that viewers appropriate movies in idiosyncratic ways. But the process of that appropriation is also a matter of inferential elaboration, based on fresh schemas the spectator brings to bear on the film's discriminable features.

In isolating comprehension as a central viewing activity, the cognitive perspective is open to the charge that it ignores other aspects of the experience and of the film itself. What, for instance, about emotion, surely a prime ingredient of the filmgoing experience? And what about interpretation, which seems to go even farther beyond the information given and involve very high-level constructs?

These are important questions, and the cognitive frame of reference needs to respond to them. Up to a point, setting emotion aside is a useful methodological idealization: In principle, you can understand a film without discernibly having an emotional reaction to it. More positively, studies by Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, Ed Tan, and others suggest that a cognitive perspective can enrich our understanding of emotive qualities.22 This research boldly proposes that many emotional responses ride upon cognitive judgments.

As for interpretation, elsewhere I've tried to show that, as an intuitive but principled activity, it's highly amenable to a cognitive explanation. When a critic posits Mildred as the Castrating Mother or a symbol of the contradictions of entrepreneurial capitalism, the critic is still seeking out cues, categorizing, applying schemas, and making inferences that carry weight among a particular social group.23 To interpret is to cognize.

Finally, as a murder mystery, Mildred Pierce may play too much into my hands. Not every film poses a mystery at its start; is the cognitive perspective at risk of turning every film into a detective story? It's true that mystery films show the process of hypothesis formation quite clearly, but the cognitive framework doesn't favor them. In Narration in the Fiction Film, I try to show that the activity of inferential elaboration is prompted by melodramas (In This Our Life, Say It With Song), Westerns (Wild and Woolly), comedies (His Girl Friday), and straight dramas (Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison). Every narrative of any complexity withholds some story information from both viewers and characters. This creates gaps in our knowledge, disparities among various characters' states of knowledge, and mismatches between a character's knowledge and the viewer's knowledge, all the while generating Meir Sternberg's response trio of curiosity, suspense, and surprise. Every film's narration depends upon regulating the flow of information, and we don't have perfect information until the end (if then). In this respect, every narrative harbors secrets.

There is much more to understand about how viewers understand films. The line of inquiry sketched here puts a priority on studying particular films in the light of how narrational and stylistic processes are designed to elicit certain spectatorial effects. In this research program, Mildred Pierce exemplifies key features of the classical Hollywood film. There are, of course, other traditions that call on different sorts of narrational cues, schemas, and norms.24 Comparative inquiry into these traditions can contribute to that research program I've called a film poetics. By avoiding misplaced conceptions of codes or slippery analogies between film and language, the cognitive perspective offers a robust account of the viewer's activity, one that can guide a historical poetics of cinema.

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**The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice**

La Strada (1954), 8 1/2 (1963), Wild Strawberries (1957), The Seventh Seal (1957), Persona (1966), Ashes and Diamonds (1958), Jules et Jim (1962), Knife in the Water (1962), Vivre sa vie (1962), Muriel (1963): Whatever else one can say about these films, cultural fiat gives them a role altogether different from Rio Bravo (1959) on the one hand and Mothlight (1963) on the other. They are "art films," and, ignoring the tang of snobbishness about the phrase, we can say that these and many other films constitute a distinct branch of the cinematic institution. My purpose in this essay is to argue that we can usefully consider the "art cinema" as a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures. Given the compass of this paper, I can only suggest some lines of work, but I hope to show that constructing the category of the art cinema is both feasible and illuminating.

It may seem perverse to propose that films produced in such variable cultural contexts might share fundamentally similar features. Yet I think there are good reasons for believing this, reasons which come from the films' place in history. In the long run, the art cinema descends from the early film d'art and such silent national cinema schools as German Expressionism and Neue Sachlichkeit and French Impressionism. (A thorough account of its sources would have to include literary modernism, from Proust and James to Faulkner and Camus.) More specifically, the art cinema as a distinct mode appears after World War II when the dominance of the
Hollywood cinema was beginning to wane. In the United States, the courts’ divorce decree created a shortage of films for exhibition. Production firms needed overseas markets and exhibitors needed to compete with television. In Europe, the end of the war reestablished international commerce and facilitated film export and coproductions. Thomas Guback has shown how, after 1954, films began to be made for international audiences. American firms sponsored foreign production, and foreign films helped American exhibitors fill screen time. The later Neorealist films may be considered the first postwar instances of the international art cinema, and subsequent examples would include most works of the New Wave, Fellini, Renoir, Bergman, De Sica, Kurosawa, Pasolini, et al. While the art cinema is of little economic importance in the United States today, it evidently continues, as such international productions as The Serpent’s Egg (1977) and Stroczek (1977) show.

Identifying a mode of production/consumption does not exhaustively characterize the art cinema, since the cinema also consists of formal traits and viewing conventions. To say this, however, is to invite the criticism that the creators of such film are too inherently different to be lumped together. Yet I shall try to show that whereas stylistic devices and thematic motifs may differ from director to director, the overall functions of style and theme remain remarkably constant in the art cinema as a whole. The narrative and stylistic principles of the films constitute a logically coherent mode of cinematic discourse.

Realism, Authorship, Ambiguity

The classical narrative cinema—paradigmatically, studio feature filmmaking in Hollywood since 1920—rests upon particular assumptions about narrative structure, cinematic style, and spectatorial activity. While detailing those assumptions is a task far from complete, we can say that in the classical cinema, narrative form motivates cinematic representation. Specifically, cause-effect logic and narrative parallelism generate a narrative which projects its action through psychologically defined, goal-oriented characters. Narrative time and space are constructed to represent the cause-effect chain. To this end, cinematic representation has recourse to fixed figures of cutting (e.g., 180 continuity, crosscutting, “montage sequences”), mise-en-scène (e.g., three-point lighting, perspective sets), cinematography (e.g., a particular range of camera distances and lens lengths), and sound (e.g., modulation, voice-over narration). More important than these devices themselves are their functions in advancing the narrative. The viewer makes sense of the classical film through criteria of verisimilitude (is x plausible?), of generic appropriateness (is x characteristic of this sort of film?) and of compositional unity (does x advance the story?). Given this background set, we can start to mark off some salient features of the art cinema.

First, the art cinema defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode. and especially against the cause-effect linkage of events. These linkages become looser, more tenuous in the art film. In L’Avventura (1960), Anna is lost and never found; in À bout de souffle (aka Breathless; 1960), the reasons for Patricia’s betrayal of Michel remain unknown; in Bicycle Thieves (1948), the future of Antonio and his son is not revealed. It will not do, however, to characterize the art film solely by its loosening of causal relations. We must ask what motivates that loosening, what particular modes of unity follow from these motivations, what reading strategies the film demands, and what contradictions exist in this order of cinematic discourse.

The art cinema motivates its narratives by two principles: realism and authorial expressivity. On the one hand, the art cinema defines itself as a realistic cinema. It will show us real locations (Neorealism, the New Wave) and real problems (contemporary “alienation,” “lack of communication,” etc.). Part of this reality is sexual; the aesthetics and commerce of the art cinema often depend upon an eroticism that violates the production code of pre-1950 Hollywood. A Stranger Knocks (1959) and And God Created Woman (1956) are no more typical of this than, say, Jules et Jim and Persona (whereas one can see Le Mépris, 1963, as consciously working upon the very problem of erotic spectacle in the art cinema). Most important, the art cinema uses “realistic”—that is, psychologically complex—characters.

The art cinema is classical in its reliance upon psychological causation; characters and their effects on one another remain central. But whereas the characters of the classical narrative have clear-cut traits and objectives, the characters of the art cinema lack defined desires and goals. Characters may act for inconsistent reasons (Marcello in La Dolce Vita, 1960) or may question themselves about their goals (Borg in Wild Strawberries and the Knight in The Seventh Seal). Choices are vague or nonexistent. Hence a certain drifting episodic quality to the art film’s narrative. Characters may wander out and never reappear; events may lead to nothing. The Hollywood protagonist speeds directly toward the target; lacking a goal, the art-film character slides passively from one situation to another.

The protagonist’s itinerary is not completely random: it has a rough shape: a trip (La Strada; Wild Strawberries; The Silence, 1963), an idyll (Jules et Jim; Elvira Madigan, 1967; Pierrot le fou, 1965), a search (L’Avventura; Blow-Up, 1966; High and Low, 1963), even the making of a film (8 1/2; Le Mépris; The Clowns, 1971; Fellini Roma, 1972; Day for Night, 1973; The Last Movie, 1971). Especially apt for the broken telology of the art film is the biography of the individual, in which events become pared down toward a picturesque successivity (La Dolce Vita; Ray’s Apsy trilogy, 1955–1959; Alfie, 1966). If the classical protagonist struggles, the drifting protagonist traces an itinerary, an encyclopedic survey of the film’s world. Certain occupations (stockbroking in L’Eclisse, 1962; journalism in La Dolce Vita and The Passenger, 1975; prostitution in Vivre sa vie and Nights of Cabiria, 1957) favor a survey form of narrative. Thus the art film’s thematic of la condition humaine, its attempt to pronounce judgments on “modern life” as a whole, proceeds from its formal needs: had the characters a goal, life would no longer seem so meaningless.

What is essential to any such organizational scheme is that it be sufficiently loose in its causation as to permit characters to express and explain their psychological states. Slow to act, these characters tell all. The art cinema is less concerned with action than reaction; it is a cinema of psychological effects in search of their causes. The dissection of feeling is often represented explicitly as therapy and cure (e.g., Through a Glass Darkly, Persona), but even when it is not, the forward flow of causation is braked.
and characters pause to seek the etiology of their feelings. Characters often tell one another stories: autobiographical events (especially from childhood), fantasies, and dreams. (A recurring line: “I had a strange dream last night.”) The hero becomes a supersensitive individual, one of those people on whom nothing is lost. During the film’s survey of its world, the hero often shudders on the edge of breakdown. There recurs the realization of the anguish of ordinary living, the discovery of unrelieved misery: compare the heroines of Europa 51 (1952), L’avventura, Deserto rosso (1964), and Une femme mariée (1964). In some circumstances the characters must attribute their feelings to social situations (as in Ikiru [1952], I Live in Fear [1955], and Shame). In Europa 51, a communist tells Irene that individuals are not at fault: “If you must blame something, blame our postwar society.” Yet there is seldom analysis at the level of groups or institutions; in the art cinema, social forces become significant insofar as they impinge upon the psychologically sensitive individual.

A conception of realism also affects the film’s spatial and temporal construction, but the art cinema’s realism here encompasses a spectrum of possibilities. The options range from documenting factuality (e.g., Il Posto, 1961) to intense psychological subjectivity (Hiroshima mon amour, 1959). (When the two impulses meet in the same film, the familiar “illusion-reality” dichotomy of the art cinema results.) Thus room is left for two reading strategies. Violations of classical conceptions of time and space are justified as the intrusion of an unpredictable and contingent daily reality or as the subjective reality of complex characters. Plot manipulations of story order (especially flashbacks) remain anchored to character subjectivity as in 8 1/2 and Hiroshima mon amour. Manipulations of duration are justified realistically (e.g., the temps morts of early New Wave films) or psychologically (the jump cuts of A bout de souffle signaling a jittery lifestyle). By the same token, spatial representation will be motivated as documentary realism (e.g., location shooting, available light), as character revelation, or in extreme cases as character subjectivity. André Bazin may be considered the first major critic of the art cinema, not only because he praised a loose, accidental narrative structure that resembled life but also because he pin-pointed privileged stylistic devices for representing a realistic continuum of space and time (deep-focus, deep space, the moving camera, and the long take). In brief, a commitment to both objective and subjective verisimilitude distinguished the art cinema from the classical narrative mode.4

Yet at the same time, the art cinema foregrounds the author as a structure in the film’s system. Not that the author is represented as a biographical individual (although some art films, e.g., Fellini’s, Truffaut’s, and Pasolini’s, solicit confessional readings), but rather the author becomes a formal component, the overriding intelligence organizing the film for our comprehension. Over this hovers a notion that the art-film director has a creative freedom denied to her/his Hollywood counterpart.5 Within this frame of reference, the author is the textual force “who” communicates (what is the film saying?) and “who” expresses (what is the artist’s personal vision?). Lacking identifiable stars and familiar genres, the art cinema uses a concept of authorship to unify the text.

Several conventions operate here. The competent viewer watches the film expecting not order in the narrative but stylistic signatures in the narration: technical touches (Truffaut’s freeze frames, Antonioni’s pans) and obsessive motifs (Buñuel’s anticlericalism, Fellini’s shows, Bergman’s character names). The film also offers itself as a chapter in an oeuvre. This strategy becomes especially apparent in the convention of the multi-film work (the Apu trilogies, Bergman’s two trilogies, Rohmer’s “Moral Tales,” and Truffaut’s Doinel series). The initiated catch citations: references to previous films by the director or to works by others (e.g., the New Wave homages).

A small industry is devoted to informing viewers of such authorial marks. International film festivals, reviews and essays in the press, published scripts, film series, career retrospectives, and film education all introduce viewers to authorial codes. What is essential is that the art film be read as the work of an expressive individual. It is no accident, then, that the politique des auteurs arose in the wake of the art cinema, that Cahiers du cinema admired Bergman and Antonioni as much as Hawks and Minnelli, that Robin Wood could esteem both Preminger and Satyajit Ray. As a critical enterprise, auteur analysis of the 1950s and 1960s consisted of applying art-cinema reading strategies to the classical Hollywood cinema.6

How does the author come forward in the film? Recent work in Screen has shown how narrational marks can betray the authorial code in the classical text, chiefly through gaps in motivation.7 In the art-cinema text, the authorial code manifests itself as recurrent violations of the classical norm. Deviations from the classical canon—an unusual angle, a stressed bit of cutting, a prohibited camera movement, an unrealistic shift in lighting or setting—in short, any breakdown of the motivation of cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic—can be read as “authorial commentary.” The credits for the film, as in Persona or Blow-Up, can announce the power of the author to control what we see. Across the entire film, we must recognize and engage with the shaping narrative intelligence. For example, in what Norman Holland calls the “puzzling film,”8 the art cinema foregrounds the narrational act by posing enigmas. In the classic detective tale, however, the puzzle is one of story: who did it? How? Why? In the art cinema, the puzzle is one of plot: who is telling this story? How is this story being told? Why is this story being told this way? Another example of such marking of narration is the device of the flashforward—the plot’s representation of a future story action. The flashforward is unthinkable in the classical narrative cinema, which seeks to retard the ending and efface the mode of narration. But in the art cinema, the flashforward functions perfectly to stress authorial presence: we must notice how the narrator teases us with knowledge the least capable of realistic justification. In the art cinema, the flashforward functions perfectly to stress authorial presence: we must notice how the narrator teases us with knowledge that no character can have. Far from being isolated or idiosyncratic, such instances typify the tendency of the art film to throw its weight onto plot, not story; we play a game with the narrator.

Realism and authorial expressivity, then, will be the means whereby the art film unifies itself. Yet these means now seem contradictory. Verisimilitude, objective or subjective, is inconsistent with an intrusive author. The surest signs of authorial intelligibility—the flashforward, the doubled scene in Persona, the color filters at the start of Le Mépris—are the least capable of realistic justification. Contrariwise, to push the
realism of psychological uncertainty to its limit is to invite a haphazard text in which the author's shaping hand would not be visible. In short, a realist aesthetic and an expressionist aesthetic are hard to merge.

The art cinema seeks to solve the problem in a sophisticated way: by the device of ambiguity. The art film is nonclassical in that it foregrounds deviations from the classical norm—there are certain gaps and problems. But these very deviations are placed, restated as realism (in life things happen this way) or authorial commentary (the ambiguity is symbolic). Thus the art film solicits a particular reading procedure: whenever confronted with a problem in causation, temporality, or spatiality, we first seek realistic motivation. (Is a character's mental state causing the uncertainty? Is life just leaving loose ends?) If we're thwarted, we next seek authorial motivation. (What is being "said" here? What significance justifies the violation of the norm?) Ideally, the film hesitates, suggesting character subjectivity, life's untidiness, and author's vision. Whatever is excessive in one category must belong to another. Uncertainties persist but are understood as such, as obvious uncertainties, so to speak. Put crudely, the slogan of art cinema might be "When in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity."

The drama of these tendencies can play across an entire film, as Giulietta degli spiriti and Deserto rosso illustrate. Fellini's film shows how the foregrounding of authorial narration can collapse before the attempt to represent character subjectivity. In the hallucinations of Giulietta, the film surrenders to expressionism. Deserto rosso keeps the elements in better balance. Putting aside the island fantasy, we can read any scene's color scheme in two registers simultaneously: as psychological verisimilitude (Giuliana sees her life as a desert) or as authorial commentary (Antonioni-as-narrator says that this industrial landscape is a desert).

If the organizational scheme of the art film creates the occasion for maximizing ambiguity, how to conclude the film? The solution is the open-ended narrative. Given the film's episodic structure and the minimization of character goals, the story will often lack a clear-cut resolution. Not only is Anna never found, but the ending of L'Avventura refuses to specify the fate of the couple. At the close of Les 400 coups (1959), the freeze frame becomes the very figure of narrative irresolution, as does the car halted before the two roads at the end of Knife in the Water. At its limit, the art cinema creates an 8 1/2 or a Persona, a film which, lacking a causally adequate ending, seems to conclude several distinct times. A banal remark of the 1960s, that such films make you leave the theater thinking, is not far from the mark: the ambiguity, the play of thematic interpretation, must not be halted at the film's close. Furthermore, the pensive ending acknowledges the author as a peculiarly humble intelligence; she or he knows that life is more complex than art can ever be, and the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling, questions unanswered. With the open and arbitrary ending, the art film reasserts that ambiguity is the dominant principle of intelligibility, that we are to watch less for the tale than the telling, that life lacks the neatness of art and this art knows it.

The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice

The Art Cinema in History

The foregoing sketch of one mode of cinema needs more detailed examination, but in conclusion it may be enough to suggest some avenues for future work.

We cannot construct the art cinema in isolation from other cinematic practices. The art cinema has neighbors on each side, adjacent modes which define it. One such mode is the classical narrative cinema (historically, the dominant mode). There also exists a modernist cinema—that set of formal properties and viewing protocols that presents, above all, the radical split of narrative structure from cinematic style, so that the film constantly strains between the coherence of the fiction and the perceptual disjunctions of cinematic representation. It is worth mentioning that the modernist cinema is not ambiguous in the sense that the art cinema is; perceptual play, not thematic ambivalence, is the chief viewing strategy. The modernist cinema seems to me manifested (under various circumstances) in films like October (1928), La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (1928), Lancelot du Lac (1974), Play Time (1967), and An Autumn Afternoon (1963). The art cinema can then be located in relation to such adjacent modes.

We must examine the complex historical relation of the art cinema to the classical narrative cinema. The art film requires the classical background set because deviations from the norm must be registered as such to be placed as realism or authorial expression. Thus the art film acknowledges the classical cinema in many ways, ranging from Antonioni's use of the detective story to explicit citations in New Wave films. Conversely, the art cinema has had an impact on the classical cinema. Just as the Hollywood silent cinema borrowed avant-garde devices but assimilated them to narrative ends, so recent American filmmaking has appropriated art-film devices. Yet such devices are bent to causally motivated functions—the jump cut for violence or comedy, the sound bridge for continuity or shock effect, the elimination of the dissolve, and the freeze frame for finality. (Compare the narrative irresolution of the freeze frame in Les 400 coups with its powerful closure in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, 1969.) More interestingly, we have seen an art cinema emerge in Hollywood. The open endings of 2001 (1968) and Five Easy Pieces (1970) and the psychological ambiguity of The Conversation (1974), Klute (1971), and Three Women (1970) testify to the assimilation of the conventions of the art film. (Simplifying brusquely, we might consider The Godfather I [1972] as a classical narrative film and The Godfather II [1974] as more of an art film.) Yet if Hollywood is adopting traits of the art cinema, that process must be seen as not simple copying but complex transformation. In particular, American film genres intervene to warp art-cinema conventions in new directions (as the work of Altman and Coppola shows).

It is also possible to see that certain classical filmmakers have had something of the art cinema about them. Sirk, Ford, and Lang all come to mind here, but the preeminent instance is Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock has created a textual persona that is in every way equal to that of the art-cinema's author; of all classical films, I would argue, Hitchcock's foreground the narrational process most strikingly. A film like Psycho demonstrates how the classical text, with its psychological causality, its protagonist/antagonist struggle, its detective story, and its continuous time and
homogeneous space, can under pressure exhibit the very negation of the classical system: psychology as inadequate explanation (the psychiatrist’s account); character as only a position, an empty space (the protagonist is successively three characters, the antagonist is initially two, then two-as-one); and crucially stressed shifts in point-of-view which raise the art-film problem of narrational attitude. It may be that the attraction of Hitchcock’s cinema for both mass audience and English literature professor lies in its successful merger of classical narrative and art-film narration.

Seen from the other side, the art cinema represents the domestication of modernist filmmaking. The art cinema softened modernism’s attack on narrative causality by creating mediating structures—“reality,” character subjectivity, authorial vision—that allowed a fresh coherence of meaning. Works of Rossellini, Eisenstein, Renoir, Dreyer, and Ozu have proven assimilable to art cinema in its turn, an important point of departure. By the 1960s, the art cinema enabled certain filmmakers to define new possibilities. In Gertrud (1964), Dreyer created a perceptual surface so attenuated that all ambiguity drains away, leaving a narrative vacuum.20 In L’année dernière à Marienbad (1961), Resnais dissolved causality altogether and used the very conventions of art cinema to shatter the premise of character subjectivity. In Nicht versöhnlt (1965), Straub and Huillet took the flashback structure and temps morts of the art cinema and orchestrated empty intervals into a system irreducible to character psychology or authorial commentary. Nagisa Oshima turned the fantasy-structures and the narrational marks of the New Wave to political-analytical ends in The Ceremony (1971) and Death by Hanging (1968). Most apparently, Godard, one of the figureheads of the 1960s art cinema, had by 1968 begun to question it. (Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle [1967] can be seen as a critique of Deserto rosso, or even of Une femme mariée.) Godard also reintroduced the issue of montage, a process which enabled Tout va bien (1972) and subsequent works to use Brechtian principles to analyze art-film assumptions about the unity of ideology. If, as some claim, a historical-materialist order of cinema is now appearing, the art cinema must be seen as its necessary background, and its adversary.

Afterword

The preceding is the oldest essay in the volume, published in 1979 and reprinted here without revision. Like many early statements in a research tradition, it has a peremptory tenor: This is this, that is that, no fine gradations allowed. To revise it would go beyond mere updating; I’d want to query its overconfident generalizations. Some of my claims (like the faith in an emerging “historical-materialist” cinema) and terms (like “the narrator”) no longer convince me. Many of the generalizations still seem to me on the right track, but they would need much more nuancing and refinement, and the result would be very different, and much longer.

Actually, some of the refinements have snuck into other things I’ve written. Never expecting to reprint the piece, I cannibalized it twice. I used it to counterpoint a study of classical Hollywood narrative (The Classical Hollywood Cinema, pp. 370–377), and I expanded it in a discussion of modes of narration (Narration in the Fiction Film, pp. 205–233). These are more informative, but several readers have told me that they prefer the cleaner outlines of the original, and it has found its way into anthologies and course packets, so I bring it back one last time. As you might expect, though, I can’t refrain from making a few new remarks, if only to flag points that could be usefully rethought. Kristin Thompson and I have tried to offer a more systematic and comprehensive discussion of some of these issues in our survey text, Film History: An Introduction.11

Since I wrote the piece, some scholars have examined the art cinema as an institution in world film commerce. A great many fiscal mechanisms support production, distribution, and exhibition on the European scene.12 The varied mix of funding sources (private capital, national subsidy, and European Union programs) has brought forth resourceful media players such as Marin Karmitz of Paris, who started by owning theater screens and has become both a producer and distributor of major films from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Somewhat surprisingly, American investment and distribution have also helped sustain art cinema, from small companies supporting the 1950s efforts to current interest on the part of Sony and others in financing Asian projects.13

In any producing country, films assume many diverse shapes. There are always genre pictures, particularly melodramas and comedies showcasing popular local talent. (The farce featuring TV performers seems a cross-cultural constant.) Local output also usually includes a few prestige items, often adapted from national literary classics or based on memorable historical episodes. But Europe also promoted a conception of creativity that was rare elsewhere: the auteur film. The idea of a director expressing his (only rarely her) vision of life on film remains crucial to the art cinema. The head of New Danish Screen, a funding scheme from the nation’s film institute, says, “We secure a place to develop a director’s personal style without the pressure of commercial success criteria.”24 Yet personal style can have cultural and financial implications. The idea of authorship can accommodate policies that demand that local films reflect national culture (who was more French than François Truffaut, more Bavarian than Rainer Werner Fassbinder?), while also providing a marketable identity to films made with low budgets and relatively unknown stars. A sector of world film commerce still depends on the auteur premise. Acknowledging a powerful creator as the source of the film’s formal and thematic complexity yields something marketable internationally, a brand name that can carry over from project to project. Pedro Almodóvar, Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke, Roman Polanski, and a few others are still guarantees of saleable cinema. Individualized branding is even more important as creators become international directors, as Lone Sherfig moves from Denmark to Scotland to make Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself (2002) or the German Tom Tykwer allies with Miramax to make Heaven (2002). And, of course, the concept of authorship spread outside Europe rather quickly, with Kurosawa Akira and Satyajit Ray becoming celebrated as individual creators in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two institutions that I didn’t mention have become ever more important in the cultivation of art movies. The first, and least studied, is the film school. The USSR founded a national film school in 1919, and European countries followed after World War II. Film schools have multiplied since the 1960s, either in universities or
under the auspices of national film institutes. Apart from ensuring a flow of trained professionals into the industry, film schools carry in their curricula and course assignments certain presumptions about what constitutes aesthetically worthwhile cinema. Judging from my limited experience, European film academies were in the 1990s still quite oriented to the idea of individual expression—though my sense is that students who were interested in TV production, where most of the jobs were, were less committed to auteur premises. It would be a big project, but someone should study the policies, the taste structures, and the craft practices of non-U.S. film schools, and analyze the films that result.

A second sort of institution is receiving more study just now. The filmmakers and movements that defined the postwar art cinema earned much of their fame on the festival circuit, from Rashomon (winner at Venice in 1951) through If (winner at Cannes in 1959). When my essay was published in 1979, there were at most 75 principal film festivals; today there are about 250, with hundreds more serving local, regional, and specialist audiences. The development of low-budget independent cinemas, the ease with which films can be submitted on video, and the huge variety of festival themes (e.g., animation, science fiction, gay and lesbian, and film scores) have made the scene overwhelming. There is even a trade magazine for festival planners.16 Each year hundreds of programmers are chasing the world's top three or four dozen films. Everyone wants red carpet events, with major stars and directors turning up for the press. If a festival isn't allowed by the international association to award prizes, the organizers can still fly in three or four critics from the Federation Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique (FIPRESCI) and establish a jury for a FIPRESCI prize. Festivals enhance tourism and give even the smallest city a moment in the limelight. As packaging events, they build an accumulating excitement around films that many attendees wouldn’t bother to see in regular theatrical runs.

At the same time, festivals are the world’s alternative to Hollywood’s theatrical distribution system. A decentralized, informal network of programmers, gatekeepers, and tastemakers brings to notice films of daring and ambition. Festivals are the major clearinghouse for art cinema, with prizes validating the year’s top achievements. To win at one of the big three—Berlin, Cannes, and Venice—or to be purchased at Cannes, Toronto, or Sundance lifts a film above the thousands of other titles demanding attention. The payoff goes beyond cinephilia: Taiwan and Iran have used victories on the festival circuit to improve their cultural image. Hong Kong cinema would not have gained its prestige in the West without the energetic proselytizing of festival programmers and loyal journalists.17

Not all movies screened at festivals are art films, but festivals sustain the formal and stylistic conventions that my essay tried to isolate. Those conventions emerged earliest, I still believe, in Western and Eastern European cinema, but the essay did slight other cinematic traditions. For example, filmmakers in developing countries like Turkey and Egypt were sensitive to developing art cinema trends, but I simply didn’t know enough about them. Nor did I know enough about South American film to do justice to it. Italian neorealism had a strong influence there in the 1950s, and a few filmmakers, notably Leopoldo Torre Nilsson in Argentina, quickly picked up
like The Key (1987), The White Balloon (1995), The Apple (1998), The Child and the Soldier (2000), and Blackboards (2000). At the same time, and often within the same films, we find sophisticated games with cinematic technique. The Mirror (1997) starts with a little girl’s frustration with trying to cross a busy intersection, then shifts its story action almost wholly to the soundtrack when she barricades herself behind her household gate and refuses to meet the camera. Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s youth, and the result is a dizzying Moment of Innocence (1996): Reenacting Makhmalbaf’s youthful assault, several performers meet, along with their props, in the final freeze frame.

The country seems immersed in cinéphilia. When a laborer and film fan pretends ing between him and Makhmalbaf. He calls the result Kiarostami himself—superb screenwriter, director of exemplary documentaries and fiction films, and experimenter with portable video and Warholian recording with cinematic artifice but also compelled to bear witness to the lives of ordinary people. Who in the West would have predicted that a great cinema, at once humanist (Ten, 2000), Five Dedicated to Ozu, 2003)—stands as an emblem of a culture in love with cinematic artifice but also compelled to bear witness to the lives of ordinary people. Who in the West would have predicted that a great cinema, at once humanist and formalist, would have come from Iran?

Not that the period proved unproductive elsewhere. Russia and Eastern Europe contributed to the tradition of philosophically weighty works with Andrei Tarkovsky’s The Mirror (1975) and Nostalgia (1983) and Krzysztof Kieslowski’s coproductions, notably the Three Colors trilogy (1993–1994). Aleksandr Sokurov created mournful, quasi-mystical works (The Second Circle, 1990; Whispering Pages, 1993) that paralleled the elegiac music pouring out of late Soviet and post-Soviet composers like Artyomov and Kancheli. In Hungary, Béla Tarr (Satansango, 1994) and György Fehér (Passion, 1998) created harsh, palpably grimy tales of rural life. France continued to support Philippe Garrel, Claire Denis, and others of ambitious bent, whereas Belgium sustained the regional realism of the Dardenne brothers, Jean-Pierre and Luc. Denmark provided Europe’s newest Cinema of Quality, with well-carpentered scripts, thoughtful themes, and versatile actors, as well as, thanks to the Dogme 95 impulse, some films pushing against the ethos of professionalism with rawer works. A film, said Lars von Trier, should be "like a pebble in your shoe." Yet quite outside the dominion of Dogme lay Christoffer Boe, whose Reconstruction (2003) owes a good deal to Alain Resnais’ polished time jumping.

American filmmakers have been assimilating art-film conventions for a long time, as my essay suggests, but the process has been given a new force by the rise of the independent film sector. Steven Soderbergh can remake an Andrey Tarkovsky film (Solaris, 1972 and 2002), Paul Thomas Anderson can borrow sound devices from Jacques Tati (Punch-Drunk Love, 2002), and Hal Hartley can absorb ideas from Jean-Luc Godard and Robert Bresson. The burst of experimentation on display in films like Memento (2000), Adaptation (2002), and Primer (2004) probably owes as much to the European heritage as it does to U.S. traditions of film noir and fantasy. In many respects, the U.S. indie cinema blends European art-cinema principles with premises of classical Hollywood storytelling. Ahmad, the protagonist of Ramin Bahrani’s Man Push Cart (2005), has as firm a set of purposes as any Hollywood hero, but the first half-hour of the film conceals them from us. Instead, the scenes concentrate on his daily grind as he sells coffee and pastries from a wheeled stall. We get to know him by the way he lugs his propane tank, fills the coffee roaster, unpacks doughnuts and Danishes, and hauls his massive cart through midtown traffic. Suspending our awareness of the protagonist’s goals forces us to focus on minuetae of the story world.

Several books would be needed to do justice to this worldwide activity, so I’ll close by pointing out two areas that have intrigued me from the standpoint of a poetics. First is a new stylistic trend that coalesced as I was writing my essay. As if in repute to the 1960s reliance on montage and camera movement, several directors cultivated an approach based on the static, fairly distant long take. In Europe, this took the shape of what I’ve called the planimetric image. The shot is framed perpendicu lar to a back wall or ground, with figures caught in frontal or profile positions, as in police mug shots. We can find this emerging in the 1960s, with the new reliance on long lenses, but it became a feature of much European staging of the 1970s and 1980s, and it was picked up in other national cinemas (Figures 5.2-5.3). This device presents the scene as a more abstract configuration, perhaps distancing us from its emotional tenor, and it can support those psychologically imbued temps morts that are crucial to the realistic impulse of the mode. This visual schema can also display some of the arresting boldness of an advertising layout, as in the cinéma du look trend of 1980s France (Figure 5.4). The planimetric image became quite common in world cinema (Figure 5.5) and constitutes one of the art cinema’s permanent contributions to cinema’s pictorial repertoire. As a substitute for orthodox shot/reverse-shot cutting, it became a staple of deadpan humor in both art films like Kitano Takeshi’s and cult hits like Napoleon Dynamite (2004).

Even when not composed with planimetric flatness, the very long take also became a prominent technical option. In Europe, Miklós Jancso was identified with a dynamic and fluid choreography of camera and figures in shots running for many minutes. By constraint, the “minimalist” films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, such as The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach (1968), employed quite static shots with little or no camera movement (Figure 5.6). Allied with the planimetric composition, the
static long take became somewhat common in the 1970s. In the 1980s, apparently unaware of the European developments, Hou Hsiao-hsien made the fixed-camera long take central to his style, but his use of the long lens supports more dynamic staging principles than we see in most European instances. Hou's complex blocking is often employed to highlight small actions taking place quite far from the viewer (Figures 5.7-5.9). His fixed long takes appear to have influenced many other directors in Asia, though few have matched his virtuosity in recessive staging and dense image design (Figure 5.10; see also Figure 5.5). Today's festival films are likely to include at least some striking long takes with minimal camera movement, and entire films can be built out of them. The international currency of the device is evident with the French film Un couple parfait (2006), directed by the Japanese long-take adept Suwa Nobuhiro. Moreover, a director may decouple the fixed camera from the long take, creating unusually strict constraints on camera placement. We now have movies consisting wholly of conversations in automobiles, with the camera anchored outside the windshield (Kiarostami's Ten) or angled from the dashboard (Figure 5.11).

A second aspect touched on in this essay became a concern of my book Narration in the Fiction Film. The art cinema engages us not only by asking us to construct the fabula action but also by teasing us to make sense of the ongoing narration. So how is this slippery narration patterned across the length of the whole film? Taking as my example Resnais' La Guerre est finie (1966), I argued that many art films create a "game of form." The film initially trains the viewer in its distinctive storytelling tactics, but as the film proceeds, those tactics mutate in unforeseeable ways. In La Guerre est finie, the key device—the hypothetical sequence, showing several alternative actions the protagonist might take in the future—is announced quite early. At first it seems difficult and disruptive, but through repetition it becomes stabilized. Then, however,
the narration renders the hypothetical sequences more indeterminate, introducing uncertainty by mixing in flashbacks and abrupt transitions to new scenes. The final section of the film is the most transparent, as the story action comes to the fore, but there are still variations that make the premises of presentation somewhat unpredictable. The finale leaves open both the consequences of story causality and the rules governing the narration itself.27

This game of form isn't present in every film that belongs to the mode, but it does reappear.28 A striking instance is Agnès Varda's Vagabond (aka Sans toit ni loi; 1985). The film has a characteristic art-cinema situation: an unexplained psychological crisis that makes a young woman quit her job as secretary and take to an itinerant life in Montpellier. Her meanderings are presented more or less in chronological order, as she links up various people in the neighboring villages and sinks into drunkenness and exhaustion. The film begins with the discovery of her frozen corpse and assumes uncertainty by mixing in flashbacks and abrupt transitions to new scenes. The film adds, but here they also glide into a pattern of narrational uncertainty. Shortly afterward, the maid Yolande turns from her dusting toward us to describe how to get into the chateau that her uncle guards (Figure 5.15). This monologue doesn't tell us about Mona, and it is more properly addressed to Yolande's layabout boyfriend, Paulo, than to anyone else, inside or outside the fictional world. In retrospect, we can justify the moment as Yolande talking to Paulo, who may be offscreen (he slips in and out of the household), but this is by no means definite. The fact that we never see to whom she's speaking dramatically violates the internal norm set up so far. Very soon after this, when Yolande meets Paulo at the chateau, she again addresses the camera, and now she confides that she was moved by seeing Mona and another vagrant, David.

still other variants. The witnesses "help" the filmmaker "tell" Mona's story in several disquieting ways. Vagabond's first flashback is introduced by idling boys recalling seeing Mona on the beach; we simply overhear their reference to her. Later, at a truck stop a driver tells another about picking her up, and then a garage owner tells another man about hiring her. But already there's a modulation. The man whom the truck driver addresses is quite visible, but the first view of the garagiste talking of Mona comes in a reverse-angle composition, so we see only the shoulders of his listener (Figure 5.13). When we come out of the flashback, he is still talking, but to an unseen listener (Figure 5.14). In an ordinary film, such variations might simply serve to underscore the garage owner's testimony, but here they also glide into a pattern of narrational uncertainty. Shorty afterward, the maid Yolande turns from her dusting toward us to describe how to break into the chateau that her uncle guards (Figure 5.15). This monologue doesn't tell us about Mona, and it is more properly addressed to Yolande's layabout boyfriend, Paulo, than to anyone else, inside or outside the fictional world. In retrospect, we can justify the moment as Yolande talking to Paulo, who may be offscreen (he slips in and out of the household), but this is by no means definite. The fact that we never see to whom she's speaking dramatically violates the internal norm set up so far. Very soon after this, when Yolande meets Paulo at the chateau, she again addresses the camera, and now she confides that she was moved by seeing Mona and another vagrant, David, curled up sleeping together (Figure 5.16). This time, there can be no doubt that this is a soliloquy. The objective portrayal of quite unfeeling male witnesses has shifted into
a subjective monologue, with a woman telling us spontaneously of her yearning for love and companionship.

As if taking his cue from Yolande, David the hippie is soon given a recounting scene too. He squats in a boxcar and tells how he enjoyed being with Mona when she had grass (Figure 5.17). In story-world terms, his testimony undercuts Yolande's romanticism; he and Mona's relationship was based on staying stoned. Narrationally, all bets now seem off. Is he soliloquizing? Unlike Yolande, he doesn't look straight at us; his eyes move sharply left and right. So is he speaking to other people? No other characters are visible, and the train moves away while he's still speaking.

Across all these scenes, the narration has laid out contradictory cues, and these block any consistent construal of the characters' circumstances in these recounting scenes. As the film goes on, the inserted recollections continue to oscillate among these possibilities, mixing in other variants. Sometimes the repetitions affirm earlier inferences we might have made, as when Yolande soliloquizes to the camera one last time before leaving the story action; she is the only character given these private monologues. At other times, the characters recount Mona's behavior to the camera, or past it, or to someone in the scene, or perhaps some combination of all (Figure 5.18).

Per发展规划, at certain moments Mona's eyes graze the camera, sometimes pausing as if she were looking at us (Figure 5.19). The narration's determination to throw us off balance runs to the very end, when Assoun, the Tunisian immigrant worker who was closest to Mona, simply kisses her scarf and looks out at us silently (Figure 5.20). In this purely emblematic moment, he seems not to be responding to anyone on the scene, either character or filmmaker.

At the close, the tale of Mona's wanderings retains its episodic quality, and her motives remain enigmatic. We construct this art cinema fabula in and through a series of incompatible judgments about her made by diverse characters. So far, so conventional. But by equivocating about the situation in which the characters recount their stories, Varda also invites us to enter the typical game of formal hesitation. Perhaps the ambivalences of the onlookers' glimpses of Mona can finally be attributed to the supreme control of this narration over the primary conditions of the story. The voice-over commentary that quite early announced the film's method also includes a telling passage. "I know little about her myself," says the woman's voice, "but it seems to me that she came from the sea." At this moment we see a shot of Mona striding out of the ocean, watched by the biker boys. The backstory begins with an oscillation between objective presentation and a frank gesture of authorial imagination. Perhaps everything that follows, even the firm texture created by regional customs and dialects and nonactors, is to be understood as subordinate to the creative energies of authorial vision (not an implied author, or a "cinematic narrator," but the person who made this movie for us).

This poignant film is crisscrossed by many other patterns, notably the planimetrically composed tracking shots that coax us to find another theme-and-variations structure.29 A complete analysis would also show how the game of form in the various narrators' accounts blocks our constructing a complete psychological profile of Mona. Instead, it swerves us toward comparing the productive or unproductive lives of the characters she touches. One of the film's thematic dilemmas is how utter freedom can be reconciled with the danger of solitude, and this tension is played out in these onlookers who admire, criticize, or worry about Mona, homeless and lawless. Still, our consideration of themes, as abstractions from our experience of the film, should be balanced by considering how we make sense of the narration moment by moment, registering its mixed signals and following its zigzag paths. A crucial part of Vagabond's respectful uneasiness about Mona's choices is born of an ambiguous narration.


15. “The existence of an office,” writes an anthropologist, “logically entails a distinction between the powers and responsibilities pertaining to it and their exercise by different incumbents. Hence some concept of the individual as distinct from the office is established” (J. S. La Fontaine, “Person and Individual: Some Anthropological Reflections,” in Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes, The Category of the Person, 138).


17. The odd thing is that in shot 2 of the first scene, a figure can be glimpsed ducking out of sight in the passenger seat. This is a good example of what is not perceivable under normal protocols of viewing.

18. It’s been suggested to me that the filmmakers were simply sloppy; although they intended both versions of Monte’s death to be identical, they were unable to duplicate the details of performance exactly. Even if that were so, when confronted with two versions of Zachary Scott’s delivery of the line “Mildred,” the filmmakers put the version most likely to throw suspicion on the heroine in the opening and used the nonincriminating version in the revelatory flashback. The published version of the screenplay doesn’t call for the reenactment of Monte’s final words, so evidently the replay of the murder was devised in the course of shooting and postproduction. See LaValley, Mildred Pierce, 233.


Chapter 5

1. More radical avant-garde movements, such as Soviet montage filmmaking, surrealism, and cinéma pur, seem to have been relatively without effect upon the art cinema’s style. I suspect that those experimental styles that did not fundamentally challenge narrative coherence were the most assimilable to the postwar art cinema.


5. Arthur Knight compares the Hollywood film to a commodity and the foreign film to an artwork: “Art is not manufactured by committees. Art comes from an individual who has something that he must express. . . . This is the reason why we hear so often that foreign films are ‘more artistic’ than our own. There is in them the urgency of individual expression, an independence of vision, the coherence of a single-minded statement.” Quoted in Michael F. Mayer, *Foreign Films on American Screens* (New York: Arco, 1965), vii.

6. “The strategy was to talk about Hawks, Preminger, etc. as artists like Buñuel and Renoir” [Jim Hillier, “The Return to Movie,” *Movie*, no. 20 (Spring 1975): 17]. I do not mean to imply that auteur criticism did not at times distinguish between the classical narrative and the art cinema. A book like V. F. Perkins’ *Film as Film* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1978) insists not only upon authorial presence but also upon the causal motivation and the stylistic economy characteristic of the classical cinema. Thus, Perkins finds the labored directorial touches of Antonioni and Bergman insignificantly motivated by story action. Nevertheless, Perkins’ interpretation of the jeep sequence in *Carmen Jones* in terms of characters’ confinement and liberation (80–82) is a good example of how Hollywood cutting and camera placement can be invested with symbolic traces of the author.


19. For a thorough account of Wong’s debts to prestigious literature and film, see Stephen Teo, *Wong Kar-wai* (London: British Film Institute, 2005). I discuss Wong’s experimental impulses in my *Planet Hong Kong*, 266–89.


26. For a study of Hou’s staging, see ch. 5 of my *Figures Traced in Light*.

Chapter 6

After the first publication of this essay, I discovered Gerald Prince’s lively essay, “The Disnarrated” in Style 22, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 1-8. In studying those small-scale moments in literary narrative that play with what might have been, Prince’s paper intersects with mine in intriguing ways.


2. Ibid., 127.


7. It seems that the Internet, which doesn’t offer the predetermined trajectory that a film does, is far more hospitable to widely branching narrative futures. Katherine Hayles illustrates this point in “Reconfiguring Narrative in Electronic Environments” (paper presented at the Narrative at the Outer Limits conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 4, 2001). The book format offers its own intricacies, as the Choose Your Own Adventure series indicates. For a map of the possibilities in that series, see Gregory Lord, “Analysis Essay,” http://www.ethblue.com/cyoa/essay.html.


10. A clear example can be found in the Back to the Future trilogy. In the first film, the switchpoint is established as the moment when Marty, having traveled back to 1955, pushes his future father out of the path of the car driven by Lorraine’s father. As a result, George McFly doesn’t win Lorraine’s pity, they don’t go to the prom together, they don’t kiss and fall in love and marry… and Marty doesn’t get born. Having disturbed the past, Marty must restage the kiss under new circumstances, along the way allowing his father to become more courageous and self-confident. But Back to the Future II, which presents an alternative future for Marty and his family, shifts the switchpoint to an earlier moment on the day of the prom, when the villain Biff receives an almanac from the future that will allow him to win any sports bet he lays down. This earlier moment becomes the crucial fork for that second film in the series—another aspect of the plot that Doc obligingly diagrams for us on a blackboard in his lab. See also p. 186.


14. Perhaps Ayckbourn’s work is a more general inspiration as well. His play How the Other Half Loves (1969) presents two locales separated in space and time “superimposed” on the same set. Here one table serves as two tables, one sofa as two sofas, and the like, while two sets of actors play out the different scenes simultaneously. This virtuosic premise seems to anticipate Sliding Doors’ scene showing the two Helens in the same bar.

15. The Malcolm episode is “Bowling” (airedate April 1, 2001). Thanks to Jonathan Frome for pointing out this episode to me.


17. There was an African American production, also called Eyes of Youth (1920), which may have been a film record of a performance of the 1917 play. A later version is The Love of Sunya (1927).

18. The opening monologue of Slacker (1991), delivered by the director himself, introduces the notion of parallel worlds, along with the butterfly effect, chaos theory, degrees of separation, and other pop science motifs. It’s as if Richard Linklater is opening up a box of formal devices for the independent cinema to explore in the next two decades.


21. For more on the phenomenon of the replay movie and its relation to narrative experimentation and DVD consumption, see my The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 89–94.