

film

3

film genre

film and the other arts

\$5.00

Reader

"WIDE ANGLE SAXON": AN EXAMINATION OF THE FILM VIEWER AS READER

VERA DIKA

The concern for the non-referentiality of the image (an emphasis on the signifier rather than the signified), a condition that has been taken to its limits by such filmmakers as Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice, is seen to reverse itself in George Landow's *WIDE ANGLE SAXON*. The elements of this film not only present, but actively invite a plurality of references to be completed by the viewer, and in so doing, both undermine this concern of the avant-garde film while maintaining one of its major tenets: that of elucidating the processes of film perception and knowledge. In *WIDE ANGLE SAXON*, the referential components formulate a system of interaction that objectify the manner in which the viewer creates meaning in, or reads, a filmic text.

In the classical fiction film¹ the perceptual and epistemological components are mediated by the viewer but the process by which this is accomplished is obscured, and so has led to the analogy of the film viewer as "dreamer." Addressing itself to the necessity of revelation, *WIDE ANGLE SAXON* constructs a system which makes apparent both the conventions of narrativity, as well as the viewer's responses which necessarily complete them. Because of its reflexive nature, *WIDE ANGLE SAXON* engages the viewer in a disruption of narrative expectation and so establishes a distance from which he may examine the given experience. From this vantage point, the viewer is then free to observe the conventions of the fiction film, the processes of his own consciousness and the manner of their interaction in the production of meaning. Shaken from his previously held position as dreamer, the viewer is now involved in a consciously opposing function: one which demands directed thought and language formation, rather than the less self-conscious emotive responses elicited by the classical fiction film.

The Viewer as Dreamer

In the spirit of opposition and reversal so characteristic of *WIDE ANGLE SAXON*, I will begin my discussion by examining the last shot of the film. The camera which had been static throughout, suddenly pans to the left and then swings back to the right. In the darkened space revealed by the motion we see a woman sit up in bed and exclaim, "Oh...it was a dream." The conventional bracketing procedure is used to direct the viewer's attention to what he has just seen, and to modify it in terms of the given statement. This film, however, presents a problem which distances the viewer and makes him aware of the convention, as well as the conditions of its inconsistency: that which has preceded the bracket in no way resembles either the physicality of a dream, or functions to establish a dream-like (non-reflexive) consciousness in the viewer. *WIDE ANGLE SAXON* has avoided the conventional methods for the representation of dream states, i.e., slow-motion camera, soft-focus effects, chiaroscuro, etc., presenting itself instead as a set of static, predominately well-lit, "objective" situations. Moreover, the formal and narrative properties of the film have prevented the affective transference and identification so common in the fiction film and, in so doing, undermined the analogy of film viewer as dreamer. The viewer has been quite aware of his

experience, actively directing his attention, his memory, and his ability for questioning and for language, to complete the given film experience. Because of these contradictions the viewer is made aware of the bracketing convention and the established stylistics for dream representation.

The dialectical nature of WIDE ANGLE SAXON, however, advises that nothing, not even this seemingly obvious filmic statement, be accepted without examining its opposing function. The visual images of the film have been presented in mock concurrence, often implying the development of a narrative situation which is never fully realized. Much like the components of a remembered dream these elements have existed as discontinuous, highly condensed, displaced units. The most important consideration, however, rests with the viewer's response. The film's system of internal opposition has distanced the viewer from the image and directed his thought and language (in the form of inner speech) to various points outside, across, and backward through the text. In this manner, both the filmic structure and the viewer's response bear resemblance to a dream-inspired situation, but one which exists as the reversal or inversion of that common to the fiction film experience. If the fiction film can be likened to a dream because it inspires identification, "perceptual transference," and an "impression of reality" through the pre-organized continuity of its elements, WIDE ANGLE SAXON is like a dream that is in the process of being analyzed: the discontinuous shards existing outside the sensory/emotive involvement of an illusion, and so bringing language and directed thought into dominance. Because of this relationship between image and language, and the nature of the filmic text (i.e., condensed, displaced) the statement "Oh ...it was a dream." can be understood as a dialectical affirmation of the film's structure and function. WIDE ANGLE SAXON is equivalent to a dream in that its structure and the viewer's response recall the direction of waking dream knowledge: from dream content to dream thought, or in this case from film experience to film knowledge.

Jean-Louis Baudry's article "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus"² is based on a consideration which can be of interest here. The fiction film, Baudry notes, operates towards the obfuscation of differences on all levels of production and projection. For Baudry, the system by which these components transform an objective reality into a film is analogous to the dream work (i.e., the mechanism by which dream thoughts are transformed into the manifest dream content). Further, in both the dream and the filmic situation (providing the individual remains seduced by the illusion) the process by which one form is changed into another is obscured. The viewer, in this manner, becomes transcendental, i.e., replaced by the film image.

WIDE ANGLE SAXON is a filmic attempt to relocate the viewer and to make him aware of the process of "work" by which film becomes film knowledge. The viewer is placed in an analytical situation, much like that described by Freud, in which the knowledge of the images (the manifest dream content) and their referents (the dream thoughts) make known the process (work) by which one has been transformed into another. Freud writes:

It is from these dream thoughts and not from a dream's manifest content that we disentangle its meaning. We are thus presented with a new task which had no previous existence: the task is that of investigating the relation between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream thoughts, and of tracing out the process by which the latter is transformed into the former.³

To conclude, the structure and function of WIDE ANGLE SAXON is analogous to a dream analysed, i.e., retrieved from the unconscious and brought to the conscious scrutiny of directed thought and language. Distanced from the emotive seduction of the narrative, but still within this operational framework, the viewer is made

aware of the process by which meaning is established in the transformation of the images to their referential plurality. In this manner, Landow's inclusion of the dream analogy both refutes and affirms its validity in terms of the present film.

The Method

WIDE ANGLE SAXON utilizes a variety of methods to establish the viewer's presence. In the film, the camera is static (except for the last shot as I have already noted) recording the images in medium shot, with only an occasional close-up. The actor in many sequences is placed squarely in the center of the frame and speaks in the form of direct address. There is little or no movement within the frame, and each situation is presented in long take for the duration of the action. In this manner, the camera serves as a window/mirror through which the viewer will ultimately see himself.

The voice-over and the titles function in a similar manner by referring directly to the viewer, to the film, and to the film viewing situation. The most interesting of these methods, however, arises from the thread of a narrative which is presented within the film. The viewer is introduced to the "hero" of this story, Earl Greaves, and is then literally identified with him by becoming involved in a similar set of actions, i.e., watching a film, applauding, etc.

Having raised the viewer's self-awareness, the shots then fail to lead him through a linear development of ideas or situations. Instead, the individual elements exist as pieces of a puzzle slowly combining to form a system of interconnections. The viewer participates in the filmic game which has been presented to him--one of questions, puns, jokes, metaphors, and references--and so directs his thoughts, memory and imagination outside and through the text. In a sense, we can see these as conditions which respectively abstract both the structure of narrativity, and the quality of the viewer's responses in the reading of a filmic text.

The problem which faces us now is one of establishing the particular systems that the viewer utilizes in the creation of meaning. Because of the subversion of the implied narrative in WIDE ANGLE SAXON, certain of the needed components of narrativity become apparent: a question once raised sets up an expectation for an answer, an action once begun demands completion, clusters of themes, symbols, and references imply a future cohesion. In order to best define these narrative signifiers, and most adequately explicate Landow's film, I have used Barthes' model of textual analysis from S/Z.⁴ This proves to be an interesting choice for the following reasons: (a) In the analysis of Balzac's Sarrasine, Barthes has noted the existence of 5 codes which are completed by the reader, and through which the classical text comes into being. The deliberate absence of a sustained fiction in WIDE ANGLE SAXON bares a signifying structure otherwise obscured in a conventional narrative, and so allows the viewer to examine his systems of creating meaning. (b) The Barthesian model sets the reader/viewer in an interesting relationship to the dream model previously noted. The novel, for Barthes, is a signifying system capable of generating a plurality of references in the reader's mind. So too, the dream is a semiotic system, the manifest content of which stands for a plurality of references. Through a sustained analysis, as Barthes has done in S/Z, or as each viewer is engaged to do in WIDE ANGLE SAXON, the "work" or the process by which the reader/viewer creates meaning will become apparent.

The first of Barthes' codes, the *hermeneutic code*,⁵ guides the evolution of the text by series of questions and impeded answers to its final conclusion. WIDE ANGLE SAXON subverts these expectations by presenting questions which are either not maintained, or never directly answered. The disruption of expectations alerts the viewer to the convention and to his anticipation of an answer to the given question.

The *proairetic code* dictates that actions, once begun, be brought to completion. Establishing a "genre" of actions, this code constructs a linearity across the text and establishes a set of expectations in the viewer. The actions in WIDE ANGLE SAXON, however, are either never completed, or allowed to repeat with little or no alteration. The resultant circularity informs the viewer as to the nature of his expectations and the anticipatory quality of his response.

The last three codes, though not concerned with the maintenance of linearity, do rely on the reader's imagination and memory for their completion. The *semic code* constructs meaning through the connotations established within the text: it creates a mood, guides a theme; the *referential code* builds meaning from cultural knowledge; and the *symbolic code* extrapolates meaning from the text. In WIDE ANGLE SAXON, the codes function to discourage the simple elaboration of a theme, referring instead to the film and its manner of construction. The *semic code* reveals the distortion or disruption which characterizes the film, while the *symbolic code* constructs a system of antithetical situations symbolizing the internal oppositions by which the film is generated. Lastly, the *referential code* is presented in a fashion so hyperbolized that its function as cultural referent becomes apparent, just as the *semic code* and the *symbolic code* become identifiable as a series of expectations through their system of reflexivity.

In my discussion of WIDE ANGLE SAXON, each shot of the film will be treated as a "unit of reading," or *lexia*.⁶ The readings assigned to these *lexias* will then be determined by the system of connotation described by Barthes in *S/Z*. For him connotation is not an association of ideas (that is, a system of the subject), but rather, a "correlation immanent in the text."⁷ The resultant interpretation will be of the order that Barthes describes:

To interpret the text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary, to appreciate what plural constitutes it.⁸

It is this plurality, the skeletal structure of which is made central to WIDE ANGLE SAXON by the absence of a sustained fiction, that alerts the viewer to the *process* of reading a filmic text.

The Viewer's Response

Before beginning the analysis of WIDE ANGLE SAXON, a necessary word must be directed to the structure of the viewer's response. Since Landow disrupts the fiction film so as to draw its systems into consciousness, the quality of interaction which the viewer normally has with the film image also comes under scrutiny. The following is an attempt to define the possible structural components of that interaction, and the subsequent effects of its disruption.

The Russian Formalist, Boris Eikhenbaum, presented an appraisal of the silent film viewing experience in an essay, "Problems of Film Stylistics."⁹ Eikhenbaum maintained that the manner by which film is known to the viewer is opposite to that utilized by the reader of literature: the viewer transforms the film images into words, while the reader transforms words into images.¹⁰ Through a system of "internal speech" the viewer constructs meaning, logical connections, and metaphors from the visual imagery. Eikhenbaum writes:

For the study of the laws of film (especially of montage) it is most important to admit that perception and understanding of a motion picture is inextricably bound up with the development of internal speech, which makes the connection between the separate shots. Outside this process only the 'trans-sense' elements of film can be perceived.¹¹

and

From the semantic point of view the introduction of metaphor into film is of particular interest because it confirms again the real significance of internal speech, not as an accidental psychological element of film perception, but as an integral structural element of film. Film metaphor is entirely dependent on verbal metaphor. The viewer can understand it only when he possesses a corresponding metaphoric expression in his own verbal baggage.¹²

Though Eikhenbaum's argument may be disputed, WIDE ANGLE SAXON tests the existence of internal speech under special circumstances. By a system of disruptive strategies, Landow encourages the viewer to name what he sees, and then allows those verbalizations to be punned by a counter-system. The internal clash which results discloses the underlying process to the viewer, and also serves to re-establish him as a presence.

In order to analyze the techniques which may elicit such a response, the properties of internal speech must be defined. Eikhenbaum's "internal speech" is to be understood as separate in structure and function from either spoken or written language. As speech to oneself and for oneself, it is closest to the quality studied by the Soviet psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky. Using the term "inner speech," Vygotsky found this quality to be a fragmented, abbreviated, and highly condensed form of speech. Since the subject of the sentence is known to the thinker, as are the particulars of a situation, inner speech is almost entirely predicative. The result is a speech of few words which accompanies activities, and for Vygotsky, even embodies thought.

Utilizing a genetic method which postulates the child's use of egocentric speech as a developmental link to inner speech, Vygotsky found that the disruption of expectations would increase the occurrence of egocentric speech and make the individual conscious of the present activity. He writes:

It is legitimate to assume, then, that a disruption in the smooth flow of activity is an important stimulus for egocentric speech. This discovery fits in with two premises to which Piaget himself refers several times. One of them is the so-called law of awareness, which states that an impediment or disturbance in an automatic activity makes the actor aware of that activity. The other premise is that speech is an expression of that process of becoming aware.¹³

We may then assume that the quality of inner speech which normally accompanies a fiction film is increased in WIDE ANGLE SAXON through this film's disruption of conventionalized systems. On this last count, Landow's film re-establishes its analogy to a dream actively analyzed by the individual.

The statement, "Oh...it was a dream." refers to the criticism that sees a similarity between film and dream. Through its inappropriateness to the present film experience, Landow has shown that if an analogy between the two states does exist, it lies in their similarity of structure. The structures of the fiction film experience, i.e., the fragmentary, discontinuous nature of the film's material, formal, and narrative make-up, its "meaning" for the viewer (from film experience to film knowledge), and the inter-relationship between image and language, recall the quality and the direction of the dream experience. But it is ultimately the viewer who completes the analogy by remaining unconscious of the film's "work." By baring these structures, WIDE ANGLE SAXON allows the viewer to examine the processes by which he knows film, and so raises him from the position of "dreamer" to one closer to that of "analysand." In conclusion, the difference between the

fiction film and WIDE ANGLE SAXON can be stated as the difference between knowing and being conscious of knowing.

WIDE ANGLE SAXON

1. The title of the film, WIDE ANGLE SAXON, is presented in white letters on a black background; at the bottom of the image is George Landow's name and the copyright date. The first question, "What is a Wide Angle Saxon?" is posed by the title and holds the solution within its structure (HER. Enigma 1: question). The two distinct but opposing units compose the title: "wide angle" finds its conventionalized extension as "wide angle lens" (SEM. Distortion), and "Saxon," in reverse order, might call to mind, "White Anglo-Saxon" (SEM. Perfection). The internal clash which results (SYM. Antithesis) alerts the viewer to the conventionalized function of the title (to in some way reflect the work to come) and then supplies the answer to this first question by objectifying the structure of the ensuing film. Through a system of disruption or contradiction, the film will alert the viewer to his processes of knowing. The recognition of "Wide Angle Saxon" as a simple pun of "White Anglo-Saxon" serves to jolt the viewer into an actively analytical stance and then rewards him with the pleasure of the subsequent recognition. Moreover, the internal contradiction has activated, placed into opposition, and made conscious the viewer's use of inner speech.

2. The first image of the film is a M.S. of a boy playing the violin (ACT. To play the violin : 1 : to play). Behind him on the flowered wallpaper are two framed images. One is a portrait of a man, and the other is a mirror with an indistinguishable reflection. These two objects incorporate the symbolic structure of opposition which will pervade the film. (SYM. Antithesis: representation-reflexivity). The portrait of the man refers to the system of representation, i.e., a cinema in which figurative and narrative codes are maintained, and the mirror, to the cinema of reflexivity where, in this particular case, the viewer himself becomes the major point of focus.

Over the image suddenly appear the words: "Out of the blue..." As a conventionalized method for introducing an event (one which would bring the present action to an end), this title raises the expectations of the viewer (HER. Enigma 2: question). As he waits, however, nothing happens. This disruption in the expected flow of activity causes the viewer to take distance from the image, and to become aware of its structure, and ultimately his own responses. The viewer may begin to examine the content of the image more closely, noting the pictures, the wallpaper, or the boy's mode of dress (or undress); from what we know of inner speech, the process of becoming aware may result in the naming of these objects. In anticipation of an action, the viewer's attention is directed to the playing of the violin. It slowly becomes apparent that the sound and image are not synched, and that the music is not that produced by a violin. But the playing continues, the notes cyclically repeating the same set. As the repetitions create a circular progression to the scene, the only extension of the action "to play" is "to continue to play," or "to overplay" (ACT. to play the violin: to overplay).

The image is then suddenly altered (is this the upcoming event we have been anticipating?), and presented as a bi-pack of the image and its color negative. The emotional distance created by the musical repetitions and the failure of an intervening action to take place is now finalized by the eradication of the representational space. The image is seen as flattened and predominately red in color; the forms existing as abstractions of the original scene. The resultant image is composed of several layers which shift from side to side. The new action, if one were to be named, would be "to flatten," "to obscure," "to overlay" (ACT. to play the violin: 3: to overlay). As a possible predicative utterance of inner speech "overlay" is a simple pun of "overplay." (I am aware of the difficulty in attempting the description of a response when a variety of utterances may be

elicited. I wish, however, to present this example tentatively and rely on the remainder of the text to substantiate the tendency for naming and punning.)

This sequence has served in alerting the viewer to the nature of his responses. By the disruption of expectations, the viewer has seen that an action, once begun, must be developed and completed for his involvement in the narrative to be maintained. In addition, the system of opposition set into motion by the pun make the viewer aware of his use of inner speech. The viewer is thus alerted to the processes of his own thought.

3. A man dressed in a business suit is seen in M.S. as he stands in front of a bay; the sound of a motorboat is heard in the background. He begins to speak (ACT. To announce: 1: to begin to speak):

Panama has been ruled by a military junta since last fall...

The quality of the image, the distance of the camera, the position of the man, and the content of his speech identify the man as a television newscaster (REF. Television news). This, like many of Landow's images, is less personalized at the outset and so reduces the viewer's emotional involvement to the image. The announcer continues:

The nominal boss is General...

He hesitates, forgetting his lines (ACT. To announce: 2: to forget ones lines) and laughingly says to someone off-camera:

I just can't...

Before he can finish his statement, the image is abruptly cut.

The expected flow of activity within this shot is disrupted by the announcer's mistake (SEM. Disruption). The direction of his statement to an off-screen space has alerted the viewer to the frame line and to the area and people not included within the frame (SYM. Antithesis: on screen--offscreen). Moreover, the conventionalized news announcement is revealed as a staged situation (SYM. Antithesis: illusion-reality).

4. A different man is now seen in medium C.U. as he sits at a table; a paneled wall forms the background. The image is more personal than before since the man looks straight into the camera and addresses the viewer. His manner and appearance is reminiscent of an announcer in an educational film (REF. Educational films). He speaks (ACT. To teach: 1: to introduce):

In the film you are about to see all the events shown really happened though some are re-enacted.

The viewer's attention is here openly drawn to the act of film-viewing. Presented as a film within a film, the announcer's statement refers itself to an upcoming situation while ignoring the existence of the preceding events (SEM. Contradiction). The system of internal contradiction is also continued in the latter part of the statement. Whether "... all of the events shown really happened..." is to be taken figuratively (they occurred naturally), or literally (they happened for the camera), the subsequent clause, "...though some are re-enacted." serves as its negation (SYM. Antithesis: literal-figurative). In this manner the viewer is reinstated as a presence ("you" in the audience) and is made aware of the staged quality of filmic events. Moreover, the system of contradictions which generate the text, pulsating much like a verbal figure-ground alteration, brings the viewer into an awareness of his own thought processes.

The announcer continues:

This is a story about a man who reads the words of Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 19 v. 21, "If you want to be perfect, go now and sell your property and give your money to the poor; you will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me."

The viewer is here directly given the expectation of a "story." So too, the opposing function of error or mistake is presented, i.e., "to be perfect" (SYM. Antithesis: B: perfect).

Sometime after reading these words the man realizes how attached to his possessions he really is and he determines to do something about it.

The announcer pauses; convention dictates that the subsequent visual material in some way explain or elaborate the given statement (HER. Enigma 2: What will he do with his material possessions?).

5. This shot consists of an older man polishing the chrome bumper and grill (ACT. To polish: 1: to polish the chrome) (REF. Kenneth Anger, KUSTOM KAR KOMMANDOS) of a Cadillac (REF. Worldly goods, riches). The man is seen in medium C.U. and does not acknowledge the presence of the camera or that of the viewer. By virtue of the announcer's statement, the present visual material is interpreted in a given manner. The man is taken to be the "hero" of story and, because of his religious enlightenment, is expected to soon relinquish his material possessions. But, as in the initial shot of the film (to play the violin), the act of polishing is continued without change. The man polishes his car to a high shine, showing no evidence of giving up this prized object (SEM. Sin). The repetition of actions is supported by the repetition of sound: the man hums as he works while the chirping of a cricket is heard in the background (SYM. Antithesis: on-off). Again, as in the violin sequence, the expected change occurs on a formal level; the image is presented at a slightly different angle by virtue of two dissolves (ACT. To polish: 2: to dissolve).

6. The announcer, seated as he was against a paneled wall, is once again presented. He continues his statement ignoring the existence of the previous shot.

The actual moment of conviction comes to him while he is watching an experimental film at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When the film is over he applauds, yes, out of common courtesy he applauds, as you will soon see for yourself.

Since this statement does not comply with or continue from the previous image, the viewer is distanced, critical, and searching at its outset. From this distance he is presented with another system of double meaning. WIDE ANGLE SAXON is an "experimental film" which has probably been shown at the Walker Arts Center, and likewise is now being shown under similar circumstances (i.e., at another "art center" or screening of "experimental films"). The statement "as you will soon see for yourself" has a literal and a figurative plane: the viewer will see (literally) a man clapping later in the film, and he himself will probably be clapping at the end of the present film (SYM. Antithesis: figurative-literal). Moreover, the film instructs the viewer to applaud "out of common courtesy" (SEM. Correct behavior). In this manner the viewer is made aware of the present film, its setting, his conventionalized action in relation to it, and to himself as a decoder of meaning (SYM. Antithesis: representation-reflexivity).

The announcer continues:

But it is important to understand that at the moment he is applauding he is making one of the most profound and most difficult decisions of his life.

(HER. Enigma 3: What is his decision?) This question is never answered as the announcer continues in a different direction:

In case you're wondering why he was reading the Gospel of St. Matthew in the first place; let me explain:

Once again, the question though raised is not answered (HER. Enigma 4: Why was he reading the Bible?). Through the non-fulfillment of an expectation, the very mode of asking the questions which generate a linear text is made apparent, as is the viewer's desire to have them answered.

This man, whose name is Earl Greaves, once worked for a T.V. station. Appearing on an interview were, well, here let me show you...

The sequence of statements delivered by the announcer, while progressing toward a specificity, have served only to confuse understanding; each segment abstracting rather than adding to the creation of meaning (SEM. Contradiction). This last sentence is no exception since it directs the viewer on a new course and presents a new expectation (HER. Enigma 5: What happened at the T.V. interview?).

Another function of the announcer's statement has been to establish the narrative and to introduce the central character. Because of the interconnections established between the actions of the character, Earl Greaves, and those of the viewer (watching an experimental film, applauding) the process of "identification" with film characters begins to emerge. The character has become personalized, and his thoughts and actions made central, thus implicating the viewer through a transference of like experiences. Since the process has been bared, the viewer "identifies" with Earl Greaves, but now consciously so.

7. A young man is seen in extreme C.U. as he sings (sings) a religious song, strumming accompaniment on an electric guitar (ACT. to sing: 1: to begin to sing):

How can I express the anguish of my soul when sin obscures my vision of you, my Holy Lord?

The problem of expression and of the creation of meaning is central to this film as is the consideration of "seeing" clearly and its obfuscation by fiction (SYM. Antithesis: to see-not to see: reflexivity-representation).

In mid-song the image is frozen and a woman's voice-over is heard (ACT. to sing: 2: to be interrupted):

Wait a minute, let's stop and go back to a certain key word.

As a literalization of this statement, the sound and image are run backward (SYM. Antithesis: literal-figurative). The act of reversal (ACT. to sing: 3: to reverse) reveals the material interconnection between the film image and the sound track; both are seen reversing the previous action and halting at the "key word." "Sin...sin...sin..." is repeated and continues as the woman speaks:

There it is...sin. So that's what I wanted to be included in this film. It is too important a concept to be taken for granted. And in fact everything else depends on it. I mean, if there is no such thing as sin, salvation is not necessary.

An authorial voice thus directs the viewer's attention to the homology so far established by the text, each unit related to the other on the basis of its ability to "obscure vision": sin:salvation = figurative:literal = representation:reflexivity = dream:directed thought.

8. The T.V. announcer seen in shot #3 is presented again. Set as before he begins to speak (ACT. to announce: 1: to begin to announce):

Since October a military junta has ruled Panama. The nominal boss is General José Maria Ponillia. The real power is his fellow General [a few frames are missing so causing the image to jump] Omar...

(ACT. To announce: 2: to forget one's lines.) He laughs and walks off to the right saying, "I cannot remember that guy's name." (SEM. Mistake, disruption.) Because of the relatively extended nature of the newscaster's announcement, the viewer's expectation for its completion has been raised, and then once again disrupted. Since it is the second in a series, it becomes amusing.

9. The sound of one organ chord is heard over the presentation of a blackened screen; a light slowly reveals a large cast of the word "SIN" (REF. "Cast of Thousands" in Hollis Frampton's NOSTALGIA). The cast is made of chrome, shining with the reflected light, and fading, or becoming obscured, with the removal of the light source (SYM. Antithesis: to see-to obscure).

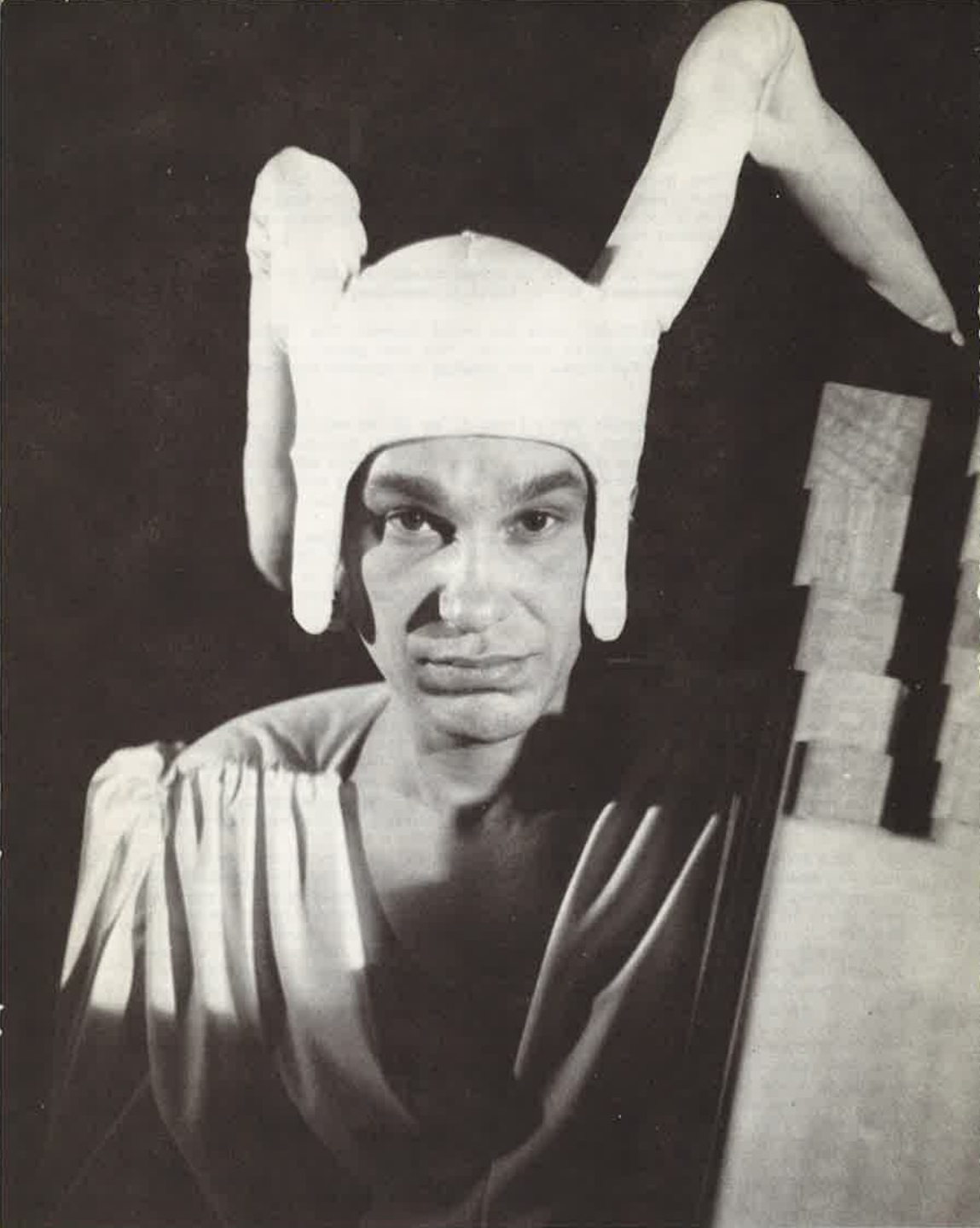
This image is a typically dream-like condensed element. Freud defined "condensation" as that process of the dream work by which many dream thoughts can be consolidated into a single image.¹⁴ Here many threads of information have come together: the chrome refers us back to the Cadillac, to the sinful quality of its implied worldliness; the light quality refers to the opposition of to see/to obscure; and its position within the frame refers to the "centrality" of the concept of sin. Lastly, the slow appearance of light and its resultant glitter conveys a sense of menacing evil. Since the referents are so clearly defined, the viewer becomes aware of the process by which a semiotic system constructs meaning, i.e., through a plurality of connotations leading outside and through the text.

10. This shot consists of an extreme C.U. of what is taken to be the Devil (SEM. Sin) and identified as such by a number of cues. The music from the previous shot is continued into the present image and so links the conceptual space of the two segments. In this manner "sin" is literally (as well as figuratively) present. The "Devil" peers directly at the audience. His features are distorted by the low angle lighting and the use of the wide angle lens (SEM. Distortion). By naming the lens function "wide angle," the viewer can actively pair it with the title of the film (HER. Enigma 1: partial answer: "wide angle" refers to the distortion and disruption by which the film characterizes itself).

The "Devil" is presented against a red background as matte flames shoot up beneath his face (REF. Conventionalized modes in the representation of the devil). His manner of dress, however, does not comply with cultural expectations: he wears white, a color used in the representation of good and purity (SYM. Antithesis: good-evil). The internal clash which results alerts the viewer to the cultural conventions.

11. The image of the T.V. newscaster is seen for the third time. He begins his speech as before (ACT. To announce: 2: to begin to announce).

A military junta has ruled Panama since last fall. The nominal boss is General José Maria Ponillia, but the real power is General Omar Torillio, Commander of the National Guard.



Production still from WIDE ANGLE SAXON

He suddenly stops (ACT. To announce: 2: to hesitate), looks off-screen to the left and laughingly says, "I got it right, but I blew it." (SYM. Antithesis: right-wrong).

In each of the three repetitions of this segment, the announcer has "blown" his lines, the continuity of the announcing situation, and the "invisibility" of the camera, the frameline, and the crew. Each incident, however, has been faulted at a different point, and the newscaster has responded by delivering a set of three separate responses:

Shot # 3 - "I cannot..."

Shot # 8 - "I just cannot remember that guy's name."

Shot #11 - "I got it right, but I blew it."

This sequence of shots will be presented intermittently throughout the text, establishing a framework which is circular, regenerative, and self-contained.

In the present case, shot #11 includes the spoken statement "...I blew it." which recalls and puns the earlier title "Out of the blue..." In noting this simple pun, the viewer becomes aware of the different forms of language utilization in the film: written, spoken, and inner speech. In this manner, not only the film's mechanisms are made apparent, but also the mental constructs which facilitate its knowledge.

12. The "Devil" appears again, now presented in M.S., playing a portative organ and singing in a sweet tone (SYM. Antithesis: angel-devil). His "angelic" qualities are contradicted by his previous associations and the flame matte at the bottom of the frame (frame/flame). This image is then altered by the superimposition of a diagonal flow of raindrops which extinguish the flame (SYM. Antithesis: fire-water). Each "drop," however, is the word "rain" and so allows the signifier to take on the function of the signified.

13. The newscaster appears as in shot #3.

14. Earl Greaves is seen in extreme C.U.; he is sleeping (REF. Landow, REMEDIAL READING COMPREHENSION). The close framing of the shot and the predicative nature of inner speech will cause the word "sleep" to rise to consciousness (Ref. Andy Warhol, SLEEP). The hyperbolized nature of the reference makes apparent the contributory nature of cultural knowledge.

An additional clash is constructed as the image of the man sleeping begins to "slip" through the film gate (REF. Ken Jacobs, TOM TOM THE PIPER'S SON) and so pairs "slip/sleep."

15. The newscaster appears as in shot #8.

16. The "Devil" is seen in extreme C.U. and looks directly into the camera. This is a composite image and "tests" the viewer's memory, perception and participation. The music is the same as that once heard and interpreted in terms of the violin playing; the slipping of the previous image is continued in the background. Because of the tendency to attribute movement to the figure rather than to the ground, the "Devil" gains an ambiguous sense of descending or sinking (*sinking/sinning*).

17. The newscaster appears as in shot #11.

18. A glass door is seen in M.S.; the interior of a store can be seen beyond it. A sign on the door states the hours which the store opens and closes (SYM. Antithesis: open-close, inside-outside).

Over this shot is superimposed the title:

The man in this picture is on his way to a film showing at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, He notices the woman, and she remains in his memory.

After the title has been projected, the man we know as Earl Greaves comes into the frame and walks into the store (ACT. Going to the store: 1: to enter) as a young woman walks out. He looks at her (ACT. Going to the store: 2: to look at the woman).

The written text is another form of authorial interjection and supplies the viewer with a variety of reflexive information. The flatness of the screen is made apparent by the titles; its representational quality then reasserted by naming that surface a "picture." In stating that this action precedes Mr. Greaves' attendance at the Walker Arts Center, the written text presents the viewer with a fictionalized temporality. Again, the distanced attitude of the viewer allows him to recognize the conventions of the narrative construction of time.

Lastly, the viewer is implicated in the "hero's" actions: "He [both Earl Greaves and the viewer] sees the woman, and she will remain in his memory." In this manner, memory, temporality, and identification, as functional modes in the process of narrativity, are objectified.

19. Shot #18 is repeated (ACT. Going to the store: 1: to enter 2: to look at the woman) but now with a new set of superimposed titles:

The woman in this picture is on her way to a singing lesson where she will sing a song by John Dowland. She does nazi the man and therefore does not remember him. She wonders why her picture is being taken.

The viewer is alerted to the artificiality of the image; it is a "picture." His attention is then propelled forward through the text, establishing a set of expectations for the woman's future action. The play on "not see/nazi" makes the viewer aware of his act of reading. "She wonders why her picture is being taken." alerts him to the camera and the cameraman. Once again, the acts of memory, anticipation, reading, and the existence of a controlled artifice, come to the viewer's awareness.

20. The preceding shot is repeated in color negative. Its representational quality is jeopardized by the altered photographic process.

21. The sequence is presented again, now with a different color process. The repetition of this action (ACT. Going to the store: 1: to enter: 2: to look at the woman), with no change save for that of the image quality, alerts the viewer to his expectation for narrative development and elaboration.

22. An Indian woman in M.S. is seated behind a large pot. The following letters appear superimposed over the image:

MALAYALAM

As a palindrome, these letters represent the mirror-like process of reflexivity. Only the letter "y" (why?) is not seen in the reflection (HER. Formulation: Why?). The convention of asking questions which generate a text is thus directly presented.

The palindrome disappears and the following title appears; the woman begins to speak. Although the title appears as a "translation," the woman speaks English:

English Translation: The process of making this film is very much like cooking. (REF. Peter Kubelka's theory of film.)

Like cooking, this film has presented a new experience through the combination of opposite elements. In WIDE ANGLE SAXON, however, the resultant clash has instigated thought.

And lastly, the term "translation" should be taken literally since the spoken text has been changed and presented in its written form.

23. The newscaster appears as in shot #3.

24. The Indian woman sitting behind a large cooking pot is seen as before; the music from the violin sequence can be heard on the sound track. The footage is metrically cut (REF. Peter Kubelka), alternating between 3 frames of a woman and 3 frames of the same image with a large flame-shaped mark on the film's surface (REF. other films that articulate the film's surface: George Landow, BARDOLIES, FILM IN WHICH...).

25. The following title appears on a black background:

REGRETTABLE REDDING CONDESCENSION
1970 Al Rutcurts

(REF. Landow, REMEDIAL READING COMPREHENSION) as another layer of a film-within-a-film, the title poses a new question (HER. Enigma 6: question). The answer is almost immediately presented by what follows: a condescension (or playful mocking) of Frampton's NOSTALGIA, which includes a "regret of making things red" (read) (REF. Frampton, NOSTALGIA). The name under the film's title, Al Rutcurts, is a backwards anagram for "structural" (REF. P. Adams Sitney, Structural Film).

As in NOSTALGIA, Michael Snow's voice is heard on the sound track. Snow clears his throat, and delivers a text, slightly displaced, but nonetheless recognizable as being that of NOSTALGIA.

Since 1966 I have been filming the process of pouring red paint on a wide variety of objects.

This is the second time that the word "process" has been used in the text: "The process of filmmaking is like cooking," and "...I have been filming the process..." The viewer is thus alerted to this film as an objectifier of processes.

Over a black screen, Snow continues:

A few weeks ago, I felt an urge to film another object being covered by red paint. What I believe I see recorded in that piece of film fills me with such dread and loathing that I think I shall never dare to make another film again. Here it is...

26. An extreme C.U. of a burner is shown (SEM. Burn, hell).

Look at it!

Red paint is poured over the burner.

Do you see what I see?

The direct address alerts the viewer to his presence in a film viewing situation: he is *looking* at an image; what does he see? The issue of "seeing," though

implied throughout, is here objectified. Do you see? Do you understand the process? (SYM. Antithesis: "See" a literal-figurative opposition).

27. As promised, Earl Greaves is depicted applauding in an auditorium (ACT. Sitting in the auditorium: 1: to applaud). Since an expectation has been fulfilled, the viewer's memory is directed to its point of origin. But, as usual, there is an opposing function: the learned expectation, i.e., to have no expectations, has been disrupted, so making conscious the anticipatory response and the act of memory which completes it. Moreover, the viewer is reminded that he soon will (or should) be applauding politely.

A girl's voice is heard on the sound track:

What I don't like about his films is that they don't have any close-ups of flowers.

28. The newscaster appears as in shot #8.

29. An extreme C.U. of a flower is presented; the following title is superimposed over the image:

They don't have any...

The previously spoken statement is here partially represented in written and imagistic form. The viewer "reads" the image while noting the process of memory, reading, and naming.

30. The sentence is continued by a man's voice:

...or shots of the moon.

This shot consists of a garden at night; the moon and stars are seen in the evening sky. Since this image includes a variety of information, it cannot be read as a "shot of the moon" (REF. Theoretical dispute over the ability of a shot to elicit a word, a sentence, or group of sentences). The word "moon" with an arrow is placed next to the picture of the moon. In this way, Landow calls attention to the various forms of representation used in film: spoken, written, and imagistic representation.

The inclusion of the written word over the image has the additional function of asserting the flatness of the film plane. The image is then moved upward revealing it to be a photograph; it is, therefore, a picture of a picture.

31. The woman last seen leaving the store, is presented in extreme C.U. The viewer's memory is set in motion as he reconstructs the particulars of the present situation: the woman is at her singing lesson; she is being photographed. The prediction, "...she will remain in his memory." has been fulfilled and so alerted the viewer to his use of that function. The viewer then notices she sings off-key (SEM. Error, disruption).

32. The newscaster appears as in shot #11.

33. The woman is seen as before; she sings, "The turtles...the turtles...the turtles..." Perhaps as an in-joke, this "song" refers to a phrase from Paul Arthur's article, "The Calesthenics of Vision" (Artforum Vol. X, #1, Sept. 1971). Describing the action of a demon in FILM THAT RISES TO THE SURFACE OF CLARIFIED BUTTER, Arthur notes that it "...makes a timely exit, carrying with him, like a turtle, his private universe." (REF. Paul Arthur, "The Calesthenics of Vision".)

Red paint is then poured on the woman's face and leaves her literally "red-faced"

or "effaced." By this time the viewer has been "trained" to actively read the image.

34. The newscaster appears as in shot #3.

35. A young man is presented in extreme C.U. He tells us that Christ had to be perfect; even one mistake would have disqualified Him as being the Messiah (SYM. Antithesis: perfect-imperfect).

The image of this man is scratched off the film's surface as he continues to speak. The viewer is made aware of the emulsion which creates the filmic image.

36. Earl Greaves is seen sleeping as before; the young man's voice continues over this image. The Devil's song soon drowns him out (SYM. Antithesis: Christ-Devil).

The girl's voice suddenly comes on and says:

What I don't like about his films is that they are always full
of scratches and dust particles.

(REF. Landow, FILM IN WHICH THERE APPEAR DIRT PARTICLES.)

37. The girl's voice continues as the now completely scratched piece of celluloid seen before is ripped apart in ragged chunks. Having removed the emulsion from the film, Landow reveals the material of the filmstrip by destroying it.

The image that remains is a white screen with scratches and dust particles. The imperfections inform the viewer that the celluloid has not been destroyed, but continues to project an image.

38. The newscaster appears as in shot #11. The sequence of shots #3, #8, #11 has been broken (SEM. Disruption); only the alert viewer will have perceived this. The following title is superimposed over the image:

A MAN : A PLAN : A CANAL = PANAMA

Like "MALAYALAM," the above is a palindrome. The letter "C" (similar to the position of "Y" in the first example), is not "reflected" on either aspect of the anagram (CY = see why?). Does the viewer now *see why* the film has been organized in this particular manner? The disruption of expectations has instigated thought and language formation, thereby allowing the viewer to "see" the processes of film perception and film knowledge normally obscured by the sustained fiction.

39. The last shot of the film, as noted earlier, includes the only camera movement. A woman sits up in bed and exclaims, "Oh...it was a dream." Rather than being a conventional representation of a dream state, the film has objectified the processes of a dream; the images are presented as condensed, displaced elements, with references outside and through the text. The central thoughts: sin, error, disruption, appear overdetermined through its elements.

The purpose of this form is to alert the viewer to the processes by which he reads film. While maintaining the analogy of film to dream, Landow creates an experience which inverts the classic film viewing situation. By presenting a dream-like structure in its "pure form," unaided by the secondary revision that would have reorganized the elements into a linear progression, the film allows the viewer to maintain an actively analytical stance. The disruption of expectation brings into awareness the convention of the narrative film. The viewer thus acknowledges the conventions by which an action, once begun, demands completion; and the narrative

expectation for the progressive elaboration of a theme, through a system of questions and impeded answers. The film's symbolic system objectifies the method by which the film instigates awareness: disruption, opposition. Through the resultant elimination of a sustained fiction, the semiotic structure becomes apparent, allowing the viewer to trace the processes which lead from film experience to film knowledge.

Notes

¹I will use the term "the fiction film" throughout this paper to indicate that cinema which, to a greater or lesser degree, maintains the conventions of representation and narrativity.

²Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Film Quarterly, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Winter 1974-75, pp. 39-47.

³Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, Trans. by James Strachey, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1965, p. 311.

⁴Roland Barthes, S/Z, Trans. by Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

⁵In the analysis of WIDE ANGLE SAXON, Barthes' five codes will be abbreviated in the following manner:

- HER. - Hermeneutic Code
- ACT. - Proairetic Code
- SEM. - Semic Code
- SYM. - Symbolic Code
- REF. - Referential Code

⁶Barthes, S/Z, p. 13.

⁷Barthes, S/Z, p. 8.

⁸Barthes, S/Z, p. 5.

⁹Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problems Of Film Stylistics," Screen, Vol. 15, No. 3, Autumn 1974.

¹⁰Eikhenbaum, p. 13.

¹¹Eikhenbaum, p. 14.

¹²Eikhenbaum, p. 30.

¹³Lev S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language, Trans. by Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1962, p. 16.

¹⁴Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 313.