Thinking, the Unconscious and Film

John Carvalho
Villanova University, john.carvalho@villanova.edu

Thinking, the Unconscious and Film

John Carvalho

Abstract
In this essay, we explore a non-standard model of the unconscious, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call the "productive unconscious," to correct the too-often reductive tendencies of psychoanalysis and film. This introduces the image of a form of thinking we may find in our encounters with film that aims more at pleasure-taking than problem-solving and that, in so doing, really gets us to think. Drawing on this productive unconscious, we come to a richer appreciation of classic Hollywood cinema, a new understanding of classic, *nouveau vague* and neo-realist films, and we enjoy the chance to ignore the rules and reconsider thinking in philosophy and film.

1. Introduction

Discussions of the unconscious and film generally stick to the Freudian standard. [1]Drawing on the insights of Freud's first major work, these discussions, implicitly or explicitly, present films as the projection of a dream world. [2] The experience of watching a film is taken in these discussions to be commensurate with the dreamer's dark encounter with a manifest stream of images whose latent associations and meanings are waiting for interpretation by a special, analytic technique. Of course, dreams are only one example of the unconscious and, however suggestive this model may be for the experience of watching films or for the efforts of film makers to capture the splendor of dreams on the motion picture screen, interpretations of films that bend to the authority of the orthodox Freudian standard are often redundant and doctrinaire. They thoughtlessly "uncover" a significance for the film worked out in advance by psychoanalytic theory and frequently tell us more about that theory than about the film.

This is unfortunate. Not only does it compromise our understanding of particular films and film in general; it also cheapens our understanding of the unconscious and of our thoughtful engagement with film. Even further, especially for an philosophical audience, it limits our understanding of thinking itself or, more specifically, of a kind of thinking we might otherwise enjoy in our thoughtful encounters with film. In this essay, we will explore a non-standard model of the unconscious, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call the "productive unconscious," and show how that model can inform our understanding of film in general. At the same time, we will show how this productive unconscious can lead us to consider a way of thinking that we neglect at our peril, a way of thinking that aims more at pleasure than problem- solving and that, in so doing, really gets us to think.

This interpretive strategy is not arbitrary. It is suggested, as a

corrective to the application of orthodox psychoanalytic theory to the interpretation of film, and it is recommended by the chance it affords us to clarify the "time-image," a concept created by Deleuze to distinguish post-war European film from its American counterpart. No one yet has noticed the connection between the conjunctive syntheses of the productive unconscious and this image Deleuze says certain film makers use to think. It is part of the point of this essay to argue that the difference in the way some post-war European film makers think with time-images is comparable to the difference in thought captured by the conjunctive syntheses of the productive unconscious. In both cases, we are introduced to a way of thinking that takes its pleasure from the way it is "forced" to abandon the prescribed protocols for thinking, and follow an association of ideas characteristic of the primary processes of the unconscious, the significations of a manifest content before its latent "secret" has been revealed by analysis.

In this essay, then, we will (1) outline the terms of the productive unconscious, (2) demonstrate the efficacy of the syntheses of this productive unconscious in the interpretation of parts of several different films, (3) contrast the function of an orthodox unconscious in a recent Hollywood film with the function of the productive unconscious in the interpretation of a classic New Wave film, and (4) end with some conclusions about the value of the productive unconscious for understanding what it might mean to think when, precisely, we do not know what or how to think. In this way, we will show how our experience with film, and specifically with an image of time in film, can bring us into contact with an alternative model of the unconscious and a different image of thinking than we ordinarily entertain.

2. The Productive Unconscious

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between connective, disjunctive, and conjunctive syntheses in their revisionist interpretation of what orthodox psychoanalysis ultimately reduced to the id. [3] On the standard Freudian view, the id is the source of the desires which the ego seeks to harness to satisfy the physical needs of the body, on the one hand, and the psychical needs of a stable identity, on the other. [4] On this same view, what the body wants is complicated by the censoring mechanism of the super-ego, which insists on the repression of those desires deemed detrimental to the life of the individual and the species. According to Freud, this dynamic of desire and interdiction is represented in the drama of Oedipus which structures, for the best, the phylogeny and ontogeny of human kind.

Where Freud sees a theater of desire and deferred satisfaction, however, Deleuze and Guattari see the libidinal cathexes of a productive unconscious, and where Freud sees the neurotic drama of Oedipus as inevitable, Deleuze and Guattari see the psychotic out for a walk as a point of departure for overcoming the Oedipal impasse. The psychotic does not produce desires that cannot be satisfied and must be repressed, Deleuze and Guattari say, but a "desiring production" that does not need or lack satisfaction or paranoid repression. They introduce the connective, disjunctive and

conjunctive syntheses to account for this way of putting Oedipus out of play. For Deleuze and Guattari, desiring production is an account of the unconscious as a process which advances on Freud's psychoanalytic model by incorporating the political economy of Karl Marx and the libidinal economy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In this essay we stop short of a discussion of Marx and Nietzsche and attempt, instead, to show how this model of the unconscious can alert us to a difference that happens in the way we think in certain encounters of philosophy with film.

For these syntheses to model for us a difference in the way we think in certain encounters of philosophy and film, we need to know something more about them. For the purposes of this essay, we will describe connective syntheses as the linking together of what psychoanalysis calls "partial objects" – a mouth, a breast, for example – in a chain that does not complete these objects or make them whole but that establishes a flux or flow of desire that connects them with one another and with other flows. The flow of milk in the newborn's mouth is connected to the flow of blood through his mother's breast, is connected to the flow of nutrients passing through the mother's small intestine, is connected to the flow of food through her mouth, is connected, through a chain of many more partial objects, to the flows of agriculture and animal husbandry, to the flows, ultimately, of rain and wind and sunlight on the earth that make plants grow, animals reproduce, and so on. The same flows, of course, pass in another direction from the child's mouth to his stomach and, through the digestive process, into his blood, through the processes of elimination into his bowel, through the household plumbing into a septic system, and so on, again. Of course, these seemingly singular flows connecting the wind and the rain and the sunlight on the earth through the child nursing at his mother's breast back to the earth once more are connected to many, many other flows connecting the mother to the father, the father to his own mother, the child to his siblings and to other children and their families and so forth. Connective syntheses produce links between the multiplicity of constituents in our bodies, the multiplicity of elements in the natural environment, the multiplicity of individuals imbricated in our personal lives, our social interactions, our world, the planet, the universe and whatever there may be beyond.

Disjunctive syntheses are part of the same process of production. At the level of the unconscious, the connective syntheses couple an overfullness of desire to points of discharge for desire. The mouth that connects with a breast now connects with a thumb and now, again, with a volume of air. A finger that couples with a ring and now taps on a keyboard now, again, twirls a lock of hair. The disjunctive syntheses contribute to this process by producing a surface, the so-called "Body without Organs," on which these connections are inscribed and recorded by signs that code the flows they link as belonging to eating *or* sucking *or* breathing, on the one hand, ornamentation *or* writing *or* curling, on the other. [5] But while the truth tables of bivalent logic require us to treat disjunctions as exclusive, Deleuze and Guattari would have us understand disjunctive syntheses inclusively. On this model, eating is not distinct *and exclusive from* but distinct *and included in* the process of sucking, distinct *and included in*

the act of breathing. So coded and recorded, the mouth which we ordinarily take to be a sucking machine *or* an eating machine *or* a speaking machine *or* a singing machine is not the exclusive point of passage for food *or* milk *or* language *or* music but inclusively the point of passage for all these flows. More importantly, by recording these connections, the disjunctive syntheses draw maps on which hitherto unexplored flows can be explored, defeating the tendency of desire to ossify in fixed patterns. The recording surface of the disjunctive syntheses provides an unexpected resource for the production of ever new connections (of milk and music, for example, or of eating, breathing, speaking, whistling and kissing).

Conjunctive syntheses, according to Deleuze and Guattari, bring this process of production to an end. The full implications of these syntheses would take us far from our theme. Suffice it to say, here, that the conjunctive syntheses produce the end of production in the double sense of being its final state, consumption, and its realization, consummation (as sex was once thought to consummate a marriage). According to the psychoanalytic tradition Deleuze and Guattari reject, the connection of the newborn with his mother's breast naturally leads to an exclusive disjunction of partners motivated by a heterosexual desire to reproduce more of the same, more newborns and mothers to nurse them. Deviations from this natural path are called perversions, and failures to incorporate perversions into a pattern of normal, reproductive sex are manifested as neuroses. For Freud, this is how we come to be who we are, both as individuals and as a species. Deleuze and Guattari think there is another way.

For becoming normal or neurotic (the only options in the Freudian scheme), they recommend becoming intense, a way of consummating or realizing desiring production that captures what is for them the force and preferred character of the conjunctive synthesis. The psychotic, for example, born of a mother known to all as Margaret, associates his mother, excessively and erroneously, with Mary, the mother of God, making him a god, and exempting him from reproduction and entitling him, instead, to pleasures without end, intensities that never exhaust themselves and that realize him as the divinity he is becoming. Such intensities are characteristic of what Deleuze and Guattari call the productive psychoses of the conjunctive syntheses, a form of schizophrenia they distinguish vigorously from false associations with split or multiple personality disorders, on the one hand and, on the other, from the damaging image of a devastated soul incapable of managing her or his own affairs. The voices in his head, the hallucinations before her eyes, the delusions of grandeur that occupy him are symptoms, they say, of the schizophrenic's refusal to conform to the standards of Oedipus and signs of her different ability to navigate the death drive and enjoy those pleasures not limited by an economy of satisfaction. These psychoses are positive and productive, Deleuze and Guattari say, because they produce a desiring that does not want satisfaction in place of desires that can never be satisfied. What we will come to, in what follows, is a kind of thinking in philosophy and film that draws on the positive and productive intensities presented by these conjunctive syntheses.

3. The Connective and Disjunctive Syntheses in Film

The connective syntheses that link elements on the motion picture screen and direct the flows of narrative and desire on it are multiple and varied. The links that connect characters in the film and direct actions among them are the most obvious of these syntheses. They connect characters to one another but also to the story those characters are enacting and that directs the flows of narrative through them. They also link this narrative to narratives about the actors playing these parts and to the narratives connecting all the characters played by these actors. We can say the same for directors, camera women and men, for whole production companies, but confining ourselves to the cinematic image as it unfolds on the screen, we can point out syntheses directing flows among the different camera shots used to make the images that tell the story on that screen. Establishing shots are connected to close-ups by the context they provide for the image of some detail relevant to the narrative. Close-ups also often tell us what a character feels in the course of an action captured in mid-range shots.

The partial objects connected in the viewer's thoughts about what she sees on the screen may be images of parts of the film connected to images from the same or different films connected to thoughts about what she has seen, which are themselves multiply and variously connected. The synthetic concept she draws from this thinking about the film is a directed linking of some of these elements. These connections and the concepts synthesized in them can become rigid and predictable. We know in advance what one critic or another will think of this or that film, and readers of these critics, often without thinking for themselves, ventriloquize their interpretations. If we have a record of these syntheses, however, we can follow the connections they have made and map new and unexplored links to elements not heretofore considered.

The disjunctive syntheses, on the model we are borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, produce a surface for recording and linking connective syntheses in inclusive flows of desire and thought. In *Casablanca* (1942), Rick is connected to Victor Laszlo to the Resistance to the letters of transit through Ilsa. He is connected to Ilsa to Paris to American isolationism to the letters of transit, again, through Sam. He is connected to Vichy France to Major Strasser to Nazi Germany to the letters of transit, yet again, through Captain Renault, and so on. The recording surface of the disjunctive syntheses maps Rick's connection to the letters of transit through Ilsa or Sam or Renault in an inclusive synthesis of co-present paths rather than as exclusive possible options. It also allows us to plot relatively unexplored connections between Rick and Laszlo, Rick and Sam, Rick and Renault against the dominant synthesis connecting Rick and Ilsa. This thinking about *Casablanca* remains latent in the unconscious until it is made manifest in a fully articulated interpretation of the film.

Much of what philosophers think about in their encounters with films amounts to connecting potentially disparate and oblique elements as they appear on the movie screen to tell a coherent story about human life and about the relations of

men and women in their interactions with one another. In *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears*, Stanley Cavell famously explores the distinct but complementary genres of remarriage comedies and melodramas of the missing woman in Hollywood films of the 1930s and '40s. [6] Cavell studies the comedies of remarriage in films like *The Philadelphia Story, Bringing Up Baby* and *It Happened One Night* to ask whether romance in a marriage can survive a relationship defined by a connection of equality, friendship and mutual respect for the intelligence and accomplishments of both parties. In his thinking about these films, Cavell asks us to explore the connection between knowing someone and loving them: can we love someone we know, and is love a form of knowledge? In films like *Gaslight, Now, Voyager* and *Stella Dallas*, Cavell inclusively synthesizes the melodrama's only latent connection of this same quest for equality of opportunity and accomplishment for men and women to the isolation of women and to the way the men in these films, and the men in the audiences for these films, conspire to enforce this isolation. Women who want the moon are made to settle for the stars.

This is not an example of philosophy subordinating film to its own terms but of Cavell thinking differently as a result of the connections he discovers in films and by virtue of an inclusive synthesis he forges between philosophy and film in general. As William Rothman and Marian Keane recount it,

> The World Viewed is one kind of thing that can be said about film. By investigating, philosophically, the obscure promptings of this expression, the motivations of its own writing, *The World Viewed* enables us to know something about the kind of object film is, and something about what philosophy is, as well. [7]

Cavell's reflections on remarriage comedies and Hollywood melodramas appear to exemplify, even if he might not put it this way, a disjunctive synthesis of philosophy and film, charting flows that move from an articulation of the ontological features of film to what can be said about comedies and weepies, in one direction, and from reflections on the narrative content of film to musings about what there is to say about philosophy, in the other. In Cavell's case, his reflections on film link him beyond his immediate chain of references to think philosophically about the writings of André Bazin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and even Deleuze and Guattari. At the same time, of course, Emerson and the late Wittgenstein remain privileged links in this chain, allowing Cavell to "keep faith" with the methodological principle "that we can find out what kind of object anything is by investigating expressions which show the kinds of thing said about it." [8] While providing a pretty good example of what a disjunctive synthesis of philosophy and film might look like, Cavell's philosophical commitments lead him to forge links that direct the flows of his thinking to selected ends. If we could extend these flows and connect them to ever more unexpected and unexplored principles and themes, references and faiths, we would come closer to what Deleuze and Guattari have in mind.

We can get a better picture of how disjunctive syntheses might reform our thinking about film by turning from the

narrative content of film to the way film looks on the silver screen. Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) broadcast its attention to the visual art of cinema with the introduction of severe shot angles and framing devices never before seen. In one especially memorable scene, the young Charles Foster Kane's mother signs his life away, in the foreground, against the protestations of his father, occupying a middle ground, while Kane himself plays in the snow in the background visible through an open window. There are three distinct flows visible in this one scene recorded and signed by framing devices borrowed from the home in which the scene is shot and marked by distinctively temporal codes. The image of the mother framed by the room where she sits at a table is connected to the representative of Mr. Thatcher, and Mr. Thatcher himself by the legal document with which she signs away the young Kane's future. In the next room, framed by a doorway that defines the division between him and his wife, Kane's father paces back and forth impotently, unable to cross over into the space where that future is being negotiated. Kane's father represents an abusive past, and his wife is taking legal action to prevent any further harm coming to her son from his father. Young Kane, visible through a window and against a white snow that serves as a surrogate motion picture screen, represents the playful, outgoing present the loss of which will haunt Kane the rest of his life. It is the recovery of that loss (and the attempt to make that present, become past, present again) that motivates the narrative of the film.

As viewers, where do we look in this scene? At the action in the foreground, which is apparently the most important key to the film's narrative, *or* at the middle ground which gives what we now call the "back story" of that narrative, *or* at what is going on in the deep background, a scene apparently irrelevant to the narrative. [9] From the point of view of the disjunctive syntheses, the motion picture screen presents us a surface on which all of these elements figure, inviting us to view and connect them in unexpected ways. And what we come to understand about the narrative of the film, as revealed in the very end, depends on our doing so. Each element has its own existence and each one is distinctly coded and marked. We do not grasp them as an amalgam, a synthesis that obliterates their distinction, but seriatim: we can look at this *or* this *or* this and we must look at and connect each and all of these elements, each image modified and multiplied by its relation to the others. Kane's playing in the present is simultaneously a past in relation to the future being decided for him. That future is being decided because the past abuses of the father threaten to become present again. In an attempt to preserve a present of play against a past of abuse, Kane's mother arranges a future that pushes the play into the past and ushers in a new, present pattern of abuse.

In what philosophy do past, present and future occupy the same time disjunctively? We certainly do not find such a time in a philosophy committed to the idea of the present as a now point, thick or thin, suspended between a past that has preceded it and a future spilling out ahead of it. We do not find it, either, in a philosophy that conceives the present as determined by a past it retains and a future it anticipates in the way the present moment in a melody is determined by all the prior notes retained in it and all the successive notes it

portends. The past in the example from *Citizen Kane* is a present past, the past that is present, not a fixed and distant datum we recall only more or less completely and obligingly but a past informed by the present, the past of this very present moment. For so many different presents – of Kane, Kane's father (the past of Kane's present), Kane's mother (the present of Kane's future), Mr. Thatcher – there are so many different pasts. Deleuze calls them "sheets of past," using this same example, in the second volume of his two volume study of film. [10] The concept is developed from Henri Bergson's idea of a time as *durée*, a non-chronological duration associated with but not subordinated to movement, associated with the present, indivisible act of covering an infinitely divisible space. We will take time to explore this idea in some more detail in the discussion of the conjunctive synthesis which we turn to now.

4. The Conjunctive Syntheses in Film

The idea of "thinking with images" is suggested in the preface to the French edition of the first volume of Deleuze's study of film. "The great directors of the cinema," Deleuze writes there, "may be compared, in our view, not merely with painters, architects and musicians, but also with thinkers. They think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts." [11] In short, movement-images track action and purpose, while time-images track duration, or non-chronological time. In general, movement-images dominate mainstream Hollywood films, while time-images are more common in post-war European films. On the model we are testing here, Hollywood films and what we think about them will tend to produce reified – static, predictable, neurotic – forms of the unconscious. Films from the *nouveau vague* or neo-realist tradition, by contrast, will exemplify the excessive, intense consumption and consummation of desiring production associated with the conjunctive syntheses. To see exactly what this means and prepare some evidence in support of these claims, let's consider two films, a recent film firmly rooted in the tradition of Hollywood movies and a classic new wave film from the 1960s by the French director Jean-Luc Godard.

Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) uses the movement-images of a fight film to think about the love and estrangement between a father and his daughter. In the first place, this means that Eastwood did not start out with an abstract idea that he found or formed images to represent. Rather, he started out with images already freighted with ideas, specifically images from fight films, from classics like *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1962) and *Raging Bull* (1980) to melodramas about redemption and missed chances for redemption, like *Rocky* (1976) and its many sequels. The topology of these films is well established. The gym is on a back street. It is barely outfitted with the necessary equipment. It is populated with aspiring fighters, failed fighters, trainers, managers and hangers on. The gym's owner has very little investment in the business, fiscally or psychically. He has an assistant who handles the day to day affairs of the gym, while he spends the majority of his time in his office balancing the books and biding his time. Frankie Dunn (Clint Eastwood) and his West Los Angeles gym appear to fit this picture perfectly. The picture is filled out by Scrap

(Morgan Freeman), a former fighter once managed by Dunn, who now works as Dunn's assistant, and a cast of would be "contenders." Then Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), a 31-year-old down on her luck waitress who wants to be a fighter, walks into Dunn's gym.

At first, Dunn refuses to work with her, says he doesn't work with girls, points out how ill-prepared she is, that she can't be trained. But Maggie has nothing to lose, and when she continues coming around, struggling with the basics of a heavy bag, Scrap agrees to help her and to persuade Dunn to manage her. Scrap knows what we don't, that Dunn himself is struggling with a not so basic estrangement from his daughter. As a result, while we see the movement of action and purpose in the film as aiming at the standard tropes of the fight film genre, there is already something else going on. When Maggie starts to show some promise, and Dunn begins to take an interest in her commitment to fighting, we can still think that this is all about the fighting, even as we begin to get some indications that there is something beneath the surface in Dunn's persona. As Dunn gets closer to Maggie, helping her to understand not just how to fight but how to live, to the point of symbolically adopting her, giving her the nickname "mo chuisle" (literally "my pulse," figuratively "my darling") and wrapping her in that identity in the form of a fighter's robe, the movement of action and purpose in the film starts to look different, starts to add up to another result.

What, if it could, would this film be trying to think about the estrangement of affection between a father and his daughter? Following Freud, in this variation on the Oedipus complex, the father's refusal of his daughter's desire to repair her castrated self through a sexual union with him is supposed to be compensated by his daughter's betrothal to another man who stands in for him and gives her the wanted "penis child." If his daughter perceives that her father does not love her, however, she may seek compensation with a man who also does not love her and resent her father for it. A failure by the father to navigate this rift could be the basis for such an estrangement. Although this part of the drama is never made explicit in the film, Eastwood leaves this possibility (and the likelihood of a reconciliation of it) open for us. It is a Hollywood film, and Eastwood knows its standards and its codes. In the end, this film is not consummated in an intensity of thinking motivated by pleasure but in a thought that affirms the traditional moral standards and the standard end, the satisfaction of a process of production that is a production of a desire that cannot be satisfied. In this way, the general audience for this film is allowed to identify with an all too familiar pattern of longing and disappointment. In a literal representation of the death-drive, Maggie dies because Dunn, who relieves her suffering, becomes the hero he never was for his own daughter.

Contempt (1963), by Jean-Luc Godard openly flaunts those standards and codes, and its irreverent and playful thinking is more closely in concert with the productive intensity of the conjunctive synthesis advocated by Deleuze and Guattari. 'Contempt,' in French *le mépris*, is an indistinct affect, a disposition located somewhere between hatred and loathing. The term is used by the French to characterize the seething, negative underside of a lover's quarrel, the tension, disdain

and unspoken scorn resulting not so much from a slight as from the failure to perceive the slight and to grasp the source of its indignity. At a central point in Godard's film, Camille (Brigitte Bardot) tells Paul (Michel Piccoli), "I have contempt for you," but it's not at all clear that this is what the film is about or what we should be thinking about while watching it. Godard is apparently thinking about film in this film, about what is implicated in making a film, and we will see that he uses time-images to think these things, both a general time-image of the film as a whole and specific time-images which signal and carry out this motif.

We can say something briefly about the time-image that will help clarify the point we want to make, here. As contrasted to the movement-image, where the relation of action to purpose is clear and that purpose is realized by the film's end, *nothing happens* in the time-image as it is exemplified in certain European films. The point of these films is not linked to or realized in purposeful action. There is nothing the action of the film's narrative is trying to accomplish. There is nothing to the film but the duration, the time it takes, "a little time in its pure state" Deleuze calls it, to get from the beginning to the end. How, then, do these films engage us, and why do we endure them? What pleasure can be gained from watching them?

One way they appear to engage us is by presenting images whose optical qualities turn in on or double themselves, establishing what Deleuze calls a circuit, a back-and-forth relation between what is actual and virtual in that image. We saw a version of this in *Citizen Kane* where the actual image of mother, father and son turned in on itself to depict connections between past, present and future that exposed the solution to the mystery about the meaning of Kane's last word, "Rosebud." [12] This image, functioning as a flashback, is itself only one of several virtual doubles of the actual image of the search for that meaning that forms the content of the film. In Welles, as we said above, Deleuze finds a time-image he describes as capturing the "sheets of past" that drape our lives.

In the films of Alain Robbes-Grillet and Alain Resnais, Luis Buñuel, and Federico Fellini, Deleuze finds another form of the direct time-image which he characterizes as "peaks of present." Here, the past is present, virtually, as the past that makes this very moment present. Here, too, the future is virtually present as the future that makes this same moment actually present, only in case this past and future are virtually present in and simultaneous with it. In this time-image, three presents (or more when the present moment is thick) are constantly implicated and revived, Deleuze says, "revived, contradicted, obliterated, substituted, recreated, fork and return." Fellini's *8½* (1963) gives an excellent example of this image. Amid the peaks of pasts and futures virtually present (as memories, fantasies, dreams) and the (actual and virtual) present demands of his wife, his lover, his producer, his crew and his own conscience, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) struggles futilely to tell the truth and learn to love. "This is a powerful time image," Deleuze says. It does not suppress all narration, but, "much more importantly, it gives narration a new value, because it abstracts it from all successive action, as far as it replaces the movement-image with a genuine

time-image". [13]

In such a time-image it becomes possible, even necessary, to think – to think about the competing claims of the real and the imaginary, about the narrative abstracted from its purpose, about the objective and the subjective, the physical and the mental, the actual and the virtual – as an effect of the image itself, as an effect of a quality of the image that releases it from what might have been its aim. It is for the sake of being able to think "aimlessly," without assigning a reason to the images on the screen, that we endure these films in which nothing happens. In these films we luxuriate in a contemplative state produced by the direct images of time in its pure state. In the case of *Contempt*, the time-image affords us the luxury of thinking about film and film making without compelling us to think that something is true or false about film. It does not lead us to a correct thought, the right thought, *une idée juste*, but, as Godard himself says, *jusq'une idée*, just to a thought, to thinking itself.

The opening shot of *Contempt* makes it quite evident that Godard is not just telling a story; he is thinking. In it we watch (from a point on the rails laid down for a tracking or traveling shot) as Francesca (the multi-lingual assistant to the American producer of the film within the film) walks toward us, reading from a soft-covered book. In this shot she is followed or tracked by a camera, the camera man, and several assistants. The cameraman in this shot is the principal cinematographer of *Contempt*, the film about the making of a film, Raoul Coutard. The scene we are watching Coutard shoot is an actual piece of the film about the making of that film, *Contempt*. Hence, in this opening sequence, we are watching the filming of the filming of a film about making a film. As Francesca walks past the picture plane and out of view, Coutard pivots his camera and pitches it down to focus directly on our viewing point, implicating us in the whole process. We are brought face to face with our own one-eyed monster, our Polyphemus, and the odyssey of *Contempt* begins. This is not at all incidental, of course. The film filmed within the film is a film of Homer's *Odyssey*, and the thematic of the film about making that film traverses the same narrative, detached from its ancient Greek purpose.

What follows the opening sequence are several loosely connected episodes: a scene dedicated to cataloging the assets of Brigitte Bardot's body [14] followed by sequences at the bankrupt Cinecittá, at a rundown Roman villa, in an apartment still under construction, at a second-rate dance hall and, finally, on the island of Capri. Each episode is a sample of the time-image, perhaps the most striking being the sequence in the apartment, taking up the middle third of the film, where Paul and Camille "kill time" bathing and arguing. In another episode we visit Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance), the American producer of the film within the film, who has taken up residence at the ruined Roman villa. He has driven Camille there from the Cinecittá studios in his two seat convertible, leaving Paul to find a cab. The cab is waylaid, much as Odysseus's seaward voyage takes him off course, and when Paul arrives he finds Camille and Prokosch walking around the unkempt grounds. Camille is clearly, already upset. After exchanging unpleasantries with Paul, she walks away from the

camera toward a mounded garden plot. The camera closes in on Camille's blond hair, in a tangle from her ride in the convertible, and then we see, in a dizzying collage of shots, prior scenes in the film, scenes from parts of the film we have not yet seen, scenes not included in the film nor ever meant to be included in it, all present before us, so many "peaks of present" appearing in quick succession. In this image, or series of images, which is a capsule of this episode, the virtual is made visually actual for no other purpose than to give us something to think and a little time, in its pure state, to think it.

The thought that takes place in this image begins to approximate the productive intensity of the conjunctive synthesis Deleuze and Guattari describe as the becoming intense of the process of desiring production. Images like these, which appear as so many hallucinations, overwhelm us and haunt us. They leave us neither satisfied nor wanting. They are at once over-full and unsatisfying in the sense that we do not know what we want from them. They do not put an end to our thinking or our desiring. They intensify them because their own thinking and desiring, the thought and desire of these images, have no purpose or end. They disable us and, in a way, distract us from the important business of following the narrative, of solving the puzzle of what is happening in this scene and what will happen next. And yet we are not reduced, for this reason, to a state of helpless or hapless inertia by these images. We find ourselves, rather, thoughtfully engaged in them in a way that is profoundly different from films governed by action and the movement-image.

By the end of *Contempt*, as one might expect, nothing has happened. The film of Homer's *Odyssey* has not been made, two of the main protagonists suffer a meaningless death, and we are left, in the final shot, with a vision of an indefinite horizon dividing the Mediterranean Sea and sky. In the course of this general time-image, filled out by a series of loosely connected episodes, we indulge the luxury of a non-chronological time, a time composed of successive moments, "peaks of presents," in the course of which we have had time to think about film, about the real and the represented in film, about the odyssey of film and of making a film, in the context of that indefinite affect, contempt, which is perhaps nothing more than the non-chronological duration – there is no specific point at which it begins or ends – of mixed negative feelings. That we arrive at no specific conclusions about film or representation or the *Odyssey* or contempt is of no consequence. We have been given some time to think, and this is what accounts for the odd sense of pleasure we feel at the film's end.

5. Thinking and Film

Are we right, though, to consider this thinking or this engagement distinctly philosophical? Perhaps time-images (and the films governed by them) keep us from thinking and thinking philosophically, especially if we take thinking in philosophy to be a puzzling out of the solution to a problem or a paradox. This is not, however, what Deleuze and Guattari would have called philosophy or thinking. [15] Finding the

solution to a problem would be, for them, just the rote application of a protocol to a situation that yields to that protocol in the same way that it has for as long as anyone can remember; answering a question correctly is just the application of the appropriate and approved procedures. For Deleuze and Guattari, we only start thinking when these protocols break down or when the situation is entirely alien to us. Only then do we truly start to think, and films like *Contempt* (and the time-images that compose them) appear to make just this point. We enjoy these films because they afford us the luxury of thinking without a purpose in mind, without an end. This thinking is not strictly speaking "aimless;" the concept of "aimless thought" assumes that thinking must have a purpose. It is rather a creative engagement with what the images on the screen have presented for our consideration without aiming to arrive at or prove any one point or another.

In sum, on the models just enumerated, there are three levels or planes on which philosophy has the chance of becoming a special kind of thinking in its encounters with film. On the plane of connective syntheses, the contents of films link flows of narrative or conceptual detail which invite the consideration of relationships in the film or resources for analyzing those relationships that might not have been considered. On the plane of disjunctive syntheses, the motion picture screen captures and codes the images which construct that content, inviting us to combine, inclusively, the meanings those codes signify in ways that complicate what a film is trying to show or say and which challenge our conceptions of time in cinema. On the plane of conjunctive syntheses, we find that certain of those images, time-images, are already thinking and so invite, by an attraction that is at once subtle and seductive and intense, a different kind of thinking. We have characterized what it means to think in these terms by following a rubric suggested by the distinction between connective, disjunctive and conjunctive syntheses introduced by Deleuze and Guattari for, admittedly, a very different purpose, and, yet, as models for thinking in philosophy and film, that rubric has proved illuminating.

Philosophy, as it is ordinarily conceived and practiced, adds to film a thoughtfulness that leads to insights about various aspects of the human condition. Philosophy, on this model, may also add to film thoughts about the ways otherwise unconscious aspects of that human condition are coded in the visual images that bring us films. And still, as our analysis has shown, there is another way of thinking that is modeled in the time image of films inspired by a certain European tradition, thinking for the sake of challenging the expectations that thought arrive at some end specified for it in advance. The point at which we no longer enjoy films of the sort that invite us to think in this way, to think without a purpose in mind to ends that have never been specified, is the point at which we no longer enjoy a form of thought that takes risks with the approved standards of truth and values and that, by thinking differently, brings something different to what we think about thinking in general and, perhaps, philosophy in particular.

John M. Carvalho

Villanova University, Villanova PA 19085
www.homepage.villanova.edu/john.carvalho

Endnotes

[1] We could make a long list of commentaries that draw on psychoanalysis to give an account of film. These would include commentaries that draw from a Lacanian revision of Freud's basic ideas: the unconscious, repetition, the drives, the gaze, narcissism, perversion, castration, all tied to a fundamental lack of satisfaction. This list would include, minimally, Jean-:Louis Baudry's "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in *Communications* 23 (1975), Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Screen, 16.3 (1975), Naomi Scheman's "Missing Mothers / Desiring Daughters: Framing the Sight of Women," in *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Autumn 1988), Jacques-Alain Miller's "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," also in Screen, 18.4 (1977-78), and many others including Bruce Kawin's "The Mummy's Pool," *Dreamworks*, 1.4 (Summer 1981).

[2] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1994). In this work, originally published in Germany as *Die Traumdeutung* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1900), Freud presents dreams as the wishful fulfillment of repressed desires and as the most uncontroversial evidence of the unconscious itself.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 1-50. These syntheses are introduced in relation to the unconscious four years earlier in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 70-128, and they turn up again a year later in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Constantine Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 174-176 and 229-32.

[4] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey (W. W. Norton & Company, 1962).

[5] The "Body without Organs" (sometimes written as "BwO") is a term of art Deleuze introduces in *The Logic of Sense* (see 186-93) and develops with Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)). It is borrowed from a radio play by Antonin Artaud ("To be Done with the Judgement of God") and refers, most generally, to a virtual totality of connections waiting to be actualized. If we ordinarily organize our desires in ways that vainly approximate the expectations of similarly organized objects of our desire, the BwO is a resource for connections with other BwOs that flaunt these organizations and expectations. *Anti-Oedipus* ends with the concept of the earth as such a BwO, a "new earth" made "a place of healing" by the abandonment of its current compulsive organizations.

[6] See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), and *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Missing Woman* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). See also *Cavell on Film*, ed. with an Introduction by William Rothman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005).

[7] William Rothman and Marian Keane, *Reading Cavell's* The World Viewed: *A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), p. 36.

[8] *Loc. cit.* See "On Makavejev on Bergman," first published in *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1979) and reprinted in Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and in Rothman, ed., *Cavell on Film*, pp. 11-39, where the reference to *Anti-Oedipus* appears on p. 35.

[9] Although it is actually crucial to the narrative of the story and of Kane's life, it cannot be known as such either by Kane or by the audience for the film (at least not on their first viewing).

[10] See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). For the discussion of *Citizen Kane see Cinema 2*, 111.

[11] *Cinema 2*, xiv.

[12] This becomes more evident to us in second, third and other successive viewings of the film which bring out for us the consequences of the scene in the foreground and the significance of the lost innocence playing in the background, which are only virtual in this image.

[13] *Cinema 2*, p. 101.

[14] The scene was added to satisfy the American producers, who wanted a more tangible return on their investment in the film's star.

[15] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).