

**The Art of Seeing - The Art of Listening. The Politics of Form in the
Works of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet**

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I declare:

a) that this thesis has been composed by me

and

b) that the work contained within it is my own

Acknowledgments

“C’est très difficile de le dire en parole...”

Jean-Marie Straub

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Abstract

The work of Straub/Huillet questions received notions of the essence of cinema. Against the background of the dominant stylistic paradigm of classical film style, their films challenge both the viewing and listening skills of their audience. In seeking to grasp the nature of this challenge, this thesis focuses on a feature which is common to all of Straub/Huillet's works. Taking recourse to a broad variety of representational forms, the filmmakers always engage with the specific properties and representational forms of existing works of art and documents.

On the basis of four films, the formative impact of a variety of art forms and source materials is analysed. The selection includes *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* in which the music of J.S.Bach provides the dominant aesthetic material; *Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*, a work whose origins lie in a piece of film music for which no film had ever been made; *Klassenverhältnisse*, an adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel fragment *Der Verschollene*; and *Paul Cézanne im Gespräch mit Joachim Gasquet*, a film in which Cézanne's paintings are presented both as physical objects and theme. In combination with a number of other materials which feature in the films, the polyphonic music of Bach, a serial composition by Schoenberg, the prose style of Kafka and the pictorial style of Cézanne, provide the aesthetic material for the interplay between film and other art forms, which is formative of Straub/Huillet's oeuvre.

A common feature emerges from the analysis of this formal and material diversity. Drawing on the distinctive features of their selected sources, the filmmakers evolve various strategies for the overt cinematic enactment of this material. A palpable split between the source material and its cinematic representation results. Stylistic operations are not merely vehicles for the transmission of meaning, but come to the fore, bringing time and space and the material features of the sounds and images to our attention. Highly unconventional forms of cinematic representation are generated in this process and classical stylistic devices are appropriated to serve new functions.

A more nuanced formulation of the political nature of the work of Straub/Huillet, than it has frequently been put forward by its critics, is proposed as a result of the study's findings. This political aspect cannot be reduced to thematic concerns expressed in their works, it predominantly resides in a film form which fractures the fixed connection between modes of representation and a predetermined meaning. Inviting us to engage with the material inscriptions of human existence and history, Straub/Huillet seek to renew our perception of reality, and sensitise us to the utopian potential in the materials they present us with.

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Introduction

“Wann wirst du endlich sehen? Jetzt?” This is the impatient question put to Karl Roßmann, the protagonist in Straub/Huillet’s adaptation of Franz Kafka’s novel fragment *Der Verschollene*. Having fallen into a serf-like captivity to the singer Brunelda, Roßmann is coaxed into watching a parade in the street below through her binoculars. However persistently he refuses her pressing offer - “Ich habe gute Augen, ich sehe alles”, he reasons - the “Gucker” is thrust in front of his eyes with the promise, “Versuch es doch, du wirst besser sehen.” However, forced to view the world through an optical instrument that is supposed to magnify the distant object of his perception, Roßmann ends up seeing nothing at all.

A little later, and the same incident is referred to by a neighbour with whom Roßmann engages in conversation from his enforced outpost on Brunelda’s balcony, he is asked, “Sie haben doch am Abend die Demonstration unten gesehen? ” The answer he gives would seem to render him blind: “Ich verstehe von Politik nichts.” Having so ardently insisted on his powers of perception, he now puts little store by them. There is little use in seeing what you do not understand in the first place, is the implicit logic of this repartee. When his neighbour reminds him “Das ist ein Fehler. Aber abgesehen davon haben Sie doch Augen und Ohren”, this sequence of exchanges about politics, understanding and perception seems to have come full circle.

Were one to summarise the work of Straub/Huillet with excerpts from their films, these two scenes would serve this purpose well. Directed at the audience as much as they are aimed at Roßmann, they flaunt how Straub/Huillet would like their films to be seen and heard. Neither entrusting our senses to a predetermined mode of vision, nor relying on received knowledge, will enable either Roßmann or us to “make sense.” The common concern of all of Straub/Huillet’s films is to jolt our perception, to make us rediscover a world which has

become obscured by a false familiarity. Rather than make us “understand politics”, they involve our perception in the physical traces of human existence in the hope that a different form of sense and understanding will spring from the engagement. Like the neighbour who reminds Roßmann of his powers of perception, they seek to redirect us to “the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known.”¹ Their films are instances of resistance against a process of “habitualization [that] devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war”, as described by Victor Shklovsky. An openness of mind on a given subject matter and a willingness to see and hear differently are the qualities which Straub/Huillet thus seek in their audience. “Cavemen” and “children” are the audience which they once professed to make their films for.²

A mere look at a filmography of Straub/Huillet’s work makes this a truly astonishing claim. Since 1962 they have made altogether twenty-one films, all of which are based on existing works of art. They span the period from the 17th century to the present day, and cover a broad spectrum of representational forms. Common to all of these source materials is a thematic and formal complexity which would appear to make them a disingenuous choice for the kind of spectator whom Straub/Huillet claim to address.

The polyphonic music of Johann Sebastian Bach and the serial compositions of Arnold Schoenberg feature prominently in their work. Excerpts from works by Bach can be heard in a number of their films, and in *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* of 1967 Bach’s music takes centre-stage. Three of Straub/Huillet’s films reflect a continued interest in the serial music of Schoenberg. In 1972 his *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* composed between 1929 and 1930, which bears the subtitle *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*, provided the point of departure for a short film. In it Straub/Huillet presented the Holocaust in the context of a wider history of repression and violence. In 1975 a film of Schoenberg’s unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* followed. This centres around the conflict between the people’s need for

representation, argued for by Aron, and the *Bilderverbot* imposed by Moses. A second film based on a Schoenberg opera was completed in 1997. In *Von heute auf morgen*, a husband and wife, who seek to redefine their relationship along more “modern” lines, become contestants in a battle “de la raison contre la déraison moderne.”³ In their film *Paul Cézanne im Gespräch mit Joachim Gasquet* of 1989, Straub/Huillet turned their attention to a painter whose art they had long cited as a formative influence on their filmmaking. Their filmic essay explores the vision which they see epitomised in Cézanne’s paintings through a variety of materials. Amongst these are two extensive recitations of blank verse from *Der Tod des Empedokles oder Wenn dann der Erde Grün von neuem euch erglänzt*, the film which Straub/Huillet made in 1986. It marked the beginning of a filmic encounter with Hölderlin’s writing which was to continue until 1992. During this period the first and third version of the dramatic fragment *Der Tod des Empedokles* provided the basis of two films. At the centre of Hölderlin’s drama is the breach between subject and object, between a man-made world and nature. *Die Antigone des Sophokles nach der hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet von Brecht 1948* made in 1992 is a filmic reworking of a play which forms a point of intersection between Hölderlin and another important influence on their work, Bertolt Brecht. In Brecht’s adaptation, Antigone’s refusal to bow to the tyranny of Creon is reinterpreted against the historical background of the Third Reich. Quotations from Brecht had already prefaced *Nicht Versöhnt*, Straub/Huillet’s first film of 1962. Ten years later they filmed *Geschichtsunterricht*, an adaptation of the novel fragment *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* in which Brecht dissects Roman History with the critical tools of dialectical materialism.

This selective list of source materials illustrates the thematic and formal complexity of the art works which Straub/Huillet engage with in their films. The challenges which are already inherent in these sources are compounded by their filmic representation. Straub/Huillet’s

works defy assumptions about the essence of cinema as the term “motion pictures” reflects them. On a first viewing their films will be remembered for the prolonged stasis in them. A sparse choreography of movements within the shot space combines with a high average shot length and a pronounced economy of camerawork to create this impression of cinematic inertia. Where the dramatisation of events involves extensive movement it is frequently not contained within a smooth flow of imagery, but rather gives rise to a style of editing which fragments space. These stylistic features make Straub/Huillet’s films conspicuously devoid of what conventionally accounts for cinematic action. Instead, they focus our attention on the smallest instances of mobility, when they do occur and on the properties of the space within which they take place.

Nor do Straub/Huillet subscribe to the assumption that film is essentially a visual art form. A tangible expression of the importance which they attribute to sound is the fact that, in contrast to the industry’s prevailing use of post-synchronisation, all of their films are shot with direct sound. Strikingly random intrusions of atmospheric noises from beyond the frame, or cuts which are initiated by the fading of a sound rather than the end of a narrative event, are the most apparent traces of this recording practice. The attention to the material properties of sound which these stylistic traits reflect is no less obvious in Straub/Huillet’s use of language and music. Neither of these sonic elements fulfils a merely accompanying function in their work. Their actors do not give a psychologically expressive interpretation of a text. Rather, they recite a dialogue which has undergone a thorough stylisation. Unexpected accents, pauses and lesions defamiliarize words and sentences, and foreground a system of signification while barring a smooth passage into its meaning. Similarly, music acquires an audible and visible prominence which forms the basis of a far more dynamic interaction with other filmic elements than is conventionally ascribed to film music.

The stylistic texture into which these features combine has frequently been described as

“minimalist.” The term points to the rigorous restraint with which Straub/Huillet use stylistic devices throughout their films. The very rarity of a camera movement or of gestures by the actors gives them a considerable impact when they do occur. This sparse stylisation does not primarily answer to the demands of verissimilitude, but it foregrounds the properties and features of the materials to which it is applied.

Another salient trait distinguishes these films from the conventional cinema fare which is aptly summarised by the term *Erzählkino*. Straub/Huillet’s works confront the viewer with considerable difficulties in retracing a unifying principle in the shape of a narrative thread or the progression of an argument. Narrative and essayist structures are presented in almost equal measure in Straub/Huillet’s oeuvre. However, where a narrative runs through the film, as for example in *Nicht Versöhnt*, this is highly elliptical. Information about the connection between individual events and about narrative causes and effects, might be permanently withheld in them, or at least remains unclear. Those of their films in which a variety of materials are arranged around a particular subject matter - as for instance in *Paul Cézanne im Gespräch mit Joachim Gasquet* - pose comparable problems. Their construction is not conducive to the extraction of a linear, cinematically illustrated argument. A filmic narration which refuses to dedicate itself wholly to the transmission of story information, or to a represented content, adds to the challenge which Straub/Huillet’s viewers are faced with. In their films the narration seems to digress from conveying a story or an argument; it even neglects this task altogether while embarking on an errand of its own.

Their flagrant deviations from cinematic conventions have earned Straub/Huillet a reputation that is diametrically opposed to their artistic intentions. Their films have a long-standing association with the tediously obscure if not the outright boring. Where Richard Roud, the author of the first monograph about their work, reported in 1971 that a contemporary audience viewed the filmmakers as proponents of a “minimalism” that amounts

to “aesthetic sadism”.⁴ Wolfram Schütte - reviewing their receptive fate in 1998 - recorded little change. He argued that the overwhelming majority of the few cinema-goers to whom they were known at all, regarded Straub/Huillet as “der absolute Horror, (der Schrecken des ‘Anti-Kinos’, die ‘Dilettanten’ par excellence).”⁵ Hardly considered to be the appropriate aesthetic fare for “cavemen” and “children”, these films are deemed to speak to those who - as Maureen Turim concluded - “are familiar with Bach and Schoenberg and remember college lectures on Corneille.”⁶ Klaus Kreimeier echoes this sentiment by stating: “Straub ist es gelungen, bis heute seine Verzweiflung für eine Gemeinde gleichgesinnter Intellektualisten in Filme umzusetzen.”⁷

That Straub/Huillet’s films are considered inaccessible and difficult is hardly surprising. Viewers do not come to them as the unprejudiced and unconditioned audience their creators might wish for. The film-viewing and listening skills which we bring to Straub/Huillet’s work are those we have acquired via the stylistic and narrative norms of a film form which has become the defining instance of the art form - the classical Hollywood style. Organised around a narrative dominant, this film form is based upon a hierarchical structure which David Bordwell succinctly summarises as follows:

In Hollywood cinema ... narrative causality operates as the dominant, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it. These systems do not always rest quietly under the sway of narrative logic, but in general the causal dominant creates a marked hierarchy of systems in the classical film.⁸

Reviewing the transposition of this filmic structure onto other domains of filmmaking, and pointing to the remarkable persistence of this stylistic tradition, Kristin Thompson asserts: “In sum, it is not too much to say that our conception of any film ... fictional or not, rests chiefly upon assumptions derived from the classical Hollywood style.”⁹

Viewed against this pervasive background norm, Straub/Huillet’s work does indeed constitute a considerable challenge to our perception. An acting style which does not give us

access to the motivations of a character, the tenuous cohesion of the films' over-arching structure - be it narrative or essayist - the way in which the narration cuts loose from narrative determination, and the foregrounding of the materiality of the film's individual components, these are the most striking evidence of Straub/Huillet's violation of dominant norms of the cinematic.

The stylistic idiosyncrasies of Straub/Huillet's films have sparked off a highly polarised debate which continued throughout their filmmaking. Drawing a connection between the "Konsequenz und Radikalität seiner Ästhetik ... [und] den immensen Schwierigkeiten, unter denen seine Filme stets zustande kamen", and the fervour of the discussion surrounding these films, Ulrich Gregor observed in 1978: "Die Diskussion um die Filme Straubs sind seit jeher gekennzeichnet durch eine Aufspaltung in bedingungslose Anhängerschaft und verständnislose Gegnerschaft. Man war - und ist - entweder 'Straubianer' oder nicht."¹⁰ Even in the changed cultural climate of the 1990s Straub/Huillet's work seems to foster such a tendency towards the taking of aesthetic sides. Thus Barton Byg concedes that his study on Straub/Huillet's films adopts a eulogistic tone, but justifies it by stating that "it is difficult to discuss the shortcomings of artists whose strengths have not yet been recognised."¹¹

One of the poles of the critical reaction to Straub/Huillet's oeuvre, and also the most prevalent question running through reviews of their films, is the question whether they merit the classification as films at all. Statements concerning *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* such as "gegen alle Grundgesetze des Films wurde von Anfang an bis zum langersehnten Schluß verstoßen", are a regular feature in the debate on Straub/Huillet's work in general.¹² As Hans Hurch, looking back at thirty years of critical discussion on Straub/Huillet notes, the categorisation of their work as "unfilmisch, das ist der große Bann, mit dem die Kritik von Anfang an ihr Werk belegt und ihm den Weg versperrt hat."¹³

Contrary to this wholesale condemnation of their work, is the recurrently held view that the

violation of dominant film norms is the unifying momentum of Straub/Huillet's films. Thus the pair have frequently been requisitioned for a deconstructivist approach to filmmaking. For instance, Martin Walsh - referring solely to Straub - notes that "much of his work may be elucidated in terms of a systematic 'deconstruction' of the old forms of cinematic expression."¹⁴

Gregor explains the fundamental disagreements in the critical appreciation of Straub/Huillet's work as a result of their individual aesthetics and production circumstances. However, this polarisation can also be viewed in a more general context. As Kristin Thompson maintains, the study of alternative film form has often been beset by an approach which seems to thrive on oppositions. She notes with regard to this:

Theorists usually discuss alternatives to the classical cinema in general and largely negative terms. If the classical style is invisible, we will praise films that show the camera. To a cinema of pleasure we oppose a cinema of "unpleasure" or frustration or boredom to a cinema of depth, a cinema of flatness or materiality. Working with such mighty opposites it becomes easy to claim that the favoured filmmaker ... subverts or "deconstructs" the dominant style ... such polarities lack nuance and precision.¹⁵

The description of Straub/Huillet's work as "Anti-Kino", and thus as a systematic negation of cinematic conventions, is an example of such a coarse-grained view. Without doubt, Straub/Huillet's films feature striking inversions of dominant conventions. However, it is significant that they have consistently refuted the claim that what they do is, as Alexander Kluge once formulated it, "vollkommen neu." Straub retorted to this: "the things I do are not new at all, they are traditional. Anyone who makes films progresses in tiny steps forward on this road, in one direction, and only in tiny steps."¹⁶ Straub/Huillet have in fact never ceased to express their admiration for directors who worked within the tradition of the classical Hollywood style. Names such as Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang, Erich von Stroheim, D.W. Griffith and John Ford are co-ordinates of a film history that they frequently evoke. Given the opportunity to programme their works in combination with films of their own choice during a

1997 retrospective of their work in Paris, they did not only draw on representatives of a diverse tradition of alternative film form such as Carl Theodor Dreyer and Robert Bresson. They also included numerous examples from the repertory of classical films.¹⁷

One indication of a certain traditionalism in Straub/Huillet's work is their uncompromising insistence on original sound. This contravention of current standard post-production procedures, is also a return to what constituted the norm until the late 1930s. In Schoenberg's opera *Von heute auf morgen* Straub/Huillet take this practice to its extreme. In it the singers' performances are accompanied by a full size orchestra which is shown in the process of tuning their instruments in the film's first shot; for its entire remainder the musicians occupy the off-screen. In *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*, the indivisibility of sound and image that this recording procedure preserves, is essential to what Straub/Huillet want to make us see and hear in the film's numerous performances of Bach's works. Rather than an incidental working practice, direct recording is essential to what the film is about. Another striking recourse to a stylistic tradition is evident intermittently in Straub/Huillet's presentation of space. Spatial disjunctions and fragmentation are frequently a feature of their films. This gives a striking impact to those instances in which Straub/Huillet return to the continuous representation of space as it characterises the classical film style. However, Straub/Huillet do not merely cite dominant stylistic figures, they appropriate them for a new and different function than they fulfil in dominant film style.

The above observations point to the need for a more finely tuned evaluation of what in the original sense of the word is "radical" in Straub/Huillet's work. While their films question central assumptions about reigning cinematic conventions, this fact should be situated in the context of an art form that has far from realised its full aesthetic potential. The task which Alexander Kluge outlined for filmmakers of his generation, might thus have elicited more agreement from Straub than the suggestion of wholesale innovation. In Kluge's view it is

incumbent upon filmmakers to “radically expose the root of film as long as cinema remains merely an unrealised project.”¹⁸

To view the art of film in this way recommends itself to the critical discussion of Straub/Huillet’s work. The merit of such an approach is not least that it provides a safeguard against the issuing of aesthetic sanctions. To accept that Straub/Huillet’s films challenge our perception is a prerequisite for the engagement with them. Indeed, to deny them this attribute would diminish their potential to achieve what they set out to do: to make us see and hear differently. David Bordwell’s statement on the analysis of Carl-Theodor Dreyer films: “only by recognising the power of art to outrun our familiar explanations can we acknowledge that films can change the way we look at them, think about them, talk about them”, is no less relevant for the discussion of Straub/Huillet’s films.¹⁹ However, to describe Straub/Huillet’s work as “unfilmic” - an interpretation which surely would appear curiously passé in the context of any other art form with a more established modernist tradition - promises few new insights. Ultimately, this aesthetic verdict runs the danger of merely perpetuating a definition of film which is synonymous with the conventions of the classical cinema. Yet, as Kristin Thompson points out, it is precisely the fact that classical film style has come to be synonymous with the art form *per se* which makes the study of alternatives to it so “acute and urgent.” When Straub/Huillet are censured for the allegedly wooden intonation of their actors, even though this is the result of a painstaking process of stylisation; or when they are admonished for the immobility of their camera, when finding a single “strategischer Punkt” for the filming of an extended sequence is the result of meticulous planning, the limitations of a prescriptive approach to their work becomes apparent. Rather than the certainty of definition, it is the Bazinian tenet that, “the existence of cinema precedes its essence”, which should therefore inform the discussion of Straub/Huillet’s work.²⁰ As an exasperated Straub tells his interviewer when asked about certain unconventional features in their film

Klassenverhältnisse: "Das ist eine Schule der Toleranz, so ein Film."²¹

The polarised debate which surrounds much of Straub/Huillet work cannot be divorced from the political and ideological stance which it has come to be associated with. In over thirty years of filmmaking Straub/Huillet have been extremely vocal about their political convictions. In interview statements and pronouncements in connection with screenings of their films, they have left no doubt about their leftist views and allegiances. For instance, they dedicated *Les yeux ne veulent pas en tout temps se fermer ou Peut-être qu'un jour Rome se permettra de choisir à son tour (Othon)* to the French workers, and *Moses und Aron* to Holger Meins, the RAF member and cameraman. The premiere of their stage production of *Antigone* in 1991 was followed by Jean-Marie Straub's dedication of the production to Georg Rauch who was killed during the student rebellion of the 1960s. This frankness has fostered the assumption that Straub/Huillet's films propagate a political message in an equally unequivocal fashion.

It is striking that critics' expectation of clear-cut political statements in the films is frequently accompanied by the realisation that the films never quite deliver on this perceived promise. Thus Martin Walsh points to "a gap that opens up from time to time between the vision of their films encountered in interview with them and our actual experience of certain of their films." Indeed, in his analysis of *Moses und Aron*, Walsh observes a gap so wide that it appears difficult to reconcile the two types of discourse. He comes to the conclusion that Straub/Huillet's "claims for a specific radical content are in some respects undercut by the formal investigations of language which are aimed at the elimination of meaning." This, he continues, also "eliminates the possibility of any didactic political statement."²²

A lack of political message is also commented on by Colin McCabe in his discussion of Straub/Huillet's adaptation of Brecht's *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*, entitled *Geschichtsunterricht*. Pointing in particular to the lengthy sequences of the protagonist

driving through present day Rome, McCabe reproaches Straub/Huillet of “falling into the trap of formalism”, of “separating out the methods of representation from representing anything” and of inflicting the product on a “passive and suffering audience.”²³ While McCabe’s attestation of “formalism” dismisses the film as politically regressive, Walsh glimpses the possibility of a productive discrepancy between an assumed political meaning and the film itself. Thus he suggests that although this gap exists, it “should not be taken to indicate a fatal flaw, but simply an arena for further thought, discussion, examination.”²⁴

Rather than merely conceding an occasional discrepancy between their political statements and their films, Straub/Huillet have generally sought to entirely dissociate the two from each other. In fact, they have continuously warned against the assumption that their statements as public personae might resolve the perceptual challenges of their film. Responding to a question on the merits of speaking about their work, Straub states:

Si je pouvais, tous les entretiens que j’ai faits, je presserais sur un bouton et je les ferais disparaître, parce que ce qu’on raconte, ça consiste en banalités et en généralités, et qu’on détruit justement une partie du travail qu’on fait dans les films, qui consiste à éviter qu’on s’enlise, à éviter de donner aux spectateur l’occasion de sombrer dans des clichés et des idées générales. Les films, j’estime qu’ils sont autre chose, qu’ils ont un tissu dialectique, qu’à chaque seconde il y a contradiction, et contradiction de la contradiction. C’est très difficile de le dire en paroles.²⁵

Taking his own advice in interview with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Straub gives full reign to his reluctance to elaborate on the meaning of their films. When asked about the significance of the final shot of *Othon* - a view of the deserted garden in which Corneille’s Roman court intrigue has previously unfolded - he distances their work from conventional notions of political film, by replying:

J’espère que le film ne signifie rien: l’unique signification du film est celle que dit le titre, parce que justement le film en soi n’a aucune signification. Je crois que nous devons faire des films qui n’ont aucune signification, parce que sinon, on fait des cochonneries. Un film ... comme *Z* par exemple, je suis convaincu, que c’est un film qui signifie quelque chose, et pour cette raison, c’est un film qui ne peut être qu’une cochonnerie, parce qu’il confirme les gens dans leurs clichés.²⁶

Rather than take this statement at face value, it may be considered significant for the politics of form and perception which is at the centre of Straub/Huillet's films. These seek to engage us in the perception of the "dialectical fabric" of their materials and the world that has inscribed itself in them, and to make us see and hear differently in the process. To reduce these films to a political comment is to reduce them to what Straub himself has at times referred to as "brechtisme de patronage."²⁷

However, Straub/Huillet do not only challenge our automatised perception. In so doing they also defamiliarize our understanding of the issues that are engraved into the films' materials. The intrinsic connection between their fight against a habitualised form of perception and the political intention of their films is expressed in the quotation with which Straub/Huillet end their adaptation of Brecht's *Antigone*, and which they appended to the publicity material for the film. It reads:

Das Gedächtnis der Menschheit für erduldet Leiden ist erstaunlich kurz. Ihre Vorstellungsgabe für kommende Leiden ist fast noch geringer. Diese Abgestumpftheit ist es, die wir zu bekämpfen haben, ihr äußerster Grad ist der Tod. Allzu viele kommen uns schon heute vor wie Tote, die schon hinter sich haben, was sie vor sich haben, so wenig tun sie dagegen. Laßt uns das tausendmal Gesagte immer wieder sagen, damit es nicht einmal zu wenig gesagt wurde! Laßt uns die Warnungen erneuern und wenn sie schon wie Asche in unserem Mund sind! Denn der Menschheit drohen Kriege gegen welche die vergangenen wie armselige Versuche sind, und sie werden kommen ohne jeden Zweifel, wenn jenen, die sie in aller Öffentlichkeit vorbereiten, nicht die Hände zerschlagen werden.²⁸

When Peter Handke describes this quotation as providing a "Spruchrahmen veralteter Klassenkämpferei" and a momentary lapse into the "Kleingeist expliziten Denkens", in an otherwise remarkable film, he deprives the films of a dimension which cannot be divorced from them.²⁹ By confronting us with the physical inscription of human existence in their filmic materials, Straub/Huillet restore a history of "erduldet Leiden" to our senses, and they pose the possibility of change which would emanate from a changed form of perception.

The split between the palpable operations of style and the materials which Straub/Huillet present in their films has generated a distinctive semantic field in the debate about them. Thus

Edward Bennet states that their films feature separate "discourses" which "co-exists without justifying or transforming each other."³⁰ In his discussion of *Geschichtsunterricht*, Martin Walsh observes the presence of "two (at least) texts - Brecht's verbal one, and Straub/Huillet's formal one, the two co-existing, interdependent in fundamental ways, yet neither subjugating the other."³¹ Serge Daney suggests that the title of Straub/Huillet's first film, *Nicht Versöhnt*, points not only to the deep divisions which run through German history, but that it also epitomises a "pratique généralisée de la disjonction" in their filmic constructions. He concludes: "La non-réconciliation c'est aussi une manière de faire des films, de les fabriquer."³² This separation of the filmic representation from its material is tangible at many levels in Straub/Huillet's films. The minimalist stylisation of the cinematic processes of representation from the enactment of language to the "optische[r] Gestus" of their cinematography are the hallmarks of a narration which split away from a mere transmission of content.³³ The overriding impression created is of a meticulously devised disjuncture. In trying to grasp this, another Brechtian notion can be usefully evoked.

In his *Anmerkungen zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Bertolt Brecht calls for the introduction of the principles of the epic theatre to the opera in an effort to claim this most bourgeois of art forms for a more revolutionary purpose. As Brecht envisages it, this would lead to

einer radikalen Trennung der Elemente. Der große Primatkampf zwischen Wort, Musik und Darstellung kann einfach beigelegt werden durch die radikale Trennung der Elemente. Solange "Gesamtkunstwerk" bedeutet, daß das Gesamte ein Aufwaschen ist, solange also Künste verschmelzt werden sollen, müssen die einzelnen Elemente alle gleichermaßen degradiert werden, indem jedes nur Stichwortbringer für das andere sein kann. Der Schmelzprozeß erfaßt den Zuschauer, der ebenfalls eingeschmolzen wird und einen passiven (leidenden) Teil des Gesamtkunstwerks darstellt.³⁴

The saliency of a concept developed with theatre and opera in mind for the films of Straub/Huillet, is of a structural kind. It resides in the suggestion, that to re-appropriate an art form an emancipation of its individual elements should replace their fusion in a hierarchical

structure. A similar structural shift is at work in relation to dominant film form in Straub/Huillet's productions. As previously noted, the "Primatkampf" between the resources of film has been settled in a hierarchical constellation of its own. In this the narrative becomes the dominant around which other filmic resources are moulded. In the works of Straub/Huillet the filmic elements are part of a constellation of far greater equality. Here, a tenuous and gapped narrative or an argumentation fails to fully unify a film; the representation of time and space is not solely committed to a content to be transmitted and sounds and images engage our attention as materials in their own right. References to the "co-existence of discourses" record the perceptual effect of this.

It is in connection with the creation of a filmic "separation of elements" that Straub/Huillet's perennial adaptation practice comes into view. Referring to this working procedure, Heinrich Böll, the author of the short story and novel upon which their first two films were based, commented in 1965: "Ich glaube, Herrn Straubs schwacher Punkt ist die Tatsache, daß er, um seine Vorstellungen von Film zu realisieren, fremde Stoffe braucht."³⁵ While Straub/Huillet's subsequent work would bear out Böll's general observation, his implicit charge of a lack of imagination misses the point which underlies their recourse to existing works of art. The reason given for this by Danièle Huillet points to a more dynamic and constructive interaction than Böll perceives "Der Mensch" she states "ist 'twas beschränkt. Es passiert mehr, das heißt er kommt viel weiter, wenn er wie ein Pferd mit Hindernissen arbeitet, und die Hindernisse sind die Formen, die Schemen, die man übernimmt und die man versucht zu entwickeln, zu sprengen und zu erweitern."³⁶ Straub/Huillet's recourse to other art works is not merely motivated by a *sujet*. Their adaptation practice explores the representational strategies of source materials which are marked by a similarly non-hierarchical construction, as they seek to realise it in the films themselves.

It is instructive to view this aesthetic approach in the context of the discussion which has

surrounded the relation between the seventh art and its predecessors. What Franz-Josef Albersmeier describes as “eine im Grunde alltägliche kulturelle Interaktion”, was often considered to be an existential threat where film was concerned.³⁷ Indeed, the history of the medium has at times been viewed as almost synonymous with an emancipation from the traditional arts. In Erwin Panofsky’s view, for instance, the advance of film was to lead to the realisation of the “the basic nature of the medium”, and thus a cinematic essence.³⁸

One of the most vocal contestants of such a notion of cinematic purity was André Bazin. In *What is Cinema?* he seeks to answer this very question in relation to other arts. He acknowledges the formative influence of a variety of representational forms on film as an established feature of the medium’s past and present. In advocating a “mixed cinema” he points to specific instances where this interplay of art forms has borne rich fruit. It is the aesthetic exchange between theatre and film that he dwells on in particular detail. “Staging a play by means of cinema” is the formulation by which he denotes a form of cinematic adaptation which emerges from a dialogue between film and theatre.³⁹ The outcome of this is not what Bazin calls “canned theatre” and thus a filmed stage production, nor is the dramatic source material simply made into a film. In the third of three possible forms of interaction described by Bazin, the filmmaker devises cinematic equivalents for certain theatrical conventions. But while Bazin suggests that such an interplay is full of aesthetic potential, he also contains it within clearly defined limits. His belief in an ontological realism, and thus the notion that “the realism of cinema follows directly from its photographic nature”,⁴⁰ leads him to conclude that the creation of cinematic equivalence must always be guided by the knowledge that “in all circumstances and under the best possible conditions” cinema can only ever aspire to be the theatre’s “humble servant.”⁴¹

Surveying the various attempts to draw a delineation between theatre and cinema as well as other instances of media interplay, Susan Sontag arrives at a question that is extremely

relevant in the context of Straub/Huillet's work. She notes:

For some time all ideas in art have been extremely sophisticated. Like the idea that everything is what it is, and not another thing. A painting is a painting. Sculpture is sculpture. A poem is a poem, not prose. Etcetera. And the complementary idea: a painting can be "literary" or sculptural, a poem can be prose, theatre can emulate and incorporate cinema, cinema can be theatrical. We need a new idea. It will probably be a very simple one. Will we be able to recognise it ?⁴²

Straub/Huillet's work provides the chance to pick up this gauntlet with regard to film. Their recourse to artistic traditions yields neither the pure cinema as advocated by Panofsky nor the variations of the "mixed cinema" as Bazin envisages in the exchange between theatre and film. Their works create a different dynamic between representational forms.

Conspicuous visualisations of this kind of interaction abound in Straub/Huillet's work. Their film of Franco Fortini's extended poem *I Cani Del Sinai*, entitled *Fortini/Cani*, offers a particularly striking example. It starts with a protracted and static shot of Fortini's book. Shot two displays the film titles. It is followed by a close-up of a section of the volume's prefatory page with a pair of reading glasses placed diagonally across it. Over it, Franco Fortini starts the reading of his text. An extensive shot of black frames follows.

While establishing a palpable focus on the material aspects of its source text, this shot sequence also overtly denotes its enactment by various means: the presence of glasses implies the act of reading - which will continue to form a major part of the film's diegesis - and the scene's lapse into darkness foregrounds the act of filmic presentation. The viewer is thus presented with a striking recognition of the source material's autonomy. However, the filmic treatment which it inspires is not effaced in the "humble service" of the source material. The vantage point which is created in this encounter also foregrounds the specificity of film.

In the films discussed in this study the realisation of this dynamics between the filmic representation and its materials evolves in the response to the art works with which Straub/Huillet engage. Kafka's prose writing, Cézanne's painting, the music of Bach and Schoenberg as well as a number of other representational forms become Straub/Huillet's point

of departure for an exploration of an art form which they consider to be the as yet largely uncharted territory.

The engagement with films which seek to change the viewer's perception also requires their critic to refocus attention. From a search for meaning our attention has to be diverted to the films' formal features, and the ways in which they seek to involve us in new modes of perception. As Susan Sontag notes, it is exactly those films which elicit such a readjustment, which free us from what she calls "the itch to interpret", that account for the most intriguing instances of contemporary filmmaking.⁴³ In her seminal essay *Against Interpretation* Sontag states that: "Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use or for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories." Films, which prove recalcitrant to such approaches expose us to a wider sensory experience and test our sensibilities.⁴⁴

Viewed from this angle, the work of Straub/Huillet may also pose a productive challenge to received notions in the critical approach to film. Thus David Bordwell points out, that if film at various stages of its brief history has had to fight off a stifling embrace by its more established predecessors amongst the arts, film study might in turn benefit from its own liberation. He concludes that "film study has too long laboured under the sway of literary interpretation. We know how to do 'readings' of films, but we have seldom examined how film as a medium creates a unique mode of aesthetic experience."⁴⁵

Large sections of Straub/Huillet's films defy such "readings" and thereby the preoccupation with purely thematic aspects. Drawing on the insights of Russian formalist and neoformalist film criticism, Kristin Thompson suggests a different approach to the analysis of film. Where the aim of art is seen to be "to make things new", a film will not only be analysed for the meaning it generates, but also for how it defamiliarises what it makes us see and hear. Interpretations - which Thompson defines as eliciting "implicit" and "symptomatic" meaning -

is no longer necessarily the central part of any analysis. Instead of explaining away a film's obstacles to understanding, the analysis of films "should try as much as possible to point out and preserve the difficulties and complexities of the film, but should suggest at the same time the perceptual and formal functions of the problematic aspects."⁴⁶ It is such an approach which complements the understanding of the function of art as it underlies Straub/Huillet's films.

Notes

¹ Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

² Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet is there too', *Enthusiasm*, 1 (January, 1970), p. 10.

³ Stephane Bouquet, 'Intimité', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 510 (février 1997), p. 66.

⁴ Richard Roud, *Straub*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 52. The other monographs published about the work of Straub/Huillet are: Jean-André Fieschi, ed., *Les films de Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet* (Paris: Le Centre Allemand Goethe Institut, 1977); Franco Fortini, *Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet : Les chiens du Sinaï* (Paris: Edition de l'Etoile, 1979); Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, (London: B.F.I., 1981); Wolfram Schütte, *Klassenverhältnisse* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1984); Christian Thorel and Jean-Paul Archi eds., *Les Films de Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet: Amerika/Rapports de Classes/Klassenverhältnisse d'après Kafka* (Toulouse, Paris: Ombres, NEF Diffusion, 1984); Jacques Déniel and Dominique Païni, eds., *Der Tod des Empedokles/ La mort d'Empédocle* (Dunkerque: Studio 43/ Dopa Films/ Ecole régionale des beaux-arts, 1987); Dominique Païni, and Charles Tesson, eds., *Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet: Hölderlin, Cézanne* (Lédignan: Editions Antigone, 1990); Louis Seguin, *Aux distraitements désespérés que nous sommes...* (Toulouse: Ombres, 1991); Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵ Wolfram Schütte, 'Reduktion, Präzision, Materialität und Spiritualität: Ein Wort für den Filmemacher Jean-Marie Straub', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 Januar 1998, p. 3.

⁶ Maureen Turim, 'Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet: Oblique Angles on Film as Ideological Intervention', in *New German Filmmakers: From Oberhausen Through the 1970s*, ed. by Klaus Phillips (New York: Ungar, 1984), p. 356.

⁷ Klaus Kreimeier, 'Rückblick auf ein Biedermeier mit Raketen' in *Abschied vom Gestern*, ed. by Hilmar Hoffmann and Walter Schobert (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1991), p. 16.

⁸ David Bordwell, 'Story Causality and Motivation' in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, (London:

Routledge, 1991), p. 12.

⁹ Kristin Thompson, 'Alternative Modes of Film Practice', in *ibid.*, p. 379.

¹⁰ Ulrich Gregor, 'Jean-Marie Straub', in *Geschichte des Films ab 1960* (München: Bertelsmann, 1978), p. 142.

¹¹ Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance*, p. 235.

¹² Herbert Linder, 'Kinder, aufgepaßt!', in *Filmkritik*, 10 (Oktober 1968), p. 709.

¹³ Hans Hurch, 'Von Steinen und Menschen', *Falter*, 16 (1992), p. 24.

¹⁴ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 39.

¹⁵ Kristin Thompson, 'Alternative Modes of Film Practice', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 379.

¹⁶ Quoted in John Sandford, 'Jean-Marie Straub', in *The New German Cinema* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1980), p. 16.

¹⁷ Part of Straub/Huillet's selection were for instance Amongst others Howard Hawks, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, John Ford *Chinese Frontier*, D. W. Griffith, *A Corner in Wheat*, Fritz Lang, *Hangmen Also Die*.

¹⁸ Alexander Kluge, 'Zur realistischen Methode' in *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975), p. 220.

¹⁹ Bordwell, David, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981), p. 3.

²⁰ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), p. 71.

²¹ Nothnagel, Klaus, 'Gespräch mit Straub/Huillet', *epd Film*, 9 (September 1984), p. 25.

²² Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 105.

²³ Colin McCabe, 'The Politics of Separation: Discussion', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1975-76), p. 59.

²⁴ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 105.

²⁵ Jacques Aumont, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', in *Der Tod des Empedokles: La mort d'Empédocle*, ed. by Jacques Déniel and Dominique Païni (Dunkerque: Studio 43/Dopa Films/Ecole régional des beaux arts, 1987), p. 44.

²⁶ Sebastian Schadhauer, Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 223 (août 1970), p. 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁸ Straub/Huillet also included this quotation in the publicity material for the film. Cf., *Die Antigone des Sophokles: Film des Monats*, published by the film museum München, November 1992.

²⁹ Handke, Peter, 'Kinonnacht, Kinotier', *Die Zeit*, 20. November 1992, p. 67.

³⁰ Edward Bennett, 'The Films of Straub/Huillet are not "Theoretical"', *Afterimage*, 7 (Summer 1978), p. 5.

³¹ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 76.

³² Serge Daney, 'Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's "Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene"', in *Les films de Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Jean-André Fieschi, p. 65.

³³ Wolfram Schütte, 'Akte des Widerstandes', in *Herzog, Kluge Straub*, ed. by Peter W. Jansen, and Wolfram Schütte (München: Hanser, 1976), p. 42.

³⁴ Bert Brecht, *Gesammelte Schriften. Schriften I: Zum Theater* ed. by Elisabeth Hauptmann, 8 vols. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 1010.

³⁵ Quoted in Helmuth de Haas, 'Die Geschichte einer Erregung', *Die Welt*, 24. Juli 1965, p.18

³⁶ Peter Zach, 'Vom Unglück in einer Maschine zu sein, die viele Freiheiten beinahe hat, aber in der sich das Glück nur ab und zu zeigt', *Blimp* (March 1985), p. 20.

³⁷ Franz-Josef Albersmeier, *Einleitung: Von der Literatur zum Film. Zur Geschichte der Adaptionsproblematik*, in., *Literaturverfilmungen*, ed. by Franz-Josef Albersmeier and Volker Roloff (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 16.

³⁸ Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Picture', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 3rd ed. (New York. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 227.

³⁹ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 93.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴² Susan Sontag, 'Film and Theatre' in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism* p.355.

⁴³ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴⁵ David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Cf. Krstin Thompson, 'Neoformalist Film Analysis: One Approach, Many Methods', in *Breaking The Glass Armour* (Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 33.

Chapter One

"...wormit eine deutliche Art gezeigt wird mit dreien obligaten Partien richtig und wohl zu verfahren." The Polyphony of Time, Space and Narrative in *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*

In *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* Straub/Huillet took their departure from "[der] Idee einen Film zu versuchen, in dem man Musik nicht als Begleitung, auch nicht als Kommentar, sondern als ästhetische Materie benutzt."¹ This focus on the musical material could have hardly been more strikingly realised: over two thirds of the film's ninety-three minutes playing time are taken up by performances of excerpts from Bach's works, as well as by numerous shots of original scores and their title pages.

Much of the criticism which was levelled at *Chronik* chose the startling predominance of music as its target. In questioning the primacy of the visual in film in such a flagrant fashion, *Chronik* hardly seemed to qualify as film in the minds of many of its critics. Bernardo Bertolucci's suggestion that the film provided its audience with the opportunity to see a "Tonband über Bach", expressed a common sentiment.² The intention to make films "die immer unfilmischer werden",³ which Jean-Marie Straub voiced in an interview with Barbara Bronnen in 1973, had been achieved in *Chronik*, with substantial assistance from the "ästhetische Material" provided by Bach.

It is, however, more than just the sheer prominence of music which makes this a film that challenges received notions of the cinematic. In *Chronik*, formal experiment and innovation feed on the complexities of another art form. In the polyphonic structure of Bach's music, with its elaborate interlacing of autonomous voices, Straub/Huillet find a resonant model for their own work. The judgement of one of Bach's contemporaries on his music may serve to highlight the central affinity between Straub/Huillet's film and its source material. In 1737 Johann Adolphe Scheibe launched a public attack against his former teacher. According to his detractor, Bach's music is marred by an "excess of art", an overelaboration which must

alienate the listener, since “all the voices must work with each and none of them can be recognised as the principal voice.” In an age in which public taste favoured the “natural” and “lofty”, Scheibe described Bach’s music as “somber”, “turgid”, difficult to play, and no less difficult to listen to.⁴

The perceptual difficulties which *Chronik* posed to its audiences at its release in 1967, led many critics to evoke parallels with the music to explain the unconventional nature of the film. In seeking to grasp its formal rigour and its palpable play of variation and repetition, the notion of counterpoint was frequently applied. As Richard Roud was to ask his reader in his monograph on Straub/Huillet: “Given the contrapuntal nature of Bach’s music, what more natural than for Straub to have found, not an illustration but an equivalent for it?” Roud proceeds to detect counterpointal structures in the stylistic play of “binary symmetry, left-right polarity, and the changing directions of [Straub’s] diagonals both in the camera set-ups and the camera movement.”⁵ Other forms of equivalence were identified in the wake of a question which Roud was not the only one to ask. In Roy Armes’ investigation of narrative styles in modern European cinema, the term “strict counterpoint” summarises Straub/Huillet’s negation of cinematic conventions in *Chronik*, and in their work in general.⁶ Martin Walsh detects a reflection of the musical structure in the “organisation of the compositions, their relation to each other.” In his view the “rigorous clarity of the music ... finds its counterpart (counterpoint) in the ascetic simplicity of Straub’s visual representation.”⁷

In considering the impact of Bach’s music on *Chronik*, these observations are helpful insofar as they record a formal rigour which will strike the viewer early on in the film. However, the finer nuances of the cross-fertilisation between the music and the filmic structure escapes them. Here, a counterpart can turn into counterpoint by a semantic twist and the simple juxtaposition or inversion of stylistic devices comes to be equated with polyphony.

In pursuing its own answer to Roud's question, this analysis of *Chronik* will seek to detect more intricate links between the music and the film which so far have largely gone unnoticed.

However, Bach's music does not only have a formal influence on *Chronik*. It is also what the film is about. Straub/Huillet show the performance of numerous works by Bach, as well as the material context from which they sprang. The hallmark of this presentation of the music is a painstaking concern for authenticity. From the details of performance practices, such as the use of original instruments, or the arrangement of musicians, down to their spectacles, Straub/Huillet sought to recreate the physical conditions of Bach's time as faithfully as possible. Straub/Huillet's casting of Gustav Leonhardt as Johann Sebastian Bach, and their co-operation with Nikolaus Hanoncourt, points to the intention behind such attention to detail. Hanoncourt and Leonhardt were amongst the first musicians to pursue authentic performance practices in their Bach renditions, and thus to acknowledge, as Straub put it with regard to Bach's works "[que] c'est une musique qu'il avait écrite pour des moyens concrets."⁸ In *Chronik* Straub/Huillet sought by cinematic means to peel away some of the layers of interpretation which Bach's work has acquired since its rediscovery at the turn of the 18th century.

However, the long sequences in which Straub/Huillet show us musical performances on original instruments, do not only serve to demonstrate the material basis of an art form. The insistence with which the filmmakers invite us to engage in the perception of the music, points to the fact that there is more to hear and see here. In *Chronik*, Bach's music is not only shown as a reflection of a historical and social reality, but also as carrying the inscription of its potential transcendence.

The carefully crafted structure of *Chronik* which critics variously commented on quickly impresses itself on the viewer. In Straub/Huillet's film, different materials are offset against each other like clearly discernible voices and are woven together in variable constellations.

Undoubtedly, the most prominent of these strands of the filmic structure is the music which takes up the major part of the work's duration. In all, twenty performances of segments from Bach's music occur intermittently across the film. They are presented in a strikingly similar fashion. Drawing on an extremely restricted cinematographic repertoire, Straub/Huillet show all of these performances as shot-sequences. In these, the musicians are either filmed in one long take, shot in the majority of cases from the very pronounced oblique angle which Roud comments on, or else the camera slowly tracks in or out of the shot space.

A second recurring element are pieces of evidence of Bach's work and life. An array of authentic documents such as original musical scores and letters in either the composer's handwriting or in print, title pages of his music, and copperplate etchings of localities which Bach visited, run past the viewer in quick succession. More than half of the film's hundred and fourteen shots contain such graphic or written material. Its presentation, however, takes up a relatively small percentage of the film's overall playing time. In contrast to the long takes associated with the musical performances, these documents introduce a marked contrast of briefer time-spans into the film. While the shots of musical performances last up to seven and a half minutes, these inserts are between one and fifty-six seconds long. The representation of the documents takes three different forms. They are either shown in fixed shots, or are gradually revealed through left to right trackings or downward tilts.

The combination of the musical performances and the written material introduces a highly documentary note into *Chronik* to which the conventionally fictional sequences provide a contrast. The narrative episodes feature moments from the life of Bach and his second wife Anna Magdalena. In nine brief dramatic interludes we see the Bachs either together or individually in a private setting, or in the pursuit of their profession as musicians. Thus a shot towards the beginning of the film shows Bach and one of his daughters as they perform the final steps of a minuet. Later in the film he returns home to be greeted by another of his

children with the news that a gift from a relative has arrived. In the film's second last shot Bach - now blinded by the abortive eye operation which was to lead to his death - is shown standing by a window with his unseeing gaze directed towards the outside.

The two longest narrative segments of the film focus on the perennial conflict between Bach and his superiors during his twenty-eight years as Cantor of the *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig. In the first of these we see Gustav Leonhardt as he reads Bach's *Höchstnöthigen Entwurf einer wohlbestallten Kirchen Music* to Anna Magdalena. In this memorandum to the Leipzig Town Council, Bach gives a detailed breakdown of the resources required to ensure the maintenance of the church music in his care. With this information he seeks to convince his employers of the necessity to restore the financial support which has been withdrawn. A second sequence enacts an equally well documented altercation between Bach and the rector of the Thomas School. Centring around the encroachment of the cantor's prerogative to nominate the prefects for the four church choirs under his supervision, this conflict soured Bach's working life for years before it was eventually settled in his favour by royal intervention.

Bach's renown amongst his contemporaries as a teacher of music is acknowledged in a brief scene in which he lectures on the figured bass. His expertise in acoustics is highlighted in a sequence which sees him travelling to Berlin at the invitation of King Frederick the Great. During his visit he inspects the new opera building and identifies its unique acoustical features.

Three narrative segments feature only Anna Magdalena. In the film's second shot she is introduced in a brief close-up. Shot eighty-two shows her confined to her bed by illness during her husband's absence. Finally, towards the end of the film we see her as she opens the shutters of her window and hangs up her singing bird's cage just before she receives news of a suicide.

Five of these nine episodes consist of only a single shot: in the other four, several shots are edited into highly clipped dramatic interludes. In contrast to the considerable and extensive frame mobility which the documents and the performances, with their inherently static or tableaux-like arrangements, generate, the cinematography in these sequences is strikingly inert. The fixed shots in which they are filmed are generally marked by a flagrant refusal of the camera to reveal or follow the narrative events.

With its restricted use of specific cinematic devices for the presentation of periodically recurring types of material, *Chronik* provides a striking example for the aesthetic potential of the stylistic sparseness which critics have frequently commented on in Straub/Huillet's work. This "minimalism" allows the creation of a stylistic pattern across *Chronik*. A number of exceptions from this intrinsic stylistic rule further throw the film's regularities into relief and also create moments of striking perceptual impact.

For instance, following eighteen performances which have been presented through fixed shots or trackings, Gustav Leonhardt's rendition of the *Goldberg Variations* is shown in a markedly different manner. Straub/Huillet start this sequence with a close-up of his hands and then the camera tilts up and comes to rest on his face. Furthermore, while all the performances were filmed and recorded in sets with authentic architectural features, one shot constitutes an arresting deviation from this pattern. In it, we see Bach conducting an off-screen orchestra in front of a back projection of Leipzig City Hall.⁹ Similarly, a number of montage sequences, in which documents fill the screen and are therefore divorced from any physical context, is followed by a single deviation from this pattern. The first two pages from Anna Magdalena's bible are shown as part of a volume which she holds in her hands. The changeover from the frontispiece to the dedication of the book to Anna Magdalena's son Johann Christoph Friedrich, is not the result of editing but of her turning the pages. Another departure from the general stylistic background can be observed in a shot of an etching towards the beginning of

the film. In this, the camera does not pan or simply remain still, but tracks onto the central architectural feature, Weimar Castle. The sudden extensive frame mobility in the seventh and ninth narrative segment of the film completes its play of repetition and variation. In the first of these, the camera moves off into a pan to reveal the object of Bach's gaze - the ceiling of the *Apolloaal* of the Berlin State Opera. In the second last shot of the film, the camera tracks in on Bach himself. Straub/Huillet thus conclude the film with a cinematographic gesture which mirrors the tracking from a medium shot to a medium long shot with which the film begins. The stylistic play described here combines into a very pronounced structure of regularities and deviations. It provides the film with a coherence which is derived from the formal arrangement of the materials rather than merely the progression of a narrative.

Indeed, the narrative sequences are only a relatively small part of the film: in all they take up eleven minutes of it. What could be expected to take centre stage in a more conventional cinematic rendering of the famed musician's life, thus gets astonishingly short shrift in *Chronik*. In an article in *Filmkritik*, Jean-Marie Straub refers to the film's narrative elements as "points" as defined by the composer Stockhausen, and thus as "essentially self-contained filmic instances."¹⁰ These do not combine into a continuous filmic biography, but merely single out isolated moments from Bach's life. Their narrative self-containment is compounded by the fact that each of these segment unfolds in a new and different setting. Furthermore, neither Bach nor his wife show any signs of the passage of time over a narrational time span of twenty-eight years. There is, therefore no intrinsic reason why the segments should occur in the sequence in which they do; they would be freely interchangeable with each other were it not for the film's fourth recurring element: the voice-over.

Exceptionally in the context of Straub/Huillet's filmmaking, this is not based on an existing text. There never was a chronicle by Anna Magdalena Bach. What we hear is in fact a collection of excerpts from some of the main sources of information on the life and work of

Johann Sebastian Bach. The obituary written by Bach's oldest son Carl Philip Emmanuel, surviving letters and documents by the composer, as well as the words of cantatas, are worked into one single text.

The voice-over's first words, "Er war", mark its external and posthumous perspective on the life of Bach. The close-up of a woman, by which these words are accompanied, links them to the person we must assume to be Anna Magdalena Bach. The shot with which Straub/Huillet anchor the voice-over recitation in this diegetic presence, is remarkable both for its extreme brevity and its shot composition. Succeeding an opening shot of more than three minutes, it startles the viewer by its flash-like appearance for less than one second. It also imprints itself onto the viewer's perception by its emphatically decentred composition. Anna Magdalena is shown in a close-up from an oblique high angle; her three-quarter profile which occupies the left frame section is turned away from a window which juts into the shot space behind her. In a conspicuous inversion of classical framing convention her gaze is thus averted from an open expanse of shot space, rather than being allowed to traverse this. There is yet another respect in which this shot comes forward as a play on classical stylistic conventions. Anna Magdalena's words introduce a journey back in time and thus a shift in the film's temporal order. Straub/Huillet's cinematography dramatises this in a very unusual way. In classical film mode, the most common stylistic options to indicate a temporal inversion would be to zoom in on an actor's contemplative expression; prior verbal references would perhaps prepare the viewer for the narrative's regress in time, and a dissolve might conjure up the notion of reality as seen through a recollecting mind's eye. Indeed, a protracted shot of the character looking into the distance - and thus enjoying an outlook such as is ostensibly denied to Anna Magdalena - might initiate the cinematic realisation of a character's memories. Each of these devices would serve the same function: to smooth over the temporal transition by motivating it as an act of recollection which the viewer can be party to.

In *Chronik*, the inversion of temporal order is not effaced by such an appeal to subjectivity and psychological motivation. Far from gradually opening up an imaginary passage into a narrative past, the film's second shot punctures the diegesis through its extreme brevity and calls attention to itself through its angular and decentred composition. The onset of the voice-over in *Chronik* clearly signals that this is not a film which seeks to take us back in time and into the minds of its narrator and its protagonist. As Jean Marie Straub stated in an interview with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, there can be no such thing as "un film 'historique', parce qu'un film historique n'existe pas, ne peut pas se faire: on peut faire une réflexion sur le passé."¹¹ In the film's second shot, Straub/Huillet flaunt *Chronik* as such a filmic reflection on the past, and thus a construction which is marked by a choice of perspective, as well as by the selection and arrangement of materials. It is the film's title which gives the viewer advance notice of the salient feature of Anna Magdalena's chronicle. Inspired by Esther Meyell's book *The Little Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, it highlights chronology as the structural mainstay of the film's account of Bach's life.¹²

David Bordwell has pointed out that narration in classical film favours a chronological flow of time, and thus typically presents events in the order in which they are supposed to have occurred. By focusing on the sequence of causes pursued by the characters and their subsequent effects, this chronological representation of time supports the viewers' forward flow of hypotheses, triggering their concentration on "what will happen next."¹³ In his description of the narrative of *Chronik* as "ganz klassisch, ganz linear", Jean-Marie Straub would seem to claim a certain proximity to the classical blueprint.¹⁴ The film does indeed tell the story of a shared life in chronological progression. Only on one occasion - when Anna Magdalena tells of the journeys Bach undertook in his youth to listen to other organists, and the appointments he held before he came to Anhalt Cöthen - do we hear of events which preceded their marriage. As the film unfolds, an accumulation of linguistic structuring devices

establishes the sequentality of events as a narrative principle. In *Chronik*, actions and events are not combined into a succession of causes and effects. Instead, it is temporal markers such as “und dann”, “bald”, or “er war nun” which link the individual incidents related by Anna Magdalena.

Straub/Huillet thus do not only adopt a chronological order of time, they also foreground it emphatically. In *Chronik* it appears to be the forward flow of time itself which expedites the narrative. This feature of the film becomes strikingly evident at the very beginning of Anna Magdalena’s account, in which she relates how she came to meet and marry Bach. All we hear about the courtship is that “Bach war Capellmeister am Anhalt=Cötheneschen Hofe” and, she continues, “Ich wurde bald als fürstliche Sängerin am Anhalt=Cötheneschen Hofe engagiert. Seine Frau war ein Jahr zuvor gestorben und aus der Ehe waren drei Söhne und eine Tochter am Leben.” What is striking in these formulations is the omission of the very element which is central to the progression of the classical film narrative - a character’s causes and motives. Throughout the film, Anna Magdalena’s rendering of her chronicle reflects its factual tenor. As yet another composition is completed, she speaks of it in the same detached tone as she does of the death of many of her numerous children. The life she shared with Bach is not presented as a subjective account which interprets events with the benefit of hindsight. Rather than subordinate the flow of time to “a protagonist’s endeavour to master conflicts, to overcome obstacles and achieve goals”, the voice-over narration of *Chronik* reflects the continuity of the forward march of time.¹⁵ The story of an artist who struggles against obstacles to the realisation of his art and numerous misfortunes in his private life, does not structure time, but is embedded in it.

Straub/Huillet’s refusal to render Bach’s life as a readily accessible sequence of causes and effects is no less evident in their reticence on the historical context of his life. In *Chronik*, material traces of the past can be seen and heard, but Anna Magdalena tells us little about the

historical conditions to which they bear witness. As Ulrich Siegele points out, the conflicts between Bach and his superiors reflected the political developments of his time. They were localised reflections of a contemporary power struggle between the Estates and the Electorate of Saxony. Differences of opinion about the appointment of a successor to the cantor of the Thomas Church, were one indication of the conflict between these two dissenting parties. While the Estates wanted a cantor in the traditional sense, and thus a musician who would also be able to teach in the school affiliated to the Thomas Church: the absolutist camp campaigned for “a more modern music directorship.”¹⁶ Their favoured candidate was to have the remit of a *Kapellmeister* who was supposed to dedicate his efforts entirely to music. Having been put forward by the absolutist party as a candidate, Bach was to spend the rest of his professional life as a pawn in a conflict which outlived him. The repercussions of these working conditions are referred to at length in the voice-over, but no explanation is given for this or any other aspect of Bach’s life in terms of its historical framework.

The function of the voice-over in *Chronik* differs greatly from the conventional purpose this cinematic device is made to serve. Mary-Anne Doane describes the use which the dominant film mode makes of the voice-over as “a form of direct address”, which is endowed with considerable authority by virtue of its non-diegetic status. The voice of the unseen narrator “speaks without mediation to the audience, bypassing the characters and establishing a complicity between itself and the spectator - together they understand and thus place the image.” They “interpret ... the image, producing its truth.”¹⁷ None of this is evident in *Chronik*. Weaving in and out of the filmic texture, Anna Magdalena’s voice-over gathers the various strands of *Chronik* into the chronological sequence of an extended flash-back. This over-arching structure gives the film’s stylistic play a directional momentum in time. Thus Anna Magdalena’s first words, “Er war”, anticipate both the end of her account and of the

film in Bach's death. However, the voice-over does not produce a unified truth about the destiny of an individual life and its historical background.

A more detailed analysis of the links between the voice-over and the film's other elements points to considerable fluctuation in the way in which they relate to each other. At times there are striking moments of convergence between the images and Anna Magdalena's narration. Occasionally her words accompany the depicted events like a commentary, or they even complement the image. Thus one close-up shows Bach as he travels to Berlin. The voice-over informs us that his son Friedemann accompanied him on this journey, whereupon Gustav Leonhardt acknowledges his off-screen presence with a sideways smile. At other times, the musical performances seem to take on a symbolic significance as the works played respond to the events the voice-over has referred to. Thus a shot of Anna Magdalena who - as the voice-over informs us - is struck down by illness during her husband's absence, is succeeded by Bach's cantata, "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme." This begins with the following exchange between Jesus and a Soul:

Seele: Wann kommst du, mein Heil?
 Jesus: Ich komme, dein Teil.
 Seele: Ich warte mit brennendem Öle.

Obvious links are also established with many of the documents on display. Particularly striking consonances between the voice-over and the film's diegetic elements occurs when the written words on the screen are also spoken by Anna Magdalena. Thus, shots seventy-two and seventy-four present letters whereby Bach sought to secure positions for two of his sons. While the texts fill the screen, Anna Magdalena tells us of these very efforts, quoting verbatim from the documents.

The study of the script for *Chronik* shows that, in fact, all the documents on display, as well as the performances, have a close relation to the voice-over narration. However, these

connections are not necessarily evident, and indeed are frequently impossible to grasp during the time-bound activity of seeing and hearing a film. The antiquated script and the musical system of notation do not yield their significance willingly. The problem of legibility which these written codes pose is compounded by the way in which Straub/Huillet present them to us. Frequently we are simply not given sufficient time even to attempt to decipher documents, or substantial parts of them are withheld by Straub/Huillet's framing. During the musical performances, the connection between the voice-over and the diegesis becomes problematic for different reasons. Here, a filmic segment may be introduced and the voice-over abates. However, the performances take up such a long time that the link to the voice-over seems momentarily severed. They are presented as moments of duration which achieve considerable autonomy from any narrative.

These instances of duration which strike the viewer, by either being too short or too long, highlight a concern with the cinematographic sculpturing of time which had already been evident in Straub/Huillet's previous work. In *Nicht Versöhnt*, their adaptation of Heinrich Böll's novel *Hauptstädtisches Journal*, Straub/Huillet had presented the period of the Third Reich and post-war Germany through a complex structure of unmarked flashbacks. By eliminating cues that signal the film's repeated shifts of levels of time, Straub/Huillet render highly problematic the integration of the narrative events into a historical continuum. Past and present are made to merge, and the flow of time itself is frozen into simultaneity and stasis. Time has literally stood still in the representation of a society in which the Fascist past lives on under a democratic veneer. The temporal structure which Straub/Huillet create in *Nicht Versöhnt* thus enacts rather than merely conveys the central theme of the film. In a congratulatory letter, the composer Stockhausen acknowledged this "composition of time, which is - as it is to music - particular to film", as one of the most salient features of *Nicht Versöhnt*.

In *Chronik*, Straub/Huillet continue this cinematographic work with time. However, they now approach it from a new angle. The translation of the order of narrated events into the sequence in which they are supposed to have happened, does not pose a difficulty in *Chronik*. In it the linear progression of a life is matched by a chronologically structured narration. Now it is the element of duration which comes to the fore. Straub/Huillet create a filmic rhythm which engages our attention by frequently cutting free from a represented content as well as the narrative. Against the chronological flow of time and the sequential progression of a lifetime, as they are established by Anna Magdalena's chronicle, Straub/Huillet thus set up a temporal pattern which challenges familiar forms of perception. Jean-Marie Straub's rationale for the selection of musical works in *Chronik* highlights this concern for a rhythm of filmic representation which exceeds narrative demands. He states:

Ich habe die Musik so ausgewählt, daß wir von jeder Art ein Beispiel haben, und auch aus allen Schaffensperioden ... Andererseits, "dialektisch" haben wir die Musik doch ganz mit Beziehung auf den Rhythmus des Films ausgesucht ... Die Adäquation zwischen dem ausgewählten Musikstück und dem Rhythmus des Films muß in jeder Szene mit Musik im Rhythmus, in der Konstruktion total werden."¹⁸

Indications of the close connection between the musical and filmic rhythm are given in the early parts of *Chronik*. Shot three shows Wilhelm Friedemann Bach as he plays one of the pieces from the *Clavierbüchlein* which his father wrote for him. The two shots which follow display the title pages of the two editions which subsequently grew out of this collection. Wilhelm Friedemann's playing accompanies these two documents and is perfectly timed to come to its conclusion when the pan, which runs down the second document, reaches the end of the text. This alignment of the cinematic and the musical rhythm is further underlined by a similarity between the graphic and the musical material. As the camera reveals the ornamental figure at the apex of the inverted pyramid of text on the title page, the music reaches its resolution in a final flourish. In shot seven of the film, the interaction of musical and narrative

rhythm finds its most obvious expression. Here, the narrative action itself - the final steps of a minuet - responds to the musical rhythm.

In the heated debate which erupted on the cinematographic merits of *Chronik* after its release, critics frequently commented, that the rhythm and pacing of the film seemed to verge on outright inertia. This is also the central criticism to which reviewers keep coming back to in the comprehensive collage of contemporary verdicts on the film, which Herbert Linder assembled for *Filmkritik*. Where one critic notes: "die Bewegungslosigkeit der Kamera wird zum Stilprinzip deklariert", another detects a "fetischistische Verklärung der Bewegungslosigkeit." This perceived stolidity of the camera is put down by one reviewer to Straub/Huillet's blatant lack of imagination. He states: "Die einzige Aufgabe der Kamera besteht darin, Personen, Dokumente, Musiker oder musizierende Gruppen minutenlang und aus unveränderter Perspektive anzustarren."¹⁹

These observations are interesting for what they miss: far from veering towards a cinema of immobility, *Chronik* does, in fact, feature a considerable degree of camera movement. Of the film's hundred and fourteen shots, forty-three feature extensive trackings and pans, whereas in another twenty-three shots Straub/Huillet use tilts. Furthermore, in citing the film's exceedingly long takes, these viewers also ignore the fact that Straub/Huillet combine extremes of shot duration in *Chronik*. The twenty shots in which we are presented with musical performance account for eighty percent of the film's playing time. However, these long performance shots are shown side by side with short takes which can last as little as under one second. The film's first two shots introduce us to such extremes of variation in shot duration: a seven and a half minute take of an ensemble of musicians is followed by the first flash-like view of Anna Magdalena.

It is Straub/Huillet's match of these extremes of duration with the represented material which challenges familiar viewing habits in *Chronik*. As Noël Burch observes, the experience

of duration in a film cannot be expressed mathematically. To understand filmic duration, the demands made on a viewer's perception by such factors as the density and complexity of information in a shot, must be taken into account. Duration thus emerges as a function of "legibility."²⁰ The appropriateness of this term to a representational form which has persistently defied linguistic analogies may be problematic in general. However, its appropriateness for the discussion of the filmic rhythm in *Chronik* is readily apparent. Here, legibility is constantly an issue. "Illegible" texts and musical scores shown with a framing, or at a speed which defies our efforts to decipher them are a defining feature of the film.

The first graphic shot of the film thus introduces us to a feature of the film which will recur frequently: In it the camera tilts down the lines of text at a speed which at best allows us to absorb the lay-out of the text, and to surmise its connection to the voice-over. Quite contrary to critical charges of cinematographic inertia, camera movements of an uncommonly high velocity are a recurring feature in *Chronik*. Queried on the numerous instances of illegibility in the film, Jean-Marie Straub comes back to the notion of rhythm and a filmic design in which "die Formen wichtiger sind als der Inhalt. Und über die Form hinaus gibt es einen kinematographischen Rhythmus innerhalb der Sequenz."²¹

While the short takes in *Chronik* foreground time by frustrating any attempt to pass through the graphic representation to its meaning, the film's shots at the other extreme of the temporal scale seem to show too little too long. In the musical performances duration appears to outrun by far the demands of "legibility", thus causing a viewer such as Roy Armes to advise his reader: "after a short while one hardly needs to look at the screen anymore."²² Given that the images which Armes refers to record a common cultural practice which does not cease to attract large numbers of visitors to concert halls, it seems justified to ask just why they should elicit boredom when projected onto the screen.

A reason for this perceptual disengagement is suggested by comparing the use of duration in *Chronik* with the conventions of classical film. In this, duration reflects narrative saliency, while time, which is deemed empty of narrative significance is skipped over, or abridged through such stylistic figures as montage sequences, dissolves or fades. Straub/Huillet's filming of the music does not inscribe it with narrative significance. No audience is ever shown, and the musicians' playing does not give rise to an exploration of expressive intensity. To engage with these shots, rather than simply look away, we have to adjust our notions of what is significant in them. It is the minutiae of gestures, of their relation to the sounds produced and the consort of movements associated with the act of making music, to which Straub/Huillet invite us to attend.

In his discussion of modernist film form, Noël Burch describes the exploration of different types of correlation between legibility and duration as one of the avenues which filmmakers might pursue in search for alternative film form. He notes that,

finding a duration adequate to the legibility of each shot is not what is important: the creative factor lies, rather, in varying the ease or difficulty with which a shot can be "read" by making certain shots too short to be comfortably grasped ... or so long that they can be read and reread to the point of absolute satiety.²³

The filmic rhythm of *Chronik* is crucially sustained by such a juxtaposition of instances which engage us with the perception of nuance, and shots which confront us with an overload of visual and aural information.

Shots in which the camera whisks across written documents or scores are the most overt indication of how time in *Chronik* splits away from the represented content. However, Straub/Huillet also devise sequences during which the stylistic processes weaves around a narrative thread in a more subtly unconventional pattern. The film's montage sequences, which involve graphic inserts, provide a demonstration. In them, Straub/Huillet appropriate a conventional filmic means for the condensation of narrative time to create temporal patterns which never entirely acquiesce to a narrative dominant.

Chronik features three extensive sequences which consist entirely of graphic material. They contain most of the film's fifty graphic shots. The first of these sequences comprises five shots of copperplate etchings of localities which Bach either had visited or in which he had lived in his youth. As Anna Magdalena lists the place names, etchings of Lüneburg, Hamburg, Arnstadt, Lübeck, Mühlhausen and Weimar are shown in succession. What makes the representation of these etchings so striking, is the variation in the way in which they are filmed. This is the case despite the fact that the amount of visual detail in the images, and of verbal information in the voice-over, does not vary greatly. In shot nine, the first shot of the sequence, the camera performs a pan which guides the viewer's eyes over the etching at an extremely measured and even pace; by contrast, in shot eleven, it whisks across a city's outlines and comes to an abrupt halt just before the cut. Shots ten, twelve and thirteen are all fixed shots in which duration varies from seventeen to just over three seconds. Finally, in shot sixteen the camera slowly tracks in on Weimar castle where, as the voice-over points out, Bach worked in 1703.

Another example of a filmic rhythm which does not simply leave narrative concerns behind, but uses them as a basis for a freer temporal play, is a twenty-one shot sequence of cantata scores and their title pages. A variation in the filmic presentation which is similar to the one described above can be observed here. Pans which wipe across the screen combine with others which allow us to scan the image in some detail. Sometimes the camera comes to a sudden stop before it has revealed a score in its entirety; then again, it runs its full course across a stave. In some cases pans across the documents start immediately after the cut; in others they commence after a short moment of immobility.

Both these montage sequences might be said to expedite narrative ends. With the succession of etchings Straub/Huillet abridge narrative time which predates Bach's marriage to Anna Magdalena. Straub/Huillet's condensation of time through a sequence of scores can be

explained with biographical fact. During his first three years in Leipzig Bach had to produce a wealth of cantatas to cater for the cycle of church music in the Nicolai Church and the Thomas Church. The appearance of cantata after cantata on the screen, to the accompaniment of Anna Magdalena's enumeration of Bach's duties, highlights his formidable workload. However, the stylistic variation to which these sequences give rise, and in particular the astonishing speed and brevity in the presentation of some of the documents, also create a tangible rhythm of perception. This, therefore, is a film which is as much about time as it is about the past.

The saliency of time in *Chronik* is perhaps most palpable in the last of its ten reels. Eight minutes before the end of the film, Anna Magdalena tells us: "In den letzten Jahren führte er einige Werke wieder auf." This factual announcement of Bach's impending death is disconcerting because nothing in Anna Magdalena's chronicle has prepared us for it. There is no sense of denouement, only the abrupt change of outlook that is associated with a life facing the prospect of death. This change of perspective is reflected in the acceleration of the rate of editing which becomes evident shortly after. In shots one hundred and five to one hundred and ten, the images seem to race towards the predicted conclusion of a life as well as of the narrative. The pace of cutting only slows down again in the film's last three shots. These show the score of the unfinished *Contrapunctus XIX* from the *Art of the Fugue*, and a medium close-up of Bach as he stands by a window. Finally a black frame to the accompaniment of Bach's last composition, the choral "Vor deinen Thron tret ich", concludes the film.

Straub/Huillet's treatment of time in *Chronik* is epitomised by this ending. Bach's death is not dramatised; no narrative in the conventional sense is derived from it and no images of the composer on his death bed bring the film to a close. Instead, Straub/Huillet render the end of Bach's life as a palpable running out of time, a collision of an individual's life-span with the flow of time itself. Throughout the entire film, death has a constantly acknowledged presence.

Reference is made to the Bachs' loss of numerous children, and to the suicide of a *Konrektor*. The consolation of an after-life is a recurrent theme in the music, and even the cantor's income is shown to be dependent on the number of funerals he has to cater for in any one year. These constant reminders of death are not merely of thematic significance for the film, they also endow it with a sense of finality and urgency. This is given full sway in the film's entire last reel. Paraphrasing Jean Cocteau's famous dictum that the essence of film is "to show death at work", Jean-Marie Straub points to the impact he wants to achieve by making the passage of time palpable in his work. In an interview with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he describes time as the essential raw material of all their filmmaking and states:

La condensation du temps, c'est ça justement le cinéma; c'est ce que j'essaie de filmer, ou de surprendre, c'est du pur présent condensé. Qui passe et qui ne se renouvellera jamais ... Disons que le fait de montrer la mort au travail ça doit donner aux gens le goût de vivre, parce qu'ils doivent se rendre compte que chaque moment qui passe, c'est fini, ils ne le récupèrent plus. Il doit y avoir une menace là-dedans.²⁴

In *Chronik*, time is brought to our attention as a filmic element in its own right. To quote Alexander Kluge, Straub/Huillet's film becomes "eine Maschine zur Herstellung von Zeit."²⁵

It is the prominence of temporal structures in Straub/Huillet's film which finally leads back to the notion of counterpoint. The musical analogy which was frequently invoked in critical discussion of *Chronik* has long provided a model for a concept of film form which is not based on the primacy of narrative. Nowhere has this parallel been pursued more persistently than in the writing of Sergei Eisenstein. In their *Statement on Sound* of 1928 Eisenstein and his co-authors Pudovkin and Alexandrow sought to avert the threat to montage culture which the advent of sound film was seen to pose. To protect an as yet nascent art form from its aesthetic regression into "dramas of high culture and other photographed presentations of a theatrical order", they advocated an "orchestral counterpoint of visual and sound images."²⁶ Eisenstein went on to refine the concept of filmic polyphony in his later writing. In *The Dramaturgy of Film-Form. (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form)* he expanded on

dynamic and non-hierarchical combinations of filmic elements for which polyphony provides a model. He envisaged a form of filmic representation which would not “adhere so slavishly to plot”, and came to the conclusion: “Plot is only one of the means without which we still do not know how to communicate something to the audience.”²⁷ In *The Fourth Dimension in Cinema*, Eisenstein wrote of the “contrapuntal collision” which would arise out of a “method of ‘democratic’ equal rights for all the stimulants.” In Eisenstein’s view, this should replace “the ‘aristocracy’ of unambiguous dominants” and thus the narrative as the most important voice in the consort of filmic elements.²⁸

Eisenstein’s reflections aimed to break the narrative mould of the art form.²⁹ The concept of a filmic polyphony which he evolves as the basis of alternative film form reverberates in Kristin Thompson’s definition of modernist film. In this, narrative would indeed no longer be the “leading voice.” In Thompson’s view, modernist film can be described “as one in which spatial and temporal systems come to the fore and share with narrative the role of structuring the film.”³⁰

It is in this sense that form in *Chronik* is derived from the salient feature of its source material. In Straub/Huillet’s film the narrative retains a distinctive voice. However, it does not exclusively determine the film’s temporal structure. Instead, time cuts free from a purely narrative function and engages our attention. In a similar fashion, space is foregrounded in *Chronik*. This too becomes part of a filmic rhythm which, in Jean-Marie Straub’s view, “unifies a film because rhythm is a structure and things must be structured. If not they do not live.”³¹

As an acoustic event which carries the mark of a specific site, and of a body of resonance to which it is indivisibly linked, sound is crucial to Straub/Huillet’s representation of space. As Jean-Marie Straub comments with respect to their insistence on original sound: “c’est le son qui donne l’espace. Donc un type qui tourne en muet, il peut oublier qu’il prend l’espace.”³²

The decision to make a film in which music would be neither "commentary" nor "accompaniment", but in which the performance of music would become the diegetically dominant element, thus brought the question of space and its representation into play in *Chronik*.

The attention to space as a factor which interacts with and shapes a work of art is a shared concern in the work of Bach and Straub/Huillet. The mediation of sound through space as we are made to hear it in *Chronik* was a phenomenon which Bach was keenly aware of. As Nikolaus Hanoncourt points out, in an age in which music was perceived of as grounded in "klingender Realität", the appreciation of a particular sound environment was considered an essential subset of compositional skills.³³ Hanoncourt notes how the acoustics of the Thomas Church - the architectural body of resonance he would most frequently have borne in mind - shaped Bach's music:

Die grandiosesten Beispiele für die souveräne Beherrschung dieses Komplexes finden wir in den Werken Bachs. Wir kennen die Akustik der Thomaskirche für die er die meisten Werke geschrieben hat; wir wissen, daß sie damals mit Holz ausgekleidet war und ... die Nachhallzeit eines guten Konzertsaaes [hatte], in dem man schnelle Tempi spielen kann, ohne daß sie verschwinden. So kann man verstehen, wieso sich Bach bei den von ihm bevorzugten, sehr schnellen Tempi schnelle Harmoniewechsel erlauben konnte.³⁴

In *Chronik* the acoustic aspect of Bach's artistry is overtly acknowledged in one of the narrative segments. It is set in the venue in which the incident it dramatises occurred in 1747, the *Apolloaal* of the *Neue Staatsoper Berlin*. As Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach was later to report, and as the voice-over explains in his words, on visiting this building Bach quickly realised

daß der Baumeister hier ein Kunststück angebracht habe, nämlich: daß wenn jemand an der einen Ecke, oben ganz leise in die Wand einige Worte flisperte, so hörte es der ander, welcher übers Kreuz an der anderen Ecke stand ganz deutlich, und sonst in der Mitte oder an den übrigen Orten hörte von den anderen Personen Keiner nicht das Geringste.

Initially, these words are accompanied by a medium shot of Bach as he stands in one of the corners of the *Apolloaal*; then the camera moves off into a slow, extensive pan over the hall's

ornate ceiling. Straub/Huillet's presentation of this brief episode simultaneously highlights the significance of space for Bach, and the importance which they themselves attribute to it in *Chronik*. The pan bares the fact that *Chronik* was shot on location, and that the sounds in it are derived from the interaction with four-walled sets, rather than being the result of a studio environment or of post-synchronisation. Further to this explicit recognition of the saliency of spatial parameters, *Chronik* foregrounds space in a more intermittent fashion. Straub/Huillet create an orchestration of space which is as palpable as the film's temporal texture. The juxtaposition of forms of spatial representation and a constant alternation between different types of space are hallmarks of this.

Thus *Chronik* features a constant alternation between the shallow space of its graphic inserts and the depth of representational space in the narrative as well as the performance sequences. While this contrast is, of course, inherent in Straub/Huillet's selection of materials, it is also forcefully underlined by their filmic representation. The depth of focus in the performance and in some of the narrative shots, the repeated oblique trackings in and out of groups of musicians, the recurring backdrop of centrally positioned windows, all co-operate to establish a solidly three dimensional space. By contrast, Straub/Huillet's filming of the graphic documents accentuates their abstract and two-dimensional nature. As noted above, with a single exception there is no physical context associated with these written traces of the past. Their two-dimensional property is made particularly conspicuous in shots of musical scores in which the vertical separation of bars and the five-fold horizontals of the staves, combine into a grid system which forcefully orients the eye towards the surface of the cinema screen. Vertical and horizontal pans further emphasise these lateral and horizontal axes. They contribute to a choreography of perception which continuously leads us from the depth of scenographic space to the surface of the screen and back again. The pervasive juxtaposition of different types of space in *Chronik* combines with a continuous fluctuation in the filmic

articulation of space. In *Chronik* a continual alternation of long takes and edited sequences creates a rhythm of spatial homogeneity and fragmentation.

The extended narrative episodes of *Chronik* feature a space which is gapped and often difficult to reconstruct for the viewer. This differs markedly from what has become familiar to us through our exposure to the conventions of classical film style. There, space is represented as a perceptually unproblematic continuum which remains subordinate to narrative demands. A transition from shot to shot which is predicated on the creation of seamless continuity, focuses the viewer's attention onto the progression of a story. In most of the narrative sequences of *Chronik*, however, space cuts free from narrative determination and vies for our attention.

The question of spatial continuity is most acutely posed in the film's five extended narrative sequences. They are the only instances in which we see movements which overstep the frame margins. In all, these re-enacted events from Bach's life contain thirteen cuts, seven of which occur within a contiguous locality. The way in which Straub/Huillet assemble space through editing makes the construction of an unified space a task of which the viewer will be acutely aware. The eschewal or the delay of a master-shot, a lack of overlap in spatially proximate shots, as well as the camera's fixed vantage point on the events, all create obstacles for an effortless construction of space.

One of these obstacles is the conspicuous nature of the off-screen space in *Chronik*. Straub/Huillet make space come forward by the insistence with which they withhold it from our view. This is, for instance, evident in the shot which contains the most conventionally cinematic action in the film. Shot sixty-three is part of its longest narrative sequence which dramatises the conflict between Bach and his employers about the nomination of choir prefects against his will. In shot sixty-two we see him as he brings his grievance before his immediate superior. This scene takes place in the superintendent's study. With the cut comes a change of

set. Shot sixty-three shows a boys' choir in an organ gallery, singing under the direction of a conductor whose back is turned towards us. Muffled off-screen noises and sideways glances from some of the boys are followed by the fleeting outline of Bach who briefly enters the frame in the company of a second, unidentified person. While the latter takes over the conducting, Bach merges back into the off-screen space, dragging the original conductor with him. More agitated noises which mingle with the boys' seemingly unperturbed singing precede the cut.

An even more unremitting off-screen presence is assigned to the actors in shots eighty-eight and ninety. In the former, Elias Bach addresses his gaze to a person outside the frame whom we can infer to be Bach. However the sequence ends without him ever having been brought into view. These instances are indicative of a narration which quite literally refuses to put us into the picture. In *Chronik*, off-screen space is not effaced through narrative insignificance, nor is it highlighted temporarily to elicit hypotheses about a spatial lay-out presently to be settled. Spatial representation in *Chronik* demonstrates its lacunary nature as it consigns narratively salient action to invisibility.

However, even where Straub/Huillet present space without such permanent and overt gaps they engage the viewer in its reconstruction, and thus invite the perceptual dispersion which the classical film mode seeks to minimise. Shot sequence forty-five to forty-seven illustrates this. It begins with a medium close-up of Bach from a high-on angle which shows him reading aloud from his memorandum on a *Wohlbestallte Kirchen Music*. The subsequent close-up of Anna Magdalena is accompanied by the continuation of Bach's reading. The sound bridge over the cut suggests spatial proximity between these two shots. However, within the stylistic context of *Chronik* this shot transition bristles with ambiguity. This first sequence of the film in which we see different segments of the same space has been preceded by forty-four spatially autonomous shots. In addition, the extremely angular composition of Anna-Magdalena

hemmed-in by book shelves and wood panelling, is highly reminiscent of her spatially suspended image in shot two of the film. Given these precedents, the sound bridge of Bach's off-screen voice fails to situate the two shots unambiguously in relation to each other. Only the subsequent master-shot confirms that Anna Magdalena and her husband are in the same room. But even this overview is granted through an overt cinematographic gesture rather than as a self-effacing accompaniment to the narrative action. The mastershot is filmed by a camera which clearly is able to anticipate the action. As if she had been awaiting the cut, Anna Magdalena now starts to traverse the newly revealed space in a semicircular trajectory which takes her to the window at the opposite frame margin. A similarly prescient representation of space can be observed in shots eighty-seven and eight-eight. In the first of these we see Anna Magdalena as she opens the shutters of a window and then hangs up a birdcage. From this image Straub/Huillet cut to a closed door, thus redirecting our attention to a portion of space which holds no apparent interest. Its narrative relevance is only revealed when with some delay, a knock is heard and Anna Magdalena steps into the frame to answer the door.

This foregrounding of space can also be observed in the transition between shots sixty-three and sixty-four. After complaining to his superior about the imposition of the prefect Krause, and after removing him as the conductor of a boys' choir, Bach is seen standing at the top of a staircase. He speaks to two figures on the landing below and tells them that he has acted with official approval in removing Krause. As in shots forty-five and forty-six, spatial proximity is suggested by off-screen sound, in this case the continued singing of the *Kyrie* by the boys' choir. However, after a quick succession of three settings, none of which have been unambiguously established or linked to each other, our grasp of the wider locale in which this exchange is enacted is never quite settled. Action in this shot ends with all three protagonists exiting the frame space. It is on this narratively "empty" space that Straub/Huillet allow the

camera to linger as it echoes to an ever more distant footfall. Shot sixty-five repeats this editing pattern. The camera remains fixed on a door in front of which Krause and Bach have just had a brief exchange of words. Both leave, but the camera holds for several seconds on the deserted locale.³⁵

There is only one shot transition in the narrative sequences of *Chronik* which furnishes the viewer with an unambiguous orientation within a locality. Following the incident between Krause and Bach, the first of a two shot sequence shows Bach with his pupils in the refectory of the school which was affiliated to the Thomas Church. As the voice-over informs us: "Johann Sebastian hatte jene Woche Aufsicht im Internat." After the boys have recited the *Lord's Prayer*, Bach asks one of them by the name of Kittler why he did not take over from Krause as he had told him to. The boy's answer confirms what the voice-over has just informed us of, that the Rector has forbidden this "bey Strafe der Relegation und Castigation" to any of Bach's pupils. Interrupting Kittler in mid-sentence, Bach orders him: "Hinaus!" In this scene the boys are seated at either side of a table which carves at an oblique angle into the depth of the room. At the far end of this diagonal line Bach stands behind another table. With its staggered arrangement of human figures, its compositional focus on Bach, and its striking depth of field, this shot is highly redolent of the film's only other shots involving a large cast: the nine performances which feature an ensemble conducted by Bach himself. Now this pictorial theme and composition is both taken up and subjected to a number of significant variations. The varied arrangement of human figures around Bach in the performance shots is replaced by a rigid regularity. The drone of communal prayer which accompanies the shot complements this visual variation with an audible one. It juxtaposes the monotonous routine of recitation to the richness of the sounds and rhythms of the music.

There is a similarly striking difference between this shot of Bach and his pupils, and those which show him amongst his musicians, with regard to the processing of space. In the latter,

the presentation of spatial segments of a wider locale relies on the seamless reduction or expansion of the shot space through mobile framing. In the scene described above, Straub/Huillet follow the master-shot of the refectory with a medium close-up of Bach. As a prominent stylistic figure of spatial representation in dominant film style, such analytical cutting into a portion of space has become familiar to the extent of “invisibility.” In the stylistic context of *Chronik* it regains perceptual saliency: it highlights a spatial segmentation which is conspicuously absent from the depiction of music-making throughout the film. The presentation of space in the scene in the Thomas School encapsulates a contrast which is central to *Chronik*. The images and sounds of which it consists, bear the inscriptions of a social context which is based on hierarchical structures. The arrangement of human beings in the scene is conducive to the implementation of control and the sounds are an audible reflection of this. Straub/Huillet’s representation of space responds to this material by mirroring its divisions. At the same time they draw our attention to the contrast between the conditions of the production of music, and the act of music-making as a communal activity.

Straub/Huillet’s overt segmentation of space ceases whenever they record performances of Bach’s music. In *Chronik* the music gives rise to a *decoupage* which is as emphatically continuous and homogeneous as the editing in the narrative sequence is disjunctive and elliptical. Where the camera tracks in on the scenographic space, it is motivated by the concentration on one specific aspect of musical enactment - the score, soloists who start playing, or Bach as the conductor. The connection between the filmic space and the features of the music is brought to the viewer’s attention in the film’s very first shot. *Chronik* starts with a view of Bach in three quarter profile as he plays the cadenza from the *Brandenburg Concerto no. 5*. We see his fingers running across the keyboard, the mechanical emulation of these movements by the clavichord’s second manual, and the original score in front of him. When the rest of the ensemble joins him for the final bars of the *Concerto*, the camera tracks

back to summon them into the film's diegesis. By way of a stylistic preface, this cinematography signals the way in which the spatial representation in the performance shots is dedicated to the material aspects of the music and its rendition. It is to these that our attention is quite overtly drawn.

The cinematic representation of the musical performances in *Chronik* recalls tenets of a phenomenal continuity, as they have been put forward by André Bazin. To Bazin the cinema fulfils its ontological essence by capturing reality like an imprint. He believes that by virtue of its mechanical nature, film, more than any other medium before it, offers us a representation which is free from the imposition of an expressive intent. It is this perceived capacity of the medium to present the viewer with the very "fingerprint" of reality, on which Bazin bases his teleology of cinematic development, and which informs his preference for certain forms of filmic representation over others. To "transfer to the screen the continuum of reality", to maintain its inherent ambiguities, the filmmaker must in Bazin's view above all preserve the integrity of pre-filmic space and time.³⁶ The stylistic device best attuned to achieve this are depth-of-field photography, frame mobility, and the long take. As Bazin states when writing about his favoured filmmaker Jean Renoir, a film style based on these techniques, "would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments." It would "reveal the hidden meaning in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them."³⁷ The "evolution of the language of cinema" which Bazin advocates, would advance towards the effacement of artistic intervention and culminate in what he refers to as "simple cinematographic recording." Arguments which contest the ontological assumptions which underlie Bazin's writing on film are well rehearsed. To discard the assumption that the medium of film might present a truthful inscription of reality onto the celluloid by dint of its mechanical nature, has turned into an orthodoxy of its own which must not be elaborated on in the present context.

For this, Bazin's notion of the integrity of pre-filmic space and time provides an intriguing backdrop, despite its limitations. A fundamental affinity between Bazin's and Straub/Huillet's views on the essence and function of film are tangible in many of the filmmakers' statements. Most importantly, it is the concentration on a material's inscriptions, rather than the imposition of a pre-conceived meaning, which is an equally crucial tenet in Bazin's writing on film and in Straub/Huillet's filmmaking. It was exactly the artlessness which Bazin views as cinematic progress, which was attested to Straub/Huillet's *Chronik* by many critics. Thus Friedrich Hommel visualised the filmmakers as "in bescheidener Ergriffenheit erstummt", and concludes: "In diesem Film soll die Musik sich selbst zeigen."³⁸

However, if Straub/Huillet share Bazin's deeply held respect for reality in their work, their films are also marked by a more overtly modernist sensibility. As Gilberto Perez notes, their films are both "solidly grounded in physical reality" and "emphatically arranged."³⁹ The performance shots in *Chronik* are a striking demonstration of the dual impulse in Straub/Huillet's work. There is little stylistic neutrality in this seeming cessation of the filmic representation before the musical material. Instead, Straub/Huillet's preservation of spatio-temporal continuity in the performance shots amounts to an ostensible gesture. Thus musicians who project their voices into the invisible space beyond the frame denote the selection of a compositional field. The repeated oblique angles on the performances flaunt the choice of perspective which Straub/Huillet afford us and they never allow us to settle back to identify with an imaginary audience. In *Chronik*, the preservation of phenomenological continuity becomes as palpable a stylistic choice, as are the many instances in which time and space are broken up and fragmented.

In her essay on *The Ordering of the Filmic Text in Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*, Maureen Turim views the film's long static takes as denoting the "power" of framing and composition. Similarly the tracking shots acquire the significance of "a dissertation on the



effect of camera movement itself.”⁴⁰ Turim relates these features of the film to Christian Metz’s concept of a filmic *Ecriture Blanche*, and thus a cinematic representation “which simultaneously deconstructs the codes of the classical narrative cinema, disturbing the plenitude of the earlier cinematic text, and presents new codes which startle and thus call attention to themselves.”⁴¹

As the above analysis has shown, Straub/Huillet challenge conventions of dominant film form in *Chronik*. Stylistic features do come forward, marking their own operations and engaging our attention. Turim’s concentration on the split between style and narrative in *Chronik* yields valuable insights into some of the film’s salient formal aspects. However, her conclusions seems to over-emphasise notions of self-reflexivity and stylistic negation. However, it is this perceptual engagement rather than the “unyieldingly contemporary ... abrasiveness” and “destruction” which Turim detects, that is central to *Chronik*.⁴² Straub/Huillet’s challenge to cinematic forms of representation ultimately aims at the viewer’s perception. The exemplary evidence for this in *Chronik* are those instances in which reading is rendered problematic. However, the question of how we pass through a form of representation to the meaning it carries, is constantly at stake in Straub/Huillet’s film. Their presentation of the various materials does not reduce them to vehicles of meaning, but seeks to draw our attention to their material properties.

There are three fixed shots in *Chronik* which provide a concise filmic formulation for this filmic endeavour. Ending reels four, six and eight, they subdivide the film into four segments. The two first shots are both approximately six seconds long. The first shows waves that wash against a shore, the second a sunrise over the sea. The last and longest of the three shots has a duration of almost two and a half minutes and presents the viewer with tree tops swaying in the wind. All three shots are entirely or partially accompanied by Bach’s music.

These images create a remarkable impression. To the sense of spatial enclosure which pervades the remainder of the film, they oppose the boundlessness of nature. The atmosphere of confinement and limitation which the film's interior sets convey is lifted all of a sudden by the appearance of these open spaces. This expansion of cinematic space is matched by the film's opening up onto a different level of time. The historically determined sets make way for images which bear no such inscription, but which are shaped by the forces of nature, and thus seem to carry a perennial presence with them.

Straub/Huillet provide a very different body of resonance for Bach's music in these three shots. Here, we are not presented with the fixed man-made hierarchies and structures in which Bach's work emerged. Instead, this imagery seem like an emblematic representation of continuous transformation through the free play of water, wind and light.

In presenting us with this sound-image constellation, Straub/Huillet do not provide an explicit formulation of an utopia in which the music of Bach would resonate more freely. But having sensitised the viewer to the properties of time and space throughout the film, they provide startling filmic moments in which we are jolted into perceiving a markedly different kind of time and space. In the close engagement with the film's material resources, they make the viewer experience the potential for change.

As this example indicates, in throwing considerable weight on the process of perception, Straub/Huillet do not discard film as a medium which represents content and meaning. *Chronik* clearly has a thematic focus in the life and work of Bach as seen through the eyes of his Anna Magdalena. In making a film about such a prominent exponent of the canon of German high art, Straub/Huillet evoked certain prior expectations from the viewer. It is against this background that their presentation of the man and his work is thrown into relief.

In his study *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, Laurence Dreyfus points out, that the prevailing view of Bach as a musical traditionalist in his own day was to set the tone for the

subsequent reception of his work. Indeed, as has been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Bach's frequent disregard for the prevalent musical taste of his time was seen as nothing short of aesthetic backwardness by some contemporary critics. With the rediscovery of Bach fifty years after his death, this view of the composer as - to quote Dreyfus - an "old fogey" took a different turn.⁴³ Now, the prevailing view was that of a steadfast defender of musical traditions which had come to their final and unsurpassed culmination in his work. It is such a view of the composer which Theodor Adorno addressed in an essay in 1951. Programmatically entitled *Bach Defended Against his Devotees*, Adorno accuses the guardians of Bach's inheritance of a fundamental misapprehension of his achievements when he states:

[Bach's] work which originated within the narrow confines of the theological horizon only in order to break through them and to pass into universality, is called back within the boundary it transcended. Bach is degraded by impotent nostalgia to the very church composer against whose office he rebelled and which he only filled with the greatest conflict. What set him apart from the practices of his age, far from being grasped as the contradiction of his substance with them, is made a pretext for glorifying the nimbus of provincial craftsmanship as a classical quality.

In Adorno's view, Bach's "devotees" have turned him into "a composer for organ festivals in well-preserved Baroque Towns - into ideology."⁴⁴

It is a very different Bach that we encounter in *Chronik*. This is a man who is embroiled in a perennial conflict with the authorities. The conditions of "provincial craftsmanship" are shown to be a permanent source of frustration to him. Instead of being presented as an *Originalgenie* whose creations transcend social and personal circumstances, Bach is heard to point out to his employer, that the maintenance of church music in Leipzig is being jeopardised by the fact that many a musician in his service "vor Sorgen der Nahrung nicht dahin denken kan, um sich zu perfectioniren, noch weniger zu distinguiren." It was this debunking of a "nostalgic" and "glorifying" view of Bach as Adorno describes it above, which a number of critics distilled from Straub/Huillet's film.

This interpretation of *Chronik* as an instance of demystification was lent particular plausibility by the film's immediate historical context. The dependency of artistic production and innovation on material conditions and financial support was strikingly highlighted with regard to filmmaking during the late sixties. The filming of *Chronik* coincided with a period in German film production which saw the creation of subsidy mechanisms designed to revive a depleted film culture. Demands voiced by a group of young filmmakers at the Oberhausener Festival in 1962 had its delayed impact when subsidy mechanisms kicked into effect. Most importantly, the year 1964 saw the foundation of the *Kuratorium Neuer Deutscher Film* with its declared remit: "die künstlerische Entwicklung des deutschen Films anzuregen."⁴⁵ The coming into being of the New German Cinema before the institutionalisation of TV co-production arrangements was crucially owed to these various funding mechanisms. Straub/Huillet, however, did not consider themselves to be faring well with them. Asked to sum up his experiences with the subsidy system Jean-Marie Straub stated categorically: "Nur negative."⁴⁶

This unequivocal reaction mainly reflects the onerous production history of *Chronik*. Straub/Huillet's first project turned out to be only their third film. In Straub's view the delay was due to the determination of officials of the culture industry to guard the exclusivity of Bach's music by keeping it confined to a concert hall environment.⁴⁷ Considering the increased importance which a variety of media had assumed since the early 1960s in making classical music more widely available, this reasoning seems questionable. It appears to be more likely that Straub/Huillet's insistence on a highly unconventional aesthetic concept which translated into no less unusual production methods - foremost amongst them the shooting of extended scenes of musical performances with direct sound - prolonged the film's production period so far beyond even Straub/Huillet's expectation. In all it was to take them ten years to secure the film's budget of DM 460, 000.

Producers were hesitant to get involved with the project, and subsidies from public sources were no less elusive. Repeated denials for funding came from the Federal Film Subsidy Board in Bonn and from the Ministry of Culture in Düsseldorf. When even the *Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film*, with its explicitly artistic remit, turned Straub/Huillet's application down the *Verein Filmkunst e.V.* was founded by a number of filmmakers, and started to sell shares in the *Chronik* to underwriters of the project. Only with shooting already underway a second application to the *Kuratorium* was eventually approved, with what Straub himself describes as one unenthusiastic casting vote.⁴⁸ But even this belated support seemed a gesture grudgingly made. Only half of the average subsidy of DM 300, 000 which the *Kuratorium* had in its gift was released for the film. By dedicating *Chronik* to the Vietcong in the hope that "[dieser] nicht die Schwierigkeiten habe, die er, Straub, beim Drehen seines Filmes in dieser unserer Gesellschaft hatte", Jean-Marie Straub used the opportunity of a press screening to highlight the obstacles which he and Danièle Huillet had encountered with a characteristically provocative flourish.⁴⁹

These highly publicised production circumstances seemed to point to an affinity between Bach and Straub/Huillet beyond the purely aesthetic. The restrictions under which Bach had laboured and his dependency on patronage, seemed ultimately not so far removed from the circumstances which Straub/Huillet had to defy in making *Chronik*. The call for "beneficia" and "erleckliche Beihülffe" from the Leipzig City Council which Bach reads out to Anna Magdalena, seemed to resonate with - as Martin Walsh commented - "Straub's plea for advancement and innovation in film."⁵⁰ In Thomas Elsaesser's view *Chronik* confronted "the question of art in relation to patronage" and thus in relation to the very funding model which the *Kuratorium* had adopted.⁵¹ Wolfram Schütte's concluding remarks in a review of *Chronik* reflects the tenor of an interpretation which this perceived parallel between the artists' situation elicited. The film is seen by him as documenting "eine deutsche Misere, eine

Künstlermisere. Der Künstler prostituiert sich, muß sich prostitutieren, um leben zu können. Was ist Glück in diesem Leben? Die Kunst etwa? Sie ist harte Arbeit die schlecht bezahlt wird.”⁵²

Without doubt, the impact of material conditions on art is highlighted in *Chronik*. Music is not shown to be timeless and abstract, but as fulfilling clearly stated functions. Cantata cycles are produced at a back-breaking rate to service the church calendar, occasions involving members of the nobility are marked by dedicated compositions, music becomes the currency with which Bach curries favour with patrons of his art, and the incipient commodification of music on a new and different scale is indicated by the transition from hand-written to printed scores. As Danièle Huillet recalls in 1995, on viewing *Chronik*: “Les gens découvraient que Bach avait des autorités au-dessus de lui et qu’il composait aussi de la musique fonctionnelle. L’idée du XIX^e siècle c’était que l’art était au-dessus de tout.”⁵³ However, to reduce the thematic concern of *Chronik* to a revision of romantic concepts of artistic autonomy would rob the film of a tension which is central to it. Straub/Huillet do not merely trade one orthodoxy for another. Venting his frustration with interpretations of the film, such as Schütte’s, Jean-Marie Straub took a sideswipe at “die meisten Linksintellektuellen, die immer einen von beiden Aspekten unterwegs vergessen.”⁵⁴

In considering this other, apparently less visible aspect of *Chronik*, one of the most salient traits of the film comes into view. In Straub/Huillet’s film there is a conspicuous absence of the composer wrestling with his art in a lonely bout of creation. Instead, it is the enactment of the music which is given pride of place in the film. As Jean-Marie Straub notes, he and Danièle Huillet explicitly set out to film “non pas la musique en tant que telle, mais l’exécution d’une partition comme un travail en train de se faire.”⁵⁵ Far from choosing the wrong medium to produce a “tape on Bach” Straub/Huillet thus seek to give visibility to something through the presentation of his music.

In his essay on the *Metamorphose der musikalischen Kommunikation durch Fernsehen und Video*, Lothar Prox remarks: "Nach herkömmlichem Verständnis erschließt sich die Bedeutung von E-Musik nur dem Hörenden, d.h. seit mindestens 200 Jahren bewerten wir unsere abendländischen Tonschöpfungen als rein akkustische Phänomene." However, Prox continues to argue, this assumption ignores the fact that "jeder Musikaufführung das Sichtbare inhärent ist ... Musizieren ist Arbeit, andererseits Ausdruck des Menschen."⁵⁶ It is this conflation of work and self-realisation which Straub/Huillet present to the viewer in *Chronik*. This aspect of the film becomes particularly evident during those performances in which an ensemble is grouped around the focal point of Bach as conductor. Here the music is seen to arise out of a common choreography of movements in their interaction with Bach's gestures. According to Jean-Marie Straub these shots represent, "un travail collectif dont le point de convergence est celui qui dirige en l'occurrence Bach ... Quelque chose sort de ce point focal et se produit là, au sens où Brecht définit l'amour comme 'produire quelque chose avec les capacités de l'autre.'"⁵⁷ The fact that all the film's solo pieces played by musicians other than Bach himself were written for them with the declared aim of advancing their musical skills, reinforces this aspects of a communal creative labour in the film.

As if to remind us of the film's neglected dimension, Straub/Huillet appended the publication of their script for *Chronik* in 1969 with a quotation by Karl Marx. In it the form of human productivity which they invite us to perceive in the musical performances is described:

Gesetzt wir hätten als Menschen produziert: Jeder von uns hätte in seiner Produktion sich selbst und den anderen doppelt bejaht ... In deinem Genuß oder deinem Gebrauch meines Produkts hätte ich unmittelbar den Genuß ... in meiner individuellen Lebensäußerung unmittelbar deine Lebensäußerung geschaffen zu haben, also in meiner individuellen Tätigkeit unmittelbar mein wahres, mein menschliches, mein Gemeinwesen bestätigt und verwirklicht zu haben. Unsere Produktionen wären ebensovielen Spiegel, woraus unser Wesen sich entgegenleuchtet.⁵⁸

In *Chronik* the activity of music making is the visible enactment of a utopian dimension which is etched into the structures of the music. The polyphonic music of Bach thus has both a formal and a thematic significance for *Chronik*. Straub/Huillet do not only respond to the salient feature of their source material. They also detect structures in it which can serve as a utopian model of human co-existence. Adolf Knab's description of Bach's music as a reflection of configurations beyond the realm of art and aesthetics puts it succinctly. He summarises Bach's achievement in these words: "Die mittelalterliche Polyphonie als Symbol einer höchst organisierten Gemeinschaft, die dem Individuum größtmögliche Entfaltung im Dienste einer übergeordneten Idee einräumt, gipfelt in Bach."⁵⁹ In *Chronik* the musical performances are intended to express this potential. However, they are continuously counter-balanced by a portrayal of the restrictive conditions which govern the production of the music. What they present us with is no less the "Paradoxon einer kontrapunktischen Vielstimmigkeit ohne Gemeinde", that Theodor Adorno observes in the revival of counterpuntal techniques in the 20th century. In Straub/Huillet's portrayal of the social universe which brought forth Bach's music, there is "kein kontrapunktischer Kosmos" which could resonate with the "Echo eines sozialen."⁶⁰

Straub/Huillet's presentation of Bach's music seeks to uncover the sediments of a vision which break through the limitations of its own historical context. This does not imply that they portray the composer as a figure who takes a consciously oppositional stance to the social conditions of his time. Throughout the film Straub/Huillet provide ample evidence of a subservience shown by Bach to those from whom he seeks patronage which is entirely commensurate with his office and his time. Where Bach shows resistance against his superiors, it is his authority in musical matters which is at stake. As he asserts, when challenged to give in on the matter of the prefect's appointment: "Ich kehre mich daran durchaus nicht, es mag kosten, was es will!"

In assessing Bach's musical achievements, Laurence Dreyfus detects the reverberations of such a gesture of defiance in Bach's music. In his estimation, the fact that Bach composed against the grain of popular taste and the notions of stylistic progress in his own day was not the expression of a conservative spirit. Instead

Bach is ... better understood as a critic, an interpreter of his age, than as an old fogey or sometimes panderer to novelty ... One might well consider how Enlightenment in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in a kind of near-catastrophe for serious musical artifice: the Enlightenment's naive worship of nature, its facile hedonism, its uncritically affirmative tone, its appeal to public taste, its privileging of words over music, its emphasis on clearly distinguishable genres, and its rejection of music as metaphysics. Had Bach been a university-trained musician, it is conceivable that he might have opposed these positions explicitly. On the other hand, given the available conceptual tools for understanding music, it was impossible for a musician in the 1730s to have articulated these positions or, what is more, to have "held" them at all. Ironically, only a musician poised at some spiritual distance from the leading musical and intellectual thought of his day could have developed such an idiosyncratic brand of interpretation and criticism. And only within music, with its semi-autonomous mode of thought, can he really have formulated a coherent alternative and then only in covert form.⁶¹

Dreyfus' observations highlight a final resonance between Bach's artistic work and that of Straub/Huillet. The challenge to dominant definitions of film in their work is no less an inherent critique of the approach to reality which underlies these films.

The fact that the political dimension of *Chronik* was of a "covert" rather than conspicuous sort, was felt by no less a critic than Jean-Luc Godard, who as Jean-Marie Straub reports "trouvait que politiquement ça manquait un peu de quelque chose."⁶² However, in *Chronik* the political has become inscribed into the form itself. It is the engagement with this form which Straub/Huillet's polyphony of space, time and narrative seeks to engender.

Notes

¹ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Tribüne des jungen deutschen Films: III Jean-Marie Straub', *Filmkritik*, 11 (November 1966), p. 607.

² Quoted in Rudolf Hohlweg, 'Musik für Film - Film für Musik: Annäherung an Herzog, Kluge, Straub', in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, ed. by Peter W. Jansen und Wolfram Schütte (München: Hanser, 1976), p. 61.

- ³ Barbara Bronnen, 'Jean-Marie Straub', in *Die Filmemacher: Der neue deutsche Film nach Oberhausen*, ed. by Barbara Bronnen and Corinna Brocher (München: Bertelsmann, 1973), p. 42.
- ⁴ Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, eds., *The Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (London: J.M.Dent and Sons, 1966), p. 238.
- ⁵ Richard Roud, *Jean-Marie Straub*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 78.
- ⁶ Roy Armes, 'Jean-Marie Straub: Strict Counterpoint', in *The Ambiguous Image* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), p. 211.
- ⁷ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: BFI, 1981), p. 52.
- ⁸ Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, 'Bach/Schönberg: Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Numéro Spécial, hors series: Musique du Cinéma, (novembre 1995), p. 47.
- ⁹ There is only one original venue in the film, the *Apollosaal* of the *Neue Staatsoper* in Berlin. During an extensive search for sets, Straub/Huillet found that all others had been architecturally modified or destroyed.
- ¹⁰ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Tribüne des jungen deutschen Films: III Jean-Marie Straub', p. 607. Stockhausen's definition can be found in Karl H. Worner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 81.
- ¹¹ Sebastian Schadhauer, Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 223 (août 1970), p. 53.
- ¹² Esther Meynell, *The Little Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (Boston: E.C.Schirmer, 1934).
- ¹³ David Bordwell, 'Time in the Classical Film', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 44.
- ¹⁴ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Tribüne des jungen deutschen Films: III Jean-Marie Straub', p. 608.
- ¹⁵ David Bordwell, 'Story Causality and Motivation', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 12.
- ¹⁶ John Butt, 'Bach and the Domestic Politics of Electoral Saxony', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 22.
- ¹⁷ Mary-Anne Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: the Articulation of Body and Space', in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 168.
- ¹⁸ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Tribüne des jungen deutschen Films: III Jean-Marie Straub', p. 608.
- ¹⁹ Herbert Linder, 'Kinder, aufgepaßt!', *Filmkritik*, 10 (Oktober 1968), p. 710.
- ²⁰ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 53.

- ²¹ Helmut Färber, Frieda Grafe and Enno Patalas, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', *Filmkritik* (Oktober 1968), p. 690.
- ²² Roy Armes, 'Jean-Marie Straub: Strict Counterpoint', in *The Ambiguous Image*, p. 209.
- ²³ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, p. 53.
- ²⁴ Sebastian Schadhauer, Elias Chaluja, and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 55.
- ²⁵ Quoted in Anton Kaes, *Die Wiederkehr der Geschichte als Film* (München: edition Text und Kritik, 1987), p. 56.
- ²⁶ Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Grigori W. Alexandrov, 'Statement on Sound', in *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Writings, 1922 - 34*, ed. and trans. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), p. 114.
- ²⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form. (The Dialectical Approach to Film Form)', in *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Writings, 1922 - 34*, ed. and trans. by Richard Taylor, p. 179.
- ²⁸ Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Fourth Dimension in Cinema', in *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Writings, 1922 - 34*, ed. and trans. by Richard Taylor, p. 182.
- ²⁹ In her essay '“Ecriture Blanche”: The Ordering of the Filmic Text in “Die Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach”', Maureen Turim refers to Eisenstein's post-1930 writing and comes to different conclusions both on his notion of polyphony and its relevance for *Chronik*. Quoting from 'La Musique du Paysage' published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 217 (November 1969) she points to Eisenstein's concept of "a new stage of audio-visual montage" which "distinguishes itself, it seems to me, by this: it is born under the sign of an increasing homogeneity of polyphonic harmony of montage." In comparison to this Turim describes the filmic structure of Straub/Huillet's *Chronik* as radically dissonant and "abrasive." Cf., Maureen Turim, "Blanche": The Ordering of the Filmic Text in "Die Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach", in *Purdue Film Studies Annual* (West Lafayette: Purdue Research Foundation, 1976), pp. 177-192. While Eisenstein's notions of polyphony in film show a shift towards a harmonic unity and synthesis more akin to the model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it should be borne in mind that this might not reflect a purely aesthetically motivated change of mind. On this point see also Dietrich Scheunemann, 'The Art of Montage in Theatre and Film: Observations on Eisenstein and Brecht', *Essays in Poetics*, 15 (1992), p. 1-29.
- ³⁰ Kristin Thompson, 'Alternative Modes of Film Practice', in David Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 381.
- ³¹ Ellen Oumano, *Film Forum* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985), p. 168.
- ³² Sebastian Schadhauer, Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 54.
- ³³ Nikolaus Hanoncourt, 'Die Rekonstruktion originaler Klangverhältnisse', in *Musik als Klangrede*, (München: Baerenreiter, 1985), p. 102.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁵ In ' "Ecriture Blanche": The Ordering of the Filmic Text in "Die Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach" ', Maureen Turim perceives of a false musical and thus temporal continuity between these two shots. However, there is no evidence of this in the film. Moreover, I would contend that such a "faked" continuity would violate what is in effect a basic tenet of Straub/Huillet's filmmaking: their "respect for reality."

³⁶ André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', in *What is Cinema?* trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁸ Friedrich Hommel, 'Le martyr de Saint-Jean-Sebastian: Anmerkungen eines Musikkritikers zu Straub's "Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach" ', *Film* (May 1968), p. 30.

³⁹ Gilberto Perez, 'Modernist Cinema: The History Lesson of Straub and Huillet', *Artforum*, 17 (October 1978), p. 55.

⁴⁰ Maureen Turim, ' "Eriture Blanche": The Ordering of the Filmic Text in "Die Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach" ', p. 189.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴³ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 243.

⁴⁴ Theodor Adorno, 'Bach Defended Against His Devotees', in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p.135 and p.136.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Norbert Grob, 'Film der Sechziger Jahre', in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. by Wolfgang Jacobson, Anton Kaes and Hans Helmut Prinzler (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1993), p. 232.

⁴⁶ Barbara Bronnen, 'Jean-Marie Straub', in *Die Filmemacher: Der neue deutsche Film nach Oberhausen*, p. 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Klaus Eder, 'Der wiedergefundene Barock', in *Film* (April 1968), p. 28.

⁵⁰ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 53.

⁵¹ Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 78.

⁵² Wolfram Schütte, 'Geschichte einer Ehe', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 1968, p VII.

⁵³ Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, 'Bach/Schönberg: Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 47.

⁵⁴ Helmut Färber, Frieda Grafe and Enno Patalas, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', p. 691.

⁵⁵ Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, 'Bach/Schönberg: Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 48.

⁵⁶ Lothar Prox, 'Metamorphosen der musikalischen Kommunikation durch Fernsehen und Video', in *Film, Fernsehen, Video und die Künste: Strategien der Intermedialität* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), p. 150.

⁵⁷ Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, 'Bach/Schönberg: Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 48.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Jean-Marie Straub, *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Filmkritik, 1969), back cover page.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Wolf Frobenius, 'Polyphonie', in *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*, vol. IV, ed. by Hanz Heinrich Eggebrecht (Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 1980), p. 17.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶¹ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, p. 243.

⁶² Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, 'Bach/Schönberg: Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 49. In Straub's account, this exchange with Godard continued: "En rigolant je lui ai dit: 'Tu ne voulais quand même pas que je mette à la fin: Tout est politique!' Il m'a répondu: 'Ah! peut-être que ça aurait suffi.' "

Chapter Two

“Die Barbarei wird sichtbar”- Straub/Huillet’s “agitational film” for Arnold Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*

In 1913 Arnold Schoenberg began to discuss with his publisher, Emil Hertzka, the possibility of turning his opera *Die glückliche Hand* into a film. The composer’s suggestions were both categorical and unconventional. Describing the artistic concept which would have to sustain such a project he demanded

das Gegenteil von dem, was das Kino sonst anstrebt: Ich will: höchste Unwirklichkeit! Das Ganze soll (nicht wie ein Traum) sondern wie Akkorde wirken. Wie Musik. Es darf nie als Symbol oder als Sinn, als Gedanke, sondern bloss als Spiel mit den Erscheinungen von Farben und Formen wirken.¹

Schoenberg’s ideas seem redolent of the concept of a “visual music” which had inspired the films pioneered by Walther Ruttmann, Hans Richter and Viktor Eggeling in the late Teens and the Twenties. With their exploration of the essential cinematic elements of movement and light, their films offer an intriguing contemporary backdrop to Schoenberg’s vision of cinema. However, how exactly his ideas would have translated onto the screen must remain a matter of surmise since the project was never realised.

In 1933 Schoenberg was forced to leave Germany and soon was living in the vicinity of the world’s leading film industry in Los Angeles. His move had not been motivated by the hope of lucrative employment in Hollywood, a prospect which had brought so many European artists to the American West Coast. Nevertheless contact between the composer and the studios came about within a year of his arrival. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s Irving Thalberg approached Schoenberg to discuss a possible co-operation for the cinematic adaptation of Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth*.

Negotiations did not go well. Salka Viertel, the scriptwriter and friend who had been called in as an interpreter, relates that Schoenberg used the occasion to convey his barely disguised

disdain for the use of sound in cinema in general. Both the monotony of the dialogue and the simplicity of the music came in for his scathing criticism. In addition, he attached stringent conditions for writing a score for *The Good Earth*: he would have to be given “complete control over the sound including the spoken word.” He also specified that he would have to work with the actors, who would have to speak “in the same pitch and key” as the score would be composed in. Schoenberg’s notion of musical accompaniment, as well as the fee which he charged for this unusually extensive compositorial input, did nothing to commend him to his potential commissioners. Subsequently *The Good Earth* was made without his co-operation and with “some very lovely music.”²

Clearly, Schoenberg did not conceive of film music as a device for highlighting dramatic action, or as an unobtrusive acoustic background for dialogue scenes. Nor could he ever envisage the kind of artistic division of labour as he observed it at close quarters in the centralised studio system which had emerged in the Hollywood of the 1930s. As Graham McCann notes in his introduction to Eisler and Adorno’s study *Composing for the Movies* this “had become little more than the routine selection of a standard musical device which would result in a specific audience effect already indicated in the dramatic scene.”³ Frequently, famous composers would supply the studios with music which would then be reworked into scores to suit a particular studio style, or to comply with other criteria beyond the composers’ control, such as, for instance the availability of musicians.

In the light of these observations it is perhaps not surprising that the most tangible proof of Schoenberg’s interest in film music, his *Opus 34*, the *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*, never came to have a filmic counterpart in his lifetime.⁴ He wrote the piece in 1930 for a jubilee edition commissioned by the Magdeburger *Heinrichshofen Verlag* in celebration of the advent of the talkies. No “Lichtspielszene” preceded the film. In this respect, and with regard to its score title *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*, the piece seems reminiscent of a

scoring practice such as it had evolved since the early Twenties. Referred to as *Kinothekenpraxis*, this was based on “stimmungshafte Standards” which had an average duration of three minutes.⁵ They could be used in their entirety or split up into segments and used partially. These musical montage pieces highlighted recurring dramatic actions and moments of emotional intensity. Titles such as *Agitata*, *Apache*, *Französisch*, *Grob*, *Heroisch*, *Lustig*, *Schlachtenmusik* vividly reflect their function.

As indicated by the score title, Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik* shares the condensed musical expressiveness of the pieces associated with the *Kinothekenpraxis*. However, the complexity of its musical texture has little in common with this *Gebrauchsmusik* par excellence. As Theodor Adorno commented on the occasion of the premiere of the *Begleitmusik*:

Wenn Arnold Schoenberg ein deklariertes Gebrauchsstück schreibt, so ist’s immer noch bessere Musik, als wenn andere Leute zu ihrem Hauptwerk ausholen. Die Faktur des ganzen aufs äußerste vereinfacht, aber doch von einem Reichtum des Satzes, einer Vielfalt der rhythmischen Gestalten, einer Prägnanz in der Farbgebung, die von vorneherein jeden Vergleich mit Gebrauchsmusiken der üblichen Art ausschließt.⁶

Schoenberg seems to have been under no illusion about the compatibility of his music and the demands of the film industry. His niece Dika Newlin records in her diary, that her uncle did not “think that music for the movies can ever be good”, and she adds: “This is no condemnation of his *Begleitmusik* zu einer Filmszene. That was not really for the movies but only symbolically.”⁷

The nearest that *Opus 34* ever came to a visual complement while Schoenberg was alive was a suggestion by Otto Klemperer, who conducted its premier in the *Krolloper* in Berlin in 1930, to perform it in conjunction with a film by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. Moholy-Nagy had by then made several films in the style of the *Cinéma pur*. His *Lichtspiel schwarz-weiß-grau* which was premiered in the same year as the *Begleitmusik*, consisted of a play of light and shadow. This, one might assume, would have recommended him to Schoenberg as a filmmaker with the potential to create the “höchste Unwirklichkeit” he had previously desired to

see in the cinema. But despite Moholy-Nagy's artistic credentials, Schoenberg greeted Klemperer's suggestion with the most guarded of interest. Misgivings about having to yield any degree of artistic control over his work were foremost in his mind. The project came to nothing and the *Begleitmusik* remained as Schoenberg seems to have intended it, "Musik zu keinem Film."⁸

Then, in 1972, *Opus 34* became the inspiration of not just one but of several "Lichtspielszenen." Three shorts in response to Schoenberg's music had been commissioned by the *Südwestfunk*, one of the third German television channels, for a late night programme on avant-garde music. Among the contributions which were to be broadcast in succession was Straub/Huillet's *Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*. After a forty-two year delay the *Begleitmusik* seemed to have become the material of two filmmakers whose work did indeed pursue "das Gegenteil von dem, was das Kino sonst anstrebt."

By 1972 Straub/Huillet had made six films, amongst them the highly unconventional *Chronik*. The controversy surrounding not just this but all their films to date had confirmed Straub/Huillet's reputation as avant-garde directors at the margins of the New German Cinema. To the *Südwestfunk's* remit to "optically illustrate" Schoenberg's music, they responded in a highly idiosyncratic way and with a work which challenged existing models for the presentation of music in television.⁹ Martin Walsh summarises these as forms of

textual "appreciation", perhaps marking the "high points" of *Accompaniment* or a chat about twelve-tone composition or a biographical course - the tortured genius holding stage front against a background of musical dismissal and scorn with *Accompaniment* thus constituting his "universal anguish"; if a political angle is mentioned at all, it would be diminished by the particularity of its recognition, or generalised to a European fear of the Nazis.¹⁰

The meeting of alternative film form, atonal music and the medium of television under the direction of Straub/Huillet generates a far more challenging result than such tried and tested

formulae. A brief outline of the individual elements which have been assembled in the film illustrates the point.

Einleitung starts with the close-up of the water-spouting, sculptured face of a fountain with which *Geschichtsunterricht*, the film Straub/Huillet made earlier in 1972, ended. A long-held shot follows of Jean-Marie Straub against the skyline of the Trastevere, a district of Rome. Addressing his audience directly, he tells us that there is no "Lichtspielszene" to Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik*. After the cut, his commentary continues as a voice-over in which he lists salient dates from Schoenberg's life, and in which he informs the viewer that the *Begleitmusik* was composed between 1929 and 1930. Three images of Schoenberg accompany his words. The first is a photograph by Man Ray dating from 1926; the second a picture taken in 1951, the year of the composer's death and, after a brief interruption through black frames, the sequence concludes with a self-portrait painted by Schoenberg in 1911.

The concluding words of Jean-Marie Straub's commentary concern an invitation from the painter Wassily Kandinsky to Schoenberg in 1923 to join him as a teacher in the *Bauhaus* in Weimar. The presentation of Schoenberg's written reply to this is the focus of the sequence which follows. In it we see the film historian Peter Nestler, seated at a desk in a recording studio. In a very stylised rendering which features unexpected pauses and moments of acceleration he reads out excerpts from two letters by Schoenberg. In the first of these Kandinsky's offer is turned down. Having been made aware of anti-Semitic remarks by the painter, Schoenberg is compelled to reject the possibility of any co-operation with his former friend. An inter-title between the two letters from which Nestler quotes, gives the place in which they were written as "Mödling", and their respective dates as: 20.IV.1923 and 4.V.1923.

As the temporal hiatus indicates, the second letter replies to correspondence received by Kandinsky. It is evident from Schoenberg's words that Kandinsky's defence against the

charges levelled at him fail to impress or convince him. He tells Kandinsky that he does not wish to be exempted from his anti-Semitism, and condemns his gullibility in the face of a dangerous prejudice. Schoenberg's analysis is astute and his prediction of the looming catastrophe from the perspective of the year 1923 is almost prophetic. However, the reasons he puts forward for the recurrence of violence and repression to which he was witness in his own lifetime are fatalistic. To him these are as unstoppable in their resurgence as the forces of nature. During the extended shots of Peter Nestler's reading, black frames continue to disrupt the diegesis. It is during one of these interruptions that the music which will accompany the entire remainder of the film starts.

A fictitious reply to Schoenberg is introduced by Danièle Huillet in the next shot. Speaking to the audience, she quotes from an address which Bertolt Brecht delivered in 1935 to the International Congress of Intellectuals against Fascism. She commences with the question: "Aber, fragt Brecht, wie will nun jemand die Wahrheit über den Faschismus sagen, gegen den er ist, wenn er nichts gegen den Kapitalismus sagen will, der ihn hervorbringt?" Brecht's demand is for a "praktikable Wahrheit." The truth which he has in mind is one which could form the basis of active intervention. In Brecht's opinion, this must spring from the recognition that National Socialism is only the undisguised form of a "Barbarei" inherent in the capitalist ownership of the means of production. Brecht stages an attack on those who refuse to draw this connection, who are "nicht gegen die Besitzverhältnisse, welche die Barbarei erzeugen, nur gegen die Barbarei."

Danièle Huillet's words are followed by a shot of a recording engineer as he adjusts the controls on the panel in front of him. The off-screen voice of Peter Straschek, another of Straub/Huillet's film-maker colleagues, accompanies this, and as the camera pans towards him he is seen in the same recording studio as Peter Nestler occupied before, reading the text which Danièle Huillet has introduced previously. This second, shorter, reading ends with the

last spoken words of the film, Brecht's dictum: "Die Barbarei wird erst sichtbar, sobald das Monopol nur noch durch offene Gewalt geschützt werden kann."

The film's last part combines four silent documents. The first is a photograph of civilian victims executed by the Versailles forces after the Paris Commune of 1871. Men and women are laid out in two rows of coffins which fill the screen. Footage from the Vietnam War follows. In quick succession we see bombs being loaded onto a B52, the plane's take-off, the eventual discharge of bombs over an agricultural landscape, and the mushroom clouds which follow their explosion. After this, a seven seconds shot of the headline "Assolti I costruttori dei forni crematori del campo di Auschwitz" is followed by an Austrian newspaper article on the same news item: the acquittal of the architects of Auschwitz. Insufficient evidence, and the fact that these men are deemed to have acted under orders, are given as the reasons for the verdict. *Einleitung* ends on the music's final chords.

Three salient features emerge from this summary of *Einleitung*. This film is a documentary in a most literal sense. Photographs, a painting, filmed footage, newspaper articles, excerpts from a speech and from letters combine to record moments from the past. Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik* is one piece of historical evidence amongst these documents.

This *assemblage* of documents makes *Einleitung* a film which is marked by a considerable material diversity. It is matched by the heterogeneity of the cinematographic representation which it inspires. Rather than be subsumed by the linear progression of an argument, Straub/Huillet's montage of documents presents them in tableaux-like moments of considerable independence. Far from being mere illustrations for the music, the documents enter the film as elements which interact with each other and with *Opus 34*.

The common focus of the film's various elements is of an explicitly political nature. Starting chronologically with the Paris Commune of 1871, all the materials presented testify to the historical continuity of *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*. As Harry Halbreich

comments. Schoenberg's invocation of moments of anxiety and impending doom are immediately redolent of the imagery which the "grands maîtres du cinéma expressionniste allemand des années 20" had brought to the screen.¹¹ However, if the iconography of films in the expressionist mould was inspired by the desire to disclose the psychological depths of the human soul, it is the historical and political resonances of *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe* into which Straub/Huillet inquire.

Given the filmmaker's previous works, the *Südwestfunk* could hardly have expected them to come up with a conventional biopic in veneration of the timeless achievements of a great composer. However, *Einleitung* overtly sets out to challenge such notions of art. More than any film which Straub/Huillet had ever made before or indeed have made since, *Einleitung* was geared to provoke political sensitivities.

Jean-Marie Straub himself acknowledges this fact and even calls the film "agitational."¹² This description calls for a degree of caution. In *Einleitung* the various materials are not quoted to illustrate and resolve a political argument. The film does not constitute Straub/Huillet's attempt to argue for the accuracy of the Brechtian and thus Marxist stance, and against the misconceptions inherent in Schoenberg's views. Straub/Huillet show documents and cite arguments for us but they do not draw conclusions on our behalf. The perceptual challenge which the film's heterogeneous structure puts to the viewer is not tamed and tempered by a predictable political message. If, as Jill Forbes noted at the time of the film's release, *Einleitung* "helps us to understand in what sense, the political claims he [Straub] has made for earlier films ... could be true",¹³ then this will have to take into account the way in which the filmic representation responds to its material and how it addresses its viewer.

The heterogeneity of *Einleitung* emanates most evidently from the disparity of its elements. But it also resides in the palpable diversity of the internal logic by which these materials are

related to each other. *Einleitung* continues Straub/Huillet's exploration of a film form which draws on a variety of materials and the juxtaposition of documentary and cinematically staged elements. They had first embarked on this with their second short *Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter*. Fortini/Cani. *Trop Tôt, Trop Tard* and also *Cézanne* show their sustained interest in this form. The description of these works as "film essays" provides a useful delineation from the narrative strand in Straub/Huillet's filmmaking as it is presented by *Machorka-Muff*, *Nicht Versöhnt* or *Klassenverhältnisse* amongst others.¹⁴ However, this term can only be the point of departure for a more detailed look at the internal logic which operates amongst the materials of *Einleitung*.

Einleitung emulates the tripartite division and progression which Schoenberg ascribes to his *Begleitmusik* in the score title. The film comprises three segments which are visibly and audibly offset against each other by a variation in their internal structure, as well as by the sonic devices by which this is supported. Initially it is the voice-over spoken by Jean-Marie Straub which relates the visual materials to each other. This is followed by the diegetic sound of Danièle Huillet's voice: the words she speaks in front of the camera turn the quotation from Brecht into a repartee to Schoenberg. Finally, the film renounces such verbally supported cohesion. It is the continuous presence of the non-diegetic sounds of Schoenberg's *Opus 34* alongside the historically and materially disparate elements of the film's final part which posits a continuity between them.

The first of the three segments of *Einleitung* begins and ends with the score title *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*. These words serve as an audible framing device for a voice-over which furnishes us with the date of composition of the *Begleitmusik*, and recounts crucial events and dates from Schoenberg's life. Thus Jean-Marie Straub informs us:

Schoenberg schrieb diese Musik vom 15. Oktober 1929 bis zum 14. Februar 1930. Kaum vier Jahre später sollte er Europa verlassen, und er starb am 13. Juli 1951 in Los Angeles –

im Exil. Geboren in Wien 1874, hatte er bis 1933 sein Leben zwischen Wien und Berlin geteilt.

The visual accompaniment to these words are two photographs of Schoenberg which were taken twenty-five years apart and finally a painted self-portrait. If this first segment of the film can be described as narrative, telling us as it does the story of a life, then it answers to this description in a highly minimalist manner. Causal connections, explanatory comment or references to the major stages of Schoenberg's artistic development have no part in this. Marked by a similar economy, the visualisation of the composer's life consists of two images which serve as the visible inscription of the passage of time in the features of his face.

The reticence of the narration which marks the first segment of *Einleitung* seems explicitly acknowledged in the last shot of the sequence. This shows us Schoenberg in an unusual kind of self-portrait: with his back turned towards the viewer, he depicts himself as he walks down a street. Thus he denies us a look at what we generally assume to be the mark of individuality and the expressive focus of this genre: the face. Straub/Huillet add to this depersonalising portrayal by their cinematography. Tilting onto the lower half of the picture, they reduce the figure of Schoenberg to a mere torso.

This combination of a sparse visualisation, the paring down of a life to a few significant dates and the repeated reference to Schoenberg's score title for *Opus 34*, dramatises an individual life as the inscription of its historical context. Born within living memory of the Paris Commune, Schoenberg's lifespan encompasses the major catastrophes of the 20th century. The developments he foresaw so clearly in 1923 were to lead to his dismissal from the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1933, and would force him into exile. Straub/Huillet's minimalist account of Schoenberg's life presents it to us, not as the singular existence of an artistic forerunner, but as shaped and saturated by its historical moment.

In contrast to the pared down narrative which unifies this first part of the film, the second segment of *Einleitung* revolves around a discursive opposition. Straub/Huillet construct an argument out of Schoenberg's letter and Brecht's speech excerpt. In this, Schoenberg, who berates Kandinsky for his alarming naiveté in the face of history, is in turn accused of dangerous short-sightedness. Danièle Huillet's words supplant the documented rift between Schoenberg and Kandinsky with an entirely fictive disagreement between Schoenberg and Brecht - two men who had made not more than a fleeting acquaintance during their years in exile and who showed but little enthusiasm for each other's work.

As in the first segment of *Einleitung*, biographical detail is overtly elided here. The reason which led to the estrangement between the former friends - Kandinsky's alleged anti-Semitic remarks - as well as the defence Schoenberg mounts against the accusations directed at him, can only be gleaned from Schoenberg's reactions. Their truthfulness remains uncertain and clearly as irrelevant to the film as the fact that by 1927 a reconciliation between the two artists had come about. Nor is there any contextual information forthcoming about the nature and function of Brecht's statement, such as the fact that twelve crucial years had passed between Schoenberg's letters and Brecht's public address.

The last words in this part of the film summarise Brecht's stance. They counter Schoenberg's fatalistic view of the impending historical developments with an explanation of anti-Semitism as a stage in the class struggle. His words "Die Barbarei wird sichtbar sobald das Monopol nur noch durch offene Gewalt geschützt werden kann", are also the last words spoken in the film. Their echo reverberates through the three subsequent documents. All testify to instances of mass killings: the obliteration of the Paris Commune, the deployment of advanced military technology in Vietnam and the mass extinction of Jews in Nazi extermination camps. But as the music takes over from the spoken word as a continuity

device, it is left to the viewer to gauge the similarity which becomes visible in these diverse images.

Barton Byg's discussion of *Einleitung* characterises the film by its renunciation of "traditional narrative."¹⁵ However, it might be argued that the film's formal organisation does not so much constitute a negation of narrative - indeed the first segment of *Einleitung* echoes the kind of minimalist narrative which we have already encountered in *Chronik* - but rather the creation of a genuinely mixed and hybrid form, with a pronounced fluctuation of the internal logic in the three segments of the film. In fifteen minutes the film takes us through a succession of discursive patterns. Starting from the sketchy narrative of Schoenberg's life, it proceeds to present us with the argumentative opposition of two documents, and concludes on a montage of materials which leaves us to infer conceptual parallels.

This refusal to settle into one familiar mode of logical coherence corresponds to changing demands on the viewer. Put schematically, *Einleitung* starts by pointing us to the historical causes behind the succession of dates which map out Schoenberg's life; then the emphasis shifts to an identification of the nature and nuance of the opposition between Schoenberg's and Brecht's stance, and finally the film strongly elicits a consideration of similarity and likeness on the viewer's part.

Such inferences are a necessary condition for viewing a film which is characterised in all its segments and their associated formal construction by one common trait. In *Einleitung* the material is never seamlessly integrated into a context or a formal schemata. A life, an argumentation, a span of historical time, appear in a highly compressed and elliptical form which does not yield an explanation or interpretation of these documents for us.

The selection of the significant and essential from the illustrative and anecdotal, which is at work here, is a recurrent theme in Straub/Huillet's treatment of their source material. Films like *Geschichtsunterricht* or *Nicht Versöhnt* are particularly striking results of this approach

to an existing material. Jean-Marie Straub's description of the adaptation of documentary footage for the last part of *Einleitung* highlights the search for condensation which underlies their selection. He recounts how

dans un fatras de je ne sais combien de mètres d'actualités américaines, on a choisi un geste, et ça devient terrifiant parce qu'il y a un geste, puis la coupe, l'autre plan et de nouveau un geste. Le film lui même, on l'a monté en deux jours, mais sur ce passage-là il nous a fallu trois semaines, trois semaines à regarder, à voir.¹⁶

In *Einleitung* this high degree of succinctness and ellipsis seems to answer to the aesthetic properties of Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik*. As David Hush points out in his analysis of the *Modes of Continuity in Schoenberg's "Begleitmusik"*, it was the principle of compression which preoccupied Schoenberg during the period in which *Opus 34* was composed. Elaborating on this in his essay *New Music: My Music* of 1930, Schoenberg describes the opera *Die Glückliche Hand* as a "major drama compressed into about 20 minutes, as if photographed with a time-exposure."¹⁷ In *Opus 34* Hush identifies the implementation of this principle in the increased compression of musical events up to an audibly recreated cataclysmic moment.¹⁸ In *Einleitung* the drive towards compression becomes palpable against the background of familiar discursive schemata. These are invoked in the very pronounced manner described above. However, they are only realised in a highly elliptical form from which no unequivocal meaning comes forth. What Kristin Thompson describes as the characteristic "dynamic of unity and fragmentation" of modernist film is a hallmark of Straub/Huillet's endeavour in *Einleitung* to engage the viewer in the construction of meaning.¹⁹

A major device by which the film's momentum towards fragmentation and heterogeneity is supported is the recurring insertion of black frames. There are altogether eleven instances of this throughout the film. In the first segment a black frame sequence appears between the photographic images of Schoenberg and his self-portrait. In the third part, the materials are

separated from each other in a similar manner. Black frames also precede the explosion of bombs in the Vietnam sequence. But the majority of these inserts intersect the reading of Schoenberg's second letter in the middle part of the film.

These black frames puncture the duration of the filmic construction. They constitute emphatically disruptive moments in the visual representation. With one notable exception - the eschewal of imagery which accompanies the onset of the music to be discussed later in this chapter - these black frames do not interact with other elements of the film in a way which would cue us to recoup their presence through a thematic interpretation. Emphatically indexical, they clearly denote what they are: gaps, signs of selection and discontinuity. Indeed, the comparison with the Schoenberg-Kandinsky correspondence proves them to be just that: indications of substantial cuts which Straub/Huillet have made in the original text. This montage of black frames fosters what Joachim Paech describes as the "Dekonstruktion bestehender Zusammenhänge und ihre Auflösung in Elemente, die in ihrer Heterogenität erhalten bleiben und in einer offenen textuellen Struktur variable Verbindungen eingehen."²⁰

For the viewer, this pattern of interruptions creates spaces for the reflection of such "variable combinations." They presuppose and foster the viewer's readiness to engage in a perceptive stance, which Jean-Marie Straub would seem to commend to us in the succinct dramatisation of Brecht's notion of an alert but detached viewer at the beginning of the film. Lighting his cigarette with deliberation before addressing the viewer, he prefaces *Einleitung* with a gesture which - according to Brecht - if performed during a Shakespeare production would bring about the collapse of Western Art and equate to "igniting a bomb."²¹

The black frame sequences in *Einleitung* constitute moments where the film draws back from what is an essential cinematic function: to present an image. As such they bare the film as construction and are an apparent expression of a separation between Straub/Huillet's filmic representation and their material. In the encounter with a diversity of materials Straub/Huillet

create both a visible and audible *gest*, a constantly perspicuous act of construction and representation for which they enlist a number of representational strategies. Indeed, the very title of the film highlights this separation with regard to the film and the music. It does not point to a filmic dramatisation of Schoenberg's music but rather a temporarily desynchronised reaction to it.

Uniquely in the context of their work, Straub/Huillet do not only continuously signal the presence of an agency behind the act of representation in *Einleitung*, they also tie this to their own persona through two personal appearances. They present themselves as the masters of production, the *monteurs* from whom this filmic *assemblage* originates. In shot two of *Einleitung* we see Jean-Marie Straub seated in a markedly informal position against the backdrop of Rome. After lighting his cigarette, he turns his gaze towards the camera and begins to address his audience. Following the synoptic account of Schoenberg's life, he tells us of Kandinsky's invitation to the composer to join him in Weimar. The sequence ends with the words: "Schoenberg and Kandinsky", and thus with a verbal gesture which emulates the colon and quotation marks of a written citation.

The direct audience address, and overt statement of artistic control which this scene articulates, is repeated in a frontal shot of Danièle Huillet. Like Straub she appears in a position and in surroundings which differs considerably from that of the conventional talking head in television. Seated on a sofa in a domestic setting she is seen stroking her cat. Looking straight into the camera she delivers her lines beginning with the words: "Aber fragt Brecht" Like Straub's comment during the opening sequence of the film, her intervention serves to structure the succession of materials.

These declarations of authorship are given visible prominence in *Einleitung*. They are clearly offset against the rest of the film both by their intensity of colour and by their direct address to the viewer. By contrast, all other shots of *Einleitung* display highly muted colours,

or are photographed in black and white. Through their direct acknowledgement of an audience, these personal appearances by the filmmakers also differ from all of the other shots of the film which are accompanied by dialogue. Neither of the two readers takes any cognisance of an implied audience. Their gaze remains firmly fixed upon the text before them. They are thus shown to take part in a staged event, the initiators and producers of which we are left in no doubt.

These reading scenes are the most extended instance of an overt representation of a given material in *Einleitung*. They take approximately ten minutes, and thus account for a third of the film's entire playing time. Performance is reduced to an almost purely verbal activity: the presentation of a text according to a clearly predetermined notation. In his analysis of Brechtian elements in *Einleitung*, Martin Walsh points out that these scenes recall Brecht's precept of "presentation-as-quotation", as the shorthand for an acting style which he considered to be commensurate with the concept of epic theatre.²² In *Einleitung*, the term provides not only a fitting description of the acting, it also captures the essence of the filmic strategies of representation which Straub/Huillet evolve as a reaction to their *assemblage* of documentary evidence in a variety of representational forms.

If the excerpts from letters with which Straub/Huillet present us are framed by audible quotation marks, then the visual documents are delineated by the visual equivalent of such markers of re-representation. Thus, the black and white photographs and the self-portrait by Schoenberg, as well as the image of the dead communards, are all shown in double framing and offset against a coloured surround. This insistence on a demarcation between the filmic frame and the frame of the documents displayed, is most strikingly articulated in the presentation of Schoenberg's self-portrait. Here, the camera tilts downwards over the canvass and comes to rest upon his legs, with the blue filmic backdrop drawing our attention to the

fact that the painting is contained within another medium, that it is incorporated as a visual quotation.

In *Einleitung* the revelation of the artifice of representation, as Brecht demanded it from his actors, also brings the technical operations by which film shapes its material under scrutiny. By setting the reading scenes in a recording studio Straub/Huillet clearly denote the fact that the sound we hear is not only shaped by a reader's voice and delivery, but that it is also subject to the technological operation which it is mediated by. The staging of these scenes – with the microphone occupying a prominent position in the shot space, and also determining the placement of the reader – further emphasises the formative influence of technical procedures and choices on what we perceive.

In shot sixteen Straub/Huillet demonstrate this point most strikingly. We get a view of the sound engineer as he makes adjustments on his control panel. After a pan onto a glass pane which separates him from the recording studio, we see the sound source of the words we have been hearing all along. As the camera comes to rest on Peter Nestler, the sound changes from that heard by the recording engineer to a fuller and more conventionally “realistic” sound representation.

What has been described by Rick Altman as the “reproductive fallacy” in the perception of recorded sound, the assumption that sound might be endowed with an unproblematic authenticity and that it could ever represent an original unmanipulated acoustic event, is visually undermined in this take. Altman's description of sound recording as an act of creative intervention succinctly describes what is demonstrated in this shot. He notes: “Recording choices ... govern our perception of particular sound events. Far from simply recording a specific story of a specific sound event, the sound engineer actually has the power to create, deform and reformulate that event.”²³

In *Einleitung* the act of filmic representation is constantly brought to our attention by the devices and operations which have been analysed above. As Serge Daney formulates it, there is a form of narration running through this film which “silencieusement dit: ‘Voici. Voici des cadavres, un B 52. Etc. ... Quelque chose, quelqu’un, une voix, un appareil nous donnent à voir.”²⁴

In their presentation of historical documents Straub/Huillet evolve a rich repertory of such cinematographic gestures. However, these do not operate reflexively, their aim is not to lay bare the film’s construction and stage an inquiry into the attributes and procedures of film as a medium. The last shot of *Einleitung* exemplifies with particular clarity the way in which the filmic narration in *Einleitung* is intended to work on the viewer. Here, as twice before in the film, the focus is on a text, this time a newspaper article. Straub/Huillet present this by tilting down its two columns at reading speed. In comparison to the two extensive sequences which have been dedicated to the exposition of a text earlier on in the film, this visual representation of words constitutes a marked variation. Two previously prominent elements of staging the written word are now conspicuously absent: the readers, and the defamiliarising stylisation of their delivery. The article on the acquittal of the architects of Auschwitz, with which Straub/Huillet choose to conclude *Einleitung*, recalls the central issues which have been highlighted in the film. Most obviously, this text marks a return to historical events which Schoenberg foresaw with such astonishing clear-sightedness. But in contrast to his prescience, this article testifies to a most improbable blindness in hindsight. The tangible proof of contrivance in the planning and organisation of mass murder is not conceived of as culpable act. Thus the reader is informed:

Die Hauptfrage, ob sich die Angeklagten der Mitwirkung am Massenmord dadurch schuldig gemacht hätten, daß sie die Pläne für die Gaskammern und Krematorien entwarfen, wurde einstimmig verneint. Auch die weitere Frage auf entfernte Mitschuld wurde – beim Angeklagten Ertl unter Hinweis auf Befehlsnotstand – verneint.

A verdict which considers the design of the technology for the Holocaust as exempt from questions of guilt, seems to confirm the fatalistic assumptions which Schoenberg voices in his second letter, “daß sich unserem auf Sachlichkeit gerichteten Hirn die Wahrheit für alle Zeiten verschließt”, and the cyclical repetition of historical catastrophes to which he appears to resign himself.

However, in the course of the film, we have also been presented with a reflection on the inherently violent nature of fascism from a very different perspective. Brecht’s notion of a “praktikable Wahrheit” perceives of National Socialist atrocities not as a matter of individual guilt, but as a stage in the class struggle. In Brecht’s view the “Barbarei” which is revealed under the conditions of fascism is always present, but:

gewisse Länder sind imstande, ihre Eigentumsverhältnisse noch mit weniger gewalttätig wirkenden Mitteln aufrechtzuerhalten als andere. Ihnen leistet die Demokratie noch die Dienste, zu welchen andere die Gewalt heranziehen müssen. Das Monopol auf die Fabriken, Gruben, Ländereien schafft überall barbarische Zustände, jedoch sind diese weniger sichtbar. Die Barbarei wird sichtbar, sobald das Monopol nur noch durch offene Gewalt geschützt werden kann.

These words reverberate against the silent images which follow, and against the concluding article in particular. Here, Barbarei is indeed not immediately “sichtbar.” Of the three pieces of historical evidence, this alone does not document an instance of violence; it records the verdict of a democratically sanctioned judiciary on the actions of those who devised the technological foundation for murder on an industrial scale. Brecht’s words suggest reasons for the invisibility of “barbarism” in this shot: the judicial apparatus merely represents the less overtly violent methods by which capitalism must be sustained. Seen from this perspective, the truth which this “Wahrspruch” - as the article calls it - reveals, is a complicity of interest in a “Barbarei” which is no less the foundation of capitalism than it is of fascism.

In Straub/Huillet’s montage documents of considerable diversity are made to comment upon each other. However, *Einleitung* contains no authorial narrative intervention which might extract a political message from these materials on our behalf. In the film’s contemporary

context this eschewal of filmic rhetoric would have been perhaps more acutely perceptible than is the case today. In 1972 the combination of documentary evidence of the repressive and destructive forces of fascism and imperialism, would have invoked a highly topical political discourse. Globally, the Vietnam War had come to epitomise the imperialist thrust of advanced capitalism. In a specifically German context, the first violent activities of the Red Army Faction had attempted to expose the historical continuity between the fascist past and capitalist present. Straub/Huillet's refusal to summon materials which reflect these issues to didactic ends and to draw a conclusion for the viewers, is sharply outlined against this historical background. As Karsten Witte noted disapprovingly, this film "verweist, aber er argumentiert nicht."²⁵

The forceful gesture of address in the film's final shot is indeed of a different kind. The spatio-temporal operations of the cinematography, by which this text is shown to us, are wholly bound up with making it legible to an audience. In the last shot of *Einleitung*, Straub/Huillet's "presentation-as-quotation" thus explicitly reveals its intended function. It aims to engage our perception with the signs and traces of history.

In her analysis of Straub/Huillet's film *Geschichtsunterricht*, Maureen Turim identifies "the deciphering and reinscription of textual traces" as the point of intersection between the film's content and its representational procedures.²⁶ *Einleitung* ends on a shot which demands such "deciphering and reinscription" from its audience, and thus an activity which ultimately makes us attend to our own access to the past. The process in which Straub/Huillet seek to involve us is well described by Severin Heinisch: He states:

Die Zeichenhaftigkeit der historischen Quelle bestimmt sich u.a. durch ihre Relativität: Der Text wird bei jedem Mal Lesen neu geschrieben, er wird erst durch den Leser produziert. Die Stelle, an der sich die Verwandlung der Zeichen vollzieht, ist der Ort, an dem sich die Geschichte selbst produziert.²⁷

Concluding a trajectory of perceptual involvement which leads from being read to, to reading for ourselves, Straub/Huillet bring *Einleitung* to a close with a filmic gesture which invites us to enter into our own production of history.

Through the words of Schoenberg and Brecht, Straub/Huillet present us with explanations for the recurrence of repression and genocide, but it remains for the viewer to see in what sense their words are borne out by the evidence in the film's documents. It is left to us to see the "Barbarei" which is visible in these documents. All three images present death in the context of highly organised and standardised production processes. The victims of the mass executions by the Versailles forces at the end of the Paris Commune are lined up in rows of identical coffins. The Vietnam bombing sequence is presented as the result of a precisely defined division of labour as it characterises industrial forms of production. The same aspect is highlighted in Straub/Huillet's final return to the period of fascism: the extermination of Jews is shown as dependent on a technological process, which answers to notions of productivity and efficiency. The question of the ownership of the means of production as the cause of the "Barbarei" is an insistent undercurrent in these images of mass produced death.

The photography, the film footage and the press article thus do not just document the presence of repressive power, but seek to foster an inquiry into the conditions of its existence as it is inscribed in these images. In this endeavour, Straub/Huillet also address the question as to who holds the power over the means by which the official version of history is formulated.

The images they show us also record that - as Serge Daney notes:

les Communards en bière, les bombes sur le B52, ne sont pas bien sur images neutres. Elles ne servent pas seulement à identifier tel corps, telle bombe. Elle nous disent aussi ... que la camera était américaine, du même bord que le bombardier, comme le photographe sans doute de M. Thiers.²⁸

Einleitung seeks to engage us with what becomes visible in these instances of catastrophe. It wants us to produce our own "countershots" to a history which does not unfold with the unstoppable force which Schoenberg assigns to it, but which nevertheless continues to repeat

itself with the aid of ever greater technological perfection. The film does not resolve this contradiction, but exposes us to it. Significantly, Jean-Marie Straub - far from taking the side of Brecht in the fictitious argument with Schoenberg - states that "the music of Schoenberg has in a way the last word", it "partly corrects Brecht or comments" upon his words.²⁹

The discontinuities and tensions which mark the *assemblage* of materials in *Einleitung* are summarised by Serge Daney as "refus obstiné de toutes les forces d'homogénéisation."³⁰ A number of salient representational devices by which this refusal is articulated in the film has so far been analysed. However, it remains to be asked which role Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik* assumes in the context of the film's heterogeneous form. How does it interact both with the formal complexity and the political issues raised by the film?

Since the days of Schoenberg, the Hollywood formula for the musical accompaniment of film has inevitably undergone changes. However, Stravinsky's often quoted comparison of film music to wallpaper still holds, "not only" - as David Bordwell notes - because "it is so strongly decorative, but because it fills in cracks and smoothes down rough textures."³¹ If film music has traditionally been one of the mainstays of homogenisation, then the works of the musical avant-garde, which challenged the rules of tonality, by no means proved to be incompatible with this aesthetic concept. In classical narrative film, modernist music too became subject to "forces of homogenisation."

Schoenberg's failure to do business with the Hollywood studios was not indicative of their rejection of musical innovation in itself. The source of his discord with the aesthetic concepts of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lay not with the avant-garde nature of his music, but with the function which was to be ascribed to it in the filmic ensemble. Atonal music did find its way into films in the classical Hollywood style.³² However, it was generally deployed as the auditive signal of a deranged mind or a world which careered towards chaos and destruction. As musical complement of genre specific moments in Horror or Science-Fiction movies or of

psychological drama, serial music provided a potent means of realistic illustration. As David Bordwell points out, Schoenberg's title for his *Opus 34, Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*, proved to be prescient in this context, "for Hollywood quickly identified dissonant music with just such qualities. Disturbing music could only convey disturbed states of mind."³³ Not the "Höchste Unwirklichkeit" conceived by Schoenberg, but abnormality became the expressive domain of music which broke with the laws of tonal harmony.

The encounter between dominant film mode and atonal music thus attests to Hollywood's ability to adapt the open and heterogeneous musical structures of avant-garde works of art to an aesthetic system which is controlled and unified by the dominant voice of narrative logic.³⁴ The self-effacement of a cinematic device in the service of narration, which is implied by this concept of musical accompaniment, has little purchase in Straub/Huillet's film style. Their works offer as little scope for the critical topos of "invisible editing" as they do for a discussion of "unheard melodies."³⁵ In *Einleitung* the formal complexity of Schoenberg's serial musical inspires a film form which is crucially defined by "cracks" and "rough textures."

But the impact which *Opus 34* has on *Einleitung* is not solely of a formal nature. The film emerges as much out of Straub/Huillet's perception of the music as a historical document as it does out of their interest in and attention to the formal specificity of the *Begleitmusik*. They do not present the music as a suprasocial work of art, as a pure play of form devoid of any connections with the world and with history, but as firmly grounded in reality. Straub/Huillet draw both form and representation from Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik*.

The very onset of *Opus 34* gives rise to a filmic constellation in which both these aspects of the music are called upon. The *Begleitmusik* starts during one of the black frame inserts which interrupt the reading of Schoenberg's second letter. The blackness follows upon his prophetic indictment, "Wie kann ein Kandinsky ... es unterlassen, eine Weltanschauung zu bekämpfen,

deren Ziel Bartholomäusnächte sind, in deren Finsternis man das Taferl, daß ich ausgenommen bin, nicht wird lesen können!" In combination with these words the black frames which flaunt the film's discontinuous construction, and which signal the suppression of visual information, double as a most literal visualisation of Schoenberg's prediction. The shot seems to oscillate between abstraction and a conspicuous instance of illustration. In combination with the collapse of imagery, the music enters the film as an autonomous formal element. However its tense and gloomy texture also responds to Schoenberg's sinister metaphor.

Later on in the film two very different forms of interplay between Schoenberg's *Opus 34* and the verbal and visual material exemplify Straub/Huillet's dual vantage point upon the music. Starting approximately half-way through the film, *Opus 34* accompanies eight minutes of *Einleitung*. In all, six minutes of the piece are combined with spoken language and the images of the two readers in the recording studio. In the remaining two minutes of the film the music accompanies silent or mute images.

The first of these two distinct sequences is marked by a startling separation of the language and the music. This is visibly established through the contrast of the relationship between language and the film's diegesis on one hand, and the music and the imagery on the other. Straub/Huillet's method of presenting music in *Einleitung* inverts the approach they had adopted in *Chronik*. In this – as Gertrud Koch points out – it was the "Verortung des Tons als physische Präsenz der Tonquelle" which distinguished their work with music from conventional films in its genre.³⁶ In *Chronik* the imagery thus serves predominantly to visualise music as performance. In *Einleitung* the music is never invested with visual presence, but it remains non-diegetic throughout. For the presentation of language Straub/Huillet chose a solution at the opposite end of the range of stylistic possibilities. The film's diegesis in the reading scenes is primarily dedicated to the visible anchoring of the

spoken word in its physical source, in a space and in the conditions of its technological production.

This visible delineation between the two sonic elements is carried over into the sound-mix. In contrast to dominant sound practice Straub/Huillet do not privilege dialogue intelligibility in their sound-track. As the speakers recite their text with a defamiliarising scansion they have to contend with the variations of volume and texture in the music. The result is a highly unpredictable and syncopated rhythmical structure which is thrown into even sharper relief by the black frame inserts, which occur at irregular and seemingly random intervals.

In this audio-visual orchestration of language, music and editing, the individual elements bounce off each other rather than to merge into a relationship of mutual illustration. The dynamic interplay which Straub/Huillet create between the sonic materials unsettles the understanding of the spoken word as much as it refutes a *Vergegenständlichung* of the music. The filmic representation strains against a reductive perception of the music as the reflection of Schoenberg's personal experience. Instead, these sequences expose the materiality of both text and music, and pursue what is an overriding concern in Straub/Huillet's work, the unsettling of a codified relationship between language and meaning.

In *Einleitung* the aesthetic properties of serial music support this process. The demise of the hierarchical organisation of musical resources of expression, as it underlies the work of Schoenberg, has - to quote Charles Rosen's definition - generated structures in which

a centralised system, tonality in which everything was ordered by its relation to a fundamental triad, had been replaced by a decentralised system in which cadence or resolution was achieved partly by colour, rhythm, texture, and phrasing, and partly by the new importance given to chromatic saturation. There was no longer a clear stylistic hierarchy, with everything subordinate to the so-called "rules of voice-leading" ... Other elements in music now demanded an equal status with pitch.³⁷

In the context of his reflections on how serial music could serve as a structural model for the liberation of film from a "voice-leading" narrative, and how its formal properties could contribute to more open filmic structures, Noel Burch envisages the possibility of new kinds of

interaction of music and language as well as other types of film sound. He describes these in the following way:

The traditional tonal music with its predetermined forms, its strong tonal polarities, and its range of relatively homogeneous tone colours can provide only an autonomous continuity existing alongside that of the images, merely running parallel to the dialogue and sound effects or accompanying the image with a musical synchronicity of the sort found in animated cartoons. Serial music, on the other hand, provides the most open form conceivable. In its interstices, every form of sound has a natural place, and it can provide an ideal complement to the "irrational" quality of the concrete image as well as the more rational qualities of the decoupage.³⁸

In the light of Straub/Huillet's use of Bach's music in *Chronik*, Burch's wholesale dismissal of tonal music as inspiration for cinematic innovation has to be contested. However, his observations well capture the combination of language and music in the staging of the texts by Brecht and Schoenberg. In this, Straub/Huillet do not simply oppose a filmic dissonance to the conventional notion of accompaniment. In *Einleitung* the visually sparse staging of an interaction between two clearly delineated sound elements, the music and the text, maintains the many facets of these materials in an elaborate sonic texture for the audience's perception. What Straub/Huillet attempt to engender is a conscious attention to the sounds, a process of listening which follows these texts through their complexity and contradictions. As Jean-Marie Straub notes with a view to the Schoenberg letters: these are both "beautiful" and "very limited." In his view they display an astonishing political foresight, a rare gesture of resistance from a people which "only always exposed their bent backs" but also the limitation of a fundamentally unpolitical conclusion.³⁹ Straub/Huillet's filmic realisation of Schoenberg's text does indeed highlight "un tissu dialectique" as Jean-Marie Straub demands of film.⁴⁰

Our understanding of the correspondences between the open form of Schoenberg's music and the stylistic features of *Einleitung* can be furthered by the wider structural implications of Burch's investigation into possible analogies between serial music and alternative film modes. In the film form which Burch envisages, style would cut loose from the demands of narrative

and come forward as an autonomous element in the structuring of a film. From this an organisation of expressive devices could emerge which would not be a derivative of a represented content. Rather, discernible stylistic patterns would create formal coherence through principles such as “rhythmic alternation, recapitulation, retrogression, gradual elimination, cyclical repetition, and serial variation, thus creating structures similar to those of twelve tone music.”⁴¹

Such an exploration of figures of style and filmic resources can be identified in *Einleitung*. In this the most pertinent examples for an inquiry into stylistic permutations are the various filmic strategies of an overt re-representation which Straub/Huillet evolve. The wide variety of forms of sound presentation which characterises the film is another. This starts with an apparent deviation from the conventions of moderation by a TV announcer. It proceeds to the emphatically dramatised instances of quoting by Nestler and Straschek, and finally concludes with the purely visual presentation of language. The soundscapes which are associated with these variations on the presentation of language display a trend towards increased abstraction. *Einleitung* starts with outdoor sound: the sonic backdrop to Jean-Marie Straub’s initial announcement is the distant hum of the city and the singing of birds. Next, we are presented with the very opposite: a sound which emanates from the artificial and secluded soundscape of a recording studio. The film ends with the spatially unspecific sound of the music which has been dubbed into the film. The last segment of *Einleitung* takes this investigation into sound into the realms of silence. Different forms of silence ring out from the mute documents with which the film ends. The photograph and the newspaper article simply carry no sound, while the Vietnam War footage has been divested of the atmospheric noises of aerial warfare. Such stylistic variations on a theme create discernible patterns in *Einleitung*. They are not organised around the representation of content but engage us in highly varied forms of perception. As Barton Byg observes, the film runs through “a chromatic scale of cinematic possibilities.”⁴²

The aesthetic analogy between serial music and film offers insights which can help to grasp the formal complexities of *Einleitung*. However - as Burch points out repeatedly - while this can provide a model for innovative film form, the limitations to this parallel are set by the representational aspect of film. If Straub/Huillet draw on the heterogeneity of their musical source material they also represent the political reality to which they see it bearing witness.

In *Einleitung* Schoenberg's music becomes the accompaniment for highly charged political imagery. Given that Schoenberg had once famously summarised his views on the role of the musician in society with the words, "We who live in music have no place in politics ... We are apolitical and the most we can do is endeavour to stay quietly in the background", this visualisation amounts to a provocative statement⁴³

Perhaps the most striking challenge of the notion that music could provide a refuge from political realities comes in the film's last section. It is striking both in contrast to the previous autonomy of language and music, and in the context of Straub/Huillet's work in general. The sound-image constellation we are presented with here, is based on a sustained synchronisation between the *Begleitmusik* and the image track. This effect is not only achieved because both music and images capture and convey a sense of menace, a premonition of the impending eruption of violence. Straub/Huillet also create obvious temporal convergences between the visual and auditory material. Thus the flashing of the control lights in the cockpit of a B52 bomber plane is closely shadowed by the rhythm of the music; the discharge and eerily slow descent of the bombs coincides with a hovering cluster of sounds. The most startling of such instances occurs when the smoke clouds of a bomb explosion well up in unison with a musical crescendo.

In this conjunction with the imagery, the *Begleitmusik* both establishes a conceptual continuity amongst the documents on display, and it also provides a synchronised effect. In short, this filmic segment presents us with a form of musical accompaniment which calls forth

far more conventional notions of music as an expressive filmic device than we have so far encountered in *Einleitung*.

The limited amount of critical attention which *Einleitung* has received is surprisingly off-hand with regard to this synchronisation of sound and imagery. It remains entirely unacknowledged in Barton Byg's chapter on *Einleitung* in his *Landscapes of Resistance*. Merely in passing, Martin Walsh's article on the film acknowledges this sound/image constellation as "occasional" if "crucial" occurrence. This astonishing oversight would seem to result from a desire to fit *Einleitung* into interpretative frameworks neither of which is commensurate with this particular stylistic feature of the film. Thus Byg proceeds from the assumption that "the film does not represent the music as the result of historical, political or even narrative events." He goes on to conclude that the pronounced "otherness" of the music in the filmic construction enables us to imagine a process of change which cannot be represented in the film. In parallel to a resolution which is implied, yet withheld, in Schoenberg's music, *Einleitung* "makes the spectator/listener capable of imagining a resolution which in fact does not take place."⁴⁴ Byg's interpretation rests on the assumption that Straub/Huillet attribute an autonomy outside the realm of the social and ideological to Schoenberg's music. Not surprisingly, from this vantage point the parallels between the music and images as they have been described above go unnoticed.

Martin Walsh on his part, sees the common concern of Brecht, Schoenberg and Straub/Huillet as "a form of materialist articulation that resists homogenisation - and hence the appeal to any single, universal truth."⁴⁵ However, unlike Brecht, Schoenberg does not situate his revolutionary work as musician in a similarly revolutionary political context. Walsh argues that the film provides a corrective to this apolitical stance by presenting the political meaning which is inherent in the music but which Schoenberg suppressed. In the encounter with their source materials, Straub/Huillet create what Walsh dubs a "deconstructivist" film.

In his view *Einleitung* leaves language and culture “in pieces”⁴⁶ and “reformulates a connection between art and politics.”⁴⁷ The assumption that *Einleitung* remedies a certain shortcoming in Schoenberg’s view of art seems strangely at odds with Walsh’s argument that - like Schoenberg’s music - the filmic structure of *Einleitung* does not yield a “universal truth’.” This contradiction haunts Walsh’s entire analysis. Viewing the film as an example of filmic “deconstruction”, Walsh merely remarks on the sudden synchronisation of music and images as encouraging the viewers’ reflections about “how we are to relate these apparently contradictory events, music and war.”⁴⁸ Why these instances should be as crucial as he has previously maintained remains unexplained.

However, as all films by Straub/Huillet, *Einleitung* departs from the assumption that works of art carry the inscription of their historical context. It is the laying bare of these traces which is at stake in *Einleitung*, rather than an argument about the connection of art and politics. Straub/Huillet highlight the music and its origins in a life under the portent of *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*. It is exactly because the music is an expression of its time, and because it carries the inscription of its historical origin, that it can provide a synchronised accompaniment to other documents of “Barbarei.”

In *Einleitung*, this extended instance of a sustained parallelism of sound and image comes at the very end of a film which has been marked by a dynamic interaction between these two elements. Just like a consonance surrounded by dissonances in music, this assimilation of a conventional device which has lost its perceptual edge through familiarity can restore to it the power to jolt our perception.

The final sequence of *Einleitung* constitutes what Gilberto Perez identifies as a recurring feature in Straub/Huillet’s films, a “destruction and partial reinstatement of conventional devices.”⁴⁹ Perez’s remark refers specifically to a return to shot/countershot editing after a series of highly unusual editing patterns for the rendition of conversations in

Geschichtsunterricht. Comparable instances would be the use of reverse editing in the dialogue between Roßmann and Therese in *Klassenverhältnisse*, or the accompaniment of the painting *Grandes Baigneuses* with the sound of a seascape in *Cézanne* which will be discussed in the following chapters. However, such quotations from the repertory of dominant film style have to be considered exactly as Perez describes them. They are only “partial reinstatements” of dominant devices. The viewer experiences these in the context of the film’s overall stylistic systems, and it is as part of this that they will exert their impact. In *Einleitung* the synchronisation of music and image in the third segment of the film is surprising because it differs from what we have seen and heard before. This deviation from a stylistic pattern gives it the power to draw our attention to a similarity which is inscribed in the materials.

Straub/Huillet’s two-fold exploration of Schoenberg’s music – of its formal properties and its historical implications – corresponds to an inextricable connection between the composition’s expressive force and its formal innovation. Discussing the question whether it was Schoenberg’s insights into the potential of “post-Wagnerian harmony” which made him articulate moments of anguish in his music or whether conversely his deconstruction of the tonal system was motivated by an “anxiety which was part of his public as well as his private universe”, Charles Rosen offers this cogent explanation:

The misunderstanding inherent in these questions - the reason why they ought not to be answered – is that they suggest that a style is simply a vehicle for expressing a meaning or an emotion; they turn the style into a pure form and the emotion into a pure significance. But a form and a meaning cannot be divided so simply, above all in a work of music. The intense relentless expressivity of each moment in a work like *Erwartung* is a formal device as well as an extra-musical significance.⁵⁰

Einleitung is a striking reversal of the conventional order of hierarchy between music and film. The music does not join the film as an afterthought in the last stages of the production process, it constitutes its point of departure and becomes a formative element in both of the senses outlined by Rosen.

If Straub/Huillet's film thus emerges in response to the music, the site of this encounter has no less left a discernible imprint on the work. *Einleitung* was Straub/Huillet's first commissioned work for television and the production circumstances have remained anything but incidental to both its form and the content. Straub/Huillet made their short on *Opus 34* during the period when television established its position as the financial mainstay of the depleted German film industry. Since the end of the 1960s film production in Germany had become increasingly dependent on television as co-producer. By 1974 - the year in which the *Film/Fernsehabkommen* which specified contributions from television channels to subsidise film projects, was signed - it had become an acknowledged fact that no commercially successful German film could be realised without financial backing from television.

Straub/Huillet's position at the extreme margins of the New German Cinema was conducive to their co-operating with television at an early stage: their uncompromising aesthetics and their lack of commercial viability tended to exclude them from subsidy-awarding bodies and mechanisms which had been crucially important for the work of filmmakers in the 1960s. The production history of *Chronik* had only deepened Straub/Huillet's misgivings about a state-subsidised system of film production, and the dependencies which accompanied it. In the first half of the 1970s the structures of television and in particular the Third Programmes - which since their inception in 1965 answered to a predominantly educational remit and which had acquired a reputation for culturally ambitious programming - seemed to offer an altogether greater potential for the survival of avant-garde filmmaking. As Straub reasons, when asked by Barbara Bronnen in 1973 why they had to turn to television, and the Third Programmes in particular for funding, "weil das die einzige Lücke ist, die bleibt. Es ist doch so, daß ein Film, der außerhalb des Systems entstanden ist, nie in das System kommt ... Es passiert selten, daß ein Verleih einen Film nimmt, der ganz außerhalb entstanden ist."⁵¹

Straub/Huillet's pragmatic recognition of the changed conditions for the work of avant-garde filmmakers went hand-in-hand with the awareness that the institutions of public sector broadcasting would exert more than a merely financial impact on film culture. Thus, in Eric Rentschler's assessment, the financial watershed of the *Film/Fernsehabkommen* crystallised a situation which had existed previously, but which now came to light with particular clarity. This "brought additional support, though it further dramatised just how inexorably the would-be critical cinema was trapped in a labyrinth of institutional channels." The result, in Rentschler's view, were "films marked by obliqueness, indirection, and more subtle subversion."⁵²

Under the changed conditions of film production filmmakers were thus clearly put in a position which demanded that they should learn to reckon with a "new apparatus." However, the desire on the part of the vast majority to distance themselves from television seemed in inverse proportion to this new form of dependency. As Karl Prüm points out, the relationship between filmmakers and television during the 1970s can be generalised as a "fixe[n] cinematische[n] Abwertung des Fernsehhaften."⁵³ Nor was this a transient phenomenon: even as late as 1984 no other than Edgar Reitz assures us that he has "no idea what a television film might be." Four years later Werner Herzog still maintains that "telly is just a kind of juke-box."⁵⁴

While it is not untainted by critical awareness, Straub/Huillet's approach to television was far more circumspect and pro-active by comparison. Indeed, *Einleitung* seems to contain a declaration of intent with regard to their involvement with the carrier medium of *Einleitung*. Thus Jean-Marie Straub reports of Schoenberg's determination to forestall any artistic interference with his operas by the "neuen Beherrschern der Theaterkunst, den Regisseuren" by peppering his scores with stage directions. Similar considerations seem to have guided

Straub/Huillet in the making of *Einleitung* and in relation to the commissioners of their work in television.

The very fact that *Einleitung* turned out to be what Jean-Marie Straub would later call their most “aggressive film” can be traced back to their aim to gauge the conditions under which working for television would have to be approached. Thus, he explains the politically charged content of the film by saying “we intended it that way, especially as it was going to be shown in a non-political frame, and wanted to go up to the limit and find out what the Third Programmes were prepared to stomach.”⁵⁵

Einleitung was neither changed nor censored by its commissioners – a fact which Jean-Marie Straub later put down to a merely temporary liberalism of German television. However, the assumption that overstepping the limits of artistic freedom set by television might prevent *Einleitung* from being broadcast has left tangible traces in the film. Thus the decision to shoot the longest part of the film, the reading sequences, in the recording studios of the *Südwestfunk* was not least motivated by the “desire to compromise the machine, because if they had not accepted the film in the end ...we could have said: But that was shot at your station and now you don’t want it anymore.”⁵⁶

There are other less immediately obvious signs in *Einleitung* of the contribution which television has made not just in an institutional sense, but also as a representational form. In the progression of “tiny steps” as which Straub has repeatedly described his own filmic development, *Einleitung* marks an engagement with formative features of television aesthetics.

Straub’s appearance at the beginning of the film, which seems to play so overtly on the television convention of the talking head, deserves particular attention in this respect. What has been described by Knut Hickethier as a central element of a television specific “Ästhetik der Nahtstellen” is played upon here quite overtly.⁵⁷ And Jean-Marie Straub’s emphatic declaration, “I wanted to be the announcer. I thought it would be better to have one who

speaks German badly, with bad accent and pronunciation, so one does not have the usual announcer at the beginning", ⁵⁸ highlights an intention to maintain artistic control over the seams by which a sequence of programmes is stitched together and to assimilate them for his own aesthetic purposes.

Knut Hickethier's observations on how experimental or innovative elements of television programming are integrated into the flow of broadcasts, may help to shed some light on the nature of Straub's intentions in these shots. Hickethier notes that television tends to assimilate open forms through

An-oder Abmoderierung, Einführung, klärende Diskussion und Dokumentation etc., so daß das Fragment zu einem Gesamtangebot ergänzt wird, das in sich nicht mehr die ästhetische Offenheit und Provokation bestehen läßt, sondern durch Erklärung und Interpretation bereits eine versöhnende Integration leistet. ⁵⁹

Straub's prominent appearance as his own announcer, is not least an indication that the filmmakers sought to protect *Einleitung* from such aesthetic domestication.

A similar adaptation and redefinition of a feature which is specific to television can be seen at work in the reading scenes of *Einleitung*. Here Straub/Huillet take the sound/image balance as it is characteristic of television to its very extreme. In *Visible Fictions* John Ellis contrasts the dominance of the visible in cinema with the central role which television ascribes to sound and states that

many of TV's characteristic broadcast forms, rely upon sound as the major carrier of information and the major means of ensuring continuity of attention. The news broadcast, the documentary, the bulk of TV comedy shows, all display a greater reliance on sound than any form cinema has developed for itself. ⁶⁰

It is through sound and the spoken word in particular that meaning is thus anchored in television. In *Einleitung*, sound is foregrounded most conspicuously, but this does not serve to unequivocally establish and determine meaning for the viewer. Rather, the use of sound involves us in a more active process of seeing and listening, and ultimately our own

construction of meaning. Viewed in the context of television, Straub/Huillet's refusal to explain the image to us is highly conspicuous. What Bruno Tackels describes as the characteristic "reticence" of their films seems indeed attributable in *Einleitung* to "notre besoin compulsif (télévisuel, pour une grande part) du commentaire - de cette parole univoque qui dit: ceci est une pipe, une oeuvre d'art, un salaud, une victime, un génocide."⁶¹

Not least, the heterogeneity of *Einleitung* evokes intriguing parallels to the *Programmedium* television. In the context of his discussion of evolving concepts of television programming, Knut Hickethier traces a development from a conception of television as "harmonisch durchgestaltete Kulturveranstaltung" to something more akin to the concept of "bricolage", so that by the late 1950s television presented itself as "aus verschiedenen Teilstücken ein Ganzes bastelnd."⁶² The various levels of heterogeneity in *Einleitung*, the disparity of its individual constituent elements, its variation of discursive structures as well as its stylistic diversity, give it a collage-like form which resembles the programme structure of television. Noel Burch has observed that the "creation of new forms and structures based on a deliberate mixing of genres and materials in them", was not least initiated by the impact which television, as the dominant medium, exerted on other forms of representation since the late 1950s and early 1960s. This finding seems to be borne out by the "impurity" at the heart of Straub/Huillet's *Einleitung*.⁶³

In considering the influence television had on *Einleitung*, we have returned to the two most distinctive features of the film - its heterogeneity and its political focus. In interview statements, Straub/Huillet have left little doubt about their own views on the recurrence of "Barbarei" in different guises as well as on the causes for this. Thus Jean-Marie Straub states in 1995: "Quant au fascisme, je pourrais vous dire qu'il n'y a rien de moins nouveau que le fascisme. C'est une répétition affreuse de toujours la même chose. Et voilà, cent vingts ans que cela dure."⁶⁴ In the course of the same conversation he asserts that, "l'Europe actuelle est

celle dont rêvait Goebbels. cela continue. Il n'y a pas de rupture entre le rêve de Goebbels et le rêve du capitalisme.”⁶⁵

The echo of these assertions in *Einleitung* is readily apparent. However, this does not settle the matter of what the film ultimately seeks to achieve and how it addresses its audience. To reduce *Einleitung* to a vehicle for authorial political intervention would ignore a material and formal heterogeneity which continuously strains against such a reading. Rather than Straub/Huillet's political statements, it is their other filmic oeuvre, and in particular *Moses and Aron*, the film that followed *Einleitung*, which can help in summarising its political significance.

Schoenberg's opera embodies its central opposition between “Mund” and “Gedanke” in the biblical brothers after which it is named. Moses, the leader of the people, represents the steadfast denial “das Grenzenlose ins Bild zu fassen.” Refusing to betray the infinity of meaning to the limitations of representation, he demands of the people: “Es muß den Gedanken erfassen!” In Moses' absence Aron, his mouthpiece, breaks this law by giving the Israelites the Golden Calf as object of worship. When Moses berates him for this on his return Aron tells him:

kein Volk erfaßt mehr als ein Teil des Bildes,
das den faßbaren Teil des Gedankens ausdrückt.
So mach dich dem Volk verständlich auf ihm angemess'ne Art.

The film's central conflict is encapsulated in these words. In Straub/Huillet's adaptation it remains unresolved. It is the people itself - so the film's underlying implication - which will have to find a form and a means of expression. It is not the choice between the two positions outlined, but - as Jean-Marie Straub remarks - “[l']absence du peuple” which is at stake in the film.⁶⁶

Einleitung combines documents which bear witness to a history of violence and repression and which carry the inscription of the causes for its perpetuation. However, the filmic

representation which Straub/Huillet evolve from these highly evocative materials does not put forward an interpretation for the viewer to accept or refuse. Viewed against the conflict of “expressionistischer Bildlichkeit und dem Gesetz des Bilderverbots”, which Gertrud Koch identifies in *Moses und Aron, Einleitung* represents an investigation of filmic representation which side-steps these two extremes.⁶⁷ They present the film’s various documents as - to quote Roland Barthes - “hieroglyph(s) in which can be read at a single glance ... the present, the past and the future that is the historical meaning of the represented action.”⁶⁸ Straub/Huillet’s *Einleitung* seeks to sensitise us to these inscriptions, its “agitation” is aimed at our powers of perception.

Notes

¹ Erwin Stein, ed., *Arnold Schoenberg: Ausgewählte Briefe* (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1985), p. 41.

² Walther Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 23.

³ Graham McCann, ‘New Introduction’, in Theodor Adorno, Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Film* (London: Athlone, 1994), p. XX.

⁴ Other evidence points to Schoenberg’s interest in the movies. Even in advance of the predictably abortive discussions with Thalberg, Schoenberg tried his hand at a score for the *Good Earth*. These first attempts have survived as rudimentary sketches. Cf. Walther Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg*, pp. 24. Further indication of Schoenberg’s interest in the moving pictures is his 1940 essay ‘Art and the Moving Pictures.’ In this the composer canvasses for a the advancement of film art, but he also notes his approval of some examples of popular film culture. Amongst these are contemporary Walt Disney Productions, films by Charlie Chaplin as well as the Marx Brothers. Cf. Arnold Schoenberg, ‘Art and the Moving Pictures’, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. by Leonard Stein (London: Faber/ New York: St Martin’s Press, 1975), pp. 153-157.

⁵ Cf. Ulrich Rugner, ‘Zur Entwicklung der Filmmusik in Deutschland zwischen 1924 und 1934’ in *Filmmusik in Deutschland zwischen 1924 und 1934*, Studien zur Filmgeschichte, vol.3 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1988), p.67-105

⁶ Theodor Adorno, ‘Uraufführung von Richard Strauss und Arnold Schoenberg im Frankfurter Sender’, *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk Zeitung*, 27. April 1930, p. 2.

⁷ Dikla Newlin, *Schoenberg Remembered: Diaries and Recollections* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1980), p. 207. I am indebted to Marilyn McCoy from the Arnold Schoenberg Institute for bringing information on Schoenberg’s views on film as well as the origins of *Opus 34* to my attention.

⁸ Nuria Nono-Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg 1874 - 1952: Lebensgeschichte in Begegnungen* (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1992), p. 275.

- ⁹ Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', *Enthusiasm*, 1 (January 1970), p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), p. 79.
- ¹¹ Quoted in Christian Thorel, Jean-Paul Archi, eds., *Les Films de Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet: Amerika/Rapports de Classes/Klassenverhältnisse d'après Kafka* (Toulouse, Paris: Ombres, NEF Diffusion, 1984), p. 51.
- ¹² Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', p. 19.
- ¹³ Jill Forbes, 'Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 43, no. 50 (March 1970), p. 71.
- ¹⁴ Cf. for example Maureen Turim, 'Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet: Oblique Angles on Film as Ideological Intervention', in *New German Filmmakers: From Oberhausen Through the 1970s*, ed. by Klaus Phillips (New York: Ungar, 1984), p. 347.
- ¹⁵ Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 155.
- ¹⁶ Jacques Déniel, Dominique Païni, eds., *Der Tod des Empedokles/La mort d'Empédocle* (Dunkerque: Studio43/Dopa Films/Ecole régionale des Beaux-arts, 1987), p. 51.
- ¹⁷ Arnold Schoenberg, 'New Music: My Music', in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. by Leonard Stein, p. 105.
- ¹⁸ David Hush, 'Modes of Continuity in Schoenberg's "Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene: Opus 34"', *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1984), p. 3.
- ¹⁹ Kristin Thompson, 'Historical Implications of the Classical Hollywood Cinema', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Style: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 381.
- ²⁰ Joachim Paech, *Literatur und Film* (Stuttgart: J.B.Metzler, 1988), p. 129.
- ²¹ Cf. John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 8.
- ²² Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 88.
- ²³ Rick Altman, 'The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound', in *Sound Theory: Sound Practice*, ed. by Rick Altman (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 25.
- ²⁴ Serge Daney, 'Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene', in *Les films de Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Jean-André Fieschi (Paris: Centre Allemand/Goethe Institut, 1977), p. 69.
- ²⁵ Karsten Witte, 'Kommentierte Filmografie', in *Herzog, Kluge, Straub*, ed. by Peter, W. Hansen, Wolfram Schütte (München: Hanser, 1976), p.198.
- ²⁶ Maureen Turim, 'Textuality and Theatricality in Brecht and Straub/Huillet: "History Lessons" (1972)', in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, ed. by Eric Rentschler (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 234.

- ²⁷ Quoted in Rolf Aurich, 'Einen Gedanken fotografieren: Über Geschichte als Vergangenheit und ihre Präsenz im Film', *Filmwärts*, 34/35 (Mai 1995), p. 22.
- ²⁸ Serge Daney, 'Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene', p. 72.
- ²⁹ Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', p. 16.
- ³⁰ Serge Daney, 'Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene', p. 65.
- ³¹ David Bordwell, 'Classical Narration' in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Style: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 33.
- ³² Cf. David Bordwell, 'The Bounds of Difference' in *ibid.*, pp. 70-85.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ³⁴ Examples given by David Bordwell are *East of Eden* and *The Cobweb* both released in 1955. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 72.
- ³⁵ Cf. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1987). In her study, Gorbman argues that the subordination of film music to the diegesis of the narrative film renders it transparent and "inaudible."
- ³⁶ Gertrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 49.
- ³⁷ Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 63.
- ³⁸ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 99.
- ³⁹ Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', p. 16.
- ⁴⁰ Marie Frering and Bruno Tackels, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Strasbourg', in *Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels (Strasbourg: Limelight, 1995), p. 45.
- ⁴¹ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, p. 14.
- ⁴² Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance*, p. 156.
- ⁴³ Arnold Schoenberg, 'Letter no. 224', in *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters*, ed. by Erwin Stein, (London: Faber/New York: St Martin's Press, 1964), p. 255.
- ⁴⁴ Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance*, p. 126.
- ⁴⁵ Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, p. 83.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ⁴⁹ Gilberto Perez, 'Modernist Cinema: The History Lesson of Straub and Huille', *Artforum*, 17 (October 1978), p. 30.

⁵⁰ Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, p. 26.

⁵¹ Barbara Bronnen, 'Jean-Marie Straub', in *Die Filmemacher: Der neue deutsche Film nach Oberhausen*, ed. by Barbara Bronnen and Corinna Brocher (München: Bertelsmann, 1973), p. 37.

⁵² Eric Rentschler, *West German Film: In the Course of Time* (Bedford Hills, New York: Redgraves, 1984), p. 54.

⁵³ Karl Prümm, 'Fernsehen und Film: Ambivalenz und Identität', in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. by Wolfgang Jacobson, Anton Kaes, Hans Helmut Prinzler (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1993), p. 516.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Dietrich Scheunemann, 'New German Cinema: The Art of Film in the Age of Television', in *Orality, Literacy and the New Media*, ed. by Dietrich Scheunemann (Columbia: Camden House, 1996), p. 170.

⁵⁵ Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', p. 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Knut Hickethier, ed., 'Fernsehästhetik: Kunst im Programm oder Programmkunst?', in *Film, Fernsehen, Video und die Künste: Strategien der Intermedialität*, ed. by Joachim Paech (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), p. 204.

⁵⁸ Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', p. 19.

⁵⁹ Knut Hickethier, 'Fernsehästhetik: Kunst im Programm oder Programmkunst?', in *Film, Fernsehen, Video und die Künste: Strategien der Intermedialität*, ed. by Joachim Paech, p. 210.

⁶⁰ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 129.

⁶¹ Marie Frering and Bruno Tackels, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Strasbourg', in *Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels, p. 64.

⁶² Knut Hickethier, ed., 'Fernsehästhetik: Kunst im Programm oder Programmkunst?', in *Film, Fernsehen, Video und die Künste: Strategien der Intermedialität*, ed. by Joachim Paech, p. 194.

⁶³ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, p. 59.

⁶⁴ Marie Frering and Bruno Tackels, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Strasbourg', in *Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels, p. 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁶ Jacques Bontemps, Pascal Bonitzer, Serge Daney, 'Conversation avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 258/9 (1975), p. 18.

⁶⁷ Getrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Diderot-Brecht-Eisenstein', in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 73.

Chapter Three

“Aber Sie haben doch Augen und Ohren!” - Staging the language of Kafka

The mutual attraction between cinema and Kafka has been problematic. Several diary entries show that Kafka was an avid cinema goer and that this new medium left a deep impression on him.¹ However, his fascination with film is overshadowed by fundamental misgivings. In a conversation recounted by Gustav Janouch, Kafka professes to being overwhelmed by the sensory impact of a ceaseless stream of images. In Janouch's recollection, he describes this perceptual onslaught with a note of great unease: “Ich bin ein Augenmensch. Das Kino aber stört das Schauen. Die Raschheit der Bewegungen und der schnelle Wechsel der Bilder zwingen die Menschen zu einem ständigen Überschauen. Der Blick bemächtigt sich nicht der Bilder, sondern diese bemächtigen sich des Blicks.”²

Ultimately, Kafka states his preference for a visual medium which preserves a greater autonomy of perception than motion pictures do. It is from one of the static predecessors of cinema, the panorama, that he derives a less ambivalent enjoyment. Its succession of static pictures with their stereoscopically induced third dimension strikes him as more life-like. After his visit to the *Kaiserpanorama* in Friedland in 1911, Kafka notes in his travel diary: “Die Bilder lebendiger als im Kino, weil sie dem Blick die Ruhe der Wirklichkeit lassen. Das Kino gibt dem Angeschauten die Unruhe seiner Bewegung, die Ruhe des Blicks scheint wichtiger.”³

An echo of misgivings, as they are frequently leveled at the cinematic reworking of literature rings through Kafka's declared preference for a type of representation which leaves greater freedom to the viewer. It may be considered a critical commonplace, that the written word which sparks off a myriad of recreations before our inner eye becomes visually and aurally determined in the process of its filmic representation. While books make us see, the cinema - so the argument may be summarized - sees for us.

In the context of the cinema's fascination with Kafka, this point presents itself with particular acuity. Filmic adaptations of a number of short stories and of Kafka's three novel fragments, testify to the attraction which his work has continued to hold for filmmakers.⁴ In her analysis of some of the more widely known examples of Kafka adaptations, Gertrud Koch points to a common denominator behind a stylistic diversity of cinematographic approaches which this interest has sparked off. Her investigation brings her to the conclusion that it is "was umgangssprachlich 'kafkaesk' bereits genannt wird, das heißt ein bestimmter Erfahrungsmodus von Entfremdung", rather than the letter of the text that has left its mark on film history.⁵ In Koch's view, this similarity in the approach to Kafka's work reflects the history of its reception. It is the persistence of an assumed meaning in his writing which the filmic adaptations document. If evidence for this contention were sought, the 1995 program notes of the British Film Institute for a series of films under the common heading of the *Kafkaesque* would amply supply this. The visual repertoire of the *Kafkaesque* which it describes to its prospective audience holds few surprises; announcing images of a "faceless jury", "seemingly endless rooms and corridors", the recreation of a "dark oppressive atmosphere", the "danger of the unknown", it lists a rather predictable iconography.⁶

It is difficult to reconcile Kafka's authorial intentions with the fact that the visualization of his work has generated such a conventionalised imagery. The writer who wanted his words to have the impact of a "Faustschlag auf den Schädel", who sought to turn language into an "Axt für das gefrorene Meer in uns", has tended to be cast into the mould of an easy familiarity.⁷ Few other 20th century authors have become so closely associated with a set of qualities and attributes as Kafka: Kafka is *Kafkaesque*. In Victor Shklovsky's words, his works have acquired the "glassy armour of familiarity", they "cease to be seen and begin to be recognized."⁸

In the case of Kafka, this armour might be said to shield the reader from the challenges of a difficult text. Walter Benjamin summarizes the resistance which Kafka's writing puts up against conventional notions of intelligibility when he attests to him:

eine seltene Kraft, sich Gleichnisse zu schaffen. Trotzdem erschöpft er sich in dem, was deutbar ist, niemals, hat vielmehr alle erdenklichen Vorkehrungen gegen die Auslegung seiner Texte getroffen. Mit Umsicht, mit Behutsamkeit, mit Mißtrauen muß man in ihrem Innern sich vorwärtstasten.⁹

Kafka's writing unfolds around artfully constructed incongruities which cannot be resolved by thematic readings. But Benjamin's call for caution and circumspection in engaging with these incongruities of the text, has frequently been ignored. It has been the effort to attribute a conclusive meaning or message to what remains tantalizingly unsaid in the writing itself, that has dominated the reception of Kafka's works. Interpretations of a theological, existentialist, psychological, sociological or political nature, have often resolved the paradoxes which are so crucial to the work through familiar schemata. In his survey of Kafka criticism, Beicken provides a concise summary of why such an approach fails to engage with the characteristic difficulties of the work. He states:

Bestürzend ist ... die grobe Verkennung und Ignoranz, Kafka nicht als Schriftsteller, nicht als Künstler verstehen zu wollen, sondern ihn immer wieder zum Kronzeugen für alle möglichen Theorien und ideologischen Auseinandersetzungen zu machen. Zwar erteilt auch Kafka Belehrung, sie vollzieht sich aber in Widersprüchen, macht den Widersinn zum Prinzip und gibt Stoff zu Überlegungen, die kein Ende nehmen, die aus den Gleichnissen entwendete Lehre will vom Leser, daß er das nachvollzieht, was sich der Autor zur Aufgabe stellt, die permanente "Expedition nach der Wahrheit."¹⁰

The editorial fortunes of the text on which Straub/Huillet based their film *Klassenverhältnisse*, constitutes a very tangible example of how this expedition has frequently been cut short: *Der Verschollene* was edited and published in 1926 by Max Brod under the title *Amerika*. Accompanied by an epilogue by its editor the novel fragment reached its audience together with an interpretation which was to have a lasting impact on the reception of not only this but also other works by Kafka. In Brod's reading, Karl Roßmann's adventures in

the new world are stages of an *Entwicklungsroman* which end with the protagonist's "Einordnung in ein Gottesreich."¹¹

Straub/Huillet's selection of Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene* as the source text for one of their films, seems a promising undertaking against the background of the vagaries of filmic and literary reception outlined above. While the ambiguity which constitutes the productive momentum of the text has frequently been eliminated by its critics, Straub/Huillet's often stated respect for the material features and the polysemous nature of the works of art which inspire them, implies an auspicious match between literary and filmic aesthetics.

However, at first sight the title of Straub/Huillet's adaptation hardly augurs well in this respect. By calling their film *Klassenverhältnisse*, they seem to join the ranks of those re-workings and interpretation which recruit Kafka's writing as if - as Peter Beicken notes - "Dichtung verkleidete Ideensammlung sei."¹² One could easily assume that Roßmann's "Einordnung ins Gottesreich", is supplanted here with an interpretation of his fate along Marxist lines. However, the filmmakers are quick to refute such notions. In general, they reject the idea that their films might provide an interpretation for its source material. Thus Jean-Marie Straub explains with regard to the title: "Daß das eine Interpretation für den Roman ist, glaube ich kaum. Wir haben ja einen Film gedreht."¹³

Straub/Huillet's understanding of the liberties and the restrictions which they consider permissible and necessary in working with a written source material, is well illustrated by a metaphor which Jean-Marie Straub has used repeatedly in this context. A text, he states, "c'est comme un clairière dans la forêt, il y a beaucoup de chemins pour en sortir. Si on impose une issue, ce n'est plus le texte, c'est un mode d'emploi."¹⁴ The strictures of a capitalist society which Straub/Huillet's film title denotes are undoubtedly an "issue" and a thematic concern of their source text. America, as portrayed by Kafka, is a world dominated by work-related hierarchies. It is worth noting in this context that Jean-Marie Straub considers

Kafka's two later novel fragments, *Das Schloß* and *Der Prozeß* beyond the scope of adaptation. He reasons: "Das kommt nicht in Frage. Das steht für sich."¹⁵ Straub's formulation acknowledges the progressive separation of Kafka's protagonists from an empirically verifiable reality in the three fragments. The impenetrable structures of authority and power which Karl Roßmann - like the two K's in the other novel fragments - finds himself caught up in, become increasingly self-perpetuating and hermetic as Kafka's art progresses. Arbitrary and absurd, yet eloquently justified by references to a superior logic, Kafka's descriptions allude to familiar notions of power while receding ever further from the realm of the empirical. In *Der Verschollene* this process of abstraction is as yet at a nascent stage. The world portrayed still has a familiar shape: Kafka sets the story of his protagonist in a society which is governed by a capitalist rationale. In the words of Martin Walser:

In *Amerika* kann man noch von einer sichtbaren Erschaffung der Totalität sprechen: Karl und die Gegenordnung werden erst im Laufe einer Entwicklung zu Ordnungen, die eine totale Welt ausmachen. Beide objektivieren sich von Begegnung zu Begegnung mehr. Da diese Welt noch Züge einer empirischen Welt trägt, sind immer noch Bezüge da, die nur angedeutet werden, Seiendes, das nicht ganz in das Werk eintritt. In *Prozeß* und *Schloß* bezieht sich Kafka nicht mehr auf eine vorhandene Welt.¹⁶

By choosing the title *Klassenverhältnisse*, however, Straub/Huillet not only establish a thematic focus for their film, they also seem to proclaim a critical portrayal of Amerika and the fortune which befalls the exile Karl Roßmann along predetermined ideological lines. Redolent of the themes and the tenor of political debate in the 1960s - rather than the more placid *Zeitgeist* of the early 1980s when the film was made - the title would seem to signal an interpretation, such as Klaus Hermsdorf's, which sees the novel as an explicit condemnation of the age of capitalism.¹⁷ Jean-Marie Straub's characterization of the title as "sehr unvorsichtig und ein bißchen brutal" acknowledges its provocative implications.¹⁸ However, Straub insists that the term *Klassenverhältnisse* does not serve as a summary of content and the indication of a stance. Thus he explains: "Wenn der Film tatsächlich plakativ von

Klassenverhältnissen geredet hätte, dann hätte ich ihn nicht so genannt. Gerade weil er es nicht tut, war der Titel gut.”¹⁹

The interaction at work between Kafka's text and Straub/Huillet's *Klassenverhältnisse* is indeed of a greater complexity than the title might lead us to believe. Whereas the title boldly posits a capitalist system as the driving force of the world presented in the film, the viewer soon realizes that Straub/Huillet remain strikingly reticent about matters of politics or economy. Their omission of Roßmann's silent deliberations on his misadventures and the description of the wider social context of America, makes *Klassenverhältnisse* a film which is far more restrained than Kafka's novel fragment, when it comes to providing images of power and suppression. Where the writer describes working conditions which recall scenes from the inferno of human labour such as Fritz Lang devised it in *Metropolis*, Straub/Huillet's *Klassenverhältnisse* refrains from such visualization.

In the critical reactions to *Klassenverhältnisse*, the seeming mismatch between title and film is repeatedly commented on.²⁰ However, as is the case with other film titles Straub/Huillet have chosen for their works - most notably *Nicht Versöhnt* - the term *Klassenverhältnisse* points to the indivisible unity of style and content which characterizes the filmic construction. Straub/Huillet's America is a world in which class relations do not reign as an abstract principle to be explained and verbalised. Rather, it is a world suffused by such relations in even its minutest aspect. Straub/Huillet evolve a form of representation that scans its source material for the conditions of existence which have become encoded into it, and they etch these conditions into the resources of their medium. Out of this arises a form of filmic representation which never merely accompanies or conveys the story of Karl Roßmann, but which seems to investigate the language that Kafka has presented it in. Rather than telling us what we will be shown and told, the title *Klassenverhältnisse* encourages us to look and listen for what there is to see and hear.

After seven years of working with non-narrative forms, *Klassenverhältnisse* marked Straub/Huillet's return to a film based on an extended storyline. As Jean-Marie Straub explains with characteristic candor, by 1983 he had: "die Nase voll von Filmen, die nichts erzählen."²¹ The plot of *Klassenverhältnisse* evolves in quick, linear progression. It is constructed around the focal, continuous presence of a protagonist. Reflecting the chapter division of Kafka's *Der Verschollene* in its episodic structure, the plot of *Klassenverhältnisse* evolves in seven segments. These maintain the novel's narrative trajectory of Karl Roßmann's sudden rise and protracted fall. The fragment's last chapter, *Das Naturtheater von Oklahoma*, with its dreamlike depiction of a utopia which has not previously materialised for Roßmann in this New World, - this is omitted from the film.

In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the story of Karl Roßmann unfolds as an insistently recurring pattern of appropriation and exclusion. The first segment of the film - which assumes an expository function for the film with regard to aspects of narrative construction, as well as stylistic treatment - establishes this narrative dynamic. Roßmann's very presence in America is the result of his banishment from the social context of his family. After he had fathered a child with a servant girl, his parents sent him into exile. On arrival in New York Harbour he falls into a spurious communion of solidarity with the stoker - with whom he merely seems to share a degree of misfortune and national prejudice - and becomes the spokesperson for the man's grievances. While seeking to attain justice in a cause about which he knows little, Roßmann is identified by his rich senator uncle, who has come to collect him and take him under his wing. This sudden integration into an elevated social class ends any possibility of communication with the stoker, whose concerns dwindle to an unresolved narrative sideline.

Mapping out the social strata of the New World from top to bottom, this pattern of integration and exclusion is played through in a variety of constellations across the film. Thus Roßmann's banishment from the superior social class to which he has gained access so

instantaneously and effortlessly, follows without fail. By now living with his uncle, Roßmann accepts the invitation from Pollunder, ostensibly a friend of the uncle, to his country residence. He does so despite the uncle's initial unwillingness to agree to the excursion, and his only grudgingly given approval. The punishment is quick to follow: the uncle disowns his nephew.

Finding himself in the position of an outcast again, Roßmann joins Robinson and Delamarche, two representatives of the sub-proletariat on their westward journey in pursuit of jobs and gold. When his two "Kameraden" search and deplete his belongings, he decides to leave them for the offer of accommodation, and a job as a lift-boy in a hotel. Roßmann's progress in the world of work is presented as a succession of hiring and firing. While he is on duty Robinson appears in a drunken state and collapses. Roßmann, who takes him to his bedstead, is presently accused of neglecting his work, subjected to an interrogation by the *Operportier* and the *Oberkassierer* and finally sacked. The ailing Robinson is accompanied back to his house by him where Delamarche is already expecting them. Refusing to stay with him and his mistress Brunelda, Roßmann arouses the suspicion of a passing policeman. On the run from impending arrest, he ends up in the very place he sought to avoid. The captivity with Brunelda takes Roßmann into a social twilight zone. Hers is a realm of pure domination which seems arcane by comparison to the social structures to which the film has alluded up to now.

The final scene of the filmic narrative is marked by the open-endedness of this recurring pattern of domination and exclusion. After a foiled attempt to escape, an abrupt and unexplained narrative shift occurs. We see Roßmann in the street as he studies a recruitment poster for the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, and must therefor assume that he has succeeded in fleeing from his tormentors. The next shot shows him being vetted and accepted by representatives of the Nature Theatre. This is followed by the last view we get of Roßmann. It

shows him as he travels towards a destination and future which must remain the object of our surmise.

This alternation of domination and exclusion is presented to us, not through dramatized events but through the recurrent action of people talking and listening to each other. Straub/Huillet's film script is a highly clipped version of Kafka's text, which is based on a rigorous selection of central dialogue passages. The only major exception to this is Therese's account of her mother's death, which is rendered in indirect speech in the novel, but delivered as a monologue in the film.

The successive conversations to which we become witness are rarely to be described as moments of communication, but rather as the enactment of power constellations and instances of misapprehension. The world of *Klassenverhältnisse* is inhabited by characters who either pursue their goal of domination with a ferocious determination, as we can observe in the uncle, the *Oberkellner* and Brunelda, or they survive by subordination as the stoker does, when he is faced with representatives of authority in his claim for justice. The precarious coexistence with those in power which Delamarche and the *Oberköchin* try to maintain, seems the only other viable alternative to either of these forms of behaviour.

Against the background of the narrative regularities and parallels outlined above, shifts in character function and position are highlighted. As the same characters appear in different constellations, changing sets of hierarchies emerge. When we encounter the uncle at the beginning of the film he seems to control the further narrative development. However, he has to struggle to maintain this commanding position when faced with Pollunder's insistent invitation to Karl: eventually he has to concede a temporary defeat.

The power relations between the characters become most evident in the focal scenes of the film's individual episodes. As sets of characters are brought together in different constellations, the communicative function of speech is distorted by an inexorable drive

towards domination. A central rationale for Straub/Huillet's distillation of dialogue passages from *Der Verschollene* becomes apparent here. They condense their source text into a succession of linguistic battles for superiority which document the deformation of human interaction.

The relentless intentionality with which individuals encounter each other is a central theme in Kafka's writing. He refers to it as "Der Kampf der Subjekte." Jörgen Kobs summarizes this phenomenon concisely as "die Geste einer Welt, in der bewußtseinsbegabte Wesen zueinander in Beziehung stehen und ihre Unbedingtheitsansprüche vertreten."²² It is around this recurring gesture that the narrative of *Klassenverhältnisse* revolves.

While domination seems to be the overriding goal pursued in *Klassenverhältnisse*, the film remains opaque on what ultimately motivates the characters to seek such superiority. Thus, we never find out what machinations lie behind Pollunder's invitation to Roßmann, or why Mr Green should want to delay Roßmann's departure from Pollunder's house in the country. He makes Roßmann miss a deadline which, if kept, would have saved him from his uncle's punishment. But the reason behind his actions remains unexplained. Domination, it seems, is a goal per se in this world. As the *Oberportier* states, when asserting his authority by searching Roßmann before his departure from the Hotel Occidental: "Ich bin zwar überzeugt, daß ich nichts finden werde, aber durchsucht mußst du sein!" A similarly unsatisfactory explanation for the rules by which they are made to live is given by characters who become the object of suppression. During a conversation between Roßmann and Robinson in the course of their eviction onto Brunelda's balcony, Roßmann asks his fellow captive: "Warum dürfen wir denn nicht hineingehen?" He is hardly enlightened by the answer: "Nun, solange es nicht geläutet hat, dürfen wir nicht hineingehen." The stoker's reply to a question by Roßmann in the first episode of the film, flaunts the impersonal, undefined and pervasive causation which governs this world. Responding to Roßmann's question whether he intends to quit his job because he

"does not like it there", the stoker tells him: "Ja, das sind die Verhältnisse, es entscheidet nicht immer, ob es einem gefällt oder nicht."

The film's withholding of salient information and events, the constant equivocation about causes, coupled with an at times comical incongruity of those causes which are explicitly stated, becomes a constant source for the viewer's attention in *Klassenverhältnisse*. The causal indeterminacy of the narrative construction is all the more palpable since the concept of causality is extensively invoked in the extended dialogue scenes. Examples from scene five of *Klassenverhältnisse* illustrates the prominence which is given to the search for reasons in the film.

Here, the stoker, aided by Roßmann, seeks redress for the injustices he has allegedly suffered. The ensuing conversation is ostensibly concerned with establishing the reasons and the veracity of his complaint. In the course of this scene, the viewer is confronted with a series of diverging accounts of the matter. Not only do these contradict each other, they also resonate with their own inconsistencies. The German stoker who has presented himself as the victim of xenophobia then rails against the authority of the Romanian Schubal on a German ship. Faced with representatives of power, Roßmann, who has already amply displayed his lack of experience, and who hardly knows the stoker, defends him as the victim of slander and attempts to bolster his own credibility by referring to his repeated conversations with the same stoker. The *Oberkassierer* makes the stoker out to be a "Querulant", a person with a compulsive need to complain. The captain, for his part, sees the stoker's grievances as a welcome pretext for curtailing the powers of the *Obermaschinist* Schubal. Schubal in turn declares himself entirely innocent of any dishonesty - which is not what he was accused of in the first place; and finally the uncle misrepresents the entire incident as a minor altercation between two "Maschinisten." As no authoritative account of the event is forthcoming, and as our insight into the events is as restricted as Roßmann's himself, we have no way of judging

these diverging versions against an objectively rendered reality - the search for a reason remains inconclusive.

At other times, causes which propel events are quite explicitly and authoritatively posited, yet they remain strangely unsatisfactory. Asked about the reason for his enforced exile by the stoker, Roßmann simply answers: "Ach was!" The stoker accepts his evasiveness without further questioning. However, only a little later, this blatant causal gap in the narrative seems to be plugged by the uncle. When he is united with his nephew, he takes it upon himself to disclose the sexual transgression which led to Roßmann's banishment. However, he prefaces this by establishing both the gravity and the insignificance of the event in almost the same breath. He states: "Ich will zwar durchaus nicht beschönigen, was mein Neffe gemacht hat, daß er so gestraft worden ist, aber sein Verschulden ist ein solches, daß sein einfaches Nennen schon genug Entschuldigung enthält." He then proceeds to give a detailed explanation of the careful and circumspect actions which have brought about the meeting with his nephew Karl. What, however, the viewer has had occasion to witness, is the result of an accumulation of coincidences which borders on the comical.

In *Klassenverhältnisse* a recurring pattern of events, the linearity of Roßmann's social decline, the narrow range of motivations that drives the characters, this combines into a narrative construction of almost rigid formal unity. Once established, the narrative regularities soon attain the self-perpetuating momentum of a downward spiral. It is against this background of a seemingly unstoppable and unquestioningly accepted logic, that the "foreignness" of Karl Roßmann takes shape. It is his ignorance and his questioning of the rules which govern this New World, together with his indefatigable desire to be part of a social context, which brings him into a series of collisions with the power structures he encounters. However, despite traversing the world he encounters as an insistent asker of questions, Roßmann does not come to formulate any insights or draw conclusions on the

rationale and logic which rule this world for the film's audience. In the words of Danièle Huillet "Roßmann rebelliert, wie er atmet, d.h. er rebelliert nicht."

If Roßmann's progress is that of a protagonist in search of the causes which expedite his fate, then it is a quest in which the audience must participate. With the film's causal gaps forcefully established in the early portions of the film, the viewer's attention is soon deflected from the tale to the telling, and thus to the manner in which events are narrated. It is in the workings of style that we are made to seek for the precise nature of the "Verhältnisse", of which the stoker speaks so ominously, and which the film's title identifies so explicitly.

The stylistic texture of the film offsets diversity against sparseness. It is to the second of these defining features that our attention will turn first. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, an impression of acute economy of style is created to a considerable degree by certain aspects of the acting. Thus, the film's action amounts to a highly limited set of movements and gestures. Sitting down, getting up, standing, taking a step, the turning of a head, changing the direction of a gaze, the lifting of an arm or bringing this to bear on another actor, are the salient elements of a coherent choreography of movements which spans the entire film. Their scarcity makes instances in which Straub/Huillet draw from this restricted repertoire of movements and gestures highly visible. The fact that gestures and actions are performed with a denaturalizing, and at times almost mechanical deliberation, heightens the impact of even the minutest action which does occur.

Characters' costumes are similarly indicative of a narration which exercises rigorous control over the means at its disposal. Rather than denoting individual character traits, costumes differ mainly in their degree of formality. This is most apparent in the case of Roßmann. His outfit only changes in response to his altered social standing. Variations such as the addition of a worker's cap, when he is expelled from the social class represented by the uncle, or the loss of

his jacket, which he leaves behind when he frees himself from the clutches of the *Oberportier* after his dismissal, signal the narrative downward spiral.

Utilitarian sets match this stylistic sparseness. Any notion of authenticity, and thus of a realistic portrayal of life in America, is conspicuously avoided in them. Only once - at the very beginning of the film - is America recognizably cited in a shot of the Statue of Liberty. For the remainder of the film Roßmann's place of exile is presented as a geographically and historically indeterminate place. The barrenness of the indoor sets further contributes to this lack of specificity and verisimilitude. Most of the scant furniture that structures the indoor sets is of a pronounced stylistic neutrality. Throughout, linear shapes dominate; most prominently these are associated with the multiple doors through which characters make their entry or exit. Rather than characterising the figures which inhabit them, these sets serve to interact with the actors' pre-ordained choreography of movements. Outdoor sets, too, seem to be chosen for their graphic impact rather than as illustration. They are very notable for the strong linear accents which they introduce into the shot space. Thus, for instance, Straub/Huillet's filming of a clearing in a forest, segments space with a set of very pronounced vertical lines. In the overall context of the film, these graphic accents create a notable play of structures, of verticals and horizontals which intersect the diegesis like a grid system. As is the case with the other visual elements of the film, the black and white photography supports the impression of a stylistic drive towards abstraction.

The visual sparseness of *Klassenverhältnisse* finds an equivalent in its highly purified soundscapes. As all of Straub/Huillet's films, this too was shot with original sound. However, in *Klassenverhältnisse* this practice documents a sonic texture which has been carefully pre-shaped. Dietrich Kuhlbrod's description of Straub's spirited efforts to eliminate the extraneous noise of cars in their shooting of outdoor scenes, demonstrates convincingly that the soundscapes of *Klassenverhältnisse* are no less the result of a creative design than the

visual style.²³ By their sparse sound mix, Straub/Huillet isolate language and atmospheric sounds which emanate from the actors for our attention. In the indoor sets, a concentration on dialogue intelligibility combines with the crisp audibility of noises such as the fall of footsteps which become the sonic markers of Roßmann's changing fortunes.

This summary of salient stylistic features in *Klassenverhältnisse* points to a narration which is visible at every turn. The sparseness of the visual and sonic texture marks a film that is meticulously constructed, and which is the result of a stringent selection. The world of *Klassenverhältnisse* declares itself to be built up in its entirety by narration. In it, no detail seems accidental, everything has a function. It is not a world in all its visible detail which is shown here, but one which is reduced to the structures running through it. The result is a tight stylistic weave in which parallels, opposites and variations become foregrounded. Helmut Binder's remark about the function of detail in Kafka's writing, "eine vollständige Integration aller Darstellungsmomente bezieht noch das unbedeutendste Anschauungselement einer Szene in übergeordnete Zusammenhänge ein", can be readily transposed to Straub/Huillet's *Klassenverhältnisse*.²⁴

It is at this juncture that the title discloses its significance for the filmic representation which Straub/Huillet evolve in their encounter with Kafka. They do not take their cue from an assumed signification of the source text, but from the structure of the language itself. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the discontinuities and faultlines in Kafka's language are translated into a stylistic system which inscribes the diegetic and sonic fabric with these disjunctures. Straub/Huillet adapt Kafka for the screen by taking him literally. Consisting almost entirely of images of actors as they speak or listen, *Klassenverhältnisse* features a palpable concentration on language. With few exceptions, the visualization of Kafka's *Der Verschollene* presents us with actors who turn his writing into speech. However, Kafka's language is also formative for the filmic representation of the film's recurring dialogue scenes.

In illustrating the way in which style in *Klassenverhältnisse* is derived from the source text, Noël Burch's observations on how subject matter engenders form in Jean Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu* furnish a helpful parallel. Burch notes that "the mistaken identity of lovers and the mutual meddlings of servants and masters in each other's world" which extends into "the mad chases back and forth, the continual comings and goings of all sorts," set off "a complementary stylistic play of depth of field and the off-screen" which becomes the prominent feature of the film's intriguing form. In *La Règle du Jeu*, "subject matter" - defined by Burch as the formal structures inherent in a conceptually connotated "theme" - is "contained in microcosm not only in each sequence, but in almost every shot."²⁵ Jean-Marie Straub puts forward a strikingly similar distinction between "theme" and "subject." "Un thème" he differentiates, is "une chose conceptuelle, mais un sujet est un bloc de réalité."²⁶ In yet another instance of reflection on the title *Klassenverhältnisse*, Jean-Marie Straub explains and demonstrates the "theme" which he and Danièle Huillet distilled from the film's source text. In a statement accompanied by visual enactment he elaborates:

Wir wollten mit dem Titel nur sagen, es geht so (er macht mit der Hand eine Bewegung in vertikaler Richtung), und es geht auch so (er macht mit der Hand eine horizontale Bewegung). Und in beiden Fällen finden Verhältnisse nicht statt. Es sind Klassenunterschiede, und sie wirken als Klassenverhältnisse und es wird immer abgebrochen.²⁷

Viewed from this angle Straub/Huillet's film title, *Klassenverhältnisse*, raises issues of style, of a form of representation which is commensurate with the disjunctures which Straub/Huillet detect in Kafka's language.

The stylistic sparseness which marks *Klassenverhältnisse*, calls forth the notion of "minimalism" which has frequently been applied to Straub/Huillet's work. However, against the background of narrative parallelisms, which are processed with remarkable stylistic rigor and economy, two filmic elements of *Klassenverhältnisse* become the subject of stylistic

proliferation and diversity. These are the enactment of language and the representation of space. They become the prime means, whereby Straub/Huillet turn class relations into the “blocks of reality” as which Burch describes a filmic subject.

In the performance of Kafka’s language both the spectrum of voices and the prosodic patterns of speech which we hear are marked by a rich diversity. In working with their biggest ever cast Straub/Huillet develop a breadth of variation which is highlighted in Jean-Marie Straub’s description of *Klassenverhältnisse* as “Oratorium.” Wolfram Schütte describes this musical genre as “die epischste Form der dramatischen Musik mit menschlicher Stimme in der europäischen Musiktradition. Statisch als Großform ... erlaubt sie in ihren einzelnen Teilen - von der Arie bis zum Chorsatz - eine ungeheure dynamische Ausdrucks-Breite und - Vielfalt.”²⁸ A highly heterogeneous scope of voices, accents, and individual idiosyncrasies of speech is thrown into sharp relief against a sparse stylistic background. At times the timbre, pitch and volume of the vocal instrumentation of Kafka’s language becomes an audible indication of a character’s position in the network of power constellations of *Klassenverhältnisse*. In one of the exchanges in Pollunder’s Landhaus, this connection between characters’ vocal characteristics and their role in the narrative is flaunted. Roßmann’s function as a lonely questioning voice in the strangely disjointed world of *Klassenverhältnisse* seems to be acknowledged by the servant in the Pollunder household. When Roßmann asks him whether he should speak louder to make himself understood, the servant replies “Nein. Sie haben eine klare Stimme.”

At the extreme ends of the instrumentation of language through voice, are the deep reverberations which denote the uncles’ authority, and the subdued and hesitant tones of the *Oberköchin*. When she bars Roßmann from seeing the ailing Robinson home after Roßmann has been dismissed from his job at the Hotel Occidental, her vocal ineptness when issuing a command audibly belies her claim to authority. In an earlier shot in the same scene, we

observe the opposite phenomenon. Here, the *Oberkellner*, who interrogates Roßmann about his alleged neglect of duties, shouts down any possible defence by his victim. Bellowing his command: "Ich will nichts weiter hören!", he casts off a vocal restraint which has been audible all along.

Straub/Huillet's search for heterogeneity in the performance of language is reflected in the diversity of a cast, which mixes professional actors such as Mario Adorf or Laura Betti - who does not speak or understand German - and lay actors from various linguistic backgrounds and walks of life. With all of these, Straub/Huillet evolve a pre-filmic treatment of the text. Straub/Huillet evolve a system of notation which prescribes prosodic patterns in minute detail. They confront the actors' individual characteristics of speech, their sense of rhythm and even their breathing patterns with the content and linguistic construction of specific dialogue passages. A highly unconventional form of script with indications of accents, lesions, pauses and moments of retardation, and a wide variety of types of dialogue delivery is derived from the work with the actors. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, this ranges from the highly stylized - such as the stilted and mechanic rendition of the actor of Mister Green - to the more conventionally naturalistic - as in Libgart Schwarz's performance as Theresa. In *Klassenverhältnisse* there are as many styles of rendition as there are characters.

However, this individualisation of language is not of a psychologically expressive kind: extensive rehearsals of these pattern of scansion are followed by a similarly intensive process of filming. As Jean-Marie Straub explains, the extremely luxuriant shooting ratio of *Klassenverhältnisse* - one hundred and twenty six minutes of film are cut from a total of twenty-five hours of sound film - not least serves to continue the work on the spoken language by wearing down clichéd patterns of expressiveness. The prosodic patterns evolved by Straub/Huillet in collaboration with the actors aid the same purpose. One of the most striking illustrations of the filmmakers' eschewal of conventional notions of expressivity in the

dialogue delivery occurs in a conversation between Roßmann and the servant in the Pollunder household. In passing, the servant mentions the fact that Mister Pollunder's daughter Clara is engaged to Karl's acquaintance, Mister Mack. This information comes as a surprise not just to Roßmann but also to the viewer. So far Mack has only been referred to in his capacity as Karl's instructor in the art of riding, and neither Mister Pollunder nor the uncle have hinted at the connection mentioned by the servant. Yet, Roßmann's reply, "Das wußte ich freilich nicht", is delivered in a dead pan manner and gives not the merest indication that this news might have astonished him. It takes the servant's reply to make us infer this. His question: "Überrascht Sie das so?", flaunts the absence of expressive intonation in Karl's words. Furthermore, this brief exchange highlights the fact that the function of speech in *Klassenverhältnisse* differs greatly from that which it holds in dominant film style. In Straub/Huillet's film the spoken word does not serve as the carrier medium for character traits and motivations. It is not the prime vehicle for the transmission of the psychological causation as it expedites the dominant narrative.²⁹

Across the different acting styles in *Klassenverhältnisse*, we can detect a patterned use of devices which points to the significance which Straub/Huillet attribute to the performance of language. As demonstrated above, one of the features which challenges our comprehension in the rendition of Kafka's text, is the toning down of expressiveness. The relative monotony of intonation that ensues has been one of the most frequently reiterated points of criticism of Straub/Huillet's work. Unfailingly, it is the denaturalizing stylization of language which caught the attention of critics in *Klassenverhältnisse*.³⁰ Here, as in previous discussions of their films, observations about the idiosyncratic nature of dialogue rendition, are accompanied by the suggestion that this formative element of Straub/Huillet's aesthetics would deserve further analysis. Thus Gertrud Koch remarks on the unconventional prosodic patterns in the actors' styles of delivery: "im einzelnen läßt sich da wohl zeigen, daß der Titel des Films,

Klassenverhältnisse. einen genauen Sinn hat.”³¹ Koch’s passing observation is indicative of the scant analytical attention which the formal detail of Straub/Huillet’s work with language has generally received. If this omission might be seen to reflect the primacy of the visual in film criticism, a shift of attention is certainly required in an analysis of *Klassenverhältnisse*.

The central importance which Straub/Huillet ascribe to the spoken word and its performance does indeed merit detailed analysis. The meticulous speech patterns that the filmmakers evolve in *Klassenverhältnisse* are derived in response to Kafka’s language. To analyze the rationale behind the filmmakers’ treatment of the text, the salient characteristics of Kafka’s language from which Straub/Huillet take their departure, must therefore come into view. The prominence which they attribute to the language in *Klassenverhältnisse* signals their desire to retrace the path laid out by the writer for his readers’ expedition for truth. The incongruities and ambiguities of Kafka’s texts are the linguistic sediments, the material evidence of a state of consciousness. The world which is presented to us in the writer’s epic works, is always a reality refracted and filtered, never an objectifiable fact. Confining his reader to the mental horizon of the K’s, Kafka’s narrational stance affords us no authorial comment which might explain the bizarre deformations of the world which is conjured up in his writing. In the literature on Kafka this central narrative principle of Kafka’s epic works, and the process of reading which it elicits, has been summarized under the term “Einsinigkeit.” Peter Beicken defines this concept in the following words:

Wenn nur mitgeteilt wird, was in den Bewußtseinsbereich der Persektivgestalt fällt, wenn ihr Bewußtseinshorizont die Grenzen des Mitteilbaren bildet, so darf der Leser die durch die Perspektivgestalt vermittelte Welt nicht als allgemeine Wirklichkeit einordnen, sondern muß sie als perspektivische Wirklichkeit einordnen, das heißt sie als Funktionen des Bewußtseins dieser Perspektivgestalt verstehen.³²

Here, the *Kafkaesque* ambiguities reveal their saliency and function in the interaction with the readers: they seek to encourage them to break through the circles of perception which enclose

Kafka's protagonists, and to scan the language for cues why the K's incessant attempts to grasp the world of phenomena and beings as a coherent whole, fails time and again. If Kafka's language thus reflects a world which defies our empirical knowledge, the reasons for this are not readily apparent, but rather hidden behind a linguistic surface of deceptive normality.

In his study on *Der Verschollene*, Jörgen Kobs identifies three prime semantic and syntactical features of a literary language which critics have often characterized as sober, distanced and impersonal. Exploring the stages of progression in Kafka's manuscript of *Der Verschollene*, Kobs identifies the writer's pronounced preference for semantic generality. By replacing "einen Begriff, der ohnehin nicht sonderlich prägnant ist, durch einen noch blasseren, neutraleren, unbestimmteren", Kafka pursues a style often marked by a lack of lexical variation which makes it seem strikingly artless.³³ Moreover, Kobs remarks upon the prominence of a nominal style in Kafka's writing. Thus, for instance, the uncle informs us that it was "zur Vermeidung der Alimentenzahlung" that Roßmann's parents sent their son away. He continues by reporting about the "an mich gerichteten Brief, der nach langen Irrfahrten gestern in meinen Besitz kam." This correspondence contained "die ganze Geschichte samt Personenbeschreibung meines Neffen und vernünftigerweise auch Namensnennung des Schiffs." Accumulations of nouns as they are cited here are a salient device whereby Kafka suggests the workings of a pre-ordained and strangely unfathomable logic behind the events and actions he describes. They leave the reader with the impression that occurrences are detached from any agency, that they unfold mechanically, and in the service of a cause and design which ultimately remains opaque.

Analyzing Kafka's syntax, Kobs acknowledges certain idiosyncrasies of word order. However, he also points out that such unconventional, syntactical features are offset against an overall tendency towards attenuated structures and rhythmic regularities. Notable for the absence of "hochaffektivischen Hyperbata", "kühnen Inversionen" or "spannungsreich

gestauchten Periodenbildungen". Kafka's syntax thus provides the structural support for a style of writing which superficially seems to hold few challenges for the reader or listener.³⁴

The sum of the features outlined above, is a language which, as Kobs points out, is general and sober to a degree that makes it remarkable in a literary context. According to Kobs, Kafka's language hides "ihre Eigenschaft (und damit auch ihre Leistung, ihre inhaltliche Funktion) hinter Ihrer Unauffälligkeit. [Kafka's] Meisterschaft besteht ... gerade darin, das Ungewöhnliche in der Vermittlung und Überlagerung durch das Gewöhnliche darzustellen."³⁵ With their stylization of Kafka's dialogues for the fleeting perception by a listener to film sound, Straub/Huillet carve into this deceptively inconspicuous linguistic surface.

Stylistic regularities which cut across the diversity of types of rendition in *Klassenverhältnisse*, point to the defamiliarising function which underlies Straub/Huillet's treatment of Kafka's language. A frequent and unsettling feature of the actors' delivery, is the interruption through expressively unwarranted retardation. Such syncopation is put to particularly striking effect when it is applied to collocations, that is a combination of words which has become so widely used, that we can anticipate a construction upon hearing an initial component in a given context. Early on in the film, an example of this occurs when Roßmann responds to the stoker's account of the discrimination he alleges to have suffered. After a brief moment of reflection, Roßmann asks him: "Waren Sie schon beim Kapitän? Haben Sie schon bei ihm Ihr Recht / gesucht?" (Slashes in the text indicate pauses in the delivery). This temporal delay in the progression of a familiar and common turn of phrase, questions its apparent transparency of meaning. Stopped in our cognitive tracks, we are made aware of the material components of a semantic structure which has been effaced by common usage. The deflection of our attention from the meaning to the words raises questions such as: Why should rights have to be searched for? Have they been displaced in the way one would lose track of an object, and must their retrieval now be a matter largely dependent on luck? And

finally, why should the stoker's rights be in the safekeeping of the Captain? In view of the stoker's disparaging response to Roßmann's suggestion: "Ach gehen Sie, gehen Sie lieber weg, Sie hören nicht zu, was ich sage", our doubts turn on Roßmann himself. Does his implicit assumption, that justice will prevail if only sought with the highest authority on the ship, not show us just how out of his depth he is in this situation? The divide between Roßmann - the *petit bourgeois* who quotes the fact that now he might become a stoker too as the measure of his misery - and the *Heizer* - the nameless worker on the ship's lowest deck - is unearthed under the surface texture of Kafka's language by means of speech. When the stoker tells Roßmann that he will quit his job, the latter asks back: "Sie verlassen / das Schiff?" The pause between this highly unspecific combination of terms, highlights the underlying assumption that the stoker's actions are an expression of his own free will. That this is not the case, is presently highlighted when the stoker translates Roßmann's statement into his own language: "Jawohl, wir marschieren heute ab!" comes his answer.

Perhaps the most striking example of such a roughening of speech through moments of temporal retardation, occurs when an audible gap between a conventionalised combination of words opens up a space for its semantic inversion. When Delamarche, after breaking open Roßmann's suitcase in his absence, claims: "Wir haben ihm unser Vertrauen / geschenkt", this suspension of meaning elicits the words which are a far more accurate description for his abuse of Roßmann's trust. Theirs is a relationship in which "Vertrauen" has been blatantly "mißbraucht."

By contrast to these overt disruptions of the flow of language, *Klassenverhältnisse* also contains repeated examples of a delivery which closely accompanies, rather than dissects the meaning of the words. Such instances are predominantly associated with extensive hypotactical and paratactical constructions. The uncle's speech in the first episode, as well as statements by Pollunder and Clara in the second, may serve as illustration for this. All of these

extended statements revolve around an instance of reasoning - be it the uncle's explanation of the circumstances by which the meeting with his nephew has been brought about; Pollunder's explanation, why Roßmann cannot be driven back to his uncle, or Clara's pre-emptive justification for why she might decide to drive Roßmann to suicide in retribution for the indifference he has displayed towards her. The linguistic form which these accounts of causation take, is the linear and even syntax as it is commented on by Kobs. As the characters' reasoning unfolds, it is supported and reflected by a clear syntactical progression. The delivery emphasizes this clarity of the linguistic structure. Pauses separate steps of the argument from each other; cohesive devices such as "aber" or "wenn" are stressed. Yet this emphatically structured rendering does not yield clarity of meaning. The uncle's explanations for the meeting with his nephew are based on causal connections which raise more questions than they answer. Pollunder's digressions about the unavailability of his chauffeur and why this does not mean that Roßmann will be prevented from doing as he pleases, seem as spurious and uncalled for as they are detailed. What is demonstrated here is a distorted causality behind the linguistic facade. The pursuit of domination is masked as logic, and the emphatic enactment of linguistic constructions which express the connection of cause and effect only foregrounds the discrepancy between language and meaning in these utterances.

Straub/Huillet's notation of dialogue delivery in *Klassenverhältnisse* also creates patterns which run through the entire film, and which thus create audible *leitmotifs*. This is most apparent in the rendition of personal pronouns. The act of referring both to oneself and to others, is always an emphatic one. Thus in scene five the *Oberkassierer* hurls the word "Sie" at the stoker with a vocal ferocity which is underlined by Straub/Huillet's editing, and the carefully choreographed body movement of actors. In synchronisation with the *Oberkassierer* rising from his seat, Straub/Huillet cut abruptly from a long shot to a close-up. This mode of address introduces the *Oberkassierer's* subsequent demolition of any claims and complaints

on the part of the stoker. The thrust of this verbal attack contrasts with another instance later in the same scene. Now Schubal has entered the linguistic arena and mounted his defence against the accusations which he suspects the stoker of having leveled against him in his absence. Ignoring Schubal's points entirely, the captain turns to the uncle instead to pick up the thread of the conversation where it was interrupted before Schubal's entrance. With his question, "Wollten Sie/ nicht den jungen Menschen etwas fragen, / Herr Jakob?" he sweeps away Schubal's defence against the stoker (bold print in the text indicates a stress in the delivery). Not only is the word "Sie" heavily emphasized, but the captain also accompanies it by a deferential bow in the direction of the uncle. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, referring to oneself or addressing others, resembles an act of demarcation, and is a means of putting characters into their place. In Straub/Huillet's dramatization of the "Kampf der Subjekte", the voicing of a personal pronoun equates to taking and marking stances in an ever on-going engagement.

Whereas this accentuation of the act of address seems often strangely unwarranted by what is actually said, Straub/Huillet frequently withhold emphasis where this might well be anticipated by a listener. Roßmann's previously mentioned dead-pan expression of surprise is a case in point here. In another instance in the film, Straub/Huillet create a contrast between the lack of expressivity and an emphatically intoned statement to denote different sets of hierarchies. When the uncle reveals his identity to Roßmann, the latter reacts with skepticism, and is more concerned with establishing factual accuracy than with his sudden fortune. His uncle, Karl maintains, is called Jakob by first and not, as his new-found uncle, by second name. The captain, whom he addresses with these comments, replies with the words: "So / ist es." His flat intonation of this expression of whole-hearted agreement, leaves the phrase suspended between agreement and question. The rendering seems reflective of the captain's duality of position: though the highest authority on board the ship, he is inferior in status to Roßmann's senator uncle. When appealed to by Roßmann, his answer seeks to satisfy these

conflicting demands of hierarchy. Exactly the same words are repeated only a little later by the stoker. But now they are uttered with the unambiguous emphasis one might expect them to carry. By the audible contrast to their previous enactment they denote the stoker's wholesale submission under the captain's jurisdiction.

So far this analysis of the enactment of Kafka's text in *Klassenverhältnisse*, has centred on the stylization of language through speech. However, a number of other expressive devices are enlisted in the film to probe Kafka's text. Together with the intonation, they combine into a veritable orchestration of language. In scene seven, Herr Pollunder has come to collect Roßmann for a visit to his house in the country as, according to the uncle, it had been agreed only the previous day. The protestations of mutual esteem and deference, which mark the ensuing exchanges between the uncle and Pollunder, sit uncomfortably with the way in which both lay claim to Roßmann. A battle of wills seems to rage behind the words. When Pollunder temporarily concedes defeat by saying, "Für einen Tag und eine Nacht steht es aber wirklich nicht dafür", the uncle readily endorses this with the words: "Das war auch **meine** / **Meinung**." In this rendition, unexpected retardation of the flow of language combines with intonation, facial expression, the reorientation of his eyeline and body movement, to uncover the subtext of this simplest of statements. Putting an equally profound stress on both "meine" and "Meinung", Mario Adorf drops the pitch of his voice between the two words by a considerable interval. In the time lag created by his pause, he pivots his eye-line by ninety degrees from Pollunder to Roßmann as he swivels his chair between them. Simultaneously, he transforms his smile into a frown. In one brief intervention this shot captures the duplicity of the uncle's statements: his words mean one thing when addressed to Pollunder - his social equal - but they are to be heard quite differently by Roßmann, his dependant. If any insight into the various incongruities of the situation discussed by the uncle and Pollunder emerges in this scene, then it is this: there is no common language in the world which these characters

inhabit. The fact that Roßmann does not listen and comprehend from the position of dependence assigned to him seals his fate.

Another salient stylistic component in Straub/Huillet's representation of language, is its interaction with atmospheric sound. The film's selective soundscapes not only single out sonic components for our attention, they also create the basis for interactions between them. Thus sounds can become a percussive element which beats a rhythm to speech. As Mister Green tells his story about the self-sacrificing "Treue" of his ancient servant, he accentuates it with the silvery tingle of a spoon against the porcelain of his teacup. When the *Oberkellner*, referred to by Jean-Marie Straub as "die Maschine der Lügen", holds court over Roßmann he slams the table with his fist in accompaniment to his verdict over Roßmann.³⁶

A striking example of how sound becomes part of a dense stylistic weave which makes us listen out for a meaning behind the language, occurs when the uncle tells Roßmann of the rapid expansion of his haulier business. The scene shows the two men walking swiftly along a quay. The speed of their progress is emphasized by the camera which tracks with Roßmann and the uncle as the latter recounts his American success story. This action is given a strong rhythmical accent by the fall of the two men's footsteps. This sound accompanies the uncle's words with the insistent regularity of a four-four rhythm which the uncle conducts with the downward movement of his walking stick. The uncle's final statement reflects the tenor of his account, but it also captures the momentum and speed of what we have seen. He pronounces: "Alle Entwicklungen gehen hier so schnell vor sich." The fact that the speed and progress of the two characters in this scene seem entirely in the gift of the uncle, makes this a striking reflection of his rapid and seemingly unstoppable rise to power and wealth.

At the end of this exchange, the camera comes to a standstill, the actors exit on the left and the sound of their footsteps fades. By contrast to the almost military regularity of the two characters' advance in this scene, we are now presented with the ever changing irregularities

of the water's surface. As the only movement in the scene which is dissociated from the uncle's command, this image establishes a countercurrent to his ferocious imposition of will onto the world.

Straub/Huillet annotated their shooting script for *Klassenverhältnisse* with a diary entry by Kafka which reads: "Die Metaphern sind eines in dem vielen, das mich am Schreiben verzweifeln läßt."³⁷ The author's despair about a stylistic figure which has traditionally been seen to epitomize the poetic use of language, is further explained in an earlier entry in which he discards metaphor as too "abstract." The reasons why the metaphor is a blunt linguistic instrument in Kafka's view, are summarized by Jörgen Kobs in the following words:

Ihre Bildlichkeit läßt sich nicht mehr realisieren, erscheint nicht mehr als sinnliches Substrat eines bestimmten Sachverhalts, sondern hat sich von ihrem einstigen Sachbereich abgelöst und führt nun ein unbestimmtes Eigenleben in einer abstrakt verschwimmenden Zwischenwelt jenseits aller konkreten Gegenständlichkeit.³⁸

Straub/Huillet's choice of preamble for their script is indicative of their filmic treatment of language in *Klassenverhältnisse*. Their stylized presentation of Kafka's language aims to take us back to what Kobs refers to as "sinnliches Substrat." Their interventions in the process of signification seek to audibly restore the materiality of a medium which has become effaced through habitual usage. By unsettling the processes of comprehension, they make us listen to language as the material sediment of the world. While they do not identify or explain to the viewer the "Verhältnisse" which expedite the narrative, Straub/Huillet point us towards the language in which they are encapsulated. Helmut Krebs' remark on the filmic reworking of Friedrich Hölderlin's *Der Tod des Empedokles*, succinctly summarizes this approach to language, and the aim it pursues. Krebs comments on this: "Es kommt somit nicht darauf an, von den Verhältnissen zu erzählen, sondern das Erzählen dem Zuschauer zu konfrontieren, worin die Verhältnisse selbst zur Sprache kommen."³⁹

The attention to the sonic texture in *Klassenverhältnisse* recalls some of the aspirations that inspired early statements on the artistic potential of sound in the cinema. Film theoreticians such as Siegfried Kracauer, viewed the addition of a new filmic resource with a certain amount of concern. However, in Kracauer's view, sound also offered the chance to complement the rediscovery of the world through the camera, by the exploration of its sonic fabric with the help of the microphone. The subsequent incorporation of sound into film did not live up to this perceived promise, but rather realized the fear which Kracauer had harboured - the coming of sound to cinema amounted primarily to the advent of language. The silent film metamorphosed into the "talkie."⁴⁰

The proximity of Straub/Huillet's literary adaptation to a conception of sound film, as voiced by Siegfried Kracauer, suggests itself not only by their attention to sounds, but also by the role which they ascribe to the voice in the enactment of language. In Kracauer's view, the acoustic retrieval of the world around us not only requires attention to atmospheric sound, but also a shift in the integration of the spoken word into film. Sharing the commonly held assumption that the advent of language in film could jeopardize the specificity of the medium, he counsels a "shift from the meaning of speech to its material qualities."⁴¹ Only in this way - argued Kracauer - will film remain true to its calling - to renew our awareness of the raw materials of reality.

In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the enactment of language combines extreme stylization with such a discovery of speech as part of a sonic reality. By the very heterogeneity of its vocal spectrum, the material properties of speech are foregrounded in the film. The voice engages our attention not only as the medium of meaning, but also as sound in its own right. In the words of Stephen Heath the voice as employed by Straub/Huillet "is also a certain deposit of the body, a certain 'grain', something else ..., in excess ... It is this potential excess that has become the point of emphasis, the voice used towards a heterogeneity in and against the image."⁴² As the diversity

of voices and delivery patterns meets with the stylization of the text. Straub/Huillet present us with a dialogue of material inscriptions. The imprint of the world in Kafka's text is made to interact with the different inscriptions of an individual reality in the actors' voices.

In one of the interviews on *Klassenverhältnisse*, Jean-Marie Straub has declared that language is "die einzige Schwierigkeit dieses Films" and has thus pointed to the adjustment of aural perception which the film demands from its audience.⁴³ However, there is another prominent stylistic feature which makes this a "difficult" film: the representation of space which challenges our habitual film viewing skills. The diversity of dialogue constellations that makes up *Klassenverhältnisse* provides Straub/Huillet with a point of departure for an inquiry into space which challenges reigning cinematographic norms. Taking their cue from the faultlines inscribed in the language, Straub/Huillet evolve a highly diverse system of spatial representation which renders space both highly visible and problematic.

This foregrounding of space grows out of a central feature of the narrative construction. Karl Roßmann's itinerary through America alternates between appropriation and expulsion. As one critic noted about the film's focal figure: "Immer wieder gerät er in eine vergleichbare Raumnot, entweder Räume verlassen zu wollen, die er nicht mehr verlassen kann oder darf, oder sie verlassen zu müssen, weil er gegen die 'Raumordnung' verstossen hat, die er nicht kennt."⁴⁴ Each of the seven episodes of *Klassenverhältnisse* is associated with a central space in which the further progress of Karl Roßmann comes to be decided. As two or more actors assemble in these localities axes of power are established in them. Scene III in the stoker's cabin, the scene with the biggest cast, illustrates this point amply. Here a triumvirate of representatives of power - the captain, the uncle and the *Oberkassierer* - occupy one end of the room. Roßmann and the stoker are placed at its far end. To formulate the stoker's grievances Roßmann launches himself into the middle ground between the two camps. Without delay the space which he has vacated beside the stoker is filled by a steward. Later

Schubal, the *Obermaschinist*, will take his position beside them. As Roßmann's familial link with the uncle is revealed his outpost in the center of the room provides a ground on which both can meet. The sequence ends on a shot of Roßmann as he kneels before the stoker of whom we only see the lower half. The difference in social status which has emerged between the two characters in the course of this scene finds its spatial recognition here. Only from his stooping position can Roßmann hope to reach the stoker now.

In rendering the constellations between characters visible, Straub/Huillet draw on the restricted repertoire of actors' movements: In *Klassenverhältnisse* the simple movement of leaving or occupying a space can assume the impact of taking a stance. When the *Oberköchin*'s defence of Roßmann's integrity falters and she accepts the *Oberkellner*'s version of events, she steps behind the chair on which she has been seated previously. Her change of position is an overt indication of the distance she puts between herself and her protégé.

The reification of character stance and correlation through space, is a common denominator in the aesthetics of Kafka and Straub/Huillet. Films such as *Der Tod des Empedokles*, or *Antigone* feature representational strategies by which space is turned into the external evidence of human constellations. In Kafka's *Der Verschollene*, as in the two other novel fragments, we find numerous passages which charge space in a comparable fashion. When, for instance, Roßmann dares contradict his new-found uncle by his insistence on justice for the stoker, it is his co-ordinates in the figure arrangement which provide him with a launching pad and justification for this action. The passage reads: "Er stand zwischen dem Onkel und dem Kapitän und glaubte durch diese Stellung beeinflusst, die Entwicklung in der Hand zu haben."⁴⁵ As Kafka's protagonists measure out space, the reader can trace their progress in a continuously established locality.⁴⁶ As Hartmut Binder points out in this connection, a continuous space is established in Kafka's writing by a succession of scenes, "die auf einer

hinsichtlich der Personenzuordnung und der Requisiten scharf konturierten Erzählbühne spielen, Kafka hat sozusagen Regieanweisungen und deren Inszenierungen 'auskomponiert' und in die Darstellung eingebracht."⁴⁷ In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the spatial orientation of the viewer becomes problematic by comparison. Where the film's mise-en-scène is shot through with fissures, the filmic representation of space cracks this apart in its own arresting fashion.

To define Straub/Huillet's break with classic scenographic space in *Klassenverhältnisse*, it will be helpful to survey the concept of narrativisation of space as it informs dominant film form. Stephen Heath has pointed out, that the classical Hollywood style presents us with a space which - be it in stasis or motion - is shaped and unified by narrative logic. In classical film mode

Frame space ... is constructed as narrative space. It is narrative significance that at any moment sets the space of the frame to be followed and 'read' and that determines the development of the filmic cues in their contribution to the definition of space in film. Narrative contains the mobility that could threaten the clarity of vision in a constant renewal of perspective; space becomes place - narrative as the taking place of film.⁴⁸

This marriage of spatial continuity and narrative intelligibility calls upon the stylistic paradigm of continuity editing. As the guiding principle of spatial representation in the classical mode, this set of devices joins fragments of space into a clear and consistent whole for us.

Amongst the most salient devices contributing to this, is the establishment of an axis of action. Restricting the camera's movement within a one-hundred-and-eighty degree circumference, the "180-degree-rule" guarantees directional consistency. Under the spatial regime of dominant film form, the sequential organization of shots during a scene will be held together typically by a mastershot which affords the audience an overview of the scenographic space, and re-establishing shots which reorient us to any changes. It is against this spatial blue-print that we can chart any subsequent break-down of a locality, through the stylistic

figures of reverse angle or analytical editing. Eyeline-matches and match-on-action cuts further stitch together the scenographic space.

By such means the classical film constructs a space which is clear, continuous, and complete. Easing our spatial comprehension further is the redundancy of cues which aid our inferences. In our construction of space we will not be informed by just any one of the above devices, but by a cluster of them. Ultimately, the ready grasp of space which these procedures afford us, concentrates our attention on what is designed to be our main task in this narrative mode: the construction and comprehension of the unfolding narrative. It is around this that space is moulded into an inconspicuous shape.

In *Klassenverhältnisse* we are confronted with a very different kind of space. Here it is not the narrative but the disjunctures which run through the language that are made to "take place." The characters in Straub/Huillet's film inhabit a space which is marked by elisions and gaps, a diegesis in which an unaccounted for off-screen reality acquires a presence as forceful and permanent as that which we see. This is achieved by a spatial system which both cites and challenges dominant conventions.

Foremost amongst the hallmarks of spatial representation in *Klassenverhältnisse*, is the frequent eschewal of mastershots and re-establishing shots. Their absence is conspicuous in most of the scenes of the film in which Roßmann becomes the subject of yet another imposition or verdict. For instance, the distribution of characters in the captain's quarter is never shown in its entirety. We only ever see the scenographic islands which they inhabit. Similarly, when the uncle and Pollunder haggle over Roßmann, we merely see the spatial segments which they occupy. In the scene which ends with Roßmann's dismissal from the Hotel Occidental, an initial mastershot is provided. However, as the composition and position of characters changes and new portions of space become narratively relevant, no re-establishing shot follows to reorient us, and the spatial construction becomes destabilized.

During Roßmann's first encounter with Brunelda the camera shows only her, while Roßmann, Delamarche and Robinson are consigned to an off-screen space which is audible, but never visible.

Mastershots are not only conspicuous by their repeated omission, Straub/Huillet also signal the narration's unwillingness to provide a scenographic overview for us. This becomes palpable in the first extended conversation in the film. All the viewer ever sees of the stoker's cabin, are the two separate segments of the room which are taken up by the two characters. However, the overview which is denied to us is granted to Roßmann. As he sits down, his eyes measure out the room with great deliberation. At this early stage of the film, the extensive optical gesture seems to flaunt the fact that to understand the world which Roßmann is about to enter, we have to look out for the lines of division which run through it. It is through their perception that we will acquire the insights which will truly give us an "overview" over the world of class relations.

The break-down of space during the various conversations compounds the pull which space exerts on our attention in *Klassenverhältnisse* even further. In dominant film mode, the shot pattern most likely to be used for such scenes of characters talking to each other would be a shot/countershot sequence. In this, a character is shown from an oblique angle which is roughly reversed in the subsequent shot of a second interlocutor. Supply attuned to the subordination of space to narrative, this cinematographic representation of the conversational exchange effaces its own operations and comprehensively and seamlessly establishes space for the viewer. *Klassenverhältnisse* does not feature such a formulaic articulation of space. Straub/Huillet's cinematography processes the alternation of exchanges in response to the class relations they seek to reflect. One indication of this is the desynchronisation of the cutting point, and the dynamics of dialogue exchange. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the fluidity of the shot/countershot sequence is undermined by the fact that the camera frequently and

extensively lingers on a speaker turned listener. Thus, characters who have taken their turn are either temporarily or entirely edited out of a scene - for long intervals we hear but we do not see them.

The foregrounding of an unaccounted-for off-screen space which this entails, becomes evident in the initial conversation between the stoker and Roßmann. Straub/Huillet's editing of this scene sabotages spatial contiguity and completeness. Both the stoker and Roßmann are initially shown in perpendicular position to the background. In the shots of the stoker, this view is maintained throughout the scene. Subsequent views of Roßmann show him in high-angle close-ups from a camera position to his left. In contrast to the seamless flow of space associated with reverse-angle editing, this combination of framing and cutting avoids any overlap between the segments which the two characters inhabit. Instead they are anchored in positions around which spatial gaps are opened up.

This discontinuity is supported by a camera which never reframes in response to character movement. Nor is a change in position which exceeds the bounds of the compositional field ever recouped by match-on-action cuts. When actors overstep the frame space this action does not initiate the revelation of a wider locale, but leaves us to contemplate a vacated field of vision on which the camera rests for an extended period. If characters are shown in their new spatial context this is only the case after some temporal delay. While thus staging their reappearance at a later point, the narration flaunts the expanses of a scenographic *terra incognita* which they have crossed.

One shot composition which recurs in different contexts, and with different characters throughout the film, violates this pattern of spatial segregation. In it, we see Roßmann as he is restrained by an arm which juts into the shot space. The gesture occurs for the first time when the stoker stops Roßmann from retrieving his suitcase. Later, in Pollunder's house, Clara will exert a stranglehold on him which is framed in a similar way. The *Oberportier* establishes his

authority through the same gesture, and the end which Delamarche puts to Roßmann's attempted escape from Brunelda's apartment repeats the pattern. The implication of this shot composition is evident. Where the off-screen space which divides Roßmann from another character is crossed, an act of imposition follows. The physical proximity we see, is borne out of the intention of keeping Roßmann in place.

The representational strategies described above challenge our notions of a coherent space, but they do not imply a transgressive representation of space. Andreas Eisenhart thus overstates the case when he concludes: "Man kann sich nicht mehr orientieren, kann sich kein Bild von der Konstellation der Personen machen: eine exakte visuelle Umsetzung von Karl's Rat-und Auswegslosigkeit in dieser Situation."⁴⁹ The perceptually engaging momentum of spatial representation in *Klassenverhältnisse* lies precisely in the fact that it becomes problematic, but not contradictory. Straub/Huillet furnish their audience with both visual and audible signposts which aid its comprehension of space. However, they do so with considerable economy. By contrast to the over-determination of space through a set of functionally equivalent devices, as it is characteristic for dominant film mode, they fine-tune our senses in the construction of space.

As pointed out previously, the frequent eschewal of mastershots, the character placement and camera work in *Klassenverhältnisse* do not combine to offer an easy orientation for the viewer. Without the mental map of a mastershot, our attempts to connect the segments of a locale must rely heavily on editing devices which, in dominant film mode, would typically serve to confirm already stable assumptions about the lay-out of a space. The film's first episode demonstrates this well. In it Roßmann - who is never shown in the same shot with the stoker while in his cabin - faces the camera frontally and turns his head by about ninety degrees to the right. It is the directional feature of this gaze which allows us to infer that the two characters are placed at a right angle in relation to each other. When the cut to the Stoker

comes, this hypothesis about character position in space is confirmed, as an eye-line match is established.

Inferences about spatial proximity in this scene are further supported by alterations in sound quality. Shot-changes from a speaker to a listener are accompanied by a change of sound perspective, which allows us to gauge the unseen speaker's distance from Roßmann in the off-screen space. The foregrounding of the eyeline and the earline match which this scene establishes in the early portions of the film, is maintained throughout the film. In *Klassenverhältnisse* these two devices become the mainstay of our spatial construction. The use of both these stylistic means in *Klassenverhältnisse* merit closer analysis in comparison to the function which they by serve in dominant film style.

In his analysis of the changing parameters of sound production since the late 1920s, Rick Altman traces the development of prescriptions to sound technicians with regard to the proportionality of image and sound scale. Altman notes that the tenets of early sound technicians and theoreticians soon made way for a dominant mode of sound representation, which jettisoned notions of a strictly realistic sound perspective. Building on the fact that our optical sense overrides our hearing in the perception of space, the dominant style devises an aural texture which deviates from our everyday hearing in its lack of spatial specificity.

Rick Altman cites the reactions of sound technicians in the 1930s to recording methods, which reflected a similar lack of spatial "realism" in the reproduction of sound. He records the fact that these practices suggested an altogether different species of listener, namely a person "with five or six very long ears, said ears extending in various directions."⁵⁰ Straub/Huillet's attention to the nuances of sound perspective contrasts with the primacy which the dominant style accords to vision in the construction of space. By contrast to the sound representation of the dominant film mode, their insistence on the spatial specificity of sound jolts our perception. This insistence on fine-tuning our ears guides our attention to what is of central

importance in *Klassenverhältnisse*: the position from which characters address each other and the “Verhältnisse” that this points to.

With their pronounced use of the eyeline match, Straub/Huillet cite a central continuity device of the classical style. Stephen Heath summarises the crucial function this stylistic figure plays in welding space into a coherent whole in dominant film mode. In classical film style

the drama of vision in the film returns the drama of vision of the film: the spectator will be bound to the film as spectacle as the world of the film is itself revealed as spectacle on the basis of a narrative organization of look and point-of-view that moves space into place through the image-flow.⁵¹

In *Klassenverhältnisse* this “drama of vision” loses its self-effacing quality. As the episode in the stoker’s cabin indicates, Straub/Huillet do not use the gaze to manoeuvre space into its narrative place. This is most strikingly obvious in those instances where entire actions are replaced by directional glances. When, for example, Roßmann goes onto his knees before the stoker and appeals to him to defend his own rights, this action is only represented through a shot of the captain lowering his eyes in response to what he sees in the off-screen. Conversely, when Roßmann rises back to his feet to the words, “Lerne Deine Stellung begreifen!”, it is the uncle’s rising gaze which makes the viewer infer Roßmann’s compliance with this command.

The nature of the space which Straub/Huillet construct through the representational strategies outlined above, is aptly described by an imagery which Kafka used in a conversation with Gustav Janouch. Recording Kafka’s reaction to a drawing by George Grosz of a rich man sitting on a poor man’s back, Janouch recounts his friend’s criticism. In Kafka’s view this image fails to capture the essence of capitalism. To Grosz’s depiction of a simple logic of cause and effect he opposes a more complex model. Negating what he considers to be “die alte Ansicht des Kapitals”, he states:

Der dicke Mann trägt auch Fesseln, die in dem Bild nicht dargestellt sind. Das Bild ist nicht vollständig, darum ist es nicht gut. Der Kapitalismus ist ein System der Abhängigkeiten, die von innen nach außen, von außen nach innen gehen, von oben nach unten und von unten nach oben gehen. Alles ist abhängig, alles ist gefesselt. Kapitalismus ist ein Zustand der Welt und der Seele.⁵²

The world which Roßmann traverses seems ruled by a hermetic logic of power and domination from which even those who seem to hold the power of others - such as the uncle - are not able to extract themselves. The space presented in *Klassenverhältnisse* is reflective of a self-perpetuating system which is shot through with divisions and dependencies such as Kafka describes it above.

Against this background, one scene in the film stands out. In it, continuity editing and a classical break-down of scenographic space, mark a return to the coherent and continuous space of dominant film mode. In scene thirty-two, Therese, the *Oberköchin's* secretary at the Hotel Occidental, tells Roßmann about her mother's death at work. This extended monologue is shown as a self-contained scene in a symmetrically constructed sequence of seven shots. It starts with a centred medium shot of Therese and Roßmann at either side of a window. After six seconds, and with the onset of Therese's recollections the camera tracks in on Roßmann. Shots two and three are medium-close-ups of Roßmann and Therese in which part of the window forms the right or, in the reverse angle, the left margin of the frame. The fourth and thus central shot is a close-up of Karl. Shots five and six mirror shots two and three. Of the six cuts in the scene, five are motivated by the establishing of an eyeline from Roßmann to Therese, or vice versa. At the end of Therese's tale, the camera tracks out to re-establish the scenographic space. In her account of her mother's illness and death, Therese describes a world in which there is only space for those who are "useful", who have a workforce to sell. Recognizing her own ineptness in this scheme of things, there is only one kind of labour left for Therese's mother - her self-annihilation. This she carries out with an absurdly obedient determination.

The device of the narrative within the narrative, such as Therese's tale presents it, has a central function in Kafka's novel fragments. All three of these feature a focal story which is central to both the novels' form and meaning. These internal narratives form the apex of a symmetrical structure. In his analysis of *Der Verschollene*, Jörgen Kobs shows that chapters at either side of this central divide are marked by an inverted parallelism, and that the second part of the fragment provides the "regressive" mirror image of a progression of events in the first half.⁵³ This pivotal structural function is matched by the potential which this internal narrative holds with regard to the protagonist's further progress. As small-scale reflection of the wider narrative framework, this story within the story could act as an eye-opener for the K's, as a key to the causes for their often absurd and incoherent misfortunes.

Therese's monologue is the closest that Straub/Huillet's *Klassenverhältnisse* comes to an overt deconstruction of the capitalist promise of a secular paradise, that is the "American Dream." In her tale, the "Verhältnisse", which deny a fulfillment of Roßmann's desire for human community, take on discernible shape, and one of the verbal *leitmotifs* which runs through the film reveals its full meaning. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, the inclusion into a social context is intrinsically linked with the concept of "usefulness." Thus the *Oberkassierer* describes Roßmann as "vollständig unbrauchbar" when he sacks him from the Hotel Occidental. Delamarche tells the policeman who threatens to arrest Karl of his failed attempt "einen brauchbaren Menschen aus ihm zu machen." Towards the end of the film the word reappears prominently in written form. Roßmann's final and open-ended effort to achieve a form of social existence takes him to the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma. Emphasized by the typography on its recruitment poster, this organization advertises itself as: "das Theatre, das jeden brauchen kann, jeden an seinem Ort!" Whereas the social existence which has so far been granted to Roßmann, has been based on coercion and instrumentalisation, the Nature

Theatre extends the promise of a human community in which the realization of the individual and the social potential would not have to be forever mutually exclusive.

Therese's recollections are given a filmic reworking by Straub/Huillet which highlights their important function both in a narrative and a stylistic respect. Straub/Huillet offset this scene against the remainder of the film by diagonal tracking shots which advance into the shot space at the beginning of the scene, and recede from it at the end. As it is unique within the film, this cinematographic device is highly conspicuous. The fact that, at the onset of the sequence, we see the two characters standing silently and motionlessly beside each other for six seconds, before the camera dollies in and Therese starts to speak, heightens their impact further. As her story comes to an end and the camera tracks out, the two actors are again captured as if in a silent freeze frame before the cut comes.

The exceptional nature of this scene in *Klassenverhältnisse* is further underscored by the break-down of space. Here the editing cues us redundantly and unambiguously towards the construction of a space which is continuous and homogeneous. Whereas the spatial representation in the film generally undercuts communication through the overt disjunctures it creates, the representation of this monologue uses a rigorous sequence of reverse-angle editing which affords the viewer an easy orientation. Viewed in isolation, this citation from the stylistic repertoire of the dominant film mode would suggest the subordination of space to narrative demands. Yet in *Klassenverhältnisse* this occurs in the context of a narration which has constantly been out of gear with the expediency of storytelling, and which has challenged us with its spatial discontinuities. Against such a background, the space in this scene retains the visibility of its highly unified nature. Style is not effaced here; what constitutes the a-priori choice by which classical film processes space, comes forward as exceptional in *Klassenverhältnisse*.

As Therese tells Roßmann of her past, we witness a moment in which the assertion of supremacy, the battle of conflicting intentionality abates. Instead, an opportunity of a shared and different way of seeing offers itself both for the characters in the scene, and for its audience. The window with its open view which forms the focal point of the mastershot and the re-establishing shot, and which intersects all the other takes, seems like the material manifestation of the new outlook which this scene offers to Roßmann. As he and Therese direct their gaze at the empty window frame between them, Straub/Huillet also guide the viewers eyes towards this open and uninscribed space, the potential of a truly new world

The dramatization of Therese's story is a striking indication that the discontinuities in the world of *Klassenverhältnisse* are to be gauged against a different kind of space. But this contrasting space does not merely have a localized presence in the film, it is implicitly present throughout the entire film: it is only against the shadowy presence of a coherent space that the viewers can form their inferences. Only the premise of continuity allows us to see the persistent discontinuities of the diegesis. In *Klassenverhältnisse* the reality of a pre-filmic space is continuously maintained and implied. Nowhere is this respect for space more apparent than in Straub/Huillet's sound practice. Thus Louis Hochet, the sound engineer in *Klassenverhältnisse* and most of their other films, points out that they "prennent jamais une phrase prononcée off dans une autre prise. Il faut que ce soit vraiment le son de la prise."⁵⁴ The template of a homogeneous pre-filmic space which Straub/Huillet respect so meticulously in the process of filming, is overlaid in *Klassenverhältnisse* with a pattern of spatial disjunctions which documents a world in the grip of class relations. In the words of Andreas Eisenhart, Straub/Huillet do not seek to give an "Abbild der Realität ... , sondern ein Modell ihres Funktionierens."⁵⁵

In *Klassenverhältnisse* the severing of space from the narrative is the most apparent mark of a filmic structure in which the source material and its filmic representation do not mesh, but

where they seem to exist side by side. The critics' recurring observation, to quote Didier Goldschmidt, that *Klassenverhältnisse* preserves "la césure qui sépare à jamais ... le livre du film" as one would guard "un bien précieux et essentiel", records this split created by a narration which cuts adrift from merely conveying a story.⁵⁶

The delineation between the literary source material and the filmic representation as Straub/Huillet devise it in *Klassenverhältnisse* invokes salient features of a third art form: the theatre. The most conspicuous indication of this is the film's concentration on dialogue. As pointed out previously, the fear that the addition of sound might lead to a prominence of the spoken word which would undermine specifically cinematic means of expression, was frequently voiced when sound arrived in the cinema. It went hand in hand with the fear that sound would bring the theatre - whose stifling, if respectable, embrace film had just thrown off - back into film.⁵⁷ In *Klassenverhältnisse*, language in the form of recurring exchanges between different sets of characters becomes the central aesthetic material. The action we see is mostly that of people listening and speaking. Furthermore, the "Kampf der Subjekte" which Straub/Huillet dramatise in the film's various character constellations, is fought out in a highly stylized and artificial language. The way in which actors render their lines defies conventional notions of the cinematic use of language as they are, for instance, summarised by Jean Mitry. Distinguishing film and theatre by the way in which these two art forms employ language, Mitry contrasts the stylization of theatrical language with dialogue in film. In his view this "muß stets einen Eindruck vom gelebten Leben geben." "Die Wahrheit des Theaters" on the other hand, is in Mitry's view "eine Wahrheit der Übereinkunft, eine stilisierte Wirklichkeit, ein Zusammenspiel von Kunstgriffen", and the structure and delivery of the dialogue must reflect this fact.⁵⁸ The overtly pre-structured and artificial dialogue delivery in *Klassenverhältnisse* could not be further removed from such notions of cinematic specificity and verisimilitude.

The focus on character interaction is yet another respect in which *Klassenverhältnisse* might be said to display theatrical affinities. In André Bazin's view, the resources of the theatre make this art form perfectly suited to represent the drama amongst human beings, whereas the photographic nature of film would seem to predestine it for the depiction of the drama between human beings and the physical world.⁵⁹ In *Klassenverhältnisse*, there are only a few instances in which we witness an interaction between the characters and the world of objects. Rather than invoke the plenitude of a world, Straub/Huillet mostly restrict themselves to the presentation of rooms whose multiple doors create points of exit and entry for the characters, in a fashion which recalls the conventions of chamber theatre. Even the interiors of these rooms are more reminiscent of the relative stylistic economy of the stage than of the realism to which cinema generally aspires in its sets.

The above observations highlight an air of theatricality in *Klassenverhältnisse* which arises out of the adaptation of theatrical conventions in the use of expressive resources which theatre and film hold in common. But there is also a wider sense in which Straub/Huillet's filmic reworking of Kafka's text can be said to draw on notions of the theatrical. In her essay *Film and Theatre*, Susan Sontag contests the assumption that the history of film constitutes an advance from theatrical stasis and artificiality to cinematic fluidity.⁶⁰ A further elaboration of this point can be found in Stephen Heath's *Lessons from Brecht*. Instead of an innate and unchanging aesthetic opposition between the two art forms, Heath perceives the possibility that specific types of theatre might contribute to the advancement of film as an art form. In Heath's view, the development of a cinematic equivalent to the Brechtian theory of epic theatre - a process to which he refers as "theatricalization" - can provide a significant impetus for innovative film form.

According to Heath, films which take on board the Brechtian "lesson", achieve their own form of "distanciation." They can evolve structures in which the cinematic representation pulls

away from the text it re-represents. In the heterogeneous structure which results from this, the text and the staging would not merge but they would be existing side by side.⁶¹ The kind of theatrical potential, which is outlined by Heath, can be seen to have informed *Klassenverhältnisse*. The stylistic hallmark of the film is an overt staging of the language of Kafka. The most distinct expression of this conspicuous enactment is a representation of space and a style of dialogue delivery which does not merely convey a narrative, but which guides our attention to the inscriptions which these two types of filmic materials carry.

In Kafka's novel fragments, neither the reiterative course of events which leads to the protagonists' failure to achieve their goals, nor the cues of the axial narrative can bring enlightenment to them. If the three K's remain confined to the inadequacies of their consciousness, then the fundamental critique which Kafka leveled against language would seem to make this a predicament which their creator shared with his protagonists. In his 57. *Betrachtung*, Kafka states the limitations of his medium in asserting: "Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur andeutungsweise, aber niemals nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht werden, da sie, entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt, nur vom Besitz und seinen Beziehungen handelt."⁶² Precluded from yielding insights into the world from which it emanates, language thus seems doomed to perpetuate the essential predicament and deformation it records. Yet Kafka's works exceed the bounds of the incomprehensible. They are not just the linguistic mirror images of a hermetic consciousness. Despite the shortcomings of language as Kafka perceives them, and notwithstanding the restriction imposed upon the narration through the principle of "Einsinnigkeit", Kafka's work holds out the offer of an understanding to be gained.

For Kafka, it was the act of writing itself which provided an escape route out of *The Castle*, the possibility of a disengagement from *The Trial* and an insight into why Roßmann's search for social inclusion in the fragmented world of America must remain illusory. By objectifying

the processes of the mind, which consign his protagonists to positions of dependency, Kafka achieved for himself what he described as "Tat-Beobachtung" - and thus a state of momentary reprieve from the relentless intentionality in the interaction between individuals, as well as between the self and the physical world. Jürgen Kobs remarks in this context, that it was the perfect union of action and observation which Kafka experienced in the act of writing, which enabled him "jenen unabhängigen Standpunkt des inneren Lebens einzunehmen, ohne deshalb auf sprachliche Darstellung verzichten zu müssen."⁶³ In the novel fragments this "Tat-Beobachtung" yields the crystalline representation of the distorted workings of consciousness.

Where, however, does this leave the readers who are presented with the evidence, but not granted an authorial voice which would explain the nature and causes of the disjointed world which they are confronted with? Kafka's texts do not only throw us by their incongruities they also provide us with what Peter Beicken refers to as "Perspektivsignale", and thus linguistically embedded pointers to the reasons for its inconsistencies.⁶⁴ The first sentence of *Der Verschollene* may illustrate the point. This is a strikingly condensed account of the events which have brought about Roßmann's journey to America, and a description of the first view which Roßmann gets of his destination. It opens the book with what seems to be at first sight a highly factual description. However, closer scrutiny reveals the traces of a mind's projections onto the world. For instance, on his arrival in New York Harbour we are informed that Roßmann "erblickte ... die schon längst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgöttin wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht."⁶⁵ Behind the knowledgeability and communicativeness of a narration which right from the novel's start seems to put us so comprehensively into the picture, this brief passage is marked by inconsistency. Thus the combination of the verb "erblicken" with "schon längst beobachtet" creates a highly contradictory sequence of events. How can Roßmann "catch sight of something" which he has "observed all along"? In addition to this implicit indication that this reality is far from

objectively or factually rendered, inconspicuous linguistic signals, such as the “wie”, mark the description of the ambient light, and the account as such as the result of subjective impressions.

The readers’ realization that this deformed world is the result of mediation should direct their subsequent course of discovery. Peter Beicken describes the stance which Kafka seeks to induce in his reader in the following words:

Indem die Sehweise der Hauptgestalten, immer wieder durch Perspektivsignale bekräftigt, als befangene erkannt wird, nimmt der Leser eine “mittlere Stellung” zwischen dem Autor und der Figur ein und erlangt einen Grad von überlegener Einsicht, die sich dem beobachtenden Weltverhalten, seiner Tat-Beobachtung” annähert.⁶⁶

In *Klassenverhältnisse* such a “mittlere Stellung” is afforded to the viewer through representational strategies which set up a dynamic tension between the text and its staging. Straub/Huillet’s cinematic representation of their source text creates what Jean-Marie Straub once referred to as “un regard”, a cinematic “look” which responds to the material it perceives. As Jean-Marie Straub says “Ça, c’est le travail.”⁶⁷ In devising this vantage point for the viewer the filmmakers engage us with - to appropriate Bazin’s observation on Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* - the “phenomenology” of capitalism rather than its ideology.⁶⁸ The “Zustand der Welt und der Seele” as which Kafka perceived capitalism, is shown to be inscribed in language and space.

If it is a filmic structure marked by persistent discontinuities which emanates from Straub/Huillet’s reading of their source text, there is also an insistence on the potential for change running through the film. In the representation of Therese’s account, fragmentation makes way for a striking coherence. A different way of seeing and listening and the utopian potential of a truly New World are inextricably linked in this shot. Jean-Marie Straub’s statement that all their films try to show that “c’est comme ça mais ça pourrait autrement”,⁶⁹

finds its concise cinematographic expression here. This duality of purpose is engraved into the film form of *Klassenverhältnisse*.

Notes

¹ Cf. Hanns Zischler, *Kafka geht ins Kino* (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1996).

² Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka. Erinnerungen und Aufzeichnungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1951), p. 93.

³ Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher 1910 - 1923* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1954), p. 539.

⁴ Cf. Wolfgang Jacobson, 'Kafka-Adaptionen: Filmografie, Bibliografie', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, ed. by Wolfram Schütte (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1984), pp. 195-204.

⁵ Gertrud Koch, 'Nur vom Sichtbaren läßt sich erzählen: Zu einigen Kafka-Verfilmungen', in *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶ British Film Institute, *National Film Theatre Program*, August 1995, p. 24

⁷ Franz Kafka, *Briefe 1902 - 1924* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1985), p. 27.

⁸ Victor Shklovsky, 'The Resurrection of the Word', in *Russian Formalism*, ed. by Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), p. 44.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages', in *Schriften II, 2*, 7 vols., ed. by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 422.

¹⁰ Peter Beicken, *Franz Kafka: Eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Athenäum, 1974), p. xiii.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.* p. 252. Brod's influence on the understanding and reception of the text did not stop there. Like most of Kafka's writings, his first novel fragment was not published in a form authorized by himself. Only the first chapter of *Amerika*, entitled *Der Heizer*, had been edited by the author in 1913. The remainder of the text bore the visible imprint of Brod's interpretation in the form of numerous high-handed alterations. The most apparent of these unsolicited changes is the ending which Brod imposed on a text which had remained manifestly unfinished. Cf. Peter Beicken, 'Sorge der Interpreten', in *ibid.* pp. 1-20.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹³ Manfred Blank, 'Wie will ich lustig lachen, wenn alles durcheinandergeht?' *Filmkritik*, 9/10 (September/Oktober 1984), p. 272.

¹⁴ Marie Frering and Bruno Tackels, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Strasbourg', in *Rencontres: Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels (Strasbourg: Limelight, 1995), p. 40.

¹⁵ Wolfram Schütte, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, p. 41.

¹⁶ Martin Walser, *Beschreibung einer Form: Versuch über Franz Kafka* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1968), p. 116.

¹⁷ Cf. Klaus Hermsdorf, *Kafka: Weltbild und Roman* 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966).

¹⁸ Wolfram Schütte, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, p. 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁰ Cf. for example Götz Grossklau, 'Klassenverhältnisse' *Filmfaust* 40/41 (1984), p. 34. Grossklau states categorically; "Die Leseart des Kafka-Textes, die der Titel ankündigt, wird ... nicht geliefert."

²¹ Wolfram Schütte, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, p. 42.

²² Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchung zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, ed. by Ursula Brech (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970), p. 319.

²³ Cf. Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, 'Klassenverhältnisse: Bei den Dreharbeiten', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, ed. by Wolfram Schütte, p. 29.

²⁴ Hartmut Binder, 'Bauformen', in *Kafka Handbuch II: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Kroner, 1979), p. 89.

²⁵ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 142.

²⁶ Sebastian Schadhauer and Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinema*, 223 (août 1970), p. 56.

²⁷ Manfred Blank, 'Wie will ich lustig lachen, wenn alles durcheinandergeht?', p. 271.

²⁸ Wolfram Schütte, 'Wer an eine Zukunft denkt, gehört zu uns - "Klassenverhältnisse": Ein Film von Straub/Huillet', in *Klassenverhältnisse*, p. 13.

²⁹ Cf. David Bordwell, 'Causes and Effects', in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema. Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 12-18.

³⁰ Cf. Klaus Nothnagel, 'Gespräch mit Straub/Huillet', *epd Film*, 9 (September 1984), p. 25.

³¹ Gertrud Koch, 'Klassenverhältnisse', in *ibid.*, p. 24.

³² Peter Beicken, 'Erzählweise' in *Kafka Handbuch II: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder, p. 42.

³³ Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchung zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, pp. 106-112

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁶ Manfred Blank, 'Wie will ich lustig lachen, wenn alles durcheinandergeht?', p. 56.

- ³⁷ Cf. Wolfram Schütte, 'Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', p. 40.
- ³⁸ Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchung zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, p. 111.
- ³⁹ Helmut Krebs, 'Der Tod des Empedokles', *Filmfaust* 60/61 (Juli/September 1978), p. 51.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Siegfried Kracauer, 'Dialogue and Sound', in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 132.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- ⁴² Stephen Heath, 'Language, Sight and Sound', in *Cinema and Language*, ed. by Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1983), p. 6.
- ⁴³ Klaus Nothnagel, 'Gespräch mit Straub/Huillet', p. 25.
- ⁴⁴ Götz Grossklaus, 'Klassenverhältnisse', p. 32.
- ⁴⁵ Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983), p. 46.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Jahn, *Kafkas Roman "Der Verschollene"* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965). Jahn views the emphasis on "visuelle Kontinuität" in Kafka's works as one of the inspirations the writer derived from his cinema viewing.
- ⁴⁷ Hartmut Binder, 'Bauformen', in *Kafka Handbuch II: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁸ Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1976), p. 83.
- ⁴⁹ Andreas Eisenhart, 'Zum letzten Mal V-Effekt', *Filmkritik*, 9/10 (September/Okttober 1984), p. 267.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in Rick Altman, 'Sound Space', in *Sound Theory: Sound Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 49.
- ⁵¹ Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', p. 91.
- ⁵² Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka. Erinnerungen und Aufzeichnungen*, p. 90.
- ⁵³ Cf. Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchung zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, pp. 499-501. Kobs identifies this narrative symmetry in *Der Verschollene* in cross-references between the following chapters and segments of chapters: Chapter 5 serves as the axial chapter, chapter 1 is mirrored in 6, chapter 2 in 7, the beginning of chapter 3 in the fragmentary chapter 1, chapter 4 in the unfinished chapter 2. Finally, chapter 5 is mirrored in the last chapter.
- ⁵⁴ Alain Bergala, 'La Plus Petite Planète du Monde', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 364 (octobre, 1984), p. 28.
- ⁵⁵ Andreas Eisenhart, 'Zum letzten Mal V-Effekt', p. 276.
- ⁵⁶ Didier Goldschmidt, 'Amerika/Rapports de Classes: Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cinematographie*, 104 (novembre, 1984), p. 46.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. Susan Sontag's discussion of the relationship between theatre and film in 'Film and Theatre', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Mast and Cohen Marshall, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 340-355.

⁵⁸ Jean Mitry, 'Das Wort als Spiegel der Wirklichkeit', in: *Die Rolle des Worts im Film*, Sonderheft Sprache im technischen Zeitalter, 13, ed. by Walter Höllerer (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1965), p. 1046 and p. 1047.

⁵⁹ Cf. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol 1, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 102-107.

⁶⁰ Cf. Susan Sontag, 'Film and Theatre', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Gerald Mast and Cohen Marshall, pp. 340-355.

⁶¹ Cf. Stephen Heath, 'Lessons from Brecht', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 103-128. A comprehensive discussion on the relevance of Brecht's concept of the epic theatre for the creation of alternative film form can be found in Gerald Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht, Cahiers du Cinéma and Contemporary Film Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982)

⁶² Franz Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, 2nd ed., ed. by Max Brod (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1966), p. 45.

⁶³ Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchung zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, p. 533.

⁶⁴ Cf. Peter Beicken, 'Erzählweise', in *Kafka Handbuch II: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Peter Beicken, 'Erzählweise', in *Kafka Handbuch II: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Sebastian Schadhauser, Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 223 (août 1970), p. 54.

⁶⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol 1, trans. by Hugh Gray, p. 136. In 'The Stylistics of Robert Bresson' Bazin comments that Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, "offers us a new dramatic form, that is specifically religious - or better still, specifically theological; a phenomenology of salvation and grace."

⁶⁹ Alain Bergala and Serge Toubiana, ' "Quelque chose Qui Brûle Dans le Plan": Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 364 (octobre 1984), p. 35.

Chapter Four

“Die gewissenhafte Betrachtung der Dinge.” Reframing Cézanne

Straub/Huillet are readily prepared to answer questions about the craft of filmmaking or, as Jean-Marie Straub put it on one occasion, to talk about films in “concrete terms.”¹ Interviews and transcripts of question and answer sessions with audiences as well as seminars for film students, document their readiness to engage in discussion of their films. However, the filmmakers are prone to reticence and even obscurity when asked to comment on their work from a more theoretical angle. Inquiries of this kind have often elicited reactions from them which seem much in keeping with their approach to film-making itself, that is, they quote. Formulations of such artists as Sergei Eisenstein, Carl-Theodor Dreyer or Marcel Proust are prominently represented in Straub/Huillet’s statements on their work and art.²

Most frequently and consistently, they have on such occasions used the words of a painter to point to the central tenets of their filmmaking. They have variously paraphrased one particular statement by Paul Cézanne on the motif that has become inseparably linked with his name - Mont Sainte-Victoire: “Regardez cette montagne, autrefois elle était du feu.”³ This quotation is reiterated in Straub/Huillet’s *Paul Cézanne im Gespräch mit Joachim Gasquet*. However, it is not presented to us in conjunction with one of the painter’s numerous canvasses of Mont Sainte-Victoire, but the mountain itself as Straub/Huillet saw and recorded it.

This combination of the painter’s formulation and the filmmakers’ images, encapsulates the very nature of this film as a cinematically dramatised dialogue on ways of seeing and showing. Through and with Cézanne, Straub/Huillet map out the aesthetic parameters of their own work. This, arguably the most fulsome statement about their art, does not come in the form of words, but draws on the manifold resources of their medium. Nor do

Straub/Huillet merely put forward the formulation of an aesthetics of which the viewer is the passive recipient. *Cézanne* not only presents what Stéphane Bouquet refers to as an “esthét(h)ique de l’engagement du spectateur”, it also engages its audience in the construction and the experience of this.⁴ Straub/Huillet’s film extends an invitation to the viewer to see as Cézanne sought to during a lifetime of hard work: to re-discover the world in the act of perception.

A translation of Cézanne’s approach to “picture-making” into the language of “picture-taking” seems to answer readily to the task which Straub/Huillet were given by the Musée d’Orsay, which commissioned the film in 1996. In the words of Virginie Herbin, the producer of the film, this was intended as part of an audio-visual series, designed “à rapprocher de la sensibilité contemporaine les oeuvres d’un siècle révolu.”⁵

But if Straub/Huillet relate the aesthetics of an artist who is frequently dubbed “the father of modern painting” to their own art form, they also extend this remit considerably. Exponents of a range of historical epochs and diverse art forms become part of their filmic *assemblage*. They invoke Gustave Flaubert, Jean Renoir, Friedrich Hölderlin, and they also cite examples of their own filmmaking. Combining excerpts and examples from works of art across the divisions of representational forms and historical periods, Straub/Huillet weave the aesthetic concurrences between their own work and that of Cézanne into a wider historical trajectory. Traces of Cézanne’s work, the recorded statements and the canvasses become the point of departure for a film which presents us with a strand of “l’art de voir et montrer” which extends back into the late 18th century.⁶ In an interview with Jacques Aumont in 1987 Jean-Marie Straub commented that in his view “l’histoire du cinéma, ça n’existe pas, il n’y a qu’une histoire des succès commerciaux.”⁷ *Cézanne* seems to respond to this shortfall: it maps out an ancestry for the kind of vision which Straub/Huillet seek to realise in their films. In documenting this history, Straub/Huillet create a work of considerable diversity. Thus their film about the painter Cézanne is divided in almost equal measure amongst three different modes of seeing: painting, photography and film. Cézanne’s

work is represented through ten of his canvasses. The painter himself is shown in three photographs. Filmic images show his place of birth, Aix-en-Provence, and a variety of views of Mont-Sainte

Victoire and its surroundings. A shot of the house in Paris in which Cézanne had a studio during the last years of his life, concludes the film. This material diversity is further enriched by two film excerpts. Bearing no immediately apparent relation to the work of Cézanne, these are perhaps the most surprising elements of the film. The first of these filmic quotations is a seven minute cut from Jean Renoir's 1933 adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Two sequences of roughly five minutes' length from Straub/Huillet's reworking of Hölderlin's first dramatic fragment of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, released in 1986 under the title *Der Tod des Empedokles oder Wenn dann der Erde Grün von neuem euch erglänzt*, add to the diverse stylistic texture of *Cézanne*.

In editing these materials together, Straub/Huillet point to affinities between them, but they do not furnish the viewer with any explanatory comments about them. To the remit of creating an audio-visual aid for the purposes of an art museum the filmmakers respond by combining art works which perform a material introduction into seeing Cézanne. The film's division into two very different parts reflects this approach to the painter and his work. During the first forty minutes of the film, a variety of art forms and historical periods are evoked, but only one canvas by Cézanne is shown. The various materials are interwoven with recorded statements by the painter. Only after this initial approach to Cézanne's vision, do Straub/Huillet present us with his work. In a strikingly different second part, heterogeneity makes way for a concentration on the physical traces of Cézanne's work: in the film's remaining twenty minutes, nine of his paintings are shown. They are accompanied by the continuation of the voice-over which makes more or less oblique reference to features in them.

In considering the diversity of materials which form part of *Cézanne*, the choice and use of the text which is referred to in the film's title, and which is the source of the voice-over, is of

particular significance. The conversations between the painter and the Provençal writer Joachim Gasquet from which it quotes, would have taken place in the period from 1896 and 1904. In 1921, and thus fifteen years after Cézanne's death, Gasquet ostensibly reconstructed these from his recollections and published them.⁸ It is not only the fact that Gasquet's text is subject to the distortions of memory which makes this such an intriguing and multifaceted document. His reminiscences inscribe Cézanne's work with concerns which are redolent of their own historical moment and context. A way of seeing Cézanne has lodged itself in them.

As such, Gasquet's text is part of that process of transformation to which any work of art is subjected in the course of a history that reaches far beyond its moment of completion. Straub/Huillet's film does not bypass the layers of interpretation that the work of Cézanne has accrued, nor does it purport to strip it of such subsequent inscriptions. Rather, it draws the audience's attention to these and provides the grounds for gauging them against the work itself, for seeing Cézanne anew.

As this outline of the central features and issues raised in *Cézanne* indicates, the film poses some particularly intriguing questions with respect to the encounter between the medium of film and the various materials it draws upon. One of these concerns the fact that a third of the playing time of *Cézanne* is dedicated to an art form which does not lend itself readily to the re-creation through performance, which is of such central importance in Straub/Huillet's work. How does their film respond to the challenge of an art form that is marked by such self-sufficiency?

The emergence of forms of representation out of the encounter with a given material is formative for Straub/Huillet's entire oeuvre. All of their films are concerned with our access to the world through our senses. However, in *Cézanne* - the material documentation of an aesthetics - the question of representation and into an explicit thematic focus. What are the affinities which Straub/Huillet perceive behind the material and stylistic diversity which they assemble in their film, and by which they define their own artistic beliefs? And how do these feed into the film itself? How, in other words, do Straub/Huillet create a form of cinematic

representation in response to a way of seeing which is encapsulated in the work of Cézanne?

How do they make us see Cézanne?

In trying to answer these questions, it is the way in which Straub/Huillet create associations and connections amongst the disparity of the film's individual elements, which will first come into view. The two most striking features of the formal organisation of the materials in the first part of *Cézanne* are repetition and variation. Altogether fourteen minutes of this part of the film - which is approximately forty minutes long in total - are taken up by a photograph of Cézanne which is shown in two long-held shots. The first appears towards the beginning of part one, the other towards the end. This emphasis on the image of the artist combines with a repeated view of his favoured mountain motif. Four shots of a mountain punctuate the first part. The film starts with the distant view of Mont Sainte-Victoire in the opening sequence. After two successively closer shots it ends on the image of a mountain taken from a slope below it.

The focus which Straub/Huillet create on the image of the painter, and the motif that has become a monogram of his artistic endeavours, reflects the formative tension in Cézanne's work: his quest to achieve a vision which aimed to be both true to the self and the material world it encountered. In her study on interpretations of Cézanne, Judith Wechsler puts it succinctly, when she observes:

Cézanne stakes everything at this personal vision. From each painting he labours to eliminate idiosyncrasy and cliché. He shows us reality neither external and schematic nor internal and capricious. But one which rejoices in the material of expression and is sustained by cognition itself.⁹

In combining images of Cézanne with the summoning of the mountain motif at an ever diminishing distance, Straub/Huillet create an immediate visual equivalent for the function of part one of the film: it performs a gradual approach to the painter's vision. That the last of the mountain shots does not, in fact, present us with Mont Sainte-Victoire but with the slopes of Etna - the site of Hölderlin's *Der Tod des Empedokles* where Straub/Huillet also shot their filmic adaptation of this work - is indicative of the aesthetic cross-references which they

open up in this approach to Cézanne.

The visible focus on the artist and his most famous motif is combined with materials which bear no such obvious relationship to his work. It is through a combination of editing and voice-over quotations that Straub/Huillet weave these materials into the filmic fabric of *Cézanne*. This first becomes apparent after the film's opening sequence of modern day Aix-en-Provence, and the subsequent shot of Cézanne's *Old Maid with Rosary*. In the voice-over which accompanies this canvas, Cézanne cites Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* as his source of inspiration. He relates how a "bläulich-rostrote Farbe" which emerged from his reading of the book seemed to seep into his painting. These remarks about the transformation of literature into painting are succeeded by Jean Renoir's filmic adaptation of *Madame Bovary*. After an abrupt cut, Cézanne's concluding words on how he only remembered the description "der alten Magd in der landwirtschaftlichen Versammlung" after he had finished his painting, are followed by an intertitle from Renoir's film, which reads "Les Comices Agricoles, Juillet 1841."

A similarly overt linking device is used by Straub/Huillet after the lengthy sequence from Renoir's film. Here, Cézanne returns to a previously made comparison between the receptiveness of the artist's mind and a photographic plate. In the original text by Gasquet this resumption of a subject of conversation follows a conversational digression on the nature of the artist's individual "temperament." This discussion is omitted from Straub/Huillet's script. The filmmakers do, however, preserve the formulation "ich hatte Ihnen vorher gesagt", with which Cézanne acknowledges the brief digression, and thus use this to tie the passage from *Madame Bovary* into their own filmic exchange with Cézanne.

A long take of Mont Sainte-Victoire follows the Renoir excerpt. The voice-over, by which this is accompanied, ends on Cézanne's doubt whether he might ever be able to achieve a form of visual representation that would capture "die Inkarnation der Sonne durch die Welt." An abrupt shot transition links this with the first of the two passages from Straub/Huillet's Hölderlin adaptation and Empedokles' exclamation "O himmlisch Licht!" The conspicuous

sense of repartee that this creates, is further accentuated by the fact that the last words of the voice-over create a sound-bridge to the first shot of the film excerpt. Jean-Marie Straub's own explanation for this combination of Cézanne and Hölderlin supports the impression that the filmic excerpt is tantamount to a reply. In Straub's words, Hölderlin's treatment of the Empedokles theme counters Cézanne's doubts about the attainability of the artistic vision he desires to achieve with the comment, "en voilà un qui l'a fait."¹⁰

In contrast to such dovetailing of materials, Straub/Huillet stage an astonishing collision between the voice-over and the imagery at the end of part one of *Cézanne*. Here, the voice-over turns to Cézanne's creed that the pursuit of painting must above all reflect the engagement of the artist's senses with the physical world. All else - to copy nature, to devise theories, to build up an image through drawings or to realise one's sensations through art - merely detracts from the task at hand. There is, according to Cézanne, only one "Weg, alles wiederzugeben, zu übersetzen, die Farbe." Straub/Huillet react to this artistic imperative with a startling denial of not only colour but of imagery as such: they present the viewer with forty-three seconds of black frame. Over these, Cézanne reiterates the doubts that he harbours about his ability to realise the kind of expressive force of colour which he aspires to in his work. He states:

Die Bauern empfinden vor einem Gelb die Gebärde der Ernte, die beginnen muß. Wie ich vor derselben reifenden Nuance aus Instinkt wissen sollte, auf meine Leinwand den entsprechenden Ton zu setzen, und der liebe einen Weizenacker wogen. Strich um Strich lebte so die Erde wieder. Kraft der Arbeit auf meinem Feld sprösse eine schöne Landschaft auf.

In clear contrast to the preceding shot transition, these words are followed by what they announce: a beautiful landscape. Straub/Huillet use the final shot of their *Der Tod des Empedokles* - and thus an image of the slopes of Mount Etna - to conclude the first part of their film.

The fact that *Cézanne* had been commissioned for and by the Musée d'Orsay might suggest the harnessing of its material diversity by what Louise Seguin terms the "pédagogie

de 'l'audiovisuel'." ¹¹ However, Straub/Huillet's linking of the separate elements of their film points to a far more unconventional structure. They do not embed their materials into the linear progression of an argument or an authoritative interpretation. Instead, their montage of materials creates a variety of ostentatious responses to the voice-over. In the light of this observation, the fact that Straub/Huillet have preserved the generic features of the text from which their voice-over is derived, seems significant. Its author, Joachim Gasquet, recorded his reminiscences in the format of an interview-dialogue. A popular model for the written discussion of art, such publications aimed to bring the work of an artist to life in conversation.¹² The formal organisation of materials in *Cézanne* corresponds to the dialogue structure of the voice-over from which it takes its departure. The film script retains eight of the questions that Gasquet put to Cézanne. However, more significantly, Straub/Huillet enter the various materials into a mutual dialogue through their editing. Around Gasquet's questions and Cézanne's answers, Straub/Huillet construct their own dialogue with Cézanne, for which they enlist the voices of Jean Renoir, Gustave Flaubert and Friedrich Hölderlin, as well as the expressive resources of representational forms other than film. What emerges from this cinematically dramatised dialogue is not a filmic lesson on Cézanne, rather the film engages us in the construction of an aesthetic for which Cézanne's work is a defining instance. Straub/Huillet's offer to an audience "to see for itself" did not find favour with the commissioners of *Cézanne*. Deeming it to be "pas un film didactique mais un film d'auteur", they decided not to show it in the Musée d'Orsay.¹³

The opening sequence of *Cézanne* commences the film's round of aesthetic encounters. It both states and demonstrates the central aesthetic affinity between Straub/Huillet and the painter, and it also defines the vantage point from which Straub/Huillet make us perceive Cézanne. The film starts with a shot of the motorway that cuts through the green outskirts of Aix-en-Provence. This view is followed by a first glimpse of the city framed by the foliage of trees. A slow pan reveals it to be a sprawling conurbation dominated by massive modern housing blocks and hemmed in by its peripheral network of roads. Mont Sainte-Victoire rises

as a hazy presence in the far-away distance.

An intriguing contrast to this opening is provided by the introductory passage of an early biography of the painter by John Rewald. His account of the artist's life begins with a literary device that recalls the filmic convention of the establishing shot. In Rewald's description, Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne's birthplace, is a small Southern town which

seems to have been by-passed by progress. Time appears to have stood still there for many decades and life today is almost as peaceful and quiet as it was hundred years ago. No large highway touches the town ... Many of the streets are still cobblestone and almost every one of them leads into the open, into a beautiful country of hills and vineyards, crossed by rivulets that often dry out in the summer's heat. Wherever one finds oneself, there appears in the distance the large and grey wall of Mount Sainte-Victoire, rising abruptly above the undulating valley.¹⁴

Rewald's concern in this opening passage clearly goes beyond a mere description of the physical environment in which Cézanne spent not only his formative years, but also the major part of his life. It is the accessibility of his object of inquiry beyond the passage of time for which he implicitly argues.

As is therefore the case in Rewald's introductory description, a particular vantage point is implied by Straub/Huillet's opening shots. However, by contrast, their approach to the artist's birthplace and Mont Sainte-Victoire is a visible declaration of an historical distance from their object of investigation. In the final image of the film this narrational gesture will be repeated. A fixed shot of the Paris studio in which Cézanne worked during his last years is shown through a closed iron gate and to the accompaniment of the sounds of modern city life.

Rather than claiming unimpeded access to a past reality, Straub/Huillet begin and end their film with an acknowledgement of what bars us from this - as Louis Seguin points out: "Il n'est plus permis de voir en direct ce que peignait Cézanne."¹⁵ The tower blocks and roads which have come between the observer and the distant Mont Sainte-Victoire are the tangible evidence of obstacles we have to clear away if we seek to engage with Cézanne's vision.

The filmic representation in these initial shots provides an example for such an engagement on the part of Straub/Huillet. In the opening sequence, a ten second shot is

followed by a pan to the left which comes to rest for another long-held shot of trees with the outskirts of the city in the background. After a cut, the same cinematographic pattern is applied to increasingly urban motifs, only now it is to the right that the pan eventually veers off before it again comes to a standstill.

It is after forty-three seconds and thus halfway through this symmetrically structured opening sequence, that the voice-over sets in with the following excerpt from Joachim Gasquet's record of conversations with Cézanne:

Greife ich zu hoch oder zu tief ist alles verpfuscht. Es darf keine einzige zu lockere Masche geben, kein Loch, durch das die Regung, das Licht, die Wahrheit entschlüpft. Ich treibe, verstehen Sie, ein wenig meine ganze Leinwand auf einmal zusammen. Ich nähere einander an im selben Schwung, im selben Glauben, was sich zerstreut.

Here, an overt act of filmic representation combines with Cézanne's description of its dominant stylistic feature. Where the film opens with a rigorously alternating pattern of fixed and mobile framing, Cézanne's words seem like a comment on this. Only the reference to his canvas, his "Leinwand", signals the fact that his words refer to the resources of a medium other than film. Quite overtly, these opening shots of *Cézanne* initiate an exchange between two representational forms. Beyond the stated differences - the historical distance and the specificity of the two media - the striking parallels between the painter's words and the filmmakers' cinematography forcefully cue the viewer towards a perceptual engagement with the affinities around which *Cézanne* takes shape.

Straub/Huillet's initial quotation by Cézanne is indicative of central tenets of his work. It points to a pictorial style which is derived from a meticulous attention to the physical world, which seeks to disclose "die von innen gewachsene, feste Struktur der Materie, aus der alles Sein besteht."¹⁶ It is precisely this endeavour which leads Cézanne to sever his ties with the conventions of mimetic representation, and to devise a form of visual representation in which technique and the operations of style become visible. The crucial importance that Cézanne ascribes to the act of framing epitomises this conflation of a palpable formative activity and an unyielding respect for reality. It provides an aesthetic shorthand for tenets

which are no less fundamental for Straub/Huillet's own work. As will be discussed later, this foregrounding of framing is not a singular instance but reoccurs like a *leitmotif* throughout the entire film.

In their presentation of the painter at work which follows the film's opening sequence, Straub/Huillet situate the aesthetic stance outlined above in the historical context from which Cézanne's art arose. They do not present him by one of the sizeable number of self-portraits that he painted, but by a photograph. This shows him as he was captured through the photographic lens of Maurice Denis. One of the young generation of painters who admired Cézanne's work, Denis maintained an exchange through correspondence and personal meetings with the notoriously reclusive artist during the last years of his life.

Denis' photograph shows the painter at work *en plein air*. He stands before his easel, his brush is poised before the canvas, his body posture bears witness to his absorption in the observation of an invisible motif. The accompanying words echo this moment of abeyance in the creative process. In Gasquet's reminiscences, Cézanne states: "Der Künstler ist nur ein Behälter von Empfindungen, ein Gehirn, ein Registrierapparat. Wenn er dazwischenkommt, wenn er wagt, er Mickriger, sich willentlich einzumischen in das, was er übersetzen soll, läßt er seine Kleinheit mit eindringen. Das Werk wird geringwertig." And following on from Gasquet's request for clarification, "Der Künstler wäre also für Sie geringer als die Natur?" he elaborates:

Nein, das habe ich nicht gesagt. Die Kunst ist eine Harmonie parallel zur Natur, wenn der Maler nicht willentlich dazwischen kommt, verstehen Sie mich wohl. All sein Wille soll von Stille zeugen, er soll in sich verstummen lassen alle Stimmen der Vorurteile, vergessen, vergessen, Stille machen, ein vollkommenes Echo sein, dann wird auf seiner empfindlichen Platte die ganze Landschaft sich einschreiben.

The discerning feature in the filming of this photograph is the triple framing. The painter is poised between the motive and the section of canvas before him. In turn, the photograph, with its carefully centred composition and its surrounding white border, denotes the choice of compositional field made by the photographer. The third *cadrage* is determined by Straub/Huillet. Against a bright-red background they film this picture in an emphatically

decentred position at the left-hand margin of the shot space. In conjunction with the non-diegetic sound of a voice, this pronounced arrangement denotes the medium of film as a third representational system, as well as the shaping hand behind these layers of "ways of seeing." During this protracted shot – it lasts for nearly five and a half minutes – correspondences between its individual elements emerge.

While Straub/Huillet make no explicit reference to the historical background of Cézanne's work, this shot documents momentous changes to traditional conceptions of visual representation during his lifetime. As Aaron Scharf has pointed out, "following the discovery of photography, no artist ... could approach his work without some awareness of the new medium."¹⁷ By the time Gasquet recorded his conversations, this awareness had led to a complex set of relationships between photography and the more traditional forms of pictorial representation. One particularly apparent expression of the dynamics which arose between painting and photography were territorial arguments, by which artists staked out newly discovered ground for their craft. Reacting to the superior mimetic capacity of the new medium of photography, painters

for whom the accurate imitations of external realities had lost both its moral and artistic force sought new images commensurate with their belief that art involved a more creative process. To them perception was not purely an optical procedure. They considered it the artist's right, if not his mission, to convey the essential reality, the intrinsic character of his subject, to emphasise at will for the sake of poetry and expression. However much other factors may have contributed to the growing antipathies such artists held for material truth, the photographic image undeniably had become a tangible and most convenient symbol of that truth. And while the camera through its peculiarities of form continued to suggest, even to these artists, new means of representation, it served inexorably to hasten the demise of a purely mimetic art.¹⁸

A statement made in 1909 by Maurice Denis highlights the emerging lines of demarcation between art forms. Denis would limit the photographic medium to the attainment of a simple veracity in contrast to the artistic prerogative of staging a quest for truth. "Art", he contends

is no longer a simple visual sensation which we receive, a photograph, however refined it may be of nature. No, it is a creation of our spirit for which nature is only a starting point. Instead of "working around the eye, we look to the mysterious centre of thought" as Gauguin said. Imagination has thus become, as Baudelaire wished, the Queen of the Faculties.¹⁹

There are no traces of such misgivings, or of a desire for delineation from the photographic medium, in Cézanne's statement on the nature of the creative process. That the painter's attitude towards the new art form was indeed exceptionally positive is born out by the report of eye-witnesses. In his *Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne*, the painter Emile Bernard thus acknowledges with astonishment that Cézanne did not subscribe to the common prejudice against photography, but freely accepted the aesthetic merits of the new medium.²⁰

Cézanne's formulation on the receptiveness of the artist not only acknowledges the process of technological reproduction, it uses this as the central metaphor to describe the art of painting. To Cézanne, it is not the imagination displayed by a creative talent that is crucial to the creation of art, nor is reality merely the point of departure for the human imagination. He argues that reality must be the very basis of the painter's work, and that its transformation must be achieved by what he refers to as "das Handwerk, das auch es bereit ist, nur zu gehorchen, unbewußt zu übersetzen, so gut weiß es seine Sprache." It is his intense engagement with the visible world that is crucial to Cézanne's work. In the words of Meyer Schapiro,

Cézanne differs from his successors in the twentieth century in that he is attached to the directly seen world as his sole object for meditation. He believes - as most inventive artists after him cannot do without some difficulty or doubt - that the vision of nature is a necessary ground for art.²¹

His attachment to the physical phenomena of the world allows Cézanne to embrace the processes of photography as analogous to the creative intervention he seeks to realise in painting. Cézanne's fundamental artistic creed finds its echo in Straub/Huillet's often pronounced insistence on the "documentary roots" of their films, and on the uncompromising respect for reality which guides their work.²² A striking illustration for this salient tenet of their filmmaking is provided by the quotations from their own work later in the film. In the filmic presentation of Cézanne it is the limitation to the physical traces of his life and work, and a cinematography which refrains from any dramatisation of this biographical evidence which highlights their understanding of the creative process as

emerging from the attention to a given material and its properties.

The sequence which follows the photograph of Cézanne points to another essential precept of the aesthetic approach which Straub/Huillet document. Jean Renoir's Flaubert adaptation and Cézanne's canvas *Old Maid with Rosary* provide the material basis for this dramatisation of artistic affinity. As described above, Cézanne speaks of the influence which Flaubert's novel has had on this portrait of an old farm servant, a character who makes but a brief appearance during one episode of *Madame Bovary*, the agricultural fair. Flaubert's description of her - which we do not hear in the film - does indeed bear a striking relation to Cézanne's canvas. The writer pictures her as

a timorous looking old woman... She wore heavy clogs on her feet and a big blue apron around her waist. Her thin face, framed in a borderless cap, was wrinkled as a withered russet, and from the sleeves of her red bodice appeared two drooping hands, gnarled at the joints, and so caked and chapped and hardened by barn-duties, wool grease and washing soda that they looked dirty though they had been rinsed in fresh water. Years of service had left them hanging open as if to bear their own humble witness to the many hardships they had endured. A touch of cloister austerity lent some expression to her face, but her pale stare was softened by no shades of sadness or feeling ... There she stood, before those beaming bourgeois, an embodied half century of servitude ... Having got her medal, she gazed at it, and a blissful smile overspread her feature. As she trotted off, she could be heard muttering: "I'll give it to our curé to say mass for me." ²³

Notwithstanding the resemblance between the portrait and Flaubert's description, Cézanne dismisses any thematic link between the novel and the image as "too literal." His painting is not the translation of a *sujet*. The inspiration he derives from Flaubert takes the shape of an expressive device, a "bläulich-rostrote Farbe", which to him encapsulates the essence of Flaubert's novel. Cézanne's words provide a concise formulation for one of the central artistic achievements with which he is credited - the emancipation of colour from mimetic representation. As Roger Fry points out, it is in the work of Cézanne that the decoupling of colour from the support of linear structures culminates. To Fry, Cézanne's work encapsulates the development "towards the view of colour as an inherent part of the expressive quality of form." ²⁴ The painter's approach to the transformation of a literary theme epitomises this aesthetic principle.

Another form of translation between representational forms follows upon Cézanne's visualisation of Flaubert's writing. That this reworking draws on different resources is not least apparent in the absence of colour in the black and white imagery of the agricultural fair which appears before us now. In his depiction of this seminal scene in Flaubert's novel, Renoir cross-cuts between occurrences at the Bovary household - from Emma's display of *ennui* to her budding acquaintance with Rodolphe Boulanger - a conversation in the pharmacist Hommais' shop, and a number of brief events at the fair itself. One of these is the award-giving ceremony which briefly features the old farm-servant. The excerpt ends with this.

The filmic sequence which Straub/Huillet have selected for *Cézanne* thus retains Flaubert's juxtaposition of contrasting incidents and of the disparate spaces of the private and the public which characterises his description of the agricultural fair. This is but one of the novel's features which would seem to make it ideally suited for cinematic adaptation. Other such qualities were noted by critics who commented on Jean Renoir's film at the time of its release. Thus one review of the film noted:

Now, the director opens Flaubert's book and from the first pages, he ascertains that he has the choice between ten medium shots and as many close-ups. Some close-ups: "Charles was surprised by the whiteness of her nails. They were shiny, delicate at the tips, more polished than the ivory of Dieppe..."; and "her look came at you frankly with a candid boldness..." Its all done.²⁵

Indeed, Jean Renoir himself acknowledged the filmic potential of the novel, praising Flaubert as "a very good screen-writer."²⁶ However, a closer look at the style of Renoir's adaptation shows that it was not the cinematic qualities of Flaubert's novel, which drew his interest.²⁷

A dominant stylistic feature of the film are secondary apertures, frames within frames which frequently establish shot compositions of a pronounced symmetry. For instance, Renoir uses this device for the first meeting between Rodolphe and Emma. In this, the action on both sides of the frame remains blocked off by the walls on either side of a doorway. A

similar instance of double framing occurs in an earlier shot that shows Emma with her daughter Berthe and the maid. Here the group is framed by the curtains of the alcove that surrounds it like a theatre's proscenium arch. Reframing operations, which seem to perform a repositioning in the pursuit of such twice-framed shots, underline this stylistic feature of the film.

Another recurrent trait of shot composition in the film, are prominent vertical or horizontal lines. Compositional features, such as the trailing garlands and the line of the roof which intersect the first three shots horizontally create the impression of a self-conscious arrangement. The high percentage of medium-long shots with a marked depth-of-field in which the action is generally contained in the middle ground, enforce an impression that we watch the events unfold at a certain remove. There are no close-ups, and only one medium close-up despite the fact that the short excerpt comprises six dialogue scenes. Contemporary critics disliked the detached formality and overt stylisation of Renoir's adaptation. Its treatment of a novel about the doomed romanticism of a young woman seemed to fail the subject matter blatantly. In particular, Renoir was reproached for having wasted an opportunity by turning so "cinematic" a novel into a "theatrical" film.

References to theatricality in connection with the film are by no means misplaced. In fact, Renoir's decision to adapt *Madame Bovary* was not least informed by the wish to "experiment with people from the theatre."²⁸ His cast for the film was made up of actors who had learned their trade on the stage and who worked predominantly in a theatrical context. But Renoir does not simply reproduce and subsequently film theatrical conventions; he assimilates them for his medium and his subject matter. The stylisation created by the combination of cinematography and the set, as well as other aspects such as the actors' dialogue delivery, combine to achieve an artful distancing. In sum, Renoir's *Madame Bovary* displays an overt theatricality of the filmic narration. This creates a perceptible distance between the object of representation and the operations of style. It is this palpable distance which links the author Flaubert, the painter Cézanne and the filmmaker Renoir. In

their art, this is inscribed by different means and representational strategies.

For the writer Flaubert it was the realisation of a particular vision that was at stake in his work. The torturous process of writing and reworking *Madame Bovary*, which is documented in his letters, was driven by his aim to create an authorial stance that he described as "impersonality." This term encapsulated a vision that would disengage itself from the pettiness of prejudice and the predictability of preconceived judgement. In Stephen Heath's description the attainment of such a stance was not

a question of an objective position in the work but of a play of visions, perspectives, perceptions across the characters and their doings and their world, of a tissue of discourses, ideas, orderings of meaning; leaving the reader deprived of any given grounds as to what to think, not taken in hand by some privileged voice.²⁹

Renoir's *Madame Bovary* evolves a cinematic equivalence to this "impersonality" through the film's stylistic operations. As in the transformation of Flaubert's language into colour in Cézanne's *Old Maid with Rosary*, it is a way of showing derived from a theme, rather than merely the theme itself that inspires Renoir in his source material.

Cézanne's appeal to the artist, "all sein Wille soll von Stille zeugen, er soll in sich verstummen lassen alle Stimmen der Vorurteile", denotes his proximity to Flaubert's creed that the artist must cleanse the world he portrays from preconceptions. Indeed, it is in his portrait painting that a "meditativeness and detachment from desire", which reflects this approach becomes apparent. In Cézanne's depiction of the human face, Meyer Schapiro detects a contemplative and detached stance which may be less immediately apparent, but is no less present in his landscapes and still lifes. Remarking on the mask-like character of his portraits, and thus a feature which is strikingly realised in the image of the old farm-maid, Schapiro notes: "The subject seems to have been reduced to a still life. He does not communicate with us: the features show little expression and the posture tends to be rigid. It is as if the painter has no access to the interior world of the sitter, but can only see him from outside."³⁰

The pictorial representation by which Cézanne achieves his own form of "impersonality",

shares the visibility of its operations with Renoir's "theatricality." In his paintings, style becomes visible in the endeavour to engage the viewer with the materiality of the world they portray. In Schapiro's words, form in the works of Cézanne

is in constant making and contributes an aspect of the encountered and random to the final appearance of the scene, inviting us to an endless exploration. The qualities of the represented things, simple as they are, are effected by means that make us conscious of the artist's sensations and meditative process of work; the well-defined, closed objects are built up by a play of open, continuous and discontinuous touches of colour. The coming into being of these objects through Cézanne's perceptions and constructive operations is more compelling to us than their meanings or relation to our desires, and evokes in us a deeper attention to the substance of the painting.³¹

The reverberations of the aesthetic positions outlined above in the work of Straub/Huillet, the "metteurs-en-scène" behind this collage of works of art, are a theme which runs through this study. The filmic articulation of a vision which is derived from an existing source material and which becomes visible in the palpable operations of style, has been analysed in the different forms it takes.

In *Cézanne*, two excerpts from Straub/Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles* demonstrate the realisation of the aesthetic tenets outlined above in the idiom of their art. The first of these two citations of their own work features the scene in which Empedokles tells his disciple Pausanias of the hubris which has made him an outcast from society and an exile from the union in which he lived with nature. His self-indictment for having fallen from such grace by his own doing,

Ich kannt es ja, ich hatt es ausgelernt,
Das Leben der Natur, wie sollt es mir
Noch heilig sein wie einst! Die Götter waren
Mir dienstbar nur geworden, ich allein
War Gott uns sprach's im frechem Stolz heraus,

concludes the excerpt. It is preceded by Empedokles' description of the union with nature which had inspired his very existence, and which he will seek to regain by plunging himself into the crater of Etna. In Straub/Huillet's filming of this passage, the thematic focus on the harmonious co-existence of man and nature is visibly enacted through a combination of spatial representation, framing and the scene's marked changes of light.

The first of the sequence's five shots shows Empedokles in a medium close-up with the right half of his face framed by leafy branches. The ever-changing refractions of sunlight on the leaves suffuse the shot. By shot five, at the end of the excerpt, the bright light has made way to dark shadows and all we see is Empedokles' lower torso against a stony background.

The space that surrounds him is forcefully indicated by the orientation of his gaze as he addresses Pausanias, but it is never fully revealed. Only a three second shot of Empedokles' disciple reveals a section of the surroundings. This cinematography focuses our view on the compositional unit within the individual shot, and concentrates our attention on the elements contained within it. This emphasis on the shot as an autonomous unit is heightened by the absence of any camera movement that might interlace this with a wider spatial context.³² The camera's immobility becomes especially marked at the end of the excerpt. As Empedokles rises to the words, "Nein, ich sollt es nicht aussprechen, heilige Natur", we are left with the view of the lower half of his toga-clad figure, while the recitation carries on off-screen.

This last shot of the sequence gives perhaps the most striking indication that Straub/Huillet's cinematography is not dictated by the human figure and its expressions. Instead, they seek to retune our attention to the play of light, the movement of the wind in the trees and the human presence, as only one element amongst many in this natural setting. It is these various manifestations of life which lay as much claim to our attention, as do the recited words and their enactment. In Helmut Krebs' formulation, it is not Hölderlin's drama, nor the Sicilian landscape nor the actors themselves, which can be isolated as the subject matter of the film, "sondern ihrer aller Lebensäußerungen als miteinander verbundene Rezitation des Textes: Licht, Wind, Wolken und Pflanzen, Stimme und Körper."

³³ It was the variations in these natural constellations in the numerous takes made for each shot of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, which inspired the filmmakers to edit four versions of this film. According to Jean-Marie Straub they differ from each other by being

mehr oder wenig sonnig, mehr oder weniger windig, und diese Aufnahmen wurden - am Anfang und am Ende - mehr oder weniger knapp geschnitten, je nachdem, was am Anfang und Ende der Aufnahme geschah oder nicht geschah in den Darstellern oder um die Darsteller - im Blick oder außerhalb des Bildes, an Spannung, Entspannung, Ausatmen, Blickbewegung, Windbewegung, Lichtwechsel, Schmetterlinge, Vogelzwitschern, Rabenkrächzen, Windrauschen.³⁴

Straub's statement highlights the intrinsic connection between the filmic treatment of *Der Tod des Empedokles* and the central theme of this dramatic fragment: the union of man and nature. It is out of the attention to the material qualities of sound and image that a filmic representation arises which reflects both the possible shape and the loss of the kind of existence for which Empedokles yearns.

As noted above, it is the light motif that links the excerpt from *Der Tod des Empedokles* with the voice-over. Cézanne desires a form of representation which would capture "die Inkarnation der Sonne durch das Licht", and which would thus recount "die physische Geschichte der Welt." Straub/Huillet answer this plea with Empedokles exclamation and pronouncement:

O himmlisch Licht! - es hatten mich's
 Die Menschen nicht gelehrt - schon lange, da
 Mein sehnd Herz die Allebendige
 Nicht finden konnte, da wandt ich mich zu dir,
 Hing wie die Pflanze dir mich anvertrauend.
 In frommer List dir blindlings nach.
 Denn schwer erkennt der Sterbliche die Reinen
 Doch als der Geist mir blühte, wie du selber blühst,
 Da kannt ich dich, da rief ich es: Du lebst!
 Und wie du heiter wandelst um die die Sterblichen
 Und himmlisch jugendlich den holden Schein
 Von dir auf jedes eigen überstrahlst
 Da alle deines Geistes Frabe tragen
 So ward auch mir das Leben zum Gedicht.

The commentary that follows the *Empedokles* sequence further pursues this thematic focus on the harmonious consort between man and the physical phenomena of the world. Over a shot of Mont Sainte-Victoire, Cézanne tells Gasquet:

Alles mehr oder weniger, Wesen und Dinge, wir sind nichts als ein wenig Wärme, aufgespeichert, organisiert ein Andenken der Sonne. Ein wenig Phosphor, der brennt in der Gehirnhaut der Welt. Die verstreute Moral der Welt ist die Anstrengung, die sie vielleicht macht, um wieder Sonne zu werden. Da ist ihre Begriff, ihr Gefühl, ihr Traum von

Gott... Die Zartheit unserer Atmosphäre hängt zusammen mit der Zartheit unseres Geistes. Sie sind eins im andern. Die Farbe ist der Ort, wo unser Gehirn und das Universum sich begegnen.

Straub/Huillet's juxtaposition of Hölderlin and Cézanne marks their positions at different moments in a history of the "art of seeing and showing." The historical roots of the painter's statement in an age of science and technology shines through the language. Its lyricism does not disguise the fact, that it reiterates scientific insights into the nature of human perception. However, it is an underlying similarity which transcends the historical distance to which Straub/Huillet's filmic collage draws our attention. Jacques Aumont points to the common stance which sustains both the work of the writer and the painter when he notes:

Le sentiment moderne de la nature - et sa représentation qui culminera avec Cézanne - s'invente à l'aube du 19ème siècle. Hölderlin est le contemporain exact de cette audacieuse représentation de la nature qui se dispense de la justification d'un discours préalable et implicite (religieux, philosophique, ou poétique).³⁵

In the film, the perception of light and colour comes to epitomise a process of human engagement with the material world which does not inscribe it with preconceived meaning, but which is itself shaped through this encounter. Schapiro's celebration of Cézanne's work as "a living proof that a painter can achieve a profound expression by giving form to his perception of the world around him without recourse to a guiding religion or myth or any explicit social aims"³⁶, recognises the painter's quest for such an original and authentic vision.

Where an inscription of preconceived meaning into the empirical world is no longer within our grasp, we will have to make sense of reality in other ways. In Cézanne's words, it is the "logic of the eyes" which we will have to entrust ourselves to rather than "the logic of the mind." Our eyes will become the instruments through which we will rediscover the world. The technological extension of the human visual faculty as it emerged first in the guise of photography, and then in the subsequent development of the "Kino-eye", seemed a tangible manifestation of a way of seeing as Cézanne sought to achieve it. When Siegfried Kracauer defined film as the medium which would bring about "die Errettung der physischen Realität"

from the abstractions which separate us from the world around us, "the logic of the eye" seemed indeed to have found its medium.³⁷ Here then, emerged a representational mode which was in a very literal sense based on the inscription of light, and which sprung from the perceptual insights which are reflected in the painter's above statement. To quote Jacques Aumont's formulation, Cézanne's description of colour as "der Ort, wo unser Gehirn und das Universum sich begegnen" reflects the realisation that,

just as the perception of luminosity is a product of the response of the visual system to the luminosity of objects, the experience of colour is a product of its responses to the wavelength of the rays of light emitted or reflected by objects. Quite contrary to our common sense impressions, colour is not a property of objects any more than luminosity is, but lies "within" our perception.³⁸

Photography and film as instruments for the tangible inscription of the world's luminosity were indeed seen by many as the perfect instrument for a rediscovery of the world. What constituted itself in them is summarised by Aumont as "une confiance nouvelle faite à la vue comme instrument de connaissance et pourquoi pas de science, apprendre en regardant, apprendre à regarder. Le thème de la connaissance par les apparences qui est le thème du XIXe siècle, et celui du cinéma."³⁹

In another striking parallel between Cézanne's words and their filmic representation Straub/Huillet flaunt the fact that it is such a conception of film which underlies their work. After the cutting from *Der Tod des Empedokles*, and as accompaniment to the third shot of Mont Sainte-Victoire, we hear Cézanne's description of the light above the rocky cavities of the mountain. Commenting on the modulation of the quality of light through the proximity of the sea he directs the attention of his implied listener with the words: "Wie dort rechts auf dem Pilon du Roi Sie sehen im Gegensatz, daß die Helligkeit sich wiegt, feucht, schillernd, es ist das Meer, das muß man wiedergeben." The camera responds to this with a hundred-and-eighty degree pan to the right until it comes to rest on the locality described by Cézanne.

Given this direct interaction of image and sound, the pan might appear as a substitute for the redirection of our own gaze towards the nearby coastline, or alternatively, as a point-of-view shot of the partner in this dialogue. However, this sudden cinematographic agility in a

film which is predominantly constructed of immobile shots conceals itself in neither of these ways. This is in part due to the fact, that throughout the film the non-diegetic voices remain divorced from any human presence to which we might link this semicircular trajectory of vision. Joachim Gasquet merely remains a name in the title and the recitation of Cézanne's statements by Danièle Huillet undercuts any speculation that these words are more than the trace of a conspicuous absence.

Instead, this pan comes forward as an overt intervention of the filmmakers in response to Cézanne's words. This synchronisation demonstrates the intrinsic connection between the camera eye and the physical world, and it declares Straub/Huillet's affinity to an aesthetic stance which seeks to engage us with the quality of things in their uniqueness and specificity.

Straub/Huillet's gradual approach to the physical evidence of Cézanne's work ends with a return to Hölderlin and Mount Etna. Their second excerpt from *Der Tod des Empedokles* features the film's last shot. In this, they present us with Empedokles' last address to the citizens of Agrigent. They have come to ask his forgiveness for doubting him and to make him their king. In declining their offer of the crown, Empedokles calls upon them to seek for themselves the union with nature which they would desire to worship in him. In Empedokles' vision, the holistic and revitalised perception of the world which would spring from this would also become the very basis of a just and egalitarian order amongst human beings. He tells the citizens of Agrigent:

...wenn euch das Leben
 Der Welt ergreift, ihr Friedensgeist, und euch's
 Wie heil'ger Wiegensang die Seele stille,
 Dann aus der Wonne schöner Dämmerung
 Der Erde Grün von neuem euch erglänzt,
 und Berg und Meer und Wolken und Gestirn,
 Die edlen Kräfte, Heldenbrüdern gleich,
 Vor eure Auge kommen, daß die Brust
 Wie Waffenträgern euch nach Taten klopft,
 Und eigner, schöner Welt, dann reicht die Hände
 Euch wieder, gebt das Wort und teilt das Gut,
 O dann, ihr Lieben, teilet Tat und Ruhm
 Wie treue Dioskuren. Jeder sei
 Wie alle - wie auf schlanken Säulen ruh
 Auf richt'gen Ordnungen das neue Leben.

The utopian vision painted by Empedokles reflects the historical background of Hölderlin's dramatic fragment. Written in 1789, the work expresses the writer's initial enthusiasm for the momentous changes which the French Revolution seemed to herald. In Jean-Marie Straub's words, *Der Tod des Empedokles* presents "Hölderlin's Communist dream."⁴⁰ With Empedokles' speech, Straub/Huillet clearly highlight the fact that *Cézanne* is not merely concerned with matters of aesthetics. Here, our perception of the world is shown to determine the shape of our social existence. It is from a re-awakened ability to see "das Grün der Erde" that the desire "nach eigner, schöner Welt" will be borne.

As has been shown above, there are palpable correspondences between the aesthetic tenets discussed and documented in *Cézanne* and the filmic representation Straub/Huillet evolve in response to this. However, the incorporation of the Hölderlin excerpts explicitly places these issues within a broader, intrinsically political context. The politics of perception and representation which this points to, and which is of such crucial importance in Straub/Huillet's own work, has not been an issue in their selection from Gasquet's text.

Straub/Huillet seem to make this difference visible by preceding the second *Empedokles* excerpt with forty-three seconds of black frame. As accompaniment to this, Danièle Huillet recites Cézanne's artistic utopia of reviving the world in an act of painting which captures its essence, "Strich um Strich lebte so die Erde wieder." However, his evocation of a "schöne Landschaft" is not followed with one of his paintings, nor with another filmic image of Mont Sainte-Victoire.

The final shot of the film's first part shows the slopes of Mount Etna and its outline against clouds and the sky. In *Der Tod des Empedokles* this is edited as a point-of-view shot which is anchored in a medium close-up of the drama's central figure. In the single shot we see in *Cézanne*, no visual trace remains of Empedokles, the speaker whose words accompany this image. In a shot which lasts almost five minutes, we see the mountain, the changes of light, the movement of the clouds and the trees as they sway in the wind. This is a landscape

devoid of human presence.

In *Der Tod Empedokles* the tragic hero, the embodiment of the split between the "Organische" and the "Anorganische" - as Hölderlin states in his *Grund zum Empedokles* - and thus between a man-made world and the boundlessness of nature, can only attain reconciliation through his self-sacrifice.⁴¹ Empedokles achieves this on an individual level through his suicide. But if this suicide recreates a singular instance of the union between man and nature, it also points to the realm of the social as the site of the true realisation of this utopia. Empedokles, the tragic hero "in dem sich die Extreme seiner Zeit vereinigen, muß deshalb geopfert werden, weil keine individuelle Auflösung der Schicksale einer ganzen Epoche möglich ist."⁴² The reply which Empedokles gives to the Agrigentiens in Hölderlin's drama on declining their offer of the throne, "Dies ist die Zeit der Könige nicht mehr", encapsulates the social dimension of his vision. The absence of the human being in the last shot of Straub/Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles*, attests to the elusiveness of this utopia of an egalitarian order: it remains beyond representation.

If there is a potential to transcend this imagery it can only lie with a viewer who will take up the invitation extended by Straub/Huillet's long take of a landscape to see "das Grün der Erde" afresh. Straub/Huillet's aesthetic excursions in the course of their approach to the paintings of Cézanne ends by stating the implications this would have on our way of being in the world.

The material and formal diversity of part one of *Cézanne* is followed by a filmic construction of far lesser complexity. With the exception of the final shot of the artist's Paris studio, this consists entirely of shots of water-colours and oil paintings by him. Two criteria would seem to have informed Straub/Huillet's selection. The paintings comprise all of the four major categories of Cézanne's oeuvre: the portraits, the still lives and the landscape paintings - genres which Cézanne had worked in right from the beginning. The film also includes one example of his *Grandes Baigneuses* compositions, a theme which he took up in the mid 1870s and which was to be the main focus of his work during his latter years.

Painted between the 1890s and his death in 1906, all of the images displayed are representative of the artist's mature style. Indeed, some were works still in progress at the time of his death. Straub/Huillet have filmed them in perfectly centred, straight-on shots which vary in length between ten seconds and over four minutes. With one notable exception, in which they introduce atmospheric sound, all of the canvasses are accompanied by Cézanne's reflection on his art as reported by Joachim Gasquet.

As a filmic engagement with the art of painting, *Cézanne* has a considerable number of precedents.⁴³ In view of the differences between the two visual media which are brought together in these, it is perhaps not surprising that the encounter between painting and film has sparked off its own particular kind of misgiving. Thus the painting in its filmic representation is seen to be subjected to technological manipulations which amount to the destruction of its artistic achievements. In his essay *Painting and Film*, André Bazin acts as the mouthpiece for a criticism which, it should be noted, he did not share:

The viewer, believing that he is seeing the picture as painted, is actually looking at it through the instrumentality of an art form that profoundly changes its nature ... No one colour is ever faithfully reproduced; still less therefore is any combination of colours. On the other hand, the sequence of a film gives it unity in time that is horizontal and, so to speak, geographical, whereas time in a painting, so far as the notion applies, develops geologically and in depth. Finally and above all ... space, as it applies to a painting is radically destroyed by the screen.⁴⁴

Bazin's observations had been crucially inspired by critical responses to Alain Resnais' *Van Gogh*, made in 1948. Shot in black and white - and preceded by titles from which the colour gradually drains away - Resnais edits sections of canvasses together. He creates dramatic episodes and even introduces invisible transitions between paintings as, for example, when a shot of the facade of Van Gogh's house in Arles is followed by a view of the interior of his room. As Jacques Aumont points out, such "narrativisation" and "dramatisation" combines with the mobilisation of filmic devices in the pursuit of "psychologisation." The overall effect achieved in Aumont's view is:

d'évacuer des représentations picturales de ce qui y est peinture - la touche, la pâte, la couleur, la composition - pour les muer en diégèse, en récit, en film. Ces trois opérations n'en font qu'une: une cinématisation, opération contre-nature, destructrice de spécificité,

qui ne pouvait que heurter.⁴⁵

What is a painful experience to Aumont - the absorption of the specificity of painting in the process of its filmic appropriation - is welcomed by Bazin. Films about and of paintings, he argues, are not just desirable for pedagogical reasons, since they help to popularise an art form from which the public has become more alienated than from any other; there is mutual aesthetic benefit to be drawn from this marriage of media. Extending his argument for a fruitful impurity of film into the realm of painting, he contends:

It is precisely because it [the film] substitutes for the painting a work one degree removed from it, proceeding from something already aesthetically formulated that it throws a new light on the original. It is perhaps to the extent that the film is a complete work and as such, seems therefore to betray the painting most, that it renders it in reality the greater service.⁴⁶

To view *Cézanne* in the context of such precedents and opposing views highlights its specificity. As the analysis of the film's first part has shown, Straub/Huillet begin their film, not by presenting us with what Cézanne painted, but by engaging us with the way he saw - they dramatise a vision. The "service rendered" to his art in the second part of the film is of a different kind. It is Cézanne's precept on the means of expression as it accompanies the first of the nine canvasses, "man muß sie seinem Motif anpassen, es nicht zu sich biegen, sondern sich zu ihm beugen", which seems visibly translated in a cinematography, which is given over to the object of representation, and the mode of perception implied in it. However, the fact that Straub/Huillet refrain from any "betrayal" of these paintings, must not detract from the fact that their presentation of them still comes forward as a distinct cinematic gestures which helps to throw a "new light" on Cézanne.

As in part one the film, Straub/Huillet create obvious connections between the voice-over and the imagery. Thus, the canvas *Still Life with Apples and Oranges* is accompanied by the statement, "daß in einer Orange, in einem Apfel, einer Kugel, einem Kopf es einen Kulminationspunkt gibt, und dieser Punkt ist immer, trotz der fürchterlichen Wirkung, Licht, Schatten, färbende Empfindung, ist immer unserem Auge am nächsten."

A similar cross-reference between image and sound exists between a painting of Mont

Sainte-Victoire, in which the peak is simply a bare patch of canvas, and Cézanne's observation that this lack of completion is the effect of "Abstraktionen" caused by the "färbenden Empfindungen, die das Licht geben." What thus remains unseen must also remain unpainted. Further correspondences are established through references to central techniques, by which Cézanne contributed to the redefinition of pictorial syntax.

In his search for an original mode of vision, Cézanne challenged prevalent codes of pictorial representation, and one of the foremost amongst these is his depiction of space. It is the latter to which Straub/Huillet draw our attention at the beginning of this part of the film. The pictorial evidence of Cézanne's break with the conventions of scientific perspective is what Richard Shiff refers to as his "non-hierarchical" compositions. Reflecting his quest for a manner of representation which aims both for a structural grasp of the empirical world and a more supple notion of human perception than is implied by a subordination to aerial perspective, Cézanne seems to introduce a multiplicity of spatial orders in his works.⁴⁷ In his essay *Cézanne's Doubt*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty comments on this trait of the painter's work:

By remaining faithful to the phenomena in his investigations of perspective, Cézanne discovered what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one. The objects we see close at hand appear smaller, those far away seem larger than they do in a photograph ... To say that a circle seen obliquely is an ellipse is to substitute for our actual perception what we would see if we were cameras: in reality; we see a form which oscillates around the ellipse without being an ellipse.⁴⁸

The canvas *Still Life with Apples and Oranges*, with which Straub/Huillet begin this part of their film is a vivid illustration for the nature of spatial representation in Cézanne's work. The painting strikes us by the way it jettisons conventional linear perspective in favour of a foreshortened representation of space. The composition makes the objects advance towards us rather than recede towards a vanishing point.

But the quotation from Cézanne which accompanies this image, seems to deny the very feature which provides this still life with its startling momentum. Advocating the essential precepts of scientific perspective, he advocates the ready formula, "Die Natur behandeln

gemäß Zylinder, Kugel, Kegel. Das Ganze in Perspektive gesetzt, so daß jede Seite eines Gegenstandes eines Plans sich auf einen zentralen Punkt ausrichtet.”

Straub/Huillet thus begin the second part of *Cézanne* with an astonishingly contradictory sound/image constellation. Danièle Huillet’s assertion,

der Cézanne hat auch immer wieder einen Apfel oder einen Berg angeguckt und immer wieder gemalt. Aber er hat nicht, wie der Kubismus gesagt, jetzt machen wir ein System und alle Formen sind Kuben oder Zylinder. Cézanne hat sich gehütet zu dieser Theorie zu kommen, deswegen ist er größer als die größten Büsten, die nachher kamen,⁴⁹

highlights the tension which exists between the words and the image. Given its prominent position, this statement is an overt indication that the filmmakers’ combination of visual and audible traces of Cézanne’s work does not purport to furnish us with authoritative statements and interpretations of the paintings. Instead, Straub/Huillet encourage us to gauge these traces of Cézanne’s work against each other in a more active form of perception.

Immersed in a lifelong search for what he considered the “appropriate” means of expression Cézanne seems to have felt little inclination to waste valuable time on formulating theories. Only the interest of younger painters such as Maurice Denis and Emile Bernard during his latter years made him do so at rare instances. But he did not really seem in his element when putting his artistic beliefs into words. What emerges from this is a mixture of statements that are at times intriguing and hardly original or even trite at other times. Merleau-Ponty thus draws this laconic conclusion from Cézanne’s theoretical efforts: “Cézanne could not convince by his argument and preferred to paint instead.”⁵⁰

Straub/Huillet’s selection of passages repeatedly draws our attention to the sense of unease with which Cézanne verbalises his craft. This becomes evident, for instance, when he states: “Ich habe an einen Maler geschrieben, der gekommen war mich zu sehen und der daraus, er, Theorien macht.” The rule which he does put forward, on treating nature according to the “cylinder, the sphere, the cone”, is shortly afterwards discarded as an example for what he seeks to overcome. The recommended patterns of abstraction presently turn into “Krusten, die unsere Intelligenz verstopfen.”⁵¹ Ultimately, Cézanne is heard to profess allegiance to

one method only: the eschewal of any preconceived "mythology." His "Gesetzbuch", the painter insists, "ist der Realismus, die Unermeßlichkeit, der Strom der Welt in einem kleinen Zoll Materie." If - as Judith Wechsler notes - Cézanne aimed "to rescue seeing from the already known", Straub/Huillet's presentation of his canvasses in the second part of the film seeks to maintain such a vision in our encounter with Cézanne.⁵² Both intriguing and of dubious authenticity, Gasquet's text calls for a corroboration by our own observation. Clearly, his account must be compared with what we actually see.

It would seem that it is not least the capacity of Gasquet's text to engage our attention by its unreliability and its contradictions, which recommended it to Straub/Huillet. The nature of this unreliability merits further examination. Other factors than those outlined above have in good measure contributed to the doubts about the authenticity of Gasquet's account. Straub/Huillet's selection of Gasquet's reminiscences as their source text also brings a history of "seeing Cézanne" into view.

By 1921, the year in which Gasquet's book was published, reports by eye-witnesses about Cézanne and his work had been available for some time. Joachim Gasquet helped himself freely from their insights, but never acknowledged his borrowings. Numerous passages in the book seem wholly attributable to himself. Where Gasquet does draw from statements that are taken from the correspondence he had with Cézanne, he translates them into an elegiac and at times even hymnic register. Jean Royere, a young Aix-en-Provence writer and admirer of Cézanne's work, was not alone in observing that, "there is a veritable antinomy between the lyricism of Gasquet and the painting of Cézanne."⁵³ Authenticity is thus not a primary concern that distinguished Gasquet's record of dialogues. Indeed, there are clear indications that he fashioned his reminiscences to serve his own purposes. In turn, these reflect the historical moment in which the book was conceived.

By 1921 - after almost a lifetime of critical rejection - the interest in Cézanne's work had become intense. The new perspectives offered by Primitivist and Cubist art, brought its groundbreaking nature into view. In Joachim Gasquet's account, the painter's achievement is

of a decidedly different nature. Here Cézanne stands for the recreation of a classical tradition which arises out of an insoluble bond between himself and his native soil of Provence. The combination of nationalism and classicism with which Gasquet so liberally infuses Cézanne's art seems not least a projection of his own political and aesthetic agenda onto the work. Thus Richard Shiff points out, that Gasquet's account of Cézanne reflects views held by the right wing, royalist movement *Action française* of which Gasquet himself was a fervent supporter. On aesthetic matters, this political movement propagated the view that "there is a French 'nationalism' in art and literature; it is a form of classicism."⁵⁴ Writing in 1984 Shiff comes to the following conclusion about Gasquet's recollection of dialogues:

Gasquet's sense of the issues to be addressed by Cézanne's art accorded with the concerns of the period, regardless of how foreign his own mode of expression might have been to the painter. If Gasquet articulated the thought of his own generation more than Cézanne's, it remains true, that that generation provided the critical discourse by which Cézanne still tends to be known.⁵⁵

Straub/Huillet's voice-over represents a small choice of passages from Gasquet's recollections. Obvious additions – such as the writer's frequent displays of erudition – are omitted from their film script. However, no amount of selection could claim to purge this complex textual palimpsest from the sediments of a certain perception of Cézanne.

Straub/Huillet would have us see and hear the numerous tensions which exist between Gasquet's text and the paintings. Perhaps the most overt acknowledgement of a certain critical distance to the text on the part of the filmmakers, is the school-mistressly singsong in which Danièle Huillet emulates blatant lapses into cliché, such as "Der anständige Mensch hat sein Gesetzbuch im Blut", and "Das Genie macht sich, indem es lebt, sein eigenes Gesetzbuch."

Straub/Huillet therefore direct our attention to what Richard Shiff describes as the "superimposition" of an interpretative discourse - to which the painter himself is but one contributor - onto Cézanne's art. Shiff reflects upon the process by which such interpretations taint our perception of any work of art over time :

As successive generations view an object of art, it acquires layers of interpretation. A

knowledge of such interpretations - if not of a specific work, then of its type - normally precedes any actual experience of viewing. The changing state of interpretation thus seems to transform a work of art in advance of its being seen, even as it preserves the work by keeping it before the public's attention, in the public eye. In recognition of this process, the way a given painting has appeared, usually records many more changes in its public reception than in its physical substance.⁵⁶

The clearing away of such "layers of interpretation" is a constant theme in Straub/Huillet's re-representations of works of art. That this aspect of the engagement with a pre-existing material becomes particularly salient in *Cézanne*, seems not least to be due to the circumstances of production. After all, the institution which commissioned the project and the place of exhibition for which it was destined, the Musée d'Orsay, can be considered a catalyst of the process described above by Shiff. The presentation of any item within the museum space not only signals approval of a work as a part of a national cultural canon, but also situates it within the context of an interpretative framework. As the institutional guardians of art, such institutions may be viewed to exert a tangible impact on our experience of the exhibits in their care and possession.

Jean-Marie Straub's account of the parameters to be borne in mind when filming paintings on a museum wall, clearly shows that the above considerations were not lost on them. Referring to Cézanne's painting, he states:

Il faut savoir comment on les filme: Si on refuse le cache, qui élimine le cadre et le mur... Même si le cadre ne vous plait pas, la peinture ça ne pend pas dans l'air, ces tableaux sont toujours prisonniers d'un musée. Et la prison, il ne faut pas la montrer, mais il faut qu'on la sente.⁵⁷

In *Cézanne*, the conditions under which we see the painter's work are implied by an ostensible permutation of their framing. Canvasses one, two, three, four and seven are shown with a variety of frames. Some of them are ornate gilded cornice frames; others are comparatively simple wood structures. In three of these shots, Straub/Huillet allow our view to extend beyond the frame onto a small section of the wall against which they are hung, thus implying the wider off-screen space of their exhibition sites. These variations cue us to reflect not just upon the aesthetic impact of framing decisions - the mapping out and delineation of a compositional field. Straub/Huillet also draw our attention to the frame as

the physical evidence of the conditions under which we see Cézanne's work.

This is particularly evident where some of the highly elaborate and imposing frame designs are concerned. These bestow a sense of completeness onto the paintings which seems at variance with the tenor of the voice-over so far. A recognition of the elusiveness of his goal pervades Cézanne's statements. This fully accords with the way in which the painter assessed his artistic progress. Even towards the end of his life he saw himself nowhere near the realisation of his artistic aspirations. That only thirteen works of his mature phase carry his signature - while five hundred and fifty remained unsigned, and thus were evidently considered unfinished - is palpable proof of the painter's doubts about his own achievements. Less than two months before his death he summarised these in declaring: "I am not able to arrive at the intensity which unfolds before my senses: I do not have the magnificent richness of colour which animates nature."⁵⁸

The lack of a sense of completion in this statement is not the result of an artistic quest cut short, but rather - as Shiff points out - its very essence. In Shiff's view, Cézanne's was a life-long search for a form of expression, "and if he attained it (as one must assume perhaps on the evidence of the remarkable historical status he was awarded) that realisation must have escaped him. No wonder. In Cézanne's case, a failure to realise, to come to an end signifies success."⁵⁹

The gilded opulence of the first four of the seven frames belies the notion of a continuously evolving work. They give the paintings an air of finality and pronounce their value not only in an aesthetic but also an economic sense. As Jacques Aumont notes in his discussion of the origins and functions of the frame: "sous la forme, banale et emblématique à la fois, du cadre doré ou sculpté, il est lié à la mobilisation de l'image: à son devenir-objet, précisément, et même objet marchandable."⁶⁰ Towards the end of the film, Straub/Huillet use a quotation from Gasquet's reminiscences to make the contradiction between Cézanne's vision and the commodification of his art explicit. Here, the painter is quoted as saying:

Ich male meine Stilleben für meinen Kutscher, der sie nicht will. Ich male sie dafür, daß

die Kinder auf den Knien ihrer Großväter sie anschauen während sie ihre Suppe essen und babbeln. Ich male sie nicht für den Stolz des Kaisers von Deutschland und die Eitelkeit der Petroleumhändler von Chicago. Man täte besser daran, mir eine Kirchenmauer zu geben, den Saal eines Krankenhauses oder eines Rathauses und mir zu sagen: Scheren Sie sich dort hin, malen Sie uns eine Hochzeit, eine Genesung, eine schöne Ernte. Dann vielleicht würde ich herausholen, was ich im Bauch habe, was ich darin trage, seit ich geboren bin und das wäre Malerei.

In *Cézanne* the connotations projected onto an image by its framing come to the fore because Straub/Huillet also show us canvasses without them. Thus the eighth canvas, a portrait of Cézanne's gardener Le Vallier – a painting he worked at on the day of his death – is shown without a frame, propped up on an easel against the backdrop of a painted brick wall. Recalling the photograph of the artist at work, shown at length earlier on in the film, this arrangement shows us the unfinished image as Cézanne himself saw it, and as he viewed his art: as work in progress.

Yet another mode of filmic representation is applied to the two water colours which feature in the film: the first of these shows *Mont Sainte-Victoire as seen from Les Lauves*; the second a still life entitled *Apples, Bottles, Chair Back*. Both are shown with only a broad untextured passe-partout-like surround. This internal framing seamlessly matches the four sides of the filmic frame. By contrast to the symbolic opulence of the frames for some of the other paintings, this is a form of framing which responds to the material properties of the image it contains. As Roger Fry points out, Cézanne's increasing use of water-colours from the mid 1880s onwards greatly influenced his overall style. It inspired a tendency towards greater transparency of the glaze of colour in his oils, as well as elliptical compositions in which structure is merely indicated by points of "crystallisation." Fry further argues that Cézanne's use of aquarell technique draws on the medium's inherent capacity to "stimulate our grasp of the whole nexus of planes" by only their merest indication. Comparing water colours with the aesthetic properties of oil paintings, Fry notes that in the latter

the smallest statement is definitive. The smallest touch tends to dent the surface of the canvas and to impose on the imagination a plane situated in the picture-space. In water-colour we can never lose the sense of the material, which is a wash upon the paper. The colour may stand for a plane in the picture space, but it does so only as it were, by a tacit convention with the spectator that it does so. It never denies its actual existence on the

surface of the paper... In water colour the touches are indications rather than definitive affirmations, so that the paper itself may be a connecting link between disparate touches of colour.⁶¹

The minimalism of Straub/Huillet's setting for these water-colours reduces framing to its essential functions: it guides our eyes towards an immersion in the materials contained by a delineated field. This filmic framing thus responds to what Fry summarily describes as the water-colour's capacity for "reticence" – its propensity to imply structures which engage our perception in their active creation.⁶² Straub/Huillet's presentation is given over to this way of seeing.

The filming of the London canvas on the theme of *Les Grandes Baigneuses* which succeeds Cézanne's *Apples, Bottles, Chair Back*, sets up a contrast to this elementary gesture of showing. The painting - the middle canvas of three big-scale variations on the same theme - features a group of female nudes in a natural setting. They are arranged in a frieze-like composition by a water's edge implied by the naked figures and the formation of clouds. The painting is shown with a simple narrow wood frame. A mere indication of the museum walls is visible at either side.

In his *Grandes Baigneuses* series, Cézanne transforms the central theme of classical landscape painting: the integration of the human figure in nature. In its classical interpretation - epitomised by the work of the 17th century landscape painter Poussin - an idealised representation of landscapes becomes a grandiose setting for the human being. In it, a dramatic spectacle unfolds in which human beings are shown to inhabit nature as their innate home. This conception of nature is reflected in the perceptive engagement which is elicited from the viewer. The pictorial representation of this theme in the classical idiom unfolds as an invitation to the beholder to enter and dwell in these paintings.

Cézanne takes up and inflects this theme. Some of the most apparent differences between the classical depiction of the human being in a natural setting and that of Cézanne, are summarised by Richard Verdi as his

frequent repetitions of pose, the wilfully limited palette and the virtual absence of those

blandishments for the eye which the Old Masters employed to enrich and enliven such scenes - flowing draperies, opulent still lives, episodic figure groups, and a rich and diversified landscape.⁶³

The comparative sparseness of style which Verdi comments on is matched on a thematic level by Cézanne's refusal to imbue this landscape with a sense of narrative. Four of the nude female figures in the centre of the group have their backs turned towards the viewer. Their implied gaze is directed towards the background of the canvas. The large figure in their very midst seems to invite us to follow her look as she gestures with both hands towards it. Yet, the backdrop is devoid of any dramatic focus. It consists of bushes, trees, clouds and blue sky. The gesture points towards a landscape which is not the setting for a narrative revolving around the human being, but which is part of a structural play of form and colour in which the human being and nature assume the same weight and significance.

The painting engages the viewer in a fashion which contrasts with the implied integration of the observer into the scenery of classical landscape painting. Cézanne's pictorial composition supports a distant contemplation. This perceptive stance is partly achieved through the creation of an ostensible threshold for our perception. A broad strip of sand painted in pale ochre to bright orange tones, creates an internal frame at the lower end of the compositional field, and seems to bar us from entering the field of vision which stretches out before us.

This representation of space further supports an attitude of detached observation. If the central figure of Cézanne's composition seems to beckon us to extend our view past her into the distance, the momentum of this gesture is contained by a painting in which the pull of perspective has been greatly diminished. In Schapiro's formulation on the impact of spatial representation in Cézanne's paintings on the viewer, "we are invited to look, but not to enter or traverse the space."⁶⁴

Even devoted admirers of Cézanne's work took a critical view of his trilogy of the *Grandes Baigneuses*. Features like the overt compositional integration of the figures with their natural setting, the ostensible rhyming of forms in the group of bodies itself, the

distortions of the female form as well as the broad local areas of colour, all seemed to combine into a composition which was deemed to be nothing short of lifeless. In these canvasses a “gaucherie”- which contemporary art critics otherwise considered to be proof of the immediacy of an original vision - seemed to have made way to artful technical manipulation. In the judgement of Maurice Denis, Cézanne, whose reported aim it was to “re-do Poussin according to nature”, had produced a work which - falling sorely short of such ambitions - was merely “gauchement Poussinesque.”⁶⁵ With greater hindsight, viewers would see the painting not as the failed reworking of a stylistic tradition, but as harbinger of things to come. Its perceptual challenges were seen to bear the seeds of Cubist art.

If this challenge might be said to have faded for a present-day audience with ample exposure to modern art, then Straub/Huillet’s filming of the *Grandes Baigneuses* aims to restore some of its power to jolt our perception. Compared to the filming of all other canvasses in *Cézanne*, the presentation of this painting is astonishing. In the context of Straub/Huillet’s work with sound, and their insistence on its indivisibility from the image, it is unprecedented.

Simultaneously with the cut to the *Grandes Baigneuses*, the voice-over abates and is replaced by a soundscape of gusts of wind and the breaking of waves. This conjunction of documentary atmospheric sound with an image from which it does not originate, does not, however, indicate a temporary emulation of dominant sound practice, with its artful disguise of the fact that what we hear is not what we see. Here, a separation between sound and image is forcefully stated. The combination of image and sound is based on their common reference to a seascape. However, the material properties of these two filmic elements mark them as highly disparate. The conjunction of an authentic soundscape of the seaside and the silent and highly stylised presentation of the human being in nature thus never seems to be entirely settled. If the sound is the spatial fingerprint of a natural setting, the painting is visually anchored in its site of exhibition. A dynamic interaction between the space implied by the shot and by the picture frame emerges from this constellation. Whereas the image fosters our

immersion in the demarcated field of composition, the sound orients us towards a reality which it summons from far beyond the filmic frame. Clearly relating to each other, neither becomes appropriated as mere illustration. The silent canvas and the immaterial sound do not so much complement each other, as cue us to consider the relation between them.

The shot of the *Grandes Baigneuses* recalls the uninhabited landscape which we have seen earlier on to the accompaniment of Empedokles' recitation of his vision of equality amongst human beings, and his utopian dream of harmony between man and nature. In Cézanne's painting, the reconciliation of the realm of the human, the social and the natural is visualised. However, the utopia which this canvas represents can be said to reside no less in its execution. What Cézanne wants us to see in the *Grandes Baigneuses* is summarised by Richard Shiff as "the essential wholeness, integrity and identity of a vision 'true' to nature and self."⁶⁶ Straub/Huillet's addition of sound which implies a space beyond the Museum walls – or, to use Straub's terminology, its "prison" – is the concise filmic formulation of the aspiration which is inscribed in all their films: that how they make us see and hear will have a bearing on the way we co-exist in and with the world.

Straub/Huillet's *Cézanne* introduces its audiences to a painter who was deeply attached to visible reality. But to a reality which had to be captured in its specificity and uniqueness, rather than according to the rules of a pictorial language which had become atrophied. To create the immediacy of vision he sought to realise, familiar schemata of perception and pictorial representation had to be jettisoned and redefined. This is the dual aspect at the centre of Cézanne's work: that this "direct" representation of the world finds its expression in "a modernist intensity of attention to composition and surface."⁶⁷ In his work, the respect for reality and the visible inscription of a look co-exist. Here, we finally return to the central affinity between the work of the filmmakers and the painter, around which the film's first part has been shown to revolve. In *Cézanne* this affinity is encapsulated in the film's dominant stylistic feature.

In the film's opening sequence, the verbalisation of the major point of intersection between

the art of Straub/Huillet and Cézanne combines with the investigation of a shared expressive device: the frame. Variations of framing also establish an overarching structure for the film's first part, as we are presented with ever closer views of a mountain. The film's second part continues this exploration through the permutations of framing it present us with. However, there are yet other ways in which Straub/Huillet explore the expressive potential of the framing device.

Any film or painting is, of course, to a considerable extent the result of framing operations and decisions. Many of these concern shared resources of the two media such as the dimensions and shapes of frame, angle, level, height and distance. However, both art forms are characterised by framing devices which are specific to them. In addition, typical exhibition circumstances invest the film and picture frame with a different degree of visibility. Robert Rosen thus point out that,

unlike paintings displayed on the wall of a well-lit gallery, films are shown in theatrical settings on larger than life screens surrounded by darkness. The monumentality of the images situates the edge sufficiently close to the outer limits of peripheral vision as to become operatively invisible. The neutrality and anonymity of the darkness passively cedes hegemony to brightly lit images and booming sounds within the frame.⁶⁸

This self-effacing propensity of the cinematic frame suggests an important prerequisite for an investigation of this device: to render the frame visible. Cézanne's opening words as well as the repeated and varied presentation of picture frames, play a crucial role in this context. Formal features, such as the recurrent multiple framing in Renoir's *Madame Bovary*, the overt segmentation of space in Straub/Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles* and the ostentatiously decentred presentation of photographs of Cézanne give further prominence to the delineation of a compositional field as a salient element of the act of representation.

Equally crucial in sensitising our awareness in this way, is another stylistic hallmark of *Cézanne* - the predominance of long-held shots. Straub/Huillet's film contains seventy-eight shots in all. Of these, a total of fifty make up the seven and a half minutes of the Renoir excerpt and twenty-eight shots account for the remaining fifty-three minutes. This extensive

duration contributes to an emphasis on the shot, and the selection of a segment out of the continuum of time and space as a constitutive element of the filmic construction.

In the second part of *Cézanne* the painter's canvasses provide a realistic motivation for the mode of spectatorship suggested by the long take. However, in *Cézanne* the same duration is utilised for the filmic image, and here these protracted shots suggest a wilful stasis which is unsettling. To engage with them demands a redefinition of what it means to see a film, a refocusing of our attention to the material qualities of what we see and hear. Jacques Aumont's comments on the long take well captures a perceptual adjustment which Straub/Huillet seek to elicit from their viewer: "La fascination du plan long" Aumont states, "a toujours plus ou moins reposé sur l'espoir que dans cette coïncidence prolongée du temps du film avec le temps réel (et le temps du spectateur) quelque chose d'un contact avec le Réel finisse par advenir."⁶⁹

In *Cézanne*, long intervals of immobility alternate with a way of staking out the representational field which is specific to film - the mobile frame. Such moments are striking because they are rare in the film and because they occur exclusively in the form of extensive pans at slow speed. Except for the three hundred-and-eighty degree pans, and compositional adjustments through reframing in the Renoir excerpt, *Cézanne* consists entirely of fixed shots. In its opening sequence, film's capacity to interlace on and off-screen space is quite overtly juxtaposed to the aesthetic potential of the fixed frame.

In contrast to the continuous conversion of off-screen into on-screen space, the conjunction of the *Grandes Baigneuses* and atmospheric sound demonstrates the filmic potential to summon a space from beyond the confines of the frame through the use of sound. In combining what Bazin refers to as the "centrifugal" propensity to the film frame and the "centripetal" momentum of the picture frame, Straub/Huillet create a highly dynamic and perceptually engaging filmic constellation of image and sound.⁷⁰

Any framing decision is tantamount to the creation of a vantage point on the object of representation. Straub/Huillet's often repeated dictum, "die Einstellung ist die Einstellung",

is a concise formulation for the indivisibility of the creation of a perspective from the taking of a stance. In *Cézanne* an overt acknowledgement of the capacity of the frame to orient us towards the image comes in the hundred-and-eighty degree pan from Mont Sainte-Victoire to the Pilon du Roi, which is initiated by Cézanne's words, "wie Sie sehen, dort rechts auf dem Pilon du Roi." An overt enactment of an "Einstellung" towards the act of showing as it is advocated by Cézanne in the accompanying voice-over, this shot also vividly demonstrates the film's control over our vantage point through framing.

Another defining element in this creation of a perspective is shot height. In *Cézanne* this is highlighted by two instances from the only sequences of the film which feature actors - Renoir's *Madame Bovary* and Straub/Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles*. The first view we get of Emma Bovary is a partial one. It shows her from the waist down, while her daughter Berthe is tearing at the billowing dress in which she will shortly present herself to the citizens of Ionville. Only then do we get to see the face of the person whom we so far only have heard expressing her exasperation at the child's behaviour. The same partial framing of the human body ends the first excerpt of Straub/Huillet's *Der Tod des Empedokles*. Here, a shot sequence starts on a medium close-up of Empedokles, and ends with a shot in which the upper half of his body is protruding out of the frame.

The shot from *Madame Bovary* introduces the heroine by one of her cherished items of appearance. Her attention to these - which is highlighted, as the scene progresses, around her being dressed to go out - contrasts with the emotional emptiness to which she herself attests, and her lack of a more than passing and fanciful interest in the child. This romantic heroine is thus introduced to us through her attachment to outward accoutrements, rather than to a world of genuine emotion. André Bazin's observation on Renoir's film that, "die Helden dieser Geschichte unentwegt eine Komödie spielen und sich vorspielen", seems inscribed in this brief instance.⁷¹

Straub/Huillet's *Empedokles* sequence does not begin, but ends on withholding the view of a substantial part of the human figure which we have previously seen in full. As a visual

equivalent of his changed state, this framing documents Empedokles' banishment from his union with nature. What unites the two shots discussed is the way in which they play on dominant framing conventions. The protagonist and his or her characterisation through individual expression is not the central element of their composition. What this framing brings to the fore is a state of being, rather than individual traits of personality and character.

In *Cézanne*, the voice-over creates a continuity around aesthetic affinities. On a formal level this combines with an exploration of framing as the aesthetic device in which these affinities are encapsulated. The filmic representation which Straub/Huillet evolve in *Cézanne* is thus derived from its theme, as well as from a defining feature of the art form with which the film engages. In *Cézanne*, Straub/Huillet appropriate the essential function which André Bazin ascribes to the picture frame, when he states: "just as footlights and scenery in the theatre serve to mark the contrast between it and the real world so, by its surrounding frame, a painting is separated off not only from the reality as such but, even more so, from the reality that is represented in it."⁷² In the overt staging of a given material which has been pursued in this study as a central trait of Straub/Huillet's films, *Cézanne* crucially draws on the various devices and parameters of framing, as described by Bazin.

The palpable processes of "making" in Cézanne's work, have at times led to a somewhat limited appreciation of his achievements. Roger Fry's dismissal of meaning or subject matter in Cézanne's paintings, his appreciation of them as objects which elicit a pure "contemplation of form", and thus give rise to "a peculiarly important spiritual exercise",⁷³ is the paramount example of an assessment of Cézanne's artistic achievement which - as Judith Wechsler points out - dominated the critical discussion of his work from the 1920s up to mid-century.⁷⁴

In the preface to his study on *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, Richard Shiff counters such assumptions of a split between formal concerns and "human" values and meaning. Contending an "art-historical cliché often employed to discredit modernism", he presents us with the more holistic view of Cézanne in the insights of early viewers of the

artist's work. These, he states,

did not necessarily perceive so wide a gap between form and content; they did not always see form as picturing a pre-existing meaning, but regarded it instead as an active demonstration of the experience of meaning or human value. Certainly the qualities that nineteenth century painters and critics defined as "sincerity" "truth" "originality" and "self-expression" are "human" values. My contention is that painters such as Monet and Cézanne represented these values not only in their pictures, but inside their picture making, within their technical practice itself. The painter's techniques were largely determined by their concern for expressing such values, living them out, experiencing them. Form, or rather technique, could both represent and embody content, and not in any obscure or mysterious manner.⁷⁵

Shiff's assertion holds no less for Straub/Huillet. The search for a form of filmic representation which could both "represent and embody content" is essential to their work. The prominence of style in Straub/Huillet's films does not bear witness to a preoccupation with technique, but it aims to make us see the world afresh. Just as the artist who painted an apple which "looks solid, weighty and round as it would feel to a blind man" with "tangible touches of colour, each of which ... makes us aware of a decision of the mind and an operation of the hand",⁷⁶ the overt gesture of representation in Straub/Huillet's work arises out the "gewissenhafte Betrachtung der Dinge" demanded by Cézanne in the voice-over.

In painting Mont Sainte-Victoire it was its fiery origins which Cézanne wanted to make us see. Their films, in Straub's words, are designed to make the world look strange again, to provoke "l'idée que tout ça, ni au niveau de ce qu'on voit ni au niveau des rapports entre les gens, ni de l'histoire ni de la narration – que rien de tout ça n'est normal, ne va de soi."⁷⁷ This is how Cézanne tries to make us see.

Notes

¹ Jacques Aumont, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', in *Der Tod des Empedokles/La mort d'Empédocle*, ed. by Jacques Dénél and Dominique Païni (Dunkerque: Studio 43/Dopa Films, Ecole régionale des beaux-arts, 1987), p. 40.

² Cf. for example Jean-Marie Straub, (No title), *Cicim*, 22/23 juin 1988, p. 9; Jean-Marie Straub, 'Lettre de Jean-Marie Straub', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 233 (novembre 1971), p. 47-53; Jean-Marie

Straub, 'Feroce', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 206 (novembre 1968), p. 35.

³ Cf. for example Helge Heberle and Monika Funke Stern, 'Das Feuer im Innern des Berges: Ein Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub', *Frauen und Film*, 32 (Juni 1982), p. 12.

⁴ Stephane Bouquet, 'Initimité', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 510 (février 1996), p. 66.

⁵ Dominique Païni and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Virginie Herbin', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 430 (avril 1990), p. 53.

⁶ Jacques Aumont, 'La terre qui flambe', in *Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet: Hölderlin, Cézanne*, ed. by Dominique Païni and Charles Tesson (Lédignan: Editions Antigone, 1990), p. 104.

⁷ Jacques Aumont, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 43.

⁸ Cf. Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, trans. by Christopher Pemberton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

⁹ Judith Wechsler, *The Interpretation of Cézanne* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 90.

¹⁰ Jean-Louis Raymond, 'Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Le Mans' in *Rencontres: Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels (Strasbourg: Limelight, 1995), p. 34.

¹¹ Louis Seguin, 'Circulez! Il n'y a rien a voir', *Quinzaine Littéraire*, 552 (1990), p. 27.

¹² Cf. Richard Shiff, 'Introduction', in Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, pp. 15-23.

¹³ Jean-Louis Raymond, 'Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Le Mans', p. 33.

¹⁴ John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), p. 1.

¹⁵ Louis Seguin, 'La Clarté du Matin', in *Aux distraitements désespérés que nous sommes...*, (Toulouse: Ombres, 1991), p. 127.

¹⁶ Hajo Düchting, 'Paul Cézanne: Bilder eines Berges', in *Lust an der Kunst*, ed. by Klaus Piper and Karin Staisch (München: Piper, 1991), p. 33.

¹⁷ Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (New York: Viking, 1986), p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁰ Cf. Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, p. 166.

²¹ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne: 1836 - 1906* (New York: Abrams, 1952), p. 17.

²² Cf. for example, Andi Engel, 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet is there too', *Enthusiasm*, 1 (January 1970), p. 9.

²³ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. by Alan Russell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 163.

²⁴ Quoted in Judith Wechsler, *The Interpretation of Cézanne*, p. 39.

²⁵ Quoted in Alexander Sesonke, *Jean Renoir: The French Films 1924-39* (Cambridge Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 155.

²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁷ Given the unavailability of an original cut, any statement on Renoir's film must be prefaced by a partial disclaimer. Two hundred and ten minutes long in the version which its director had authorised, the film was eventually cut down to a bowdlerised version of just over two hours. In his semi-autobiography *My Films*, Jean Renoir dissociated himself from the released version of *Madame Bovary* as the "boring" remnant of a work, which had received enthusiastic responses from his friends - Bertolt Brecht amongst them - when he gave them a private screening. In Straub/Huillet's excerpt, a trace of such rough and ready interference in the name of commercial viability is perceptible in a marked jump in the editing of the conversation between Bovary and Hommais, and in the desynchronisation of the words and the lip movement of speakers. The history of its uses has not left Renoir's film untouched either.

²⁸ Alexander Sesonke, *Jean Renoir: The French Films 1924-39*, p. 144.

²⁹ Stephen Heath, *Madame Bovary* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 106.

³⁰ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne: 1836 - 1906*, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³² There is indeed no single instance of frame mobility in "Der Tod des Empedokles."

³³ Helmut Krebs, 'Der Tod des Empedokles', *Filmfaust*, 60/61 (July/August/September 1989), p. 52.

³⁴ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Die Größe des Films ist die Bescheidenheit, daß man zur Fotografie verurteilt ist', *Filmwärts*, 9 (Dezember 1987), p. 11.

³⁵ Dominique Païni, 'Straub et Cézanne ou l'insistance du regard', in *Der Tod des Empedokles/ La mort d'Empédocle*, p. 19.

³⁶ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne: 1836 - 1906*, p. 29.

³⁷ Cf., Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

³⁸ Jacques Aumont, *The Image*, trans. by Claire Pajackowska (London: British Film Institute, 1997), p.7.

³⁹ Jacques Aumont, 'Peinture et Cinéma: L'oeil Interminable' in *Cinéma Action*, 47 (avril 1988) p. 116.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 186.

⁴¹ Cf. Stephan Wackwitz, 'Die Tragödie: "Der Tod des Empedokles"' in *Friedrich Hölderlin* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), pp. 100-101.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.101.

⁴³ Cf. Didier Thouart, 'Histoires de peintres (Les peintres vus par le cinéma)', *Historia*, 499 (1988),

pp. 108-111.

⁴⁴ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 156.

⁴⁵ Aumont, Jacques, *L'oeil Interminable: Cinéma et Peinture* (Paris: Seguir, 1989), p. 105.

⁴⁶ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Cf. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, pp. 199-218.

⁴⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Chicago: North-Western University Press, 1964), p. 14.

⁴⁹ Zach, Peter, 'Vom Unglück in einer Maschine zu sein, die viele Freiheiten beinahe hat, aber in der sich das Glück nur ab und zu zeigt', *Blimp* (March 1985), p. 21.

⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, p. 13.

⁵¹ In considering the layers of interpretation which Cézanne's work has acquired, it is worth noting that this statement has frequently been quoted to claim the painter as precursor of Cubism.

⁵² Judith Wechsler, *The Interpretation of Cézanne*, p. 63.

⁵³ Quoted in Richard Shiff, 'Introduction', in Joachim Gasquet, *Memoir with Conversations*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Marc Chevré, 'Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet: Entre Deux Films', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 418 (avril 1989), p. 64.

⁵⁸ Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, p. 192.

⁵⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 196.

⁶⁰ Aumont, Jacques, *L'oeil Interminable: Cinéma et Peinture*, p. 107.

⁶¹ Fry, Roger, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 64.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 64

⁶³ Richard Verdi, *Cézanne* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p. 193.

⁶⁴ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne: 1836-1906*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, p. 216.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 216.

⁶⁷ Judith Wechsler, *The Interpretation of Cézanne*, p. 89.

⁶⁸ Robert Rosen, 'Notes on Film and Painting', in *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*, ed by Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), p. 250.

⁶⁹ Jacques Aumont, 'Peinture et Cinéma L'oeil Interminable', p. 118.

⁷⁰ Cf. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray p.166. As a statement which claims general validity, Bazin's attribution of such an unchanging quality to the filmic frame is too schematic. In the specific case of the sound/image constellation discussed here, his terminology is helpful in grasping its perceptual dynamics.

⁷¹ André Bazin, 'Madame Bovary', in *Jean Renoir*, trans. by Alan Russell (München: Carl Hanser, 1977), p. 136.

⁷² André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. by Hugh Gray, p. 165.

⁷³ Quoted in Judith Wechsler, *The Interpretation of Cézanne*, p. 43.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 84-88.

⁷⁵ Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, p. xiv.

⁷⁶ Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne: 1836-1906*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Jacques Aumont, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', p. 52.

Conclusion

Straub/Huillet have repeatedly stated that they lack any cinephile tendencies. Asked why he embarked upon filmmaking, Jean-Marie Straub answers: "Le cinéma ne m'intéresse pas." The statement points to an essential tenet of Straub/Huillet's work. They do not seek to process a given material through the application of an a-priori style, a pre-existing cinematic language. Their films emerge out of the encounter of cinematic resources and existing works of art. Danièle Huillet - to whom it generally falls to introduce a greater degree of precision into her collaborator's statements - qualifies Jean-Marie Straub's categorical answer: "Ce n'était pas l'idée de faire du cinéma mais c'était l'idée de faire un film précis." ¹ Straub/Huillet's description of each of their films as "Ermittlung" of a given material well captures the formative role which the examination of existing works of art has for their filmmaking. ²

This "investigation" has created discernible strands in their oeuvre. Working with particular representational forms, Straub/Huillet seem to gauge the cinematic potential of materials from other art forms in ever different ways. Music and language provide examples for this varied approach to a specific material for which some of the films included in this study can serve as illustration. The emphatically diegetic and non-diegetic constellations in *Chronik* and *Einleitung* represent the two extreme poles of the inclusion of music into film. Two subsequent films from a musical source, explore options between this stylistic opposition. *Moses and Aron* combines the diegetic sounds of a choir, with the pre-recorded soundtrack of the score. In *Von heute auf morgen*, all music is diegetic; however, the orchestra remains off-screen while the camera rests on the singers.

The representation of language in the four films analysed in this study reflects a similarly exhaustive use of stylistic options. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, Straub/Huillet unfold a broad spectrum of forms of dialogue enactment. In *Einleitung*, the staging of language is reduced to the overt act of quoting. In *Cézanne* and *Chronik*, two different types of voice-over

constellations form an essential part of the filmic form, with one of them linked in striking fashion to a physical source, while the other is overtly divorced from any anchorage in the diegesis. As Straub himself remarks in connection with certain stylistic choices in *Der Tod des Empedokles*: "On essaye à chaque film, de s'amuser autrement."³

In the individual films the formative impact of the adapted material is not least due to the weighty presence it brings with it. All of the adapted works of art discussed here, are part of a European canon of high art. They precede the films as artefacts in their own right, and with an established history which has shaped the prevailing perception of them.

Most importantly, however, the independent existence which these artworks retain as part of the filmic construction is derived from their filmic representation. Straub/Huillet do not appropriate them as illustrations of a narrative or an argument. Thus in *Chronik* music does not provide a metaphor for the life and struggles of the musical genius. It is the dominant element in the film's diegesis which, rather than expediting narrative developments, elicits our attention to the sonorous and visual details of its enactment.

In *Einleitung*, the filmic use of music comes under scrutiny in a different way. Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik* enters the film as a device which does not settle meaning, but which undercuts the process of signification through its heterogeneity. Straub/Huillet's sparse dramatisation of Kafka's *Der Verschollene* is a film of dialogues. As language takes centre stage, the varying forms of delivery which are brought to the text mark an inquiry into its linguistic structure. Finally, *Cézanne* constitutes a blatant refusal to use the artist's paintings as illustrations for a filmic summary of his aesthetics. Instead, the film confronts us with the physical manifestation of his vision in materials from various representational forms, and in his own paintings.

If literary adaptations, the most commonly practised translation of another art form into film, tend to be inspired by inherently cinematic features of a text, Straub/Huillet's interest in their source materials is of a very different kind. Their response to the properties of these

materials results in a challenge to numerous received notions of film. Thus the use of photographs and paintings in *Cézanne* provides the filmmakers with an opportunity to explore cinematic stasis through extremely long shots. *Chronik* challenges the definition of film as a predominantly visual medium. In *Einleitung* the conventional hierarchy of language and music in the sound-track is undermined by a sound-mix which gives both sonic elements equal sway. The prominence and stylisation of dialogue enactment introduces an overt theatricality into *Klassenverhältnisse*, which defies notions of cinematic verisimilitude and realism. Peter Busch's recommendation that literary sources might serve to advance film as an art form: "Die Sperrigkeit des Materials kann produktiv wirken", ⁴ is thus one which Straub/Huillet have copiously implemented with a variety of representational forms. In what Jean-Marie Straub refers to as "un travail qui dynamite la rhétorique", it is not least the process of adaptation which serves as the source of ignition. ⁵

There is yet another sense in which the artworks which Straub/Huillet select for their films contribute a certain "Sperrigkeit" to their films. All of the films discussed here are marked by a rigorous stylistic texture which has been frequently seen to militate against their accessibility and beauty. The over-elaboration and "turgidity" which, from Scheibe's contemporaneous viewpoint, obviated against the musical clarity and beauty in Bach's compositions, is an indication of this, as is a strand of criticism which saw Cézanne's primary pursuit as the creation of structures and pictorial effects at the expense of "specifically human values" in his paintings. ⁶ Schoenberg's defence of his compositions as "*Zwölftonmusik*" rather than "*Zwölftonmusik*" highlights the charges of formalism to which his work was subjected. ⁷ The misconceptions around Kafka's meticulously constructed resistance to purely thematic readings, are no less indicative of the assumed split between "form" and "content" which this type of criticism is predicated on.

Aesthetic hindsight, and the inclusion of the above artists' works into the canon of European cultural achievements, has familiarised contemporary audiences with the formal challenges of their works to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, even now the names Bach, Cézanne, Kafka and Schoenberg read like a list of artists whose work engages the intellect rather than the senses, who have created art which is "difficult" or even inaccessible.

The saliency of style, the palpability of the processes of making, constitutes an essential affinity between the art of Bach, Cézanne, Kafka, Schoenberg and Straub/Huillet. Against the background of the dominant film mode and the "invisibility" which it is commonly accorded, their films draw our attention to the processes of filmic representation. Their adaptations signal their own status as re-representations at every turn.

One of the ways by which this is achieved is what Jean-Marie Straub has described as the "lacunary" narrative structure of Straub/Huillet's films.⁸ None of their works allows the viewer to infer a unified, unequivocal story or argument. Thus, defying their respective circumstances of production, the collage-like constructions of *Cézanne* and *Einleitung* are not harnessed by a linear argument. The structure of *Cézanne* emerges through the affinities and differences which are there for the viewer to perceive in the individual elements. Compared by Straub to a silent film, *Cézanne* aims to let the material speak for itself.⁹ In *Einleitung*, the refusal to restrain the material heterogeneity of this assemblage through an unequivocal political statement creates the work's central tension. The three parts of the film apply different principles for the logical organisation of its elements. However, in all three, discontinuities are foregrounded in a way which undercuts any overt history lesson. While *Einleitung* presents opposing explanations for the recurrences of "Barbarei" in modern history, it refrains from settling the argument it devises for us.

In contrast to the essayist forms of *Einleitung* and *Cézanne*, *Chronik* and *Klassenverhältnisse* both suggest a clearly defined system of logical organisation as

background norm. They evoke the tightly constructed pattern of the classical film narrative with its central principle of character causality. However, both films are remarkable for their violation of this pattern. In both, the title bares the principle of construction which governs the filmic narrative. In *Chronik*, voice-over events are connected by chronology and thus their sequential occurrence within the passage of time itself. In the Kafka adaptation, it is the workings of the "Verhältnisse" which generate the narrative permutations of the "Kampf der Subjekte." Coincidence and chance, which continuously interfere with Roßmann's actions, appear to be the unpredictable and sinister reverberations of these circumstances. In both films, impersonal causes drive the narrative onwards and prevail over the protagonists' aims and desires. The stringent causal construction of the classical narrative mode is substantially unravelled in these works. In *Klassenverhältnisse*, gaps abound as narrative lines are introduced but remain unresolved and causes and effects become strikingly disproportionate or are simply never explained. In *Chronik*, the narrative is a sequence of isolated episodes with little connection between them, other than the fact that they document instances in a life-cycle. It is the ambiguity, the gaps and elisions of these films' narrative construction which deflect the viewer's attention to the manner in which the events they present us with are narrated.

In considering the films' stylistic fabric, this study has observed the various ways in which cinematographic representation pulls away from narrative demands. Time, space and the materiality of the sounds and images come forward in this process and engage the viewers' attention. Throughout Straub/Huillet's work this is not a random process, rather it creates stylistic patterns which unify the films formally. The recurring description of their style as "minimalist", is not least a recognition of a perceptible stylistic texture which foregrounds a limited and sparsely applied repertory of devices throughout individual films. One example for this is the eschewal of reframing with character movement which can be observed in *Chronik* and *Klassenverhältnisse*. The frequent omission of mastershots and the sparse use of shot-

reverse-shot editing in *Klassenverhältnisse* are another, as is the reliance on long takes in *Cézanne*. However, if the overall texture of the films is “minimalist” in this sense, it must also be borne in mind that this sparseness of the stylistic weave provides a background against which the isolated appearance of suppressed devices can make a striking impact. The reclaiming of stylistic figures from the repertory of “invisible narration” for visibility - and indeed audibility - which has been highlighted in the different films demonstrates this point.

The creation of a film form which challenges received notions of the cinematic is far from being a formalistic pursuit in Straub/Huillet's films. This form is derived from, and intrinsically linked to, a chosen subject. Noël Burch's comments on the composite nature of subject and style, as he perceives it in certain examples of innovative filmmaking, are helpful in outlining this connection. In Burch's view, the creation of alternative film form demands that the hierarchical conception of subject matter and style be jettisoned. “Surely”, he states, “the subject matter of a film, the element that is almost always the starting point of the process of making a film, must be conceived in terms of its ultimate form and texture.”¹⁰

A stylistic pattern derived from the subject matter is foregrounded and varied across each of the films discussed in this study. In *Chronik*, recollections of a life are realised as a compilation of its physical traces. Recurring types of materials which are processed through specific filmic devices combine into a discernible stylistic structure. As the film stages an inquiry into conventional “readings” of representational forms, the way in which the various materials are presented, demands of us that we readjust habitual forms of perception associated with them. The utopian content of the film is a form of human production for which the act of music-making is the physical evidence. Its utopian momentum is a shift in our perceptual engagement from - to borrow an opposition employed by Bazin - the various materials' “signification” to their inherent “sense.”¹¹

In *Einleitung*, a history of “Barbarei” is presented through a series of documents. The filmic representation which is derived from this “documentary” basis acts as persistent reminder of the nature of the film as an extended quotation. The prominent appearance of both Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, the foregrounding of processes of recording, the repeated use of black frames, the double framing and finally the presentation of language through the two readings all evolve variations on this cinematic gesture of citation. Ultimately, it is in the progression from being presented with quoted evidence, to reading for ourselves that the film’s political message is situated.

In *Klassenverhältnisse*, Kafka’s novel fragment is condensed into dialogues which stake out the recurring battleground for the “Kampf der Subjekte” amongst the characters. By their representation of space Straub/Huillet make the faultlines and disjunctures which are distilled from the language materially manifest. Rather than thematise the causes and implications of class relations, they create a vantage point for the viewer from which “Tatbeobachtung”, and thus the perception of the dynamics of the world in which the film’s characters imprison each other, becomes possible.

Cézanne engages with the work of an artist who, from a deep commitment to physical reality, derives a form of making which leaves pictorial norms of mimesis behind. The persistent inquiry into framing which runs through the entire film is a material reflection of this conflation of respect for reality and formative activity. It is left to Hölderlin to articulate the political dimension of the essential tenets of Cézanne’s vision: the creation of a just and equal order which would spring from the intense and supple perceptual engagement with the world. Each of the four films thus features a prominent representational strategy. While being derived from the material’s inherent characteristics, this also crucially informs the delineation between the film’s source material and the processes of its cinematographic representation. In Jean-Marie Straub’s words, their films are “un moyen de faire parler le sujet du film.”¹²

Throughout this study, salient features of Straub/Huillet's films have been defined against the background of our most pervasive norm of filmic perception: the classical film style. However, the narrative construction of *Klassenverhältnisse* and *Chronik* features a number of similarities with a stylistic paradigm which evolved in the national film movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

A common focus of these attempts to create alternatives to the prevailing formulations of dominant film mode was the loosening and deconstruction of conventional narrative form. Replacing the tight causality of the dominant mode, these films present the viewer with more problematic "sujet" constructions. Here the protagonists may lack the clear-cut traits, motives and goals which expedite the narrative chain of events in the dominant style. At times character's actions and motivations seem unintelligible both to themselves and the viewer. Narrative formats which favour an episodic, less linear and more elliptical structure reflect the frequent absence of tight causal links. Narrative strands once introduced may be left unresolved. Processes of narration come forward in the viewer's search for cues to motivate these problematic structures. In contrast to the closure which characterises the dominant film style, both in term of meaning and form, this type of film creates what Roy Armes describes as a persistently "ambiguous image."¹³

However, as David Bordwell has pointed out, these films do not merely generate ambiguity, they also provide a key to its resolution, by cueing us to perceive ambiguity as signifying a "grainier" notion of verisimilitude than it is espoused by the dominant film mode. In particular, the "art film", as Bordwell calls it, uses ambiguity to reflect the subjective distortions of experience: given the prominence assigned to the auteur in the context of the art film, ambiguity can come to signal an intermittent or a more consistent commentary on the filmic events. Bordwell thus argues that, whenever ambiguities impede our understanding

we tend to seek realistic motivations. Is a character's mental state creating the difficulty? Is "life" just leaving "loose ends"? If we are thwarted we appeal to the narration, and perhaps

also to the author. Is the narrator violating the norm to achieve a specific effect? In particular what thematic significance justifies the deviation? What range of judgmental connotations or symbolic meanings can be produced from this point or pattern?¹⁴

In this way, art film narration, despite its roughened form, enables us to engage in the construction of a - realistically - ambiguous world and story.

That Straub/Huillet's first forays into filmmaking coincided with the emergence of the New German Cinema, suggests their proximity to this film mode. Their inclusion in much of the writing on the filmmakers of this period reflects this assumption. However, the marginal position to which this literature unanimously assigns their work, draws an aesthetic delineation which Straub/Huillet have never sought to contest. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, the New German Filmmakers: "broke many of the rules of classical narrative without, however, necessarily developing alternative paradigms, such as can be found in, say the films of Jean-Luc Godard or Jean-Marie Straub."¹⁵ In the light of the works of filmmakers such as Alexander Kluge or Rainer Werner Fassbinder, this statement might appear somewhat sweeping. However, it points to salient differences between Straub/Huillet's work and the art film as it has been described above.

The notion of pervasive ambiguity as an expression of realism or of an authorial commentary has little purchase in their films. To explain the tenuous narrative constructions and the digression of the narration from presenting a narrated content in Straub/Huillet's films in this way would be to ignore some of the defining features of these works. The pervasive stylisation of their films hardly appeals to notions of verisimilitude. The lack of psychological depth yielded by their favoured "inexpressive" acting style, allows little recourse to a character's inner life and mental state. Straub/Huillet's frequently stated intention to expunge any expressive intent from their filmic representation must be considered an illusory aim. However, to ascribe the function of a running authorial commentary to the overt narrational processes in these films would settle the films' perceptual difficulties by thematizing them.

The frustration which critics, particularly in the 1960s, voiced about the lack of a clear-cut political message in Straub/Huillet's films, bears witness to the resistance which their works put up against an assimilation as the political comment of an auteur. Jean-Marie Straub's reaction to critics' attempts to reduce the films in this manner is one of exasperation. On the reception of *Machorka-Muff*, he thus stated:

Nur weil ich aus der Böllschen Satire eine nackte Waffe geschmiedet habe für die vielen, die weder "militaristisch" noch "antimilitaristisch" sind ... sitzen der Atlas Verleiher, seine sogenannten künstlerischen Berater und einige andere, die als (sogar Links-) Intellektuelle gelten, immer wieder vor *Machorka-Muff* wie welche, die Pornographie erwartet haben und denen man eine Mamor-Venus zeigt!¹⁶

To interpret *Machorka-Muff* or any other film by Straub/Huillet as explicit political statements would, indeed, rob them of much of their power to achieve what they set out to do: to make us see and hear differently. It would detract from a quality which - to invoke a terminology applied to film by Victor Shklovsky - places these films nearer to poetry than to prose.¹⁷ As Danièle Huillet states on the nature of their work:

Mais, ce n'est pas compliqué: c'est le même travail que font les poètes sur la langue. Ils prennent une langue qui dans bien de cas est devenue raide, est devenue un système d'habitude, qui est presque une langue morte et tout d'un coup ils essaient de faire des choses qu'on n'avait pas faites ou qu'on a oublié de faire depuis longtemps.¹⁸

To view the films in this light does not negate their power to convey content and meaning. In his discussion of what he refers to as "parametric" film form, David Bordwell provides a cogent analysis of how filmmakers can foster a different form of engagement with films by involving the viewer in the perception of style without discarding content. In works of filmmakers such as Bresson, Dreyer or Ozu he observes a play of style which can evolve independently from narrative determination, and which is organised across entire films "according to distinct principles just as a narrative poem exhibits prosodic patterning or an operatic scene fulfils a musical logic."¹⁹ The perceptual implications which this holds for the viewer are succinctly described by Kristin Thompson in the following words:

Form can lure us into perceiving style for its own sake. But the result need not detract from the narrative. Quite the contrary, if we cooperate and follow these stylistic patterns as well as (not instead of) the narrative, our perception of the film as a whole can only be more complete, more intense. But we must first be willing to assume that a film's form is not limited to its narrative and our activity as viewers is not aimed simply at a constant interpretation of all elements in term of the meaning they create. Such a viewing procedure, commonly called a "reading" in current parlance, limits both the film and our perception of it.²⁰

Just like poetry or operatic scenes, Straub/Huillet's films are far from being devoid of semantic content, rather they deal with discernible themes and issues. All of them are political, in that they inquire into the phenomenology of human existence in the hope of laying bare the forces and the aspirations which have shaped it. The topography of class relations, the recurrence of "Barbarei" throughout modern history, the contrast between the material conditions and the restrictions of Bach's life and his music and the artistic vision of Cézanne are evidence in this ongoing examination. From it emanates a conclusion which Straub presents in a collage of quotations for the French magazine *Cicim*. Using the words of Schoenberg he writes: "und die Erdenkinder müssen sich beeilen ehe sie 'heruntergestürzt werden vom Erfolg des Mißbrauchs.'" ²¹ In Straub/Huillet's film this "Mißbrauch" is epitomised by capitalist values. The vacuous and destructive notion of progress, which the filmmakers ascribe to capitalist forms of life has become an increasingly central focus of their films in recent years. Thus in *Der Tod des Empedokles*, the human domination of nature is shown to carry the seeds of social and ecological destruction. In *Von heute auf morgen*, the changing fashions of modernity only bring about a variation of power constellations, but not the proclaimed liberation.

There is yet another theme running through Straub/Huillet's work, which by contrast is insistently utopian. In his collage of quotations for *Cicim* Jean-Marie Straub also enclosed Empedokles' speech to the Agrigentians. In this, Empedokles sees a fairer order springing from a fresh perceptual engagement with "der Erde Grün." What Meyer Shapiro describes as

the visible endeavour of Cézanne's paintings to present us with "the experience of the quality of things without regard to their use", is what Empedokles yearns for.²²

It is the intense attention to the materiality of their art which provides a common link between Cézanne, Bach, Schoenberg, Kafka. The formal principles which these artists evolve with the resources of various representational forms, is ultimately of interest to Straub/Huillet as part of what Jonathan Crary, with reference to Cézanne, describes as the "quest of a new mode of inhabiting the material world."²³ That, by taking us with them on this quest, they might make us see and hear a world beyond the layers of a false familiarity, is a hope which Straub expresses with the following words of Marcel Proust:

*La grandeur de l'art véritable, c'est de retrouver, de ressaisir de nous faire connaître toute la réalité loin de laquelle nous vivons, de laquelle nous nous écartons de plus en plus, au fur et à mesure que prend plus d'épaisseur et d'imperméabilité, la connaissance conventionnelle que nous lui substituons, cette réalité que nous risquons fort de mourir sans l'avoir connue, et qui est simplement notre vie, la vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, ma seule vie par conséquent, véritablement vécue.*²⁴

Barton Byg has noted, that the belief that authenticity can be made to shine forth from the material represented, points to a fundamental "romanticism" in Straub/Huillet's work.²⁵ It may indeed be argued that this aspiration is essentially utopian, however, it would seem difficult to deny, that against the background of an increasingly standardised cinema fare, these films merit our attention for the way in which they exercise our perception.

There is little indication of such attention at the present moment. As recently as 1998 Wolfram Schütte thus recorded,

*daß ein Werk wie das der Straubs nicht nur um sein Überleben, sondern heute auch noch um seine Duldung kämpfen muß. Was einmal - in den sechziger bis frühen achtziger Jahren - zumindest als ein mit Respekt, wo nicht sogar mit Bewunderung als inhärente "Korrektur" des Filmmachens begriffenes Oeuvre angesehen und -gehört wurde ist innerhalb der gegenwärtigen deutschen und europäischen Kinematographie und der derzeitigen Kinogänger, resp. Kinokonsumenten ein quantité négligeable geworden.*²⁶

No longer considered to be in the vanguard of cinematic innovation, Straub/Huillet are viewed "comme des traces dinosauresque"²⁷; or as Serge Daney maintains, "the last great film-

makers of the history of modern cinema, perhaps of the history of cinema period.”²⁸ In view of this changed assessment, it seems salient to situate their work in the context of the perceptual modalities which surround it today.

Straub/Huillet's most frequently proclaimed aesthetic affinity is with a painter whose work documents fundamental shifts in the conditions of visual experience and representation. D.H. Lawrence perceived this clearly when he wrote:

Cézanne's apples are a real attempt to let the apple exist in its own entity ... I am convinced that what Cézanne himself wanted was true-to-life representation. Only he wanted it more true to life. And once you have got photography, it is a very, very difficult thing to get representation more true-to-life: which it has to be.²⁹

The problem of “true-to-life” representation would, however, not be settled by what in Lawrence's day where the unsurpassed mimetic facilities of the photographic medium, nor would the moving pictures which succeeded it yield such truth. Indeed, photography provided the quintessential proof that - in Brecht's words - “eine einfache ‘Wiedergabe der Realität’ ” would disclose reality to us less truthfully than ever. “Eine Photographie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG” - writes Brecht - “ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute. Die eigentliche Realität ist in die Funktionale gerutscht.”³⁰ It is the task of form in Straub/Huillet's films to bring the “Funktionale” to the fore. However, their work as much as Cézanne's is shaped by and directed at physical reality and the forces inscribed in it.

It is precisely this anchorage of representation in a material source which is affected by present day shifts in the modalities of sensory experience. In what Jonathan Crary refers to as “abstraction of the visual”, processes of visual mediation have cut free from physical data.³¹

He notes:

The rapid development in little more than a decade of a vast array of computer graphics techniques is part of a sweeping reconfiguration of relations between an observing subjects and modes of representation that effectively nullifies most of the culturally established meanings of the terms *observer* and *representation*. The formalization and diffusion of computer generated imagery heralds the ubiquitous implantation of fabricated visual

"spaces" radically different from the mimetic capacities of film photography and television ... If these images can be said to refer to anything, it is to millions of bits of electronic and mathematical data. Increasingly, visibility will be situated on a cybernetic and electromagnetic terrain where abstract visual and linguistic elements coincide and are consumed, circulated, and exchanged globally.³²

It may be added, that far from being exempt from this process, sound might well be seen as the harbinger of this abstraction of sensory data as far as cinema is concerned. As Rick Altman points out, the reliance on post-production procedures from the mid 1930s onwards broke the indexical link between sound and a physical source far earlier than was the case for the cinematographic image.³³

In cinema, Thomas Elsaesser perceives these trends as leading to the creation of what he terms "hyper-realism." In his view, the investments which - reflecting a drive for product differentiation from television - were made in the mid 1970s into new technologies and computerisation in cinema exerted a shift from

the pleasure of representation from verisimilitude and realism to fantasy and the self-conscious, self-referential play of illusionist codes, while eight track stereo or Dolby sound systems are not innovations that create greater realism for the ear, as much as they foreground the presence of a separate sound space and the existence of purely imaginative effects.³⁴

In Elsaesser's view, techniques such as "distanciation" or "self-reflexivity" are appropriated and emptied of their once critical potential in the course of such spectacular forms of representation. "Avant-garde techniques", he concludes, "could find profitable uses."³⁵

Against this background, the perceived obsolescence of Straub/Huillet's work is sharply outlined. It is in speaking about Cézanne and painting, that Jean-Marie Straub acknowledges the crucial dividing line between their own work and a form of cinema which cuts its links to physical reality. He asserts:

On me dira que je suis un vieux réactionnaire, mais ça m'est bien égal: je pense que ce que fait Cézanne plus grand que les peintres qui déforment la réalité, et à l'arrivée, c'est

beaucoup moins payant parce que ça refoule tout ce qu'il y a de plus riche sur la plante sur laquelle on vit.³⁶

Misgivings have greeted the advent of new media ever since the invention of photography, and it seems salutary to insist on the emancipatory potential which contemporary developments in the media environment with their promise of unprecedented degrees of interactivity and accessibility of information holds.

And, one might surmise, the abstract simulations which are at the centre of these developments might well throw into sharper relief what so far has largely seemed to elude audiences behind the austerity and intellectualism that has so often been attributed to Straub/Huillet's films: their celebration of the physical phenomena of the world. With a new resonance the question then remains: "Wann wirst du endlich sehen? Jetzt?"

Notes

¹ Sebastian Schadhauser, Elias Chaluja and Gianna Mingrone, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 223 (août 1970), p. 56.

² Cf. for example Peter Zach, 'Vom Unglück in einer Maschine zu sein, die viele Freiheiten beinahe hat, aber in der sich das Glück nur ab und zu zeigt', *Blimp* (March 1985), p. 18.

³ Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 'Faire un Plan', in *Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet: Hölderlin, Cézanne*, ed. by Dominique Païni and Charles Tesson Dunkerque: Studio 43/DopaFilms/Ecole régionale des Beaux-arts, 1987), p. 93.

⁴ Rolf Busch, 'Über Verfilmung von Literatur', *Akzente*, vol. 4, no. 20 (1973), p. 309.

⁵ Marie Frering and Bruno Tackels, 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, Strasbourg', in *Rencontres: Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*, ed. by Bruno Tackels (Strasbourg: Limelight, 1995), p. 42.

⁶ Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. xiv.

⁷ Quoted in Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: B.F.I., 1981), p. 83.

⁸ Jean-Marie Straub, 'Frustration of Violence', *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*, 7 (January 1967), pp. 58-59.

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Filmography

1962 *Machorka-Muff*

18 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the short story *Hauptstädtisches Journal* by Heinrich Böll, 1958 **Photography:** Wendelin Sachtler, Hans Christof Brüning **Sound:** Janos Rozmer, Jean-Marie Straub **Main Actors:** Erich Kuby (Erich von Machorka-Muff), Renate Langsdorff (Inn) **Music:** Johann Sebastian Bach **Production:** Straub-Huillet (Munich), Atlas-Film (Duisburg), Cinéropa-Film (Munich) **Premiere:** Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, 1963.

1964 *Nicht Versöhnt oder Es hilft nur Gewalt, wo Gewalt herrscht*

55 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the novel *Billard um halbzehn* by Heinrich Böll, 1959 **Photography:** Wendelin Sachtler, Gerhard Ries, Christian Schwarzwald, Jean Marie Straub **Sound:** Lutz Grünau, Willi Hanspach **Main Actors:** Heinrich Hargesheimer (Heinrich Fähmel, 80 years), Karlheinz Hargesheimer (Heinrich Fähmel, 35 years), Martha Städner (Johanna Fähmel, 70 years), Danièle Huillet (the young Johanna Fähmel) **Music:** Bela Bartok and Johann Sebastian Bach **Production:** Straub-Huillet (Munich) **Premiere:** Berlin Film Festival, 4 July 1965.

1967 *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*

94 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on excerpts from various original documents by and on Johann Sebastian Bach **Photography:** Ugo Piccone, Saverio Diamanti, Giovanni Canfarelli **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Lucien Moreau, Paul Schöler **Main Actors:** Gustav Leonhardt (Johann Sebastian Bach), Cristiane Lang-Drewanz (Anna Magdalena Bach) **Music:** Johann Sebastian Bach, Leo Leonius **Production:** Straub-Huillet (Munich), Hessischer Rundfunk (Frankfurt), Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film (Munich), Franz Seitz Filmproduktion (Munich), R.A.I. (Rome), I.D.I.-Cinematografica (Rome), Filmfonds e.V. (Rome), Telepool (Munich) **Premiere:** Cinemanifestate Festival, Utrecht, 3 February 1968.

1968 *Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter*

23 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Jean-Marie Straub. Based on the play *Krankheit der Jugend* by Ferdinand Bruckner, 1926, and three poems by Juan de la Cruz., 1577. **Photography:** Klaus Schilling, Hubs Hagen **Sound:** Peter Lutz, Klaus Eckelt **Main actors:** James Powell (James), Lilith Ungerer (Marie and Lilith), Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Freder and the pimp), Peer Raben (Alt and Willi), Irm Hermann (Desiree), Kristin Peter (Irene), Hanna Schygulla (Lucy), Rudolf Waldemar Brem (Petrell) **Music:** Johann Sebastian Bach **Production:** Janus Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt), Straub/Huillet (Munich) **Premiere:** International Film Week, Mannheim, 10 October 1968.

1969 *Les yeux ne veulent pas en tout temps se fermer ou peut-être qu'un jour Rome se permettra de choisir à son tour*

88 minutes, 16mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the play *Othon* by Pierre Corneille, 1664 **Photography:** Ugo Piccone, Renato Berta **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Lucien Moreau **Main actors:** Adriano Apra (Othon), Anne Brumagne (Plautine), Ennio Lauricella (Galba), Olimpia Carlisi (Camille), Anthony Pensabene (Vinius), Jubarite Semaran = Jean-Marie Straub (Lacus), Jean-Claude Biette (Martial), Marilu Parolini (Flavie), Gianna

Mingrone (Albiane), Leo Mingrone (Albin), Edoardo de Gregorio (Atticus), Sergio Rossi (Rutile), Sebastian Schadhauser (first soldier), Jacques Fillion (second soldier) **Production:** Janus-Film (Frankfurt), Straub-Huillet (Rome). **Premiere:** Rapallo Film Festival, 4 January 1970

1972 *Geschichtsunterricht*

85 minutes, 16mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the novel fragment *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* by Bertolt Brecht, 1937-1939 **Photography:** Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti. **Sound:** Jety Grigioni. **Main actors:** Gottfried Bold (the banker), Johann Unterpertinger (the peasant), Hanri Ludwig (the lawyer), Carl Vaillant (the writer), Benedikt Zulauf (the young man) **Music:** Johann Sebastian Bach. **Production:** Straub-Huillet (Rome), Janus-Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt) **Premiere:** International Film Week Mannheim, 10 October 1972.

1972 *Einleitung zu Arnold Schönberg's Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*

15 minutes, 16mm, colour, b/w **Script:** Jean-Marie Straub. Based on correspondence between Arnold Schoenberg and Wassiliy Kandinsky, between 20 April 1929 and 4 May 1929, and an address by Bertolt Brecht to the International Congress of Intellectuals against Fascism, Paris, 1935 **Photography:** Renato Berta, Horst Bever **Sound:** Jety Grigioni, Harald Lill. **Main Actors:** Günther Peter Straschek, (first reader), Jean-Marie Straub (first announcer), Danièle Huillet (second announcer), Peter Nestler (second reader) **Music:** Arnold Schönberg **Production:** Südwestfunk Baden-Baden, Straub/Huillet (Rome) **Premiere:** International Film Week Mannheim, October 1972.

1974 *Moses und Aron*

105 minutes, 35mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the operatic fragment *Moses and Aron* by Arnold Schönberg, 1932 **Photography:** Ugo Piccone, Saverio Diamanti, Gianni Canfarelli, Renato Berta **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Ernst Neuspiel, Georges Vaglio, Jety Grigioni. **Main Actors:** Günter Reich (Moses), Louis Devos (Aaron), Eva Csapo (young girl), Roger Lucas (young man), Richard Salter (the other man), Werner Mann (priest), Ladislav Illavsky (Ephraimite), Friedl Obrowsky (sick woman), Choir (O.R.F.) **Music:** Arnold Schoenberg **Production:** Janus Film und Fernsehen, ORF, ARD, RAI, ORTF, Straub/Huillet **Premiere:** Film International, Rotterdam, February 1975.

1976 *Fortini/Canì*

83 minutes, 16mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the extended poem *I cani del Sinai* by Franco Fortini, 1967 **Photography:** Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti. **Sound:** Jety Grigioni **Main Actors:** Franco Lattes (Franco Fortini), Luciana Nissim (on the balcony of a flat in Milano), Adriano Apra; (in front of a window looking at the Tiber) **Production:** Straub/Huillet (Rome), Channel II, Italian Television (R.A.I. II, Rome), Sunchild Productions, Institut de l'Audiovisuel (Paris), New Yorker Films, Artificial Eye (London) **Premiere:** Pesaro Film Festival, 19 September 1976.

1977 *Toute Revolution est un Coup de Dés*

10 minutes, 35mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* by Stephane Mallarmé 1897 **Photography:** Willy Lubtchansky, Dominique Chapuis **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Alain Donavy **Main Actors:** Helmut Färber,

Michel Delahaye, Georges Goldfayn, Danièle Huillet, Manfred Blank, Marilu Parolini, Aksar Khaled, Andreas Spingler, Dominique Villain (the women recite the passages in smaller typography, the men those in larger typescript) **Production:** Straub/Huillet.

1978/79 *Dalla Nube alla Resistenza*

105 minutes, 35mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the novels *Dialoghi con leuco*, 1947 and *La luna e i falò*, 1950 both by Cesare Pavese **Photography:** Savario Diamanti, Gianni Canfarelli **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio. **Main Actors:** in *Dialoghi con Leuco*: Olimpia Carlisi (Nephele, the cloud), Guido Lombardi (Ixion), Gino Felici (Hippolocus), Lori Pelosini (Sarpedon), Walter Pardini (Oedipus), Ennio Lauricella (Tiresias), Andrea Bacci (first hunter), Lori Cavallini (second hunter), Francesco Ragusa (Litières), Fiorangelo Pucci (Hercules), Dolando Bernardini (father), Andrea Fillippi (sons). In *La luna e i falò*: Mauro Monni (the bastard), Carmelo Lacorte (Nuto), Luigi Giordanello (Valino), Mario di Mattia (Cinto), Paolo Cinnani (the knight), Maria Eugenia, Alberto Signetto, Paolo Pederzoli, Ugo Bertone, Gianni Canfarelli, Domenico Carosso, Sandro Signetto, Antonio Mingrone (the people in the bar), Gianni Toti (the priest) **Production:** Straub/Huillet (Rome), R.A.I. II (Rome), I.N.A. (Paris), Janus-Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt), Artificial Eye (London).

1980/81 *Trop tôt, trop tard*

105 minutes, 16mm, colour **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on a letter by Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky of 20 February 1889, an extract from *La question paysanne* by F. Engels and the postscript of the book *Luttes de Classes en Egypte* by Mahmoud Hussein, 1969 **Photography:** Willy Lubtchansky, Caroline Champetier, Robert Alazraki, Marguerite Perlado **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Manfred Blank **Production:** Straub-Huillet.

1982 *En Rachâchant*

7 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the story *Oh! Ernesto* by Marguerite Duras, 1971 **Photography:** Henri Alekan **Sound:** Louis Hochet **Main Actors:** Nadette Thinus, Bernard Thinus, Olivier Straub, Raymond Gerard.

1983 *Klassenverhältnisse*

126 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the novel fragment *Der Verschollene* by Franz Kafka, 1912-1914, first published under the title *Amerika* in 1927. **Photography:** Willy Lubtchansky, Caroline Champetier, Christophe Pollock **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio, Manfred Blank **Main Actors:** Christian Heinisch (Karl Roßmann), Reinald Schnell (stoker), Anna Schnell (Line), Klaus Traube (captain), Hermann Hartmann (chief cashier), Jean-Francois Quinque (Steward), Mario Adorf (Uncle Jakob), Gerard Semaan (Schubal), Willi Voebel (Pollunder), Willi Dewelk (Chauffeur), Anna Bold (Klara), Tilmann Heinisch (Green), Aloys Pompetzki (Servant), Burckhardt Stoelck (Mack), Harun Farocki (Delamarche), Manfred Blank (Robinson), Kathrin Bold (Cook), Alf Bold (servant), Libgart Schwarz (Therese), Nazzareno Bianconi (Giacomo), Salvatore Sammartino (Hotel boy), Alfred Edel (Manager), Andi Engel (Head Porter), Franz Hillers (Taxi driver) Klaus Feddermann (Policeman), Henning Rademarker (Second Policeman), Laura Betti (Brunelda), Georg Brintrup (Student), Thom Andersen and Barton Byg (the two Americans) **Production:** NEF Diffusion (Paris), Janus Film und Fernsehen (Frankfurt), Straub/Huillet, Hessischer Rundfunk **Premiere:** Berlin Film Festival, February 1984.

1986 *Der Tod des Empedokles oder: Wenn dann der Erde Grün von neuem Euch erglänzt.*

132 minutes, 35mm, colour Script: Straub/Huillet. Based on the first version of the dramatic fragment *Der Tod des Empedokles* by Friedrich Hölderlin, 1799 **Photography:** Renato Berta, Jean-Paul Toraille, Giovanni Canfarelli **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio, Alessandro Zanon **Main Actors:** Andreas von Rauch (Empedokles), Vladimir Baratta (Pausanias), Martina Baratta (Panthea), Ute Cremer (Delia), Howard Vernon (Hermocrates), William Berger (Critias), Federico Hecker, Peter Boom, Giorgio Baratta (the three citizens), Georg Brintrup, Manfred Esser, Achille Brunini (the three slaves), Peter Kammerer (the peasant). **Music:** Johann Sebastian Bach. **Production:** Films du Losange, Janus Film (Frankfurt), Hessischer Rundfunk. Dopa Films.

1988 *Schwarze Sünde*

40 minutes, 35mm, colour Script: Straub/Huillet. Based on the third version of the dramatic fragment *Der Tod des Empedokles* by Friedrich Hölderlin, 1799. **Photography:** William Lubtchansky, Christophe Pollock, Gianni Canfarelli **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Sandro Zanon, Pierre Donadieu **Main Actors:** Andreas von Rauch (Empedokles), Vladimir Baratta (Pausanias), Howard Vernon (Manes), Danièle Huillet (woman) **Music:** Ludwig Van Beethoven. **Production:** Radio Hamburg (N.D.R.), Cologne (W.D.R.), Berlin (R.I.A.S.), Baden-Baden (S.W.F.), Channel Three Cologne (W.D.R.) Straub/Huillet, Dopa Films. **Premiere:** Cannes Festival, May 1989.

1989 *Paul Cézanne im Gespräch mit Joachim Gasquet*

51 minutes, 35mm, colour Script: Straub/Huillet. Based on the the book *Ce qu'il m'a dit* by Joachim Gasquet, 1921. With extracts from *Madame Bovary* by Jean Renoir, 1934 and Straub/Huillet's film *Der Tod des Empedokles* 1986 **Main actors:** Danièle Huillet (voice of Paul Cezanne), Jean-Marie Straub (voice of Joachim Gasquet) **Photography:** Henri Alekan. **Sound:** Louis Hochet. **Production:** Musée d'Orsay, La SEPT, Diagonale, Straub/Huillet **Premiere:** Club Publicis, Paris, 3 April 1990.

1991 *Die Antigone des Sophokles in der hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet von Brecht*

99 minutes, 35mm, colour Script: Based on the play *Antigone* von Sophokles, übersetzt von Friedrich Hölderlin, 1804, für die Bühne bearbeitet von Bertolt Brecht, 1948. **Photography:** Nicolas Eprendre, Irina et William Lubtchansky. **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio, Sandro Zanon. **Main Actors:** Astrid Ofner (Antigone), Ursula Ofner (Ismene), Hans Diehl, Kurt Radeke, Michael Maassen, Rainer Philippi (The old men), Werner Rehm (Creon), Lars Studer (Guard), Stephan Wolf-Schönburg (Hemon), Albert Hetterle (Tiresias), Mario di Mattia (child), Michael König (Messenger), Libgart Schwarz (Servant). **Music:** Bernd Alois Zimmermann **Production:** Regina Ziegler (Filmproduktion, Berlin), Martine Marignac (Pierre Grise Production, Paris), Hessischer Rundfunk, Straub/Huillet **Premiere:** Berlin Film Festival, February 1992.

1994 *Lothringen!*

21 minutes, 35mm, colour. Script: Straub/Huillet. Based on the novel *Colette Baudouche* by Maurice Barrès, 1909 **Photography:** Christophe Pollock, Emanuelle Collinot. **Sound:** Louis Hochet, George Vaglio **Main Actors:** Emanuelle Straub (Colette Baudouche), Andre Warynski and Dominique Dosdat **Music:** Franz Joseph Haydn. **Production:** Saarländischer

Rundfunk, Straub/Huillet, Pierre Grise **Premiere:** Cinémathèque française, December 1994.

1996 *Von heute auf morgen*

61 minutes, 35mm, b/w **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the opera *Von heute auf morgen* by Arnold Schönberg, 1930 **Photography:** William and Irina Lubtchansky, Marion Bevfe . **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Georges Vaglio, Sandra Zanon, Klaus Barm, Charly Morell, Hans-Bernhard Bätzing, Björn Rosenberg **Main Actors:** Christine Whitlesey (she), Richard Salter (he), Annabelle Hahn (child), Claudia Barainsky (friend), Ryszard Karczykowski (singer) **Music:** Arnold Schönberg. **Production:** Straub/Huillet, Pierre Grise, Martine Marignac, Hessischer Rundfunk.

1998 *Sicilia!*

66 minutes, 35mm, b/w. **Script:** Straub/Huillet. Based on the novel *Conversazione in Sicilia* by Elio Vittorini, 1941 **Photography:** William Lubtchansky. **Sound:** Louis Hochet, Jean-Pierre Duret **Main Actors:** Angela Nuyara, Gianni Buscarino, Vittorio Vigneri **Production:** Pierre Grise, CNC France **Premiere:** Cannes Festival 1999.