

A young boy with a backpack is seen from the back, looking out a window. The room is dimly lit, with a wooden chair in the foreground and a dark cabinet in the background. The overall mood is contemplative and cinematic.

R A Ú L
R U I Z
P O E T I C S
O F
C I N E M A

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V O I R

Cover: *City of Pirates*, Raúl Ruiz (detail)

R A Ú L

R U I Z

P O E T I C S
O F
C I N E M A

1

Miscellanies

Translated by

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CHAPTER I

Central Conflict Theory

My purpose in this chapter is to discuss cinema, particularly American cinema. America is the only place in the world where, very early, cinema developed an all-encompassing narrative and dramatic theory known as central conflict theory. Thirty or forty years ago, this theory was used by the mainstream American industry as a guideline. Now it is the law in the most important centers of film industry in the world.

Forty years ago, in provincial theaters in Chile, we used to get lots of American films. Some of them we still remember. They are part of our childhood memories, or at least of our cultural background. Others were merely monstrous. We couldn't make head nor tail of them because they had too many heads and tails. I mean B movies. Enigmatic movies. Today, none of the mystery has evaporated. You won't have heard of most of the directors: Ford Beebe, Reginald Le Borg, Hugo Fregonese, Joseph H. Lewis, Bud Boetticher, William Baudine, and so on. Several of these directors could be held responsible for a misunderstanding which made us and many people believe that American television was the best in the world, for they were the directors of TV's first big international hits, *Twilight Zone*, *Bonanza*, *The Untouchables*. And when they disappeared, we lost all interest in American television. Who were "we"? Around 1948 or 1950, a gang of us kids were just about to leave elementary school. What we liked was using our 22 long rifles to shoot the bulbs out of street lights. We loved to fight recently

arrived German immigrants. I think our inspiration was a wave of anti-Nazi films. From time to time we would call a truce and go to the movies. There were two theaters in our village. One showed Mexican adult movies, Italian neo-realist dramas, and French *films à thèse*. The other theater specialized in American kids' movies. That was the one we went to, and even if some of us occasionally found our way to the other in the hope of seeing a naked woman, still we much preferred the films for kids. Long after we'd stopped being kids, we preferred those particular kids' movies. I think that's where I got something that could be called my first value system.

I'd like to outline some of the *congetti* I discovered in those films. Say we saw someone walking slowly, but pretending to be in hurry: we would say, "He's slower than the bad guy's horse." Someone who was in the right place at the right time: "He's like the good guy's hat." When someone cheated at cards, we said, "The dice were loaded like the last fight in a Western." Rainy Sundays were said to be more boring than a movie's last kiss. And the list goes on: as angry as Ming, as bad as Fu Manchu, a grin like the traitor's... The American movies we loved were as unlikely and extravagant as life itself. Nonetheless, there was a strange correspondence between our own ritual of going to the movies every Wednesday and Sunday, and the narrative rituals of the films themselves. Since the films were all totally unrealistic, and since they were all the same, the happy endings seemed oddly pathetic. In fact, happy endings always seemed tragic to me, because they condemned the healthy elements in a moral system to always win their battles. And naturally, like many others, I felt liberated by the sad endings of Italian movies, and I applauded the bad guys because I knew they had to lose. Of the innumerable extravaganzas American cinema gave us, I'd like to single out a scene from *Flash Gordon*, directed, I believe, by Ford Beebe, in which Flash Gordon takes an enemy space ship by force. His own men attack him. He has no radio to communicate with them. So he fires his guns and sends them a message in gunshot Morse.

Ten years later, in Santiago, I decided to study theater and cinema and began thinking about so-called dramatic construction. The first surprise was that all American films were subject to a

system of credibility. In our textbook (John Howard Lawson: *How to Write a Script*) we learned that the films we loved the most were badly made. That was the starting point of an ongoing debate between me and a certain type of American cinema, theater, and literature, which is considered well made. What I particularly dislike is the underlying ideology: central conflict theory. Then, I was eighteen. Now I'm fifty-two. My astonishment is as young now as I was then. I have never understood why every plot should need a central conflict as its backbone.

I recall the first statement of the theory: a story begins when someone wants something and someone else doesn't want them to have it. From that point on, through various digressions, all the elements of the story are arranged around this central conflict. What I immediately found unacceptable was this direct relation between will, which to me is something dark and oceanic, and the petty play of strategies and tactics around a goal which if not in itself banal, is certainly rendered so. I will try to summarize my objections to this notion of central conflict, as I learned it in North and South American universities and schools, and as it has come to be accepted throughout the world in recent years.

To say that a story can only take place if it is connected to a central conflict forces us to eliminate all stories which do not include confrontation and to leave aside all those events which require only indifference or detached curiosity, like a landscape, a distant storm, or dinner with friends — unless such scenes punctuate two fights between the bad guys and the good guys. Even more than scenes devoid of any action, central conflict theory banishes what are called mixed scenes: an ordinary meal interrupted by an incomprehensible incident with neither rhyme nor reason, and no future either, so that it all ends up as an ordinary meal once more. Worse yet, it leaves no room for serial scenes, that is, action scenes which follow in sequence without ever knitting into the same flow. For instance, two men are fighting in the street. Not far away, a child eats an ice-cream and is poisoned. Throughout it all, a man in a window sprays passers-by with bullets and nobody raises an eyebrow. In one corner, a painter paints the scene, while a pickpocket steals his wallet and a dog in the shade of a burning building devours the brain of a

comatose drunk. In the distance, multiple explosions crown a blood-red sunset. This scene is not interesting from the viewpoint of central conflict theory unless we call it *Holiday in Sarajevo* and divide the characters into two opposing camps.

Naturally, I am well aware that by inflicting a central conflict on otherwise unconnected scenes we are able to answer a number of practical concerns. This enables us to capture the attention of spectators who have lent us two empty hours of their lives. Before going any further, I would like to make two remarks relating to the legitimacy of using the time which spectators are prepared to grant us. We have been told that our job is to fill two hours of the lives of a few million people, and to make sure they are not bored. What do we mean by boredom? In about the fourth century A.D., Cassianus and some other early Christian fathers reflected on a phenomenon which they considered the Eighth Capital Sin. They called it *tristitia*, or sadness. It is induced by the noonday demon. Most of his victims are monks, isolated from the rest of the world. The phenomenon starts towards midday, when the light is at its strongest. The monk is concentrating on his meditation; he hears steps, runs to the window; there's no-one about, but there is a gentle knocking at the door of his cell; he checks there's no-one there, and suddenly he wants to be somewhere else, anywhere, miles away. This happens again and again. He cannot meditate, he feels tired, hungry, sleepy. We have no difficulty in discerning the three stages of *ennui* or boredom: a feeling of imprisonment, escape through sleep, and finally anxiety, as though we were guilty of some awful deed which we have not committed. The Abbot's cure for this is not a million miles from what today's entertainment experts say is the right thing to keep people alert at the workplace: distract distraction by means of distraction, use poison to heal. If the early fathers made these comments, I suspect it is because they did not really believe in demons. But let us make an effort, let us pretend these demons do exist. The monk is in his cell. He feels boredom coming on. He hears the footsteps. But he's skeptical. He knows there's nobody around. Still someone arrives. The monk knows that this apparition is an artifice, and he accepts it as such. The apparition offers to spring him from his cell and he says yes. He is transported to faraway lands. He'd like to stay, but it's already time to go home. Back in his cell,

he's astonished to discover that traveling has only made things worse. He's even more bored than before and now his boredom has ontological weight. We will call this dangerous new sentiment melancholy. Now every trip out of the cell, every apparition of his virtual friend, will make his melancholy more intense. He still does not believe in these apparitions, but his lack of belief is contagious. Soon the cell itself, his brother monks, and even communion with God becomes as an illusion. His world has been emptied by entertainment. Some one thousand two hundred years later, in France, Blaise Pascal, in the chapter of his *Pensées* devoted to entertainment, warns "All the evil in men comes from one thing and one thing alone: their inability to remain at rest in a room" — be it for no more than an hour. So perhaps boredom is a good thing.

What kind of boredom are we talking about? Take a classic example. A fair number of human beings who have passed the age of forty and who decline to take sedatives find themselves waking up every night around 4 AM. Most enjoy two activities: remembering things past and thinking ahead to what must be accomplished the following day. In Milanese dialect there is even a word to describe the first of these activities: *calendare*. Perhaps Bergson, who tended to doubt the importance of a present which was always seemed to vanish in the ebb and flow of past and future time, would have looked into this privileged moment when past and future part like the waters of the Red Sea before an intense feeling of being here and now, in active rest. This privileged moment, which early theologians called "Saint Gregory's paradox," occurs when the soul is both at rest and yet turns on itself like a cyclone around its eye, while events in the past and the future vanish in the distance. If I propose this modest defence of ennui, it is perhaps because the films I am interested in can sometimes provoke this sort of boredom. Those who have seen films by Michael Snow, Ozu, or Tarkovsky will know what I mean. The same goes for Andy Warhol, or Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.

Let us return to films that are not boring. Films provoked by the noonday demon. Central conflict theory manufactures athletic fiction and offers to take us on a journey. Prisoner of the protagonist's will, we are subjected to the various stages making up a

conflict of which he, the protagonist, is at once guardian and captive. In the end we are released and given back to ourselves, a little sadder than before. There is only one notion in our heads, which is to go another journey as soon as we can.

I believe it was Dr. Johnson who said there were two kinds of mental illnesses: melancholy and enthusiasm. After examining the case of Christopher Smart, enthusiastic author of a new ending to the Bible, he decided that the one could cure the other. Against melancholia, he recommended enthusiasm.

You will have noticed that reference has frequently been made to the will. It is possible that central conflict theory is amalgam of classical dramatic theory and Schopenhauer. At least, that is the claim of its inventors, Ibsen and Bernard Shaw. Out of all this arise stories which feed on instances of will, in which wanting to do something (active will) and wanting someone (passionate will) are often confused. Wanting and loving are part of a single web of action and decision, confrontation and choice. How you love does not matter. What matters is how you obtain what you want. In the labyrinth of major and minor options, of daily action and passion, our kidnappers always choose the shortest path. They want all conflicts to come under the one major conflict. Central conflict theorists sometimes argue that there are no works of theater, film, or narrative without central conflict. What is true is that this theory is irrefutable, i.e., unprovable.

In daily life's subtle tissue of purposeful but inconsequential actions, unconscious decisions, and accidents, I fear that central conflict theory is not much more than what epistemology describes as "a predatory theory": a system of ideas which devours and enslaves any other ideas that might restrain its activity. Ever though we know the foundations of central conflict theory were laid by Shaw and Ibsen, and even if Aristotle is invoked as its patron, I believe that its current acceptance draws it much closer to two rather minor philosophical fictions.

One is Maine de Biran's *réalisme volitif*, or willful realism, in which the world is constructed by collisions that affect the subject of knowledge, such that the world is no more than the sum of its collisions — which is like describing one's holidays as a series of car

accidents (though I'm sure that if this system were modified along the lines of Leibniz's reforms of Descartes' dynamics, the results would be stunning). The other philosophical fiction implicit in central conflict theory reminds me of Engels' *Dialectic of Nature*, according to which the world, even a peaceful landscape or a dead leaf, is a sort of battlefield. A flower is a battlefield where thesis and antithesis fight, looking for a common synthesis. I would say that both these theories share the same thrust, which one might call "a presumption of hostility." Different kinds of hostility. The principle of constant hostility in film stories results in another difficulty: it makes us take sides. The exercise of this kind of fiction leads often to a kind of ontological vacuum. Secondary objects and events (but why call them secondary?) are ignored. All attention is focused on the combat of the protagonists.

The voracious appetite displayed by this predatory concept reaches far beyond theory. It has become a normative system. The products which comply with this norm have not only invaded the world but have also imposed their rules on most of the centers of audiovisual production across the planet. With their own theologians, inquisitors, and police force. For about the last three or four years, whether in Italy or in France, fictions which do not comply with these rules have been considered unacceptable. And yet there is no strict equivalence between stories of conflict and everyday life. Of course, people fight and compete, but competition alone cannot contain the totality of the event which involves it. I sometimes discuss the trilogy of election, decision, and confrontation that configures an act, which is then forced into a unified conflict system. I will not step too far into the labyrinth that American philosophers of action (such as Davidson, Pears, and Thomson) have opened up for us. Just a quick tour so I can communicate the astonishment which overcomes me every time I attempt to approach the problem.

First, election. Election is choice. A choice between what? A person who must make a choice is in a position where he or she has no choice but to choose. The person cannot turn around and go home or there would be no story. In addition, there are a limited number of options to choose from and they have been pre-ordained.

By whom? God? Social practice? Astrology? Is my choice predetermined? If someone — say God — has determined my choice, between how many options has he chosen? It's a tough question. I remember a problem in game theory in which universal suffrage elections had to be organized with an infinite number of voters, candidates, and political parties, in an infinite world, giving all of them winning strategies, such that they all in fact win¹ (cf. Tarski and Solar Petit, on the applications of S. Ulam's "measurable cardinal"). Let us remember that the supercomputer (which Molina calls God) knows more or less whether we are bound for heaven or hell; but since infinity is only potential and never actual, His knowledge only pertains to the actual state of things. If I am condemned to hell and yet I use my free will to change my life and thus become a good person, God will immediately know that I am saved (according to *ciencia media*, or "median knowledge").

In the opposite instance, people who act without thinking and thus skip the stage of election or choice, in effect choose *a posteriori*: A man gives the wall a kick and breaks his leg, congratulates himself and says what I've done is well done because I did it; the sovereignty of my action is reason enough. Which is exactly how Don Quixote behaves. He progresses as he goes. He follows the logic of his nonsense (*la razón de la sinrazón*).

A curious Muslim variation on the theme of choice can be expressed in the following way: in order to choose, I must first choose to choose. And in order to choose to choose I must first choose to choose to choose. When there is a choice, I can make this choice into a kind of bottomless pit. Let us suppose that God is at the bottom of it all; then in the final analysis, it is God's choice. And if the choice is bad, it is because God wills it so. So why choose? Another more practical problem is the question of how many options we need to choose from. Let's say we have two. Suppose that in our story, at the end of each episode, there is again a choice between two options, and each choice is a fresh one, independent of any global strategy. In order for us to want to keep on following our protagonist, how many mistakes can he make? In a particularly fascinating essay, the pigeon specialist C. Martinoya proposed a description of the ritual cycle of pigeon's mistakes. He invented an

experiment in which the pigeon is placed between two windows, one full of food and the other empty. Instead of altering this disposition — as an ordinary pigeonologist would have done — he kept it as was and thus was in a position to observe that though pigeons very quickly learn to find the food, occasionally, according to quantifiable cycles, they check to see if by any chance there is not some food in the empty window. Having noticed this in pigeons, Professor Martinoya tried the same experiment with a group of his colleagues from the University of Bochum. To his surprise, they behaved exactly as the pigeons did. When he asked his colleagues why they behaved in this way, they were unable to say, except for one of them who made the vaguely philosophical response, “just to make sure the world is still in place.” Perhaps if we apply the pigeons’ cycle of deliberate mistakes to an adventure movie, we might conceivably discover the same pattern among the protagonists. Let us be pessimistic and assume the protagonist constantly makes the wrong choices. What kind of a story will this produce? Will the ending be sad? Will it have an ending at all? Will the story be circular? In my opinion, we will have a comedy on our hands, because the spectator will already know the protagonist’s choice, and this choice will make him laugh.

What about a story without any choices at all? Not even a refusal of choice (like Hamlet). Let me suggest a few examples of no-choice stories which come to mind. In the battle of Alcaçar Quivir, Dom Sebastião, King of Portugal, arranges his troops opposite the Muslim lines. He tells his soldiers not to move until he gives the order. Several hours go by. The king says nothing. He seems almost asleep, or at least absent, miles away from the battlefield. The enemy attack. In the face of defeat, one of the courtiers goes to the king and says “Lord, they are coming towards us. It is time to die.” The king replies, “Let us die then, but let us die slowly.” He vanishes into the thick of the battle and is never seen again. His attitude is considered a kind of heroism, a form of mystic heroism. He becomes a myth, and also a model. A few centuries later, during the Los Angeles Olympics, a great Portuguese athlete is leading the ten thousand meter race. Suddenly he quits. This gesture is interpreted as heroic by his people. He returns home to great acclaim and the President of the Republic at the time calls him “a worthy successor to Dom

Sebastião.” Another example, closer to home, is *Bartleby*, the eponymous hero of Melville’s tale. His leitmotif, “I would prefer not to,” became the slogan of my generation. In this bestiary of non-decisions, we must include Buddha, or at least my favorite incarnation of him, Ji Gong, the so-called “crazy monk.” Also the Spanish Justificationist heretics in their late form, which can be summed up in the proposition: “since Christ saved us, there is nothing left to do.” Priscillian considered that in order to leave a room one should first bang up against the walls, because actually noticing a door or a window was in itself a reprehensible action. We can add to this list those American and Soviet political scientists who developed the abstentionist philosophy known as conflict resolution. In this theory, if I am not misled by the contradictory principles of the opposing political theories which have contaminated it, intervention comes before the conflict has already begun, so as to neutralize it. Finally, to complete this anthology, I’d like point out a strange discipline called ethnomethodology invented by Professors Garfinkel, Le Cerf, and others, and in particular one practical example. A pupil asks his teacher for advice: “I’m a Jew. Can I marry a non-Jewish girl?” The professor has a number of possible, brief, and arbitrary responses. He knows, before the conversation takes place, that he is going to say no to the first five questions, yes to the next three, and so on, regardless of what the questions are. The pupil must comment on each of the teacher’s responses. His sixth question is followed by the following comment: “So whatever I do I must not introduce my non-Jewish fiancée to my parents.” The teacher replies “Yes, you must,” thus contradicting the response to the first question. But we can conceive a more dramatic example. The pupil asks “Should I kill my father?” “Yes, you must,” the teacher would reply. Then the pupil says “But if I kill him I will never be able to bring him on holiday to Rome?” And the teacher says “Yes, you will.”

Obviously, a fanatical supporter of central conflict theory will always be able to argue that every instance of refusal or hesitation is a form of action, and that any all-embracing refutation — where the proposed action is rejected as a whole — is what philosophers of action call “akratic acts.” In a short essay on Freud, Donald Davidson uses the term “Plato’s Principle” for the thesis

that no intentional act can be intrinsically irrational and “Medea’s Principle” for the theory that a person can only go against his or her better judgement if obliged to do so by some external force which violates his or her will. Later, in an attempted summary of Freud’s outlook, he touches on the central problem: 1. Our mind contains semi-independent structures which do not blindly follow the decisions of the decider (let’s call it the central government). 2. These regions of the mind tend to organize themselves as independent powers, or independent minds with their own structures, connected to the central subject by a single thread. In the esoteric Chinese treatise entitled *Secret of the Golden Flower*, an anonymous author illustrates the four steps in meditation with a drawing showing a monk meditating; by sheer force of concentration he divides into five small meditating monks, after which each of the five divides in turn into four new monks. 3. These semi-independent substructures are capable of taking power over the whole and of making major decisions. Why not think of it as a Republic in which a political party of small monks wins an election and takes decisions against the interests of — and above all beyond the comprehension of — that larger monk which is the Republic of the self?

Another element of conflict theory is the question of decision. The first problem I have with this notion is in the very words. Is drama conceivable without central points of decision? Personally, I have sought to work with stories, fairly abstract ones I admit, using what might be called a pentaludic model. Put more simply, I consider that my protagonists are like a herd of dice (just as one says “a herd of buffalo”). The number of sides to the dice varies from herd to herd — it can be zero, six, or infinite — but in each herd this number is always the same. The herds play five different games. They compete against other herds; and in this game the rules of central conflict theory are often observed. But the same herd will sometimes play a game of chance (which is quite natural for dice); and in a third variation, the dice also feign the emotions of fear, anger, and joy, donning disguises and playing at scaring each other or making each other laugh. A fourth game is called vertigo: the aim is to strike the most dangerous pose, threatening the survival of the entire herd. A fifth game might best be called the long-term wager.

For instance, they'll say something like, "I swear not to change my shirt until Jerusalem falls," or more simply, "I'll love you for the rest of my life."

Inside each die there is an indefinite number of miniature dice, with the same number of sides as the big die, except that these inner dice are very slightly loaded so that they tend to give the same results, becoming "tendentious." The herd attempts to take this trickery of the individual dice into account during each game, lending coherence to the ensemble. Luckily, within each of the small dice is a kind of magnetic powder which encourages the entire dice population to converge on the same point. So in this example, will is divided into three elements: ludic behavior, trickery, and magnetic attraction. In each game, the herds embark on a long and erratic journey, but sooner or later they meet at a single point. As this point approaches, the frequency and intensity of the games increase. Now, let's say that this galaxy of herds converging on a single magnetic pole is on the point of taking a decision. But this is also the final and/or vanishing point; let's say that a single action is the result of the collisions of these dynamic atoms (the herds of dice), and that each one possesses the galactic structure described above. End of conceptual simulation.

Let us go back to a normal or normalized story. The protagonist is getting ready to act. He is going to make a decision. He has weighed the pros and the cons, he knows, as far as possible, the effect of his decision. Unfortunately, the protagonist is a thirteenth-century Arab who would not dream of making a decision without first consulting the *Treatise on Cunning*. He knows that the first object of any decision is to allow one to submit to God's will. Decisions must be taken, as it were, by imitating God. But God created the world using *hila*, or cunning. *Hila* is not the quickest means to an end, but it is the most subtle: never direct, never obvious, because God cannot choose too obvious a path. He cannot, for instance, force his creatures to do anything. He cannot take any decision which might provoke conflict. He must use *baram*, or detour: artifice (*kayd*), mystification (*khad*), trap (*makr*). Let's imagine a Western based on these principles. The hero lays traps, never actually gets in a fight, but does all he can to submit to the will

of God. One day, he finds himself face to face with the bad guy (let's call him the sheriff) in the main street. The bad guy says, "You held the bank up and you're going to pay for it." The good guy's response is "What exactly do you mean by held up a bank? How can you be sure I held up the bank? Anyway, what is new in what you've just said? And in what way do your comments bring us closer to God?" In fact, his reaction is much the same as the English philosopher G. E. Moore's would have been.

The point of this digression is to say that the criteria according to which most of the characters in today's movies behave are drawn from one particular culture (that of the USA). In this culture, it is not only indispensable to make decisions but also to act on them, immediately (not so in China or Irak). The immediate consequence of most decisions in this culture is some kind of conflict (untrue in other cultures). Different ways of thinking deny the direct causal connection between a decision and the conflict which may result from it; they also deny that physical or verbal collision is the only possible form of conflict. Unfortunately, these other societies, which secretly maintain their traditional beliefs in these matters, have outwardly adopted Hollywood's rhetorical behavior. So another consequence of the globalization of central conflict theory — a political one — is that, paradoxically, "the American way of life" has become a lure, a mask: unreal and exotic, it is the perfect illustration of the fallacy that Whitehead dubbed "misplaced concreteness." Such synchronicity between the artistic theory and the political system of a dominant nation is rare in history; rarer still is its acceptance by most of the countries in the world. The reasons for this synchronicity have been abundantly discussed: politicians and actors have become interchangeable because they both use the same media, attempting to master the same logic of representation and practicing the same narrative logic — for which, let's remember, the the golden rule is that events do not need to be real but realistic (Borges once remarked that Madame Bovary is realistic, but Hitler isn't at all). I heard a political commentator praise the Gulf War for being realistic, meaning plausible, while criticizing the war in former Yugoslavia as unrealistic, because irrational.

In *Acts and Other Events*, J. J. Thomson attempts to define the instances of action. With an irresistible sense of humor, she attacks the assassination of Robert Kennedy with a barrage of algebraic formulas. Her analysis touches on bungled actions (intended acts which never take place), including a case in which a crime is perturbed, or provoked, by a harmonica concert — if the harmonica itself is not perhaps the crime. I quote: “If you shoot a man, is your aiming of your gun before firing it a part of shooting him? I think so. (It certainly seems as if your aiming a gun at your victim plays a part in your getting him shot). Now suppose that Sirhan did pause between aiming and firing. This would mean, as we saw, that his shooting of Kennedy was a discontinuous event. For there was no part of the shooting that was occurring at any time during that pause.” Breaking down an action into micro-actions implies that these micro-actions may to an extent be independent of each other. They may even contradict each other, or be incidental to the main action — as if the sudden interest an assassin might display in the victim’s shirt had nothing to do with the assassination. Everyone knows Zeno’s breakdown of the act of walking into infinite components. For years I have dreamed of filming events that could move from one dimension into another, and that could be broken down into images occupying different dimensions, all with the sole aim of being able to add, multiply, or divide them, and reconstitute them at will. If one accepts that each figure can be reduced to a group of points — each point being at a particular (unique) distance from the others — and that from this group of points, figures can be generated in two, three, or n dimensions, it is then equally acceptable that adding or subtracting dimensions can change the logic of an image and therefore its expressivity, without modifying the image altogether.²

I know people will bring me down to earth and say such a film is either just not possible or, at any rate, not commercial. But I’d like to point out that a film dissolve is a way of juxtaposing two three-dimensional images, which, as Russell pointed out, can even form a six-dimensional image. Any film, however ordinary, is infinitely complex. A reading that follows the storyline may make it seem simple, but the film itself is invariably more complicated. Incidentally, are we even sure that people in the near future will be

able to understand the films we're making now? I don't mean so-called difficult films, because they have been discussed and commented on at length. I mean films like *Rambo*, or *Flash Gordon*. Will people be able to recognize the hero from one shot to the next? A good viewer of the future will immediately recognize that between shot 24 and 25 Robert de Niro has had pasta for lunch, while between shot 123 and 124 he has clearly had chicken for supper; but this disruption of continuity through excessive culinary attention will make it impossible for him to follow the plot. A few weeks ago, Professor Guy Scarpetta informed me that his students at the university de Reims are unable to understand a film by Alfred Hitchcock, perhaps because the things which we take for granted and which help us to understand a film are undergoing rapid change, along with our critical values.

One last observation concerning points of decision. Can a decision contain other, smaller decisions? Obviously, it can conceal other decisions, it can be hypocritical or irresponsible, but can it be sub-divided into smaller units? Even if I do not believe in the consistency of the problem, I cannot help thinking that when I make a decision — for instance the decision to come here among you — the choice is there to hide a series of other decisions which have nothing to do with it. My decision is a mask, behind which there is disorder, *apeiron*. To be honest, I had decided not to come here. Yet here I am.