

CHAPTER ONE



The Phantom of the Cinema: Representation of Character in the Modern Film

DERSHOWITZ: "You're a very strange man."

VON BULOW: "You have no idea."

—*Reversal of Fortune*

"CLOSER TO LIFE"

The history of literary criticism in the western world may be said to have originated in an ongoing debate over the value of representation, between Plato's mistrust of mimesis as intrinsically deceptive, emotionally disturbing, and morally misleading and Aristotle's description of the same process as serious, orderly, and cathartic. In our own times, the most influential theorists—followers of Brecht, the New Critics, and Barthes, for example—have extended the Platonic attack on representation, repeatedly questioning the merits of the reader's identification with characters as if they were real and not textual effects of the plot. Critics who have persisted in treating fictional characters as representative persons have often been rather summarily consigned to a category formerly reserved for Shakespeare's groundlings and the popcorn-chewing habitués of drive-in movies: members of a *naïve* audience.

Viewed historically, the successive attempts of Russian formalists, New Critics, structuralists, and poststructuralists to objectify the study of narrative by excluding the intentionality and personality of authors on the one hand and the emotional and imaginative responses of readers on the other seems to parallel a development in post-Romantic art towards the creation of authorless texts. There is hardly space here to survey the case against characters; readers of this book will no doubt be familiar with its outlines. Briefly stated, the argument emphasizes the synthetic aspect of all narrative, thus the inevitable artificiality of characters. From different perspectives, Brecht and Barthes (one might as readily have cited Propp and Culler—the list of prominent narratologists who denigrate characterization is hardly limited) have described characters as products of the plot, serving as its agents. “Character is a construction of the text,” film theorist Edward Branigan has summarized the structuralist position, “not *a priori* and autonomous” (12). Rather than being analogous to real persons, characters are best understood as *conventions*, narrative elements attached to proper names and more like metaphors or chapter titles than people we might meet in everyday life.

At first glance, the cinema would appear to be less vulnerable than literary fiction to the structuralist/semiotics critique of representation—though perhaps more susceptible to the Brechtian/ideological analysis—if only because its sign is more closely related to its referent. Beginning with the introduction of photography, the automatic aspect of the production of images satisfied a long-held wish of representational art to “escape subjectivity” (Cavell 21). According to Jean-Louis Baudry, the invention of the cinematic apparatus fulfilled a dream “to construct a simulation machine capable of offering the subject perceptions which are really representations mistaken for perceptions” (705). Recent scholars like Gregory Currie, however, have challenged Baudry’s premise for the “ideological effects” of the apparatus, re-opening the possibilities for a neo-mimetic theoretical approach by arguing against the notion that film “is typically productive of any cognitive illusion to the effect that what it represents is real; our standard mode of engagement with the film is via imagination rather than belief But while the pictures of film are not productive of illusions, they are typically realistic pictures: pictures which are like, in significant ways, the things they represent” (280). Murray Smith has sensibly summarized this critique of Baudry’s reception theory: “Indeed, praising something for its ‘realism’ depends implicitly on

recognizing that it is not of the same order as the thing imitated, that an effort of construction was necessary to produce the effect. In other words, that it is conventional" (*Characters* 33). Aside from the fact that no serious critic has ever argued that film characters are real, it seems at least reasonable to consider a movie character as a "possible person"—the view that will be taken here—when she is represented by a real person, or, more properly, the image of a real person formed by light reflecting off a real performer and reacting with a chemical emulsion. While the novel *strains*, in other words, to represent an action, setting, or character, the fiction film seems to come by such mimetic effects quite naturally. In fact, the very autonomous quality of the cinematic image may account for the relatively slow advance of a sophisticated film theory, as Christian Metz has suggested, since movies are usually difficult to talk about because they are easy to understand.

Pressed first by the invention of photography and soon after by motion pictures, modern novelists have been forced to confront the limitations of language in depicting external reality. In part as a result of cinema's ascendancy, the development of the novel in the twentieth century may be described as having shifted its concern away from complex plots towards in-depth characterization (Petruoso 10). Joseph Conrad, writing at the very moment of film's emergence as a means of popular storytelling, defined his task as an author in visual terms: "to make you *see*" (147), the same terms D. W. Griffith would later use to describe the filmmaker's art. The immediate impact of motion pictures was not lost on an author as rooted in nineteenth-century novelistic traditions as Leo Tolstoy, who, on his eightieth birthday in 1908, recognized the radical transformation the new medium would bring to narrative literature and yet celebrated its apparent fulfillment of the writer's grandest aspiration:

You will see that the little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life—in the life of writers. It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and to the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary. I have thought of that and I can feel what is coming.

But I rather like it. The swift change of scene, this blending of emotion and experience—it is much better than the heavy, long-drawn-out kind of writing to which we are accustomed. It is closer to life. In life, too, changes and transitions

flash by before our eyes, and emotions of the soul are like a hurricane. The cinema has divined the mystery of motion. And that is its greatness. (Starr 32)

In describing the ascendancy of motion pictures as the new century's preeminent narrative form, Tolstoy struck a balance between the cinema's unique representational aspect (bringing its images "closer to life") and its equally significant capacity for rendering those images as "shadowy," fleeting, and disruptive. This evanescence he also equates with being closer to life.

The cinematic signifier is neither a pure construction (a conception formed in the mind of a reader) nor an unmediated perception; thus, the reality/convention dichotomy that has been posed between theorizing characters as autonomous persons or as textual functions serves little purpose beyond setting up a straw man argument against misguided humanist critics who stand accused of confusing representations for independent agents. Baruch Hochman has proposed a modified mimetic approach to character that opposes Branigan's premise but resists the problem of reification, one that applies even more forcefully to our experience of watching films than of reading novels: "[T]here is a profound congruity between the ways in which we apprehend characters in literature, documented figures in history, and people of whom we have what we think of as direct knowledge in life" (36). The comprehension of characters in literature and film ultimately involves both textual construction and readerly reconstruction.

No definitive theory or taxonomy of character will be attempted in this study. Nearly all such efforts to date conclude, as does John Frow, that character remains "the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory" (227), a term that "cannot be reduced to exact rules or to a comprehensive statement" (229). At the same time, Rawdon Wilson decides that, in spite of its elusiveness, character is "a concept . . . that the study of literature cannot do without" (749). In light of such of such disclaimers, I am tempted to begin this study as one of my celebrated graduate school professors used to begin his lectures: by saying, "I mean by the term 'myth' what everyone else means," and be done with the problem. Instead, I will define character as *a represented person that corresponds by analogy to our understanding of personhood in real life without being confused with reality*, a term too often conflated with verisimilitude.

In most fictional narratives, as structuralists have correctly pointed out, characters, "as opposed to people in life, intrinsically mean something" (Hochman 66), wherein we may discover the most profound dissimilarity between the two realms of art and reality. Because characters consist of a more or less selective "paradigm of traits" (Chatman, *Story* 126) representing an abiding personality (at least before the advent of poststructuralism's attack on the very concept of unified personhood), they inevitably take on a thematic aspect that threatens to obscure their synthetic (formal) status at the same time it promises to enhance our pleasure in and comprehension of the text. The characters that interest me here are not those whose traits readily resolve themselves into a recognizable type—the rogue cop Dirty Harry, the amorous double agent James Bond, the blessed innocent Forrest Gump, even the complex gangster Vito Corleone—but those whose resistance to meaning becomes the dominant paradigm of their characterization. I am interested in them for two reasons: first, because they correspond more closely than the majority of representative types to my own experience encountering historical figures and personal acquaintances in real life, and secondly, because they seem to express a fundamental truth about my experience of encountering them in the movie theater.

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

While the signifier in the cinema may be, as Tolstoy noted, "closer to life" than language (upon which modern film narrative also depends) and thus perhaps better suited to convey the sensation of witnessing physical reality, early movie makers—following the example of primitive photographers¹—were quick to display the medium's capacity to manipulate, distort, and transform the material presences it recorded. Georges Méliès became the first exhibitor to exploit his audience's acceptance of the projected image as an accurate, reliable tracing of objects and events actually present before the camera. (The Lumières presumably did not calculate the frightened response to their film of a train entering the station.) When Méliès first made a person suddenly disappear in *The Vanishing Lady* (1896) and replaced her with a skeleton (Fischer 339), he discovered "the conjurer's art" that Ingmar Bergman has equated with the activity of filmmaking itself:

And even today I remind myself with childish excitement that I am really a conjurer, since cinematography is based on deception of the human eye. . . . I perform conjuring tricks with apparatus so expensive and so wonderful that any entertainer in history would have given anything to have it. (Four Screenplays 15)

Méliès's demonstration that the camera *could* lie, that it could transform an omnibus into a hearse or a woman into a cadaverous double, significantly expanded the horizons of both film production and reception. By introducing a remarkable toolbox of special effects (including slow motion, fast motion, reverse motion, freeze frame, double exposure, and process shots), Méliès became the first of many artists of the silent cinema to deconstruct what André Bazin called the audience's "faith in the image" (1:24) as an unmediated recording of reality. In addition to photography's affinity for transcribing material presence, the cinema had illustrated the potential to project an *absence* of the natural order.

Film theorists at least as far back as Arnheim have emphasized this dialectical tension in the movies. "Cinema as a photographic medium instantly poses its images and sounds as recorded phenomena, whose construction occurred in another time and another place. Yet though the figures, objects and places represented are absent from the space in which the viewing takes place, they are also (and astoundingly) present" (Ellis 38). At the same time Méliès was re-creating the effects of a seance in *L'Armoire des frères Davenport* (1902), Edwin S. Porter, a director firmly identified with the realist tradition, created a somewhat less deliberate image of the new medium's capacity to project the uncanny. The famous close-up of the outlaw shooting directly at the camera in *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) has remained so strangely compelling because it portrays in blatant terms the medium's play of presence and absence. Porter's cowboy thus becomes the first phantom of the cinema. His appearance lies outside the parameters of the narrative; indeed, he might be seen either at the very beginning or the very end of the film, depending on the exhibitor's preference. In any case, he receives no special attention within the diegesis. Through his dead-pan expression as he looks directly at the camera and fires his revolver, he both acknowledges our presence and disavows it. "The depth of the automatism of photography is to be read not alone in its mechanical production of an image of reality," Cavell has observed, "but in its mechanical defeat of our presence

to that reality. The audience in a theater can be defined as those to whom the actors are present while they are not present to the actors" (25). For Porter's original audience, this absence might be measured by the ineffectuality of the shooting gun as well as by the ambiguity of the actor's expression; for us, it is compounded by the antiquity of the image, most evident in the absence of sound. The reflexivity of this phantom character, of course, is conveyed not only by the visual pun on "shooting" but by his acknowledgment of the camera maintaining the presentness of his world by virtue of our absence.

The concept of presence of absence became central to psychoanalytic film theory after its elaboration in Christian Metz's landmark essay, "The Imaginary Signifier," which has deeply influenced my own speculations about film character. His formulation of the ontology of the cinematic image remains neither wholly original (Arnheim and Bazin having made similar observations without the psychoanalytic framework) nor definitive, but it does offer a way of synthesizing the issues of representation and identification that have proven so problematic in theoretical discussions of character.

The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary.(45)

Against the "unaccustomed perceptual wealth" of the magnified image of a cowboy firing his gun directly at the camera, one might say, there is the "unreality" of the action's total lack of consequence, given our "irreducible distance" (Ellis 58) from it. This stamp of unreality ("Every film is a fiction film," Metz argues [44]) follows from the fundamental conditions of film production and reception: the fact that during *shooting*, the actor is present before the camera when the spectator is absent, while during *projection*, only the spectator is present before the screen when the actor is absent. Ellis has described this separation in temporal as well as spatial terms, stressing the inherent historicity in film's signifying process: "The cinema image is marked by a particular half-magic feat in that it makes present something that is absent. The movement shown on the screen is passed and gone when it is called back into being as illusion" (58).

The cinema's mode of signification can be distinguished from those of the novel and the play precisely through this imaginary aspect of the film image. What is projected on the screen involves both *presentation* (unaccustomed perceptual wealth as in the size, luminosity, and detail of the photographic image²) and *withdrawal* (not simply the spectator's distance from the screen but her normally repressed knowledge of the image's unreality). Everything perceived in the movies—landscape, decor, objects, and, it will be soon argued, particularly human figures—is, in effect, a scene screened.

Noël Carroll has forcefully questioned the significance of presence/absence as an essential quality of film by arguing that neither Metz nor Ellis takes into account the fictional nature of theater, from which cinema has supposedly been distinguished. "Once we are considering the realm of fiction," Carroll writes, "it makes no sense to speak of the differences between cinema and theater in terms of what is absent to the spectator. In both fictional film and theatrical fiction, the characters are absent from the continuum of our world in the same way." Therefore, he concludes, "Shylock is no more present to the theater spectator than Fred C. Dobbs is present to the film viewer" (38). But Carroll's point holds true only for the referent (the reader's or viewer's mental construct of a particular character) rather than the signifier (the actor). The fact remains that Olivier is actually present on stage in the role of Shylock, while Bogart is not in the movie theater. "The issue of presence of absence which Metz raises has no relevance," Carroll concludes, "where what is being communicated is first and foremost fictional" (38–39). But the issue here concerns not *what* the cinema signifies, but *how* and *to what effect*. By creating a kind of nostalgia for the evanescent image at the very moment of its luminous projection, the cinema replenishes the spectator's desire to see and to know precisely what remains irreparably removed from sight.

This nostalgia for the absent object applies to thematized places (Monument Valley and the national myth of freedom) and things ("Rosebud" and the personal myth of childhood innocence), but resonates most profoundly, I would argue, when attached to characters, who remain in real life both partially hidden (character in the sense of a matrix of emotional, moral, and cognitive traits too complex ever to be entirely comprehended) and subject to change. Unlike Xanadu, the "character" that Thompson searches for in *Citizen Kane* (1941), as the newsreel ironically confirms, cannot be photographed, and who this character apparently once was

in Colorado and in the *Inquirer* office, he is no longer in Xanadu. As the modern novel in the hands of Joyce, Proust, and Faulkner turned inward to depict the psychological dimensions of character less accessible to the camera, the cinema generally sought to compensate for its alleged deficiency in representing consciousness through a variety of theatrical strategies.

CHARACTER PRESENTED

When D. W. Griffith defined the filmmaker's task in the same terms—"to make you *see*"—as Conrad had used in reference to the novelist's craft a decade earlier, he referred not to the literal act of perception whereby audiences recognized images projected on a screen as equivalent to observable objects in the real world, but to the interpretive process by which those images acquired certain moral, historical, dramatic, poetic, and psychological meanings that gave off an aura of truth. The camera had allowed us to see; the filmmaker held the power to make us believe. Most narrative films, including those of Méliès, have therefore foregrounded spectacle and continuity in order to stabilize (or "suture," in Oudart's term) the spectator's acceptance of the representational element of the images. Mainstream cinema has relied on at least five institutionalized practices through which character is conventionally constructed, that is, *given*, made present in fullness and comprehensible in relation to norms of reality and the surface of life. Generally associated with drama on the stage, these strategies for presenting character—specifying motives, clarifying nuances, effacing inconsistencies, revealing secret desires—can be categorized as follows: (1) dialogue, (2) the star system, (3) typology, (4) performance style, (5) *mise-en-scène*.

Characters in movies and plays are perhaps most obviously defined by what they say and what others say about them. To choose an exemplary screenplay centrally concerned with the problem of personal identity, the text of *Citizen Kane* (doubtlessly influenced by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as much as by Welles's own theatrical experience) offers five successive narrative perspectives that certainly accumulate rich information about the protagonist. It is not, however, a comprehensive understanding, else the reporter Thompson's ultimate disclaimer ("I don't think any word can explain a man's life") would not be necessary. Sometimes a particularly memorable or witty line can encapsulate two or more

characters at once, as in Maddie's seductive observation about Ned in *Body Heat* (1981): "You're not very smart. I like that in a man."

The presence of Kathleen Turner and William Hurt in this popular movie illustrates a second familiar means—the star system—by which films in the tradition of classical Hollywood cinema define character. Audiences identify certain traits of personality, morality, and behavior with the recurrent roles portrayed by certain well-known actors. The thematic associations of Bogart (then) and Eastwood (now) supersede the proper names Sam Spade or Harry Callahan as indicators of character within the particular movies in which these actors appear. This institutional practice is, of course, an immensely rich area for theoretical discussion and debate, but my concern here is merely to repeat the commonplace that type casting has become an established technique for filling in the gaps of a script and constructing a recognizable person.³ The star persona has proven to be an efficient vehicle for quickly delineating character and allowing the spectator to focus on setting and plot.

Following the long-established model of theatrical characterization, the cinema has employed a nearly infinite array of stereotypes enabling audiences to apprehend quickly and confidently the representative role of a given figure. Baruch Hochman has implicitly defended this narrative device by noting how "our perception of people is typological, in life as well as in literature" (46). Against the structuralist and ideological critiques of this kind of characterization, James Phelan reminds us that, "Although people may have representative significance, they typically cannot be adequately summed up by their representativeness. And the same goes for [fictional] characters" (27). Examples of filmic typology need hardly be listed here, as the topic has preoccupied countless cultural and genre studies, except to note that "character" itself has become a definable type, an identity locked into its own persistent eccentricities, as in Robin Williams's roles in *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), *The Dead Poet's Society* (1989), and *The Fisher King* (1991).

Williams's highly theatrical performance style illustrates the fourth way in which films traditionally present a comprehensible character. Through such signifiers as facial expression, gesture, and voice, actors on stage and screen offer data suggesting implicit or hidden truths about their character's personal history, motivation, or imperfectly repressed impulses, as when Brando tries on Eva Marie Saint's white glove in *On the Waterfront* (1954) or Streep inflects a Polish accent in *Sophie's Choice* (1982).

Finally, as in a novel or play, film characters become defined by their milieu: the physical surroundings, clothing, and possessions that contribute to our comprehension of who they are. Bazin celebrated the cinema's capacity for rendering different spatial areas with equal clarity through the shot-in-depth as the medium's unique means of presenting characters in relation to their environment. Framing, masking, camera angles, and montage can also serve to clarify a character's identity, as in the low-angle views of Hitler against the background of a brilliant sky in *Triumph of the Will* (1935), transforming an historical figure into a mythic one. Sherlock Holmes's rooms at 221B Baker Street, his deerstalker and meerschaum pipe, his hypodermic needle and seven-percent solution may better serve to illustrate the simple point about mise-en-scène since they reappear so prominently as signifiers of the fictional detective in stage and screen adaptations of Doyle's stories. Such details—the sled and the glass ball in *Citizen Kane* may be the most famous—function to objectify character and then to give it resonance.

CINEMATIC LOSS AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF CHARACTER

By such commonly recognized techniques as dialogue, casting, generic conventions, acting, costuming, and mise-en-scène are characters *presented* in the cinema. But how can they be, in less obvious ways, simultaneously *withdrawn*, leaving us to contemplate (at least to sense) the "certain but fugitive testimony" (Barthes, *Camera* 93) that has brought them into being? Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis (the mirror stage), Metz has posited that this withdrawal is both inevitable and vital to the cinema's appeal to the imaginary. The specific mode of cinematic signification projects a "lost object" that becomes desirable precisely because it is given only "in effigy, inaccessible from the outset, in a primordial *elsewhere*" (*Imaginary* 61). As in other forms of voyeurism, the film spectator's pleasure derives from the survival of the gap that separates her from this unpossessible image.

Our comprehension of character on the screen thus simultaneously involves a transcendence of film's imaginary signifier when we come to recognize, understand, or identify with the fictional figure as well as an implicit acknowledgment of the imaginary when that same comprehension becomes clouded, contradictory, or

entirely lost. As a result of the cinema's "pure contingency . . . it is always *something* that is represented)" (Barthes, *Camera* 28), our awareness that the camera does not lie about the fact of the actor (or body double) having once actually appeared before it, we experience that same sense of contact we feel in watching a play—or in meeting a person face-to-face; but because we also know that the film actor impersonating a fictional character is not really there on the screen, we must imagine the presence of what has only been represented in shadow and light, as we would to a much greater degree in reading a novel, where there is not even a tracing except in the mind's eye—or in recalling a person we have not seen in some time. The mirror that the cinema holds up to nature leaves us, like Melville's Ishmael gazing at the "tormenting, mild image" reflected off the water in the first chapter of *Moby Dick*, to contemplate "the ungraspable phantom of life."

Metz's discussion of the *lack* that is the source of replenished desire in the cinema needs to be broadened to encompass several other senses in which film conveys a more diffusive sense of loss. In addition to the spatial separation inscribed both by the spectator's distance from the screen and, more decisively, by the original object's retreat to "a primordial *elsewhere*," the signifying system of film involves the passing of *time* and *energy*. The first of these elements, of course, has long been noted in contrasting film from theater. Susan Sontag, for example, anticipates Ellis's emphasis by noting the inherent historicity of the cinema:

This youngest of the arts is also the most heavily burdened with memory. . . . Movies preserve the past, theatres—no matter how devoted to the classics, to old plays—can only "modernize." . . . The historical flavor of anything registered on celluloid is so vivid that practically all films older than two years or so are saturated with a kind of pathos. . . . Films age (being objects) as no theatre-event does (being always new). (Film 260)

This recognition that the projected world no longer exists by virtue of its status as a recording contradicts, or at least complicates, the "commonplace" perpetuated by Chatman that "cinema can occur only in the present time" (Story 84).

Like the debate over the status of characters, the discussion of "tense" in the cinema remains long-standing and unresolved. In most instances, the film viewer suspends disbelief in the present-

ness (as well as presence) of the image by ignoring the fact of its production at an earlier time. This psychic process especially applies to watching a film in its initial theatrical release (aided by the institution's typical strategy of avoiding specifically dated images or references), although frequently enough filmmakers deliberately evoke an awareness of the medium's ontological pastness, as when Bogdanovich shoots *The Last Picture Show* (1971) in black-and-white or when Jeanne Moreau appears as a fictional actress of faded beauty in *The Last Tycoon* (1976) and *La femme Nikita* (1990). The spectator's comprehension of Moreau's character within these films is deeply informed by recalling her younger roles during the French New Wave. Of course, this kind of nostalgia commonly affects any retrospective viewing of classical Hollywood movies (in which we view the ghostly representatives of not only fictional characters but of celebrated performers nearly all of whom are now dead) as well as canonical works like *Citizen Kane*, where we may be struck by Welles's ironic anticipation of his own career, or Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1961), where the long-held close-up of Moreau's still-beautiful reflection in the dressing mirror as she creams her face reveals the first signs of Catherine's aging, rhymes with the earlier slide image of the island statue's eroding features, and foreshadows the inevitable decay of Moreau's own screen allure (fig. 1). Similarly, if more mundanely, even contemporary commercial releases and home movies are marked by history: Demi Moore's old haircut, last summer's bathing suit. Thus, films remain time-bound in certain ways that novels and staged works generally are not.⁴ The practice of colorizing "old" movies (some made less than forty years ago) has not succeeded in bringing the images up-to-date; ironically, the pallid, uniform new colors merely make the figures seem more ghostly. Film characters may be resurrected during projection but only as spectres from the recorded past, not really there in present time as well as space. To the concept of presence of absence must be added the presence of pastness, mediating the immediacy and definition of the perceptual experience.

The third way in which the cinematic signifier inscribes a sense of loss has been less widely discussed than the spatial and temporal aspects. Quite literally, movies *unwind* through the projector, a process of self-depletion that inexorably (at least prior to the widespread home use of video playback) results in an empty final reel. The cinema, Lawrence Shaffer has reminded us, projects a world of diminishing options: "[F]ilms run backward would blossom like flowers" (6). This entropic dimension of filmic narrative



FIGURE 1. *Jules and Jim*. Courtesy Jerry Ohlinger's

lends itself to an elegiac style: transposing the dominant musical score to a minor key or muting the color scheme, shifting from rapid cutting to sequence shots. Alternatively, the sense of lost energy may also be embodied in characterization through such theatrical and literary means as the actor's decreasing physical vitality, reversion to mechanical or compulsive behavior, or recession into memory or myth. Both Welles's Kane and Truffaut's Catherine exemplify how a character may embody not only the marks of diegetic time but also come to represent the irreversible, entropic nature of the film medium itself. Incomprehensible, exquisitely crafted, or emotionally moving passages in literature can be experienced or re-experienced at our own desired pace; the reader can delay—even infinitely postpone—the ending of a powerful novel. The power of a film, by contrast, necessarily dissipates into darkness, irrecoverable once the projector's energy has been turned off. And while the theater approximates this linear progression of events beyond the viewer's control, each staged performance, as Sontag suggests, becomes different from all others, "always new," as a result of the disparate energies of both actors and audience. Stage performers can wait for the laughter or applause to subside and can further acknowledge the spectators' influence in their curtain calls. Film, more like music, moves on despite the audience's desires.

REFLEXIVITY AND CHARACTER

In addition to evoking the spatial, temporal, and entropic qualities inherent in cinematic signification, many films more deliberately employ specific images or character types that suggest a relationship between the formal artifice of the movies and the equivocal nature of the characters they project. While the following assertion may be impossible to prove, it seems fair to say, for example, that a disproportionate percentage of those films that continue to attract the attention of serious viewers have been marked by the recurrence of privileged moments highlighting *mirrors* and *masks*. Less obviously than the reflexive use of movies-within-the-movie, these particular objects have served to remind us of the conditions under which all films are produced and consumed. Separated, screened from one another, filmmakers and spectators see their ideal self-conceptions as well as their darkest dreams reflected in the mirror and imperfectly concealed behind the mask.

David Bordwell warns against such "implicit" or "symptomatic" readings of a particular film's alleged reflexivity by cleverly illustrating the formulaic logic behind these interpretations, citing even his own well-known essay on *Citizen Kane* that compares the tension between reality and imagination to the cinema's historical split between the Lumières and Méliès. He concludes that "critics of all stripes have used virtually any means available to secure reflexive interpretations" and castigates "such an unconstrained extension of the concept" (Meaning 114–15). While one can readily agree that the mere presence of a mirror or mask within a movie is hardly a guarantee of its reflexivity (the *Friday the 13th* cycle immediately comes to mind), each example must be judged on its own merits. Surely Bordwell does not wish to confine the application of the concept to those relatively few movies whose diegetic world or explicit reference reflects the institution of film production and reception. In most cases cited here, the reflexive allusion seems intentional on the part of the filmmaker; in some instances, however, the connection may lie solely with the spectator trying to bring to consciousness the source of the image's suggestive effect.

Mirrors have been employed in countless commercial movies (*Lady from Shanghai*, *The Gambler*, all of the versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) as well as art films (*Citizen Kane*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Persona*, *Paris, Texas*) to reflect the deceptive, artificial, and imaginary aspects of human identity and cinematic representation alike. Beyond foregrounding the figure of presence/absence previously described, such moments of mirror gazing seem to serve one of two purposes in relation to the film's protagonist: either to complicate our understanding of character through contemplating the double of an already ambiguous character or to confound our effort by presenting only the surface image of an irrevocably unknowable self. The depiction of Moreau's Catherine cited earlier may serve as an illustration of the first type, her face simultaneously immortal and time-bound, inviolate and "très pathétique," as Albert describes the slide of a sculpted woman displayed immediately before the statue Catherine is thought to resemble.

Another stunning representation of modern cinema's deconstruction of the notion of a coherent, integrated self may be found in the mirror shot that climaxes von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane* (1982), a moment that also evokes the spectator's pursuit of the imaginary signifier. The journalist who, like Thompson in *Citizen Kane*, has become the spectator's diegetic surrogate in seeking

knowledge about her terrorist sister, comes to visit Marianne in prison for what proves to be the last time. The scene's establishing shot configures the interview room as a movie theater: Juliane enters and takes her seat before a large rectangular window behind which the prisoner and her guards are carefully arranged. Following a sharply defined medium profile shot of Juliane, von Trotta cuts to an extraordinary close-up of Marianne, her face apparently distorted by the thick glass. "Your face is all blurred. I can't see it properly," her sister complains. Then through a subtle pan and Juliane's slight leaning to get a better view, the shot changes to two faces, revealing that we have been looking at Julie's reflection precisely superimposed on Marianne's face.⁵ A new comprehension of the relation between these two apparently opposed sisters becomes clear: they are inextricably linked, twins in the deepest sense. Our recognition of presence/absence in this epiphany is immediately compounded by the failure of the microphone the sisters have been using to communicate, temporarily silencing Marianne's voice as the corrupt prison officials will soon permanently silence her. In the film's rather long denouement, Juliane will spend her life relentlessly yet fruitlessly pursuing the phantom double that has eluded her investigation.

Another kind of mirror shot can have precisely the opposite effect: to remind us of the cinema's status as a potentially empty signifier by revealing not a new meaning but simply another *image*. That is the interpretation most commentators have ascribed to the famous long shot of Kane infinitely duplicated in Xanadu's giant hallway mirror. A similar kind of pseudo-epiphany occurs at the end of Reisz's *The Gambler* (1974) when Axel Fried, bleeding from a stab wound across his face, glimpses his cloudy reflection in a Harlem hotel's mirror. The final freeze frame reveals nothing new about his character beyond confirmation of the pimp's frightened description of him moments earlier: "Mother fucker's crazy!" The mirror shots of Jake La Motta staring at his own image in *Raging Bull* (1980) may be even less definitive, expressing only the mystery he, like Travis Bickle in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), has become to himself.

In a similar manner, masks can be made to project a disproportionately disturbing effect on audiences, even in genre pictures like *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979) or *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974), as well as in dozens of slasher movies in which their use is almost certainly not consciously reflexive. Nevertheless, the mask, more than any other object, does represent the cin-

ema's unique *fort/da* appeal to the imaginary. When, in *Escape from Alcatraz*, we are startled by the papier-mâché head that rolls off the dummy the fleeing prisoner Frank Morris has left behind in his cell, it may be because the mask has replaced the face that had masked the character hidden behind it—Eastwood's famously impassive face, the actor himself a stand-in for the character now being impersonated on the screen by a two-dimensional image (fig. 2). In this singular case, all three figures—the actor, the prisoner in the diegesis, and the real Frank Morris—have been projected as fleeting: the first absent from the movie theater (leaving behind only his image), the second from the prison (leaving behind only his manufactured effigy), and the third from history (Frank's body, the movie's closing title informs us, having never been found).

This kind of "symptomatic" reading may send chills down David Bordwell's spine, but it seems at least as useful as invoking a cognitive schema to suggest how such an otherwise banal image haunts our memory of this generic text.⁶ How else are we to explain the disturbing effect of such scenes as the one midway through Zinnemann's *The Day of the Jackal* (1973) when the sniper practicing to assassinate de Gaulle aims at a painted watermelon hanging from a distant tree? This sequence, in fact, may be studied in detail as a paradigm of the cinema's particular mode of representation at the same time that it conjures up the mystery of human identity.

THE TARGET PRACTICE SEQUENCE IN *THE DAY OF THE JACKAL*

Like the more frequently discussed silent scene in Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966) in which the photographer studies a succession of his enlargements, this sequence serves as the pivot on which Zinnemann's movie turns as well as the moment that most viewers are certain to remember. Both sections seem to lift the narratives at mid-point to another, more philosophical level by alluding to the phantom aspect of character and, by extension, the imaginary realm of the cinema itself. In *The Day of the Jackal*, the sequence begins when the would-be assassin, known as the Jackal (Edward Fox), takes his specially designed rifle to a bucolic meadow to fine tune the scope. Frederick Forsyth's original depiction of the scene in his novel—four pages in which the Jackal changes his clothes, paints the top and bottom of the melon brown and the center pink before adding the cartoon face, then fires nine shots before loading



FIGURE 2. *Escape from Alcatraz*

the explosive bullet—lacks both the intensity and formal virtuosity of the film.

Consisting of seventeen shots in 135 seconds, Zinnemann's tour de force serves most obviously to anticipate the intended result of the conspirators' plot and to define the cold-hearted precision of the professional assassin. In terms of narrative trajectory, it both culminates the Jackal's various preparations and initiates the execution of his plans; moreover, as a rehearsal for the film's aborted climax, it satisfies the audience's desire to see, at least in symbolic form, the ultimate act of violence denied in this case by history. In addition to these diegetic functions, the target practice sequence also works in intertextual and reflexive ways to fix our attention on a lost object destroyed before our eyes.

The framing long shots that begin and end the sequence may be used to measure the dimensions of the Jackal's disruption of the natural order. Shot #1 establishes the picturesque landscape, the tree centered at the vanishing point of a perfectly balanced composition (fig. 3). Shot #17 is a reverse long shot, the melon hanging in front of the camera in the upper part of the frame, then exploding in a burst of red as the test bullet finds its target, destroying the fruit of this lost paradise (fig. 4). The shocking impact stems in part from this violation of the harmonious visual design, which had been reinforced by the peaceful chirping of birds, but also from the reverse angle, which directs the assault not simply against the melon, but against us, who have been carefully positioned in the line of fire.

The second shot, a close-up of the Jackal painting a crude face on the melon, identifies the symbolic identity of the target as Charles de Gaulle. In effect, the melon becomes a mask, one seen again through the crosshairs of the rifle scope in four successive masking shots (#s 9, 11, 13, and 15). The cartooned surface now signifies a de Gaulle who is absent from the diegetic scene, absent from the film (subsequently impersonated from long range by a virtually anonymous French actor [Adrien Cayla]), and absent from the real present (deceased two years before the film's production).

The last three masking shots in the sequence (#s 11, 13, and 15) depict the mask, shot. The stylized, generic form of this particular representation—a target carefully aligned through a rifle's telescopic sight—implies the unseen presence of a third elusive character beyond the frame: not the Jackal (who has adopted the name of a long-deceased child, Paul Oliver Duggan, and who travels on