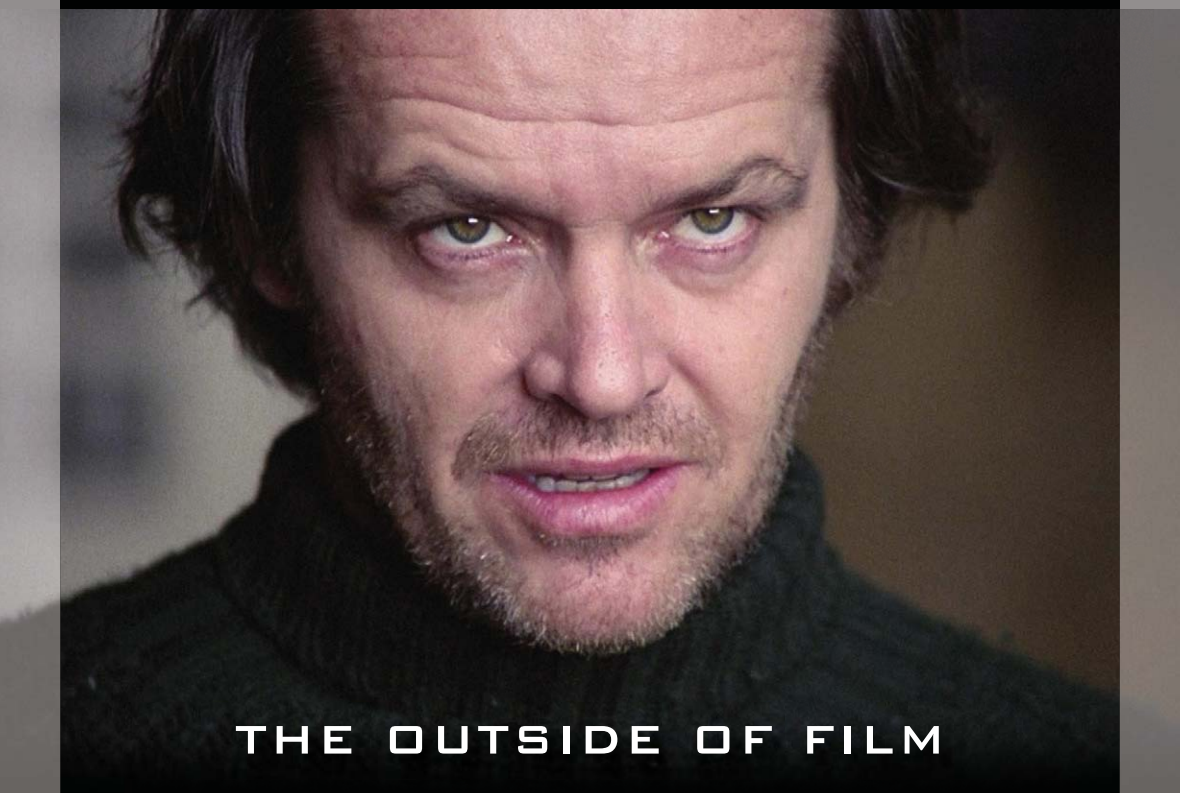
FILM CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

TOWARDS A POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF CINEMA



THE OUTSIDE OF FILM

SULGI LIE

Amsterdam University Press

Towards a Political Aesthetics of Cinema

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The Outside of Film

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New Preface to the English Edition

If the present book may appear to the reader as an exercise in hardcore film theory, especially of psychoanalytical provenance, then it is worth recalling that its initial impulse arose from a cinephilic attachment to certain irritating details of specific films, rather than from a will towards theoretical abstraction in the first place. While watching films by Antonioni, Haneke, Kubrick or Schrader, to name just a few directors whose works will be closely analyzed in the following pages, I was fascinated by a phenomenon that in strict technical terms would be regarded as an error in the construction of a character's point-of-view. In an apparently purely transitional scene in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* for example, Richard Gere is driving in his convertible as the first shot shows his head turning right towards the surrounding landscape of the highway. The next reverse shot occupies his subjective look and pans from right to left to embody the turning of his head. Nothing could be more conventional in terms of cinematic syntax than this sequence of objective shot and subjective reverse-shot. But all of a sudden the same movement of the camera discloses the view of Richard Gere from behind. What began as a perfectly causal linking of shots ends up as an illogical and impossible detachment of the point of view from the carrier of the same point of view. In trying to grasp this paradoxical short circuit of stitching and de-stitching in between one cut, I gradually came to the conviction that the old psychoanalytical paradigm of "suture" provides the most adequate and most elaborate theoretical tool to come to terms with this fundamental negativity of what Jean-Pierre Oudart, in his formative article on suture, called the "absent one". While the theoretical ramifications of this structuring absence are extremely complex – and the whole first part of this book is devoted to tracing its complicated path throughout the history of psychoanalytical film theory – its basic premise is radically simple: the absent one in film is none other than the camera itself. In other words: the camera is logically excluded from the very cinematic image it has captured itself. Or, to put it even more simply: the camera cannot film itself. Thus the core of the present book is an attempt to defend this ineluctable negativity of what I name the "outside of film" against its positivist domestications. Yet it is important to delimit this insistence on aesthetic negativity from the pre-theoretical valorisation of some vague *hors-champ* that still populates much film criticism. Not only is the outside as it is conceived here *not* the outside of the image, but the outside of the gaze, it is also not to be confused with a predilection for the decorative flavour of withdrawal and lack. On

the contrary, I understand film's structural openness to externality as its very political potential to surpass its own aesthetic immanence towards the inscription of social totality. In decoding the wounds of cinematic suture as articulations of a political unconscious, the work of Fredric Jameson enters the frame in the second part of the book. Here, I try to explicate the allegorical nature of suture, or to re-work a famous phrase by Jameson: suture is the wound in which history is what hurts.

Berlin, September 2019
Sulgi Lie

Preface

"Absence does not derive from presence, but the other way around."
– Slavoj Žižek

In this book, political film aesthetics will be articulated as a negative project. This premise presupposes the following negations: the politics of aesthetics is to be found neither in the manifest political content of films, nor in the political intentionality of individual authors, nor even in the canonized practices of political modernism. I do insist on the primacy of a politics of form, but I seek to divorce this from the modernist dogma of reflexivity. A political valency will also be ascribed to films that do not, on the surface, appear to be political. This book is not dedicated to directors and films that have cultivated a high-level avant-garde politics of form, but aims for the release of a symptomatic, non-arbitrary political potential in supposedly "apolitical" films. Thus, the contours of a political film aesthetics can only be found, here, in the process of interpretation, which precisely mistrusts the common sense of a political cinema in the style of Jean-Luc Godard.

In the wake of the discursive hegemony of the Godardian tradition of political modernism that has dominated film theory since the 1970s, another cinematic connection between politics and aesthetics must be developed. With this in mind, my work rests on two theoretical pillars: with the twin concepts of enunciation and suture as my point of departure, I will initially attempt a political revision of psychoanalytic film theory. This revision rests on the hypothesis that, in its preference for political modernism, apparatus theory, despite its seminal role for the field, is based on theoretical short-cuts which underpin the filmic *dispositif* with a structurally anti-political ideological disposition. The ontological absence of the production process in the filmic product is thus, according to this outlook, the cardinal political problem of the cinema. In the first part of this book, in contrast, I conceive of this absence as the unique aesthetic *and* political capability of film. Negativity here means, literally, the Outside of the Film: the paradoxically invisible element that lies at the core of what appears to be the most visible of the arts. The negative force of absence will firstly be formulated as a revised theory of the gaze, which has been considered as a relic of psychoanalysis since the phenomenological, corporeal turn in film theory since the 1990s. The present book also relates negatively to this trend; it adheres both to the orthodox concept of the gaze, and to the conceptualization of film as a text.

The negativity of a political film aesthetics confirms neither the positivity of the visible nor the positivity of the body.

The Marxist aesthetics of Fredric Jameson forms the other fundamental theoretical pillar of this study. In Germany, Jameson's works have never received the attention they deserve. A political aesthetics can be extracted from his writings on film theory, one that rejects the fetishism of production of an outmoded critique of ideology in favor of a negative, Marxist, allegorical approach. According to Jameson, political film aesthetics must produce an encounter between the negative totality of late capitalism and the allegorical traversal of this Outside. In this sense, the following considerations plead for a re-animation of the alliance between psychoanalysis and Marxism in film theory, in the wake of their de-animation. Tarry yet with the negative, for the lonely hour of the final instance never comes.

Part I

The Absent Cause of Film:
On the Theory of Enunciation and Suture

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Introduction

Abstract
The idea of an outside of the film is based on the assumption that an absent cause is structurally immanent to film. In a film, the absent cause coincides with the camera's gaze, which remains external to the image precisely as the generator of the cinematic image. This is the paradox of the cinema: the camera can never reveal itself as the cause of the image, the generative outside cannot be transferred to the inside of the image. With apparatus theory, however, this necessary split between gaze and image, cause and effect, production process and product, becomes the cardinal ideological problem of a political film aesthetics. How can cinema produce political effects when its the structure of its *dispositif* works towards concealing its productive outside?

Keywords: Absence, Apparatus, Camera, Ideology, Off-Screen

"To understand this necessary and paradoxical identity of non-vision and vision within vision itself is very exactly to pose our problems (the problem of the necessary connection which unites the visible and the invisible)."
– Louis Althusser

"…which would mean that *the effects are successful only in the absence of cause*."
– Jacques Lacan

If, in almost all advanced discourses of film theory, it is a commonly held position that the media self-reflexivity of an aesthetic object is virtually synonymous with an explicit political reflexivity, then it should be recalled, in line with Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, that even the most refined reflexive turn is always, in the end, condemned to failure when it comes up

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against the hard kernel of an "absent cause."[1] An apparently simple structural phenomenon, which can be described as a fundamental impossibility of every self-reflexivity, forms the point of departure for the following discussion on the complex theoretical history of the twin, inextricably intertwined concepts of enunciation and suture: the film camera cannot film itself in the process of filming. The original site of capturing the image in every cinematic shot appears as a blind spot. The entity that gives rise to the visible world remains necessarily external to it. The plenitude of the visible is thus based on the existence of an invisible site, the Inside on an Outside, the on-screen world on the off-screen world, the effect on an absent cause.

The theoretical stances on the system of enunciation and suture have frequently connected, in their own self-conceptualization, the hope for political filmmaking with the promised development of self-reflexivity in the cinema. In contrast with this dominant "politics of self-reflexivity"[2] in film theory another concept of political film aesthetics must be delineated by means of a symptomatic reading of both enunciation theory and suture theory. This political film aesthetics would distance itself from the modernist dogma of an equivalence between self-reflexivity and political progressiveness and instead seek to conceive the political potential of film in that paradoxical intersection between seeing and not-seeing which underpinned Louis Althusser's Marxist epistemology. It is astonishing that Althusser's famous definition of ideology as the "'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"[3] via Lacan's concept of the mirror stage in psychoanalytic film theory has had such an immense effect, while certain other passages from *Reading Capital* have remained fully unconsidered. It is here that Althusser even seems to formulate an implicit film theory: Althusser's reconstruction of Marx's critique of political economy as a structural theory of reading strikingly anticipates the problematic of enunciation and suture.

According to Althusser, the separation-connection of vision and non-vision extends across a "necessary invisible connection between the field

1 See Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), and Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).

2 See, for instance, Dana Polan, "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film," in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods vol. II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 661-672.

3 See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 109.

of the visible and the field of the invisible, a connection which defines the necessity of the obscure field of the invisible, as a necessary effect of the structure of the visible field."[4] Althusser's formulation of the obscure field within the field of the visible rather precisely describes the inaccessible cause of the gaze as a blind spot of the visual, which in a film coincides with the camera's viewpoint. With Althusser, the film camera may be understood less in its empirical existence as a material, technical apparatus, and more as a phantom essence, which both generates the visible field of the filmic image and hollows it out with a structural absence: "non-vision is therefore inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision."[5] Decisive, in this regard, is the fact that non-vision does indeed initially enable vision, even though this relationship can never be reciprocal. The cause of the gaze is immanent to the visible, but, at the same time, it is located in a radically "extimate" site.[6] In this regard, the following astonishing passage can be read as a theory of the cinematic off-screen *avant la lettre*:

> The invisible is defined by the visible as *its* invisible, *its* forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible (to return to the spatial metaphor), the outer darkness of exclusion – but the *inner darkness of exclusion*, inside the visible itself because defined by its structure.[7]

Transposed into the terminology of film theory, this passage has the following meaning: here, Althusser establishes the visible field as the effect of an absolute *hors-champ* (off-screen space), which should not be understood as a spatial outside that necessarily comes into being when the filmic frame has extracted a visual slice from the infinite field of the visible, but as a constitutive darkness in the heart of the visible itself – as the unfolding of an Outside in the Inside. This internal outside is – according to this hypothesis – none other than the (non-)place of the camera viewpoint.

Early film theory regularly affirmed that the aesthetic power of film resided in its unprecedented disclosure of the visible world, and that this was due less to its capacity for verisimilitude and more to the film image's potential for revelation – the revelation of the previously hidden, or

4 Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), p. 20.

5 Ibid., p. 22

6 On Lacan's notion of extimacy, see below, Ch. 4.2.

7 Althusser/Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 27.

becoming-visible of the previously invisible. At a remove from this romantic strand of thinking, Noël Burch, at roughly the same time as Althusser, systematized with formalist rigor, in his book *Theory of Film Practice*, a theory of the cinematic *hors-champ*, which augments the visible field of the filmic image by incorporating its absent side. In Burch's fundamental distinction between *screen space* (the totality of the visible space of the image) and *off-screen space* (the invisible space outside the image), the difference between presence and absence initially refers to the constitutive delimitation of the visible field – the *frame*. As an extraction of a spatially finite image from the infinite continuity of the visible world, the image field is always a sectional, delimited, framed phenomenon that is surrounded on all sides by off-screen space. Burch then differentiates six segments of this off-screen shell:

> The immediate confines of the first four of these areas are determined by the four borders of the frame, and correspond to the four faces of an imaginary truncated pyramid projected into the surrounding space, a description that obviously is something of a simplification. A fifth segment cannot be defined with the same seeming geometric precision, yet no one will deny that there is an off-screen space 'behind the camera' that is quite distinct from the four segments of space bordering the frame lines, although the characters in the film generally reach this space by passing just to the right or left of the camera. There is a sixth segment, finally, encompassing the space existing behind the set or some object in it: A character reaches it by going out a door, going around a street corner, disappearing behind a pillar or behind another person, or performing some similar act. The outer limit of this sixth segment of space is just beyond the horizon.[8]

Making use of an analysis of Jean Renoir's silent film *Nana*, Burch demonstrates how off-screen space can be mobilized through various filmic strategies. Entries and exits of figures in and out of the image field are considered to be the simplest form of off-screen construction: they open diegetic space out towards the six segments of the *hors-champ*. In addition to such movements, the visual axes of the on-screen figures indicate objects of the gaze existing off-screen, and thereby exceed the boundaries of the visual field. An off-screen space inextricably bound with the visible can also be brought into play through body parts and fragments that protrude into the on-screen space.

8 Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 17.

The off-screen necessarily evokes an imaginary space that is essentially filled by the active imagination of the spectator. Decisive, for Burch, is the fact that in film the invisibility of the imaginary off-screen can be potentially made visible through a subsequent revelation in the visual field. Through the possibilities of expansive camera movements, but above all through the space-transcending potential of montage, the imaginary off-screen can be retroactively transformed into a concrete on-screen. Burch thus does not understand the filmic off-screen as an absolute category, but as a relational phenomenon: "It is important to realize that off-screen space has only an intermittent or, rather, fluctuating existence during any film."[9] Of course, through certain camera movements, and through every cut that does not repeat the same camera position, an on-screen is shifted into the off-screen, but the power of film seems to be tied to the expansion of a mobile visual field and the occupation of the off-screen through the forces of the visible. Here, Burch seems to lean on André Bazin's well-known distinction between the *cadre* (frame) of painting, as a kind of internal closure, and the *cache* (mask) of film, as a centrifugal opening outwards:

> The outer edges of the screen are not, as the technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal.[10]

Following on from Bazin, the fact that, in this structural alternation between off-screen and on-screen, between *Fort* and *Da*, the mobile frame of the film is fundamentally distinct from both the internal closure of the painting and the fixed frame of photography was clarified by Christian Metz in an important passage:

> In film there is a plurality of successive frames, of camera movements, and character movements, so that a person or an object which is off-frame in a given moment may appear inside the frame the moment after, then disappear again, and so on, according to the principle (I purposely exaggerate) of the turnstile. The off-frame is taken into the evolutions and scansions

9 Ibid., p. 21.

10 André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," in *What is Cinema? vol. I*, trans Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 165.

> of the temporal flow: it is off-frame, but not off-film. Furthermore, the very existence of a sound track allows a character who has deserted the visual scene to continue to mark her or his presence in the auditory scene (if I can risk this quasi-oxymoron: "auditory" and "scene"). If the filmic off-frame is substantial, it is because we generally know, or are able to guess more or less precisely, what is going on in it. The character who is off- frame in a photograph, however, will never come into the frame, will never be heard- again a death, another form of death. The spectator has no empirical knowledge of the contents of the off-frame, but at the same time cannot help imagining some off-frame, hallucinating it, dreaming the shape of this emptiness.[11]

Here, Metz contrasts the absolute off-field of photography as the site of an ever unavailable outside with the variable off-field of film. While off-screen space in the cinema – as Burch has shown – always stands in causally motivated spatial relationships with the visible field through the mobile axes of the camera (and the human gaze), for Metz the withdrawal of the visible in the photographic off-field is not provisional, but conclusive. It is precisely on this point that both Burch and Metz should be contradicted. In the cinema, after all, there does indeed exist an absolute *hors-champ* which is radically external to the fictional occupation of off-screen space. The "undocumented, immaterial and projected off-frame" that Metz only ascribes to photography, persists in film as the empty space of the camera viewpoint. In the cinema, the absolute *hors-champ* coincides with the cause of the visible.

To this thesis, we could object that, in photography, the place of the camera as absent cause can of course only be conceived through the spectator's capacity for imagination. Moreover, in human perception the eyes of the person seeing cannot be seen. However, both in the case of photography and in the case of natural perception, the view remains tied to a single, fixed perspective. The spatiotemporal immobilization of a singular viewpoint at the moment of illumination is unavoidably inscribed in the *freeze-frame* of the photograph, while the human eye cannot, as a rule, be separated from the body that carries it. In contrast to these spatial limitations to the viewpoint, film allows for an undoing of the boundaries of visual perspective, and it thereby loosens the gaze from both the arrested *punctum* of photography and the limitations of the human eye. By means of mobile framings and montage, the camera can differentiate and reproduce any

11 Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (Autumn 1985), pp. 86-87.

number of successive visual perspectives, thereby potentially constructing a vision of an unlimited spatial totality.

Since the historical codification of narrative cinema, the shot/reverse-shot technique forms the smallest syntagmatic unity of this multiperspectival spatial enclosing in the cinema. In photography there is only a shot and no reverse-shot. In the cinema, by contrast, the camera in a reserve-shot occupies the approximate position of the object of the gaze in the initial shot, since it rotates the visual field by 180 degrees and encloses the space in the perimeter of the two sides. This totalization of filmic space guarantees the conversion of the imaginary off-field into a concrete on-field. Of decisive importance, however, is the fact that the imaginary off-field of the first shot is occupied simply by the placement of the camera, whereas in the direct reverse-shot the off-screen camera does not gain on-screen presence, but disappears from its original location, and is usually substituted with a fictional figure. In other words: the shot/reverse-shot technique suggests the subsequent visibility of the camera in the frontal change of perspective of the perimeter of the screen, but ends with its complete invisibility. The point where the gaze is produced is masked, and the fictional space is hermetically sealed.

And yet, the disappearance of the camera in the reverse-shot is not a result of the ideological masking of the apparatus, but of a structural impossibility – precisely that of a camera filming itself. As the "obscure field" (Althusser) of the visible, the *hors-champ* is not buried away in the relative darkness of Burch's six segments, but in the absolute darkness of an internal outside – a present absence. At the very most, this structural off-field comes close to Burch's fifth off-screen segment, "next to the camera," which symptomatically does not fit into his geometric formalization of off-screen spaces. The off-field "behind the camera" (Burch) is the camera itself as the point of absence.

From an entirely different theoretical perspective, Stanley Cavell, in his concept of "automatic world projection," emphasized the constitutive separation of the visible world of the film from its absent cause. The automatism of the film camera is intrinsically tied to its disappearance from the field of the visible, which it created in the first place: "One can feel that there is always a camera left out of the picture: the one working now."[12] Not without a relationship to Althusser's thoughts on the "dark field" of visibility, Cavell also evokes the appearance of the cinematic "world image" of an invisible

12 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 126.

outside, which is based on the primary withdrawal of the camera from the field of its effects. Cavell's formulation of "the camera's outsideness to its world,"[13] which is only immanent to the projected world at the cost of its absence, thereby observes a similar entanglement between phenomenal appearance and structural withdrawal, which (as already suggested) conceives of the camera less as a material apparatus and more as as a creature of the *hors-champ*.[14] Proceeding from this impossibility of a simultaneous visibility of projection and the source of projection, we may also speak, with Stanley Cavell and Gertrud Koch, of a fundamental latency of the camera: "The camera functions as an image-generating medium, whose phenomenal world is produced as a projection. And as in every projection, the cause of the projection remains concealed. It is for this reason that Cavell can rightly speak of an automatic world projection. It is technically-apparatively generated, without merging into this generation."[15]

The latent existence of the camera cannot, therefore, be positively duplicated in the cinematic image, but can only be visualized at the cost of a posterior absence. For Cavell, too, the camera as absent cause marks the boundary of all filmic self-reflexivity, since the latter, even in the extreme case of a camera filming itself in the mirror, cannot make manifest the hidden kernel of the projection. Cavell also comes from a position of philosophical skepticism toward the thesis of a necessarily divided subjectivity, which is astonishingly close to psychoanalytic enunciation theory (see Chapter 1.1). Even through a symmetrical self-reflection, the outside of the camera can never be inscribed in the inside of the filmic image.

> One almost imagines that one could catch the connection in act, by turning the camera on it – perhaps by including a camera and crew in the picture (presumably at work upon *this* picture), but that just changes the subject. The camera can of course take a picture of itself, say in a mirror; but that gets it no further into itself than I get into my subjectivity by saying "I'm speaking these words now." [...] The camera is outside its subject as I am outside my language.[16]

13 Ibid., p. 133

14 For Cavell's views on off-screen space, see the chapter "Photograph and Screen," in Ibid., pp. 23-25.

15 Gertrud Koch, "Latenz und Bewegung im Feld der Kultur: Rahmungen einer performativen Theorie des Films," in Sybille Krämer (ed.), *Performativität und Medialität* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), p. 165.

16 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 127. In their detailed commentary on Cavell's book, William Rothman and Marian Keane assert that the exteriority of the camera to the projected world

In the renowned opening sequence of *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), Jean-Luc Godard explored the very paradox highlighted by Cavell, which consists of the impossible attempt to film the camera itself during the act of filming. In the background of the first shot, we can see, from a low camera angle, a small filmmaking team during the filming of a long tracking shot, while a voiceover reads out the names of the cast and crew. This sequence unmistakably makes the point of simultaneously referring both to the visible filmmaking team in front of the camera and the invisible filmmaking team *behind* the camera. The visible camera slowly moves towards the invisible camera, until the cameraman of *Le Mépris*, Raoul Coutard, viewed from slightly below, can be seen sitting on a dolly in the foreground of the image. Coutard pans the camera from its initially parallel position to a frontal axis in the center of the absent viewpoint. It is with this paradoxical confrontation of two camera views that the opening sequence of *Le Mépris* concludes: Coutard behind the camera films Coutard in front of the camera behind the camera.

Godard's strategy of inscribing the absent site in the image dramatizes, in its very duplication, the aporias of a constitutive gap between the camera angle and the filmic image: the primary viewpoint can be marked only through secondary image incarnations of the technical camera apparatus in the register of the visual. These are always visual substitutes, which metonymically refer to the cause of the effect, without the site of the primary genesis of the image ever being capable of being fully obtained. *Le Mépris* seeks to obtain the blind spot in the field of the visible as the self-duplication of the camera, and thereby only invests in this empty position of an elusive causality. The hidden core of the camera viewpoint does not become transparent, if, like Jacques Aumont ("the look at another look that is looking at us")[17] or Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, we fill this empty position with the place of the spectators: "While Coutard is of course not filming the spectator's body, his camera has captured our point of view; it is looking

has as a consequence the hermetic closure of this world: "That the camera is outside its subject means it is outside, separate from, the person or things in its frame at any given moment. It also means the camera is outside the world on film; the world that reveals itself on film, that reveals itself to be the camera's, is complete onto itself, complete without the camera in it." William Rothman and Marian Keane, *Reading Cavell's* The World Viewed*: A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), p. 208.

17 Jacques Aumont, "The Fall of the Gods: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris*," in Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *French Film: Texts and Contexts* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 223. Aumont understands this visual confrontation as an expression of Godard's authorial self-reflexivity: "In short, *Le Mépris* is a movie in which the filmmaker's 'authorial' self-awareness is never far below the surface and a deliberate reflexivity constantly asserts itself."

at the site/sight of our looking, which it has reduced to the unidentifiable circle of light we see in Coutard's lenses."[18]

In the asymptotic tear of the absent and the present camera, the beginning of *Le Mépris* practically produces the failure of any attempt at a self-reflexivity of the cinematic apparatus. While, from a low-angle viewpoint, we look directly into the CinemaScope lens of Coutard's camera, the film's voiceover cites an apocryphal quote from André Bazin: "Cinema substitutes for our gaze a world that conforms to our desires. *Le Mépris* is the story of this world." As if taking the form of a visual reply to Bazin, a reverse-shot then shows us the naked body of Bardot from a high-angle shot – as an imaginary approximation of two fully, diegetically incommensurable spaces. Instead of intensifying the self-duplication in the reverse-shot (through a kind of second shot of Coutard behind the camera), the cut seems to fulfil the same desire about which Bazin speaks. The lack within the empty space of the camera angle is enriched through the plenitude of the image in the reverse-shot:

> They are shot from a high-angle position, exactly like that assumed by Coutard's camera in the previous shot. Camille and Paul thus seem to come as the reverse shot to the shot which ends with a close-up of Coutard's lens, and with the words promising us a world conforming to our desires. It is as if the first shot of *Contempt* signifies "camera," and the second "image." And of course what figures here as "image" is primarily Camille, in all of her naked beauty. Her reclining body even seems made to order for the scope format.[19]

The separation-connection of camera and image in the film's initial shot/reverse-shot also articulates an aesthetic tension between modernism and classicism which courses throughout the whole film. For Jacques Aumont, *Le Mépris* is, with its plenitude of allusions to film history, a compendium of (Hollywood) classicism, so beloved by the cinephiles of *Cahiers du cinéma*, and simultaneously a melancholic confession of the irrevocable end of this era.[20] The first shot of the film is thus a sign of the modernist gesture of

18 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 34. Suture-theory provides us with convincing arguments against such a precipitous amalgamation of the viewpoint of the camera and that of the spectator. See Chapter 2 below for more.

19 Harun Farocki and Kaja Silverman, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 33.

20 See Jacques Aumont, "The Fall of the Gods," pp. 218-219. On the "ruinous classicism" of the film, see Catherine Russell, "Jean-Luc Godard: Allegory of the Body," in *Narrative Mortality:*

a discursive transformation of its own production of meaning, while the second shot contains the full beauty of classical cinema in the color-filtered transfiguration of Brigitte Bardot's naked body. In the reverse-shot, Godard seems to yield to the Bazinian desire to imagine a phantasmatic plenitude in the totality of the filmic (body-)image, in which every kind of lack is expelled. Only linked through a reverse-shot that is simultaneously connective and disconnective, the first two shots of the film oscillate between the apparatus and the sublime, discourse and the iconic. And yet, what this highly complex cut disguises, in all its semantic refinement, is the absent camera-cause as *hors-champ*, which denies itself any capacity for becoming an image. To express this idea in Lacanian terms: in the beginning of *Le Mépris*, the Symbolic and Imaginary realms mutually intersect each other, but a full confrontation with the Real is avoided. In the following sections on enunciation and suture, I intend to articulate positions in film theory and aesthetics in which the Cavellian idea "that the camera must now, in candor, acknowledge not its being present in the world but its being outside the world"[21] is decidedly turned in a political direction, beyond the historical options of classicism and modernism. With respect to the present book, this means above all that we should not turn our backs on the (abyssal) ground of the absent cause.

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21 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 130.

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