed. They talk about the time when they rehearsed their planned robbery of a large bank in her very small apartment. Finally they spontaneously sing an old song about being crooks and being fake, not real, etc.. Terry leaves because he has things to do.

This scene is in one very long take. The camera is hand-held and follows the characters around. The lighting is natural sunlight and looks very beautiful as though it were late afternoon. The audio in not only unmixed, as in the other scenes, but it appears as though there was only one mic (probably a radio-controlled lavalier) which was placed on Annie. Thus, when the two of them are together they sound fine, but when they are apart we can still hear Annie very loud and clear, but Terry becomes very faint. We can also hear the sound of traffic and airplanes which may have been added in later or

captured "naturally." At the end of the scene the two of them hug and we can hear their hearts beating.

The only obvious purpose for this scene is exposition. We learn that Terry has been a crook or hustler (or at least had leanings in that direction) for a long time. If we had not guessed by now that Terry was the chameleon of the title, we certainly know it after Annie gives him the lizard.

(5) The scene opens with a shot that looks mysterious. In fact, it is a shot of the road from the front of a moving car, but it is shot upside down which produces the mystery. We hear Terry's voice talking to himself again, but this time it is as though we are hearing his thoughts rather than the tape recorder. His voice has obviously been dubbed. He talks of keeping the "rules" in mind. What those rules are we do not know exactly. He talks of keeping a low profile; "flash the cash, cash the flash... all a flip of the coin... what's next?... morals... why do I say scam when I mean scan?... keep both eyes moving...."

As Terry talks the camera, which is mounted on the front of his car and is looking upside down at the road, begins to slowly tilt upwards. We see large palm trees (upside down) lining the side of the road, sunny blue sky, and eventually Terry through the front windshield of his car. The shot ends as being right-side up and is shot in a single take.

(6) Terry arrives at Beverly Jameson's luxurious house. First shot from the interior. Beverly opens the door and Terry enters; they hug and walk to the living room. Terry says he likes what she has done to the house: "Oh I see, it's no longer too too, it's très très." He is on his best and most charming behavior. He presents to her the availability of some silk-screen prints he "discovered" in San Francisco. She gets him a drink (Perrier for him) and they go sit outside in the sun. Terry tells her a story about how he thought he might have had cancer then he presents again the silk-screen. She says she admires Vince's taste, but she and Max (her husband) are into the latest thing: *photorealism*. Even her astrologer said it is the right move. She offers him some cocaine and he cuts it on a round piece of glass. She asks Terry if he can get some very good coke for her gallery opening the next evening. He says sure, no problem, no need of payment in advance. She has to go so Terry leaves. He gives Beverly a necklace at the front door on his way out.

Camera movement is smooth and fluid, often tracking the characters as they slowly walk down the hallways of the house. During the cocaine section the camera's iris seems to gradually open up to give the shot an almost ethereal and heavenly quality.

The sound quality is rougher than classical film, but it does not have the same roughness that the previous scenes contain. This may be due to the more quiet location of shooting, which might denote wealth. While the characters are outside there is the sound of birds chirping which creates an idyllic aural background, especially when compared to Jack's studio. During the cocaine shot the sound of snorting the cocaine is brought up and is probably dubbed. Also, when we see the cocaine we do not see either Terry or Beverly, thus their voices could have been easily dubbed in later. This is far cheaper than recording live.

(7) Terry, along with Louis (a new character, Afro-American), flies out to the desert to buy cocaine from Emmett. They fly in a small, four seat, single-engine Cessna. Terry sits in the back seat reading while Louis and the pilot are up front. The audio is hot and truly "natural" which, in this case, means the characters must yell to be heard in the noisy plane. Eventually the plane lands on an old runway in the desert and they meet Emmett's wife or girlfriend. They talk about Emmett's new "toy", a high-tech telescope. Emmett shows up and tells them about the telescope. As he approaches the camera he becomes silhouetted against the blue sky. He says, "That is a real fucking telescope," he looks up to the sky, "and those, those are real stars." Emmett tells how he got the telescope and Terry says let's get to business. A ranger in a pickup truck drives up and Terry tells the others to get away as he handles this. The ranger says the runway was closed and it is against the law to land there. Terry smooth-talks his way out of the situation. Terry complains about the closed runway to Emmett after the ranger leaves. Cut to extreme close-up of a Clorox test (drug purity test). We hear Terry and Emmett talk about the drug deal, their voices probably dubbed in later. Emmett wants to charge more than previously arranged. Terry says he want's to show Emmett something. Cut to Terry taking Jack's gun out of his briefcase. He points the gun at the camera and as we hear a gun shot the screen goes white.

The camera tilts down to reveal Terry and Louis standing in the desert, facing the camera, naked. Several surreal images of Terry and Louis running through the desert. This part of the scene is very surrealistic and difficult to place among the other scenes.

(8) Cut to nighttime, point of view shot through the front window of a car. Terry's voice talking to himself: "Watch out Terry... You're not human... The muttering man's got a song for you...."

Cut to close-up of Beverly. She faces the camera with a pained(?) look on her face. She moves off screen to reveal a similar, large black and white photograph on the wall behind her. We hear applause. This is the gallery scene where Beverly is hosting a showing of *photorealism*. A number of people are there, many new faces, but also Vince, Terry and Jack. Terry gives Beverly the cocaine.

The gallery show is cut back and forth with images of the nighttime driving. During the driving segments we hear Terry's voice as though he is talking to himself (or as his inner thoughts). He says various things, mostly about not being human, about being a gorilla, not knowing people, etc..

The use of camera during the gallery sequences is hand-held and acts like a person wandering around the show. The audio does not always match the visuals as though someone is walking around with the camera and another is walking around with the mic and they occasionally record the same thing. Sometimes the voices are of Terry or others talking and the camera wanders from them and back again.

The show seems to consist of only four photographs, all the same, one on each wall. No one seems to be looking at the photos.

(9) This a very surrealistic scene where Terry, against a black background, wanders in front of the camera talking to himself as though he were in a nightmare. He talks about hypnotizing himself so he can be any person or thing he wanted to be. He also smears red paint on his chest and blue paint on his face. At the end he is raving about opening up the window and seeing the world with all its wonderful things.

Lighting is high key with one light directly on each side of Terry. At times he steps back and almost disappears into the blackness.

(10) Terry and Vince show up at Jack's studio to pick up the prints mentioned in scene one. Terry asks if Jack finished the prints. Jack says yes. Vince asks Jack how he liked the party (gallery show). "The party? Bullshit and small

talk." Vince says it's a game. "Your game." Jack introduces Nick, his friend from Pittsburgh, to Vince and Terry. Vince talks with Nick as Terry and Jack go into the back room to do business. Jack tells Terry that he does not want Nick to know about the forgeries. He says that Terry can pay him later and he wants Terry to take the prints and leave. Terry insists on seeing the prints and unrolls them. They are only blank sheets of paper. He asks if this is a joke. Jack says he wasn't going to do it and he meant it, "Look, my life is color, form, the shape of things. You pushed me, you took my gun, but I meant it." Terry says he wants his money now. Jack says that he will have to wait. Terry asks where the gun is. He finds it and then he beats up Jack, threatens Nick with the gun, who came running in, and leaves quickly with Vince.

During the business sequence the lighting and use of camera is *film noirish*. The camera does some unusually tilts and pans. The violence is reduced to images of broken jars of colored paint and a final image of Jack lying on the floor surrounded by these jars.

Cut to black.

Closing title: *Curtains*

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