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Cinema, Cliché, and Thought Outside Itself

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In Deleuze's Cinema 1: The Movement-Image and Cinema 2: The Time-Image, the cliché appears as merely one concern in a web of others, and here I would like to argue for its significance in distinguishing the nature of the two regimes of thought associated with the movement-image and the time-image. While Deleuze contends that artists and filmmakers must struggle with the cliché, it seems to me that he does not stress enough that filmmakers often make vital use of the clichés of continuity and spatio-temporal orientation that have been developed in the medium's short history. It is in making use of these clichés, though not for the purpose of parody alone, that filmmakers are able to most forcefully make visible the limits that clichés set on cinematic thought, and the points at which thought moves outside these limits. In order to make my arguments I will consider the filmic style of Yasujiro Ozu, and Wong Kar-wai's In the Mood for Love.

In an interview that appeared in *Le Monde* shortly after the publication of *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* in 1983, Gilles Deleuze claimed that the argument he puts forward in the book is simple: "The great auteurs of film are thinking, thought exists in their work, and making a film is creative, living thought" ("Portrait" 220). One can indeed see *The Movement-Image* and the book that followed it in 1985, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, as attempts to distinguish two distinct forms of thought made operable through two regimes of the cinematic image, that of the movement-image and that of the time-image. However, if the relationship between cinema and thought is central to Deleuze's project in these books, as I believe it is, it is not always clear how certain arguments that seem to be peripheral to this relationship should be related to it. One such concept is that of the cliché, which appears in the final chapter of *The Movement-Image* and is returned to in the opening chapter of *The Time-Image*. As we might suspect from its placement in Deleuze's texts—at the point where one regime gives way to the other—the cliché, I argue, plays an important role in understanding the distinction between time-image and movement-image cinema.

Nevertheless, in Deleuze's texts, the cliché appears as merely one concern in a web of others, and here I would like to argue for its significance in distinguishing the nature of the thought formed in the two regimes. While Deleuze contends that artists and filmmakers must struggle with the cliché, it seems to me that he does not stress enough that filmmakers often make vital use of the clichés of continuity and spatio-temporal orientation that have been developed in the medium's short history. It is in making use of these clichés, though not for the purpose of parody alone, that filmmakers are able to most forcefully make visible the limits that clichés set on cinematic thought, and the points at which thought moves outside these limits.

The Regime of the Movement-Image

First, it is necessary to describe the ways in which the regime of the movement-image is constituted. In referring to the regime of the movement-image Deleuze identifies a particular system of thinking with cinematic images and sounds. It is more useful to distinguish two regimes of audiovisual thought, rather than simply two distinct types of image, because in most cases, it is difficult to say whether an image is a time-image or a movement-image without knowing how it relates to the images with which it is linked. Thought in the regime of the movement-image is manifested through two processes: differentiation and specification (*Cinema 2* 28-29). Differentiation is the process through which “the whole constantly divides depending on the objects, and combines the objects into a whole” (28). There is a mutual movement by way of which the images externalise and differentiate the aspects of a whole and are internalised in this whole, which is open in a nonlocalisable dimension—in thought. The sequences of a film are integrated into a whole, as in a person’s internal monologue, and this whole is differentiated into sequences that establish the same world between them. Connections are fixed between people, things, and the times and spaces in which they exist (*Cinema 1* 100).

Specification, on the other hand, consists of constructing rational intervals of movement, and it is related to the filmmaker’s development of relations of commensurability and continuity between disparate sequences. There are images specified as perception-images, which present a state of things, and action-images, which present reactions that alter a perceived state of things. Affection-images occupy the interval between the two, and appear when sensations, neither captured through perception nor remaining wholly outside of consciousness, are absorbed by the body such that a change is registered directly rather than through the intermediary of the bodies onscreen. Often, these are images of the human face, expressing qualities (wonder or surprise) or powers (desire increasing, or transforming into disappointment). These are the three primary types of images that make up the sensory-motor schema.

Deleuze’s concept of the sensory-motor schema comes from Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, and it has two main aspects. First, living beings “allow to pass through them, so to speak, those external influences which are indifferent to them; the others isolated, become ‘perceptions’ by their very isolation” (Bergson 36). Our representations of matter offer us, therefore, a measure of our possible action upon the bodies we encounter, since these images result from “the discarding of what has no interest for our needs, or more generally, for our functions” (38). Deleuze describes this subtractive movement of perception as an act of framing, and as we will see, it is this discarding of what seems of no interest to us that informs his conception of the cliché. The second aspect of the living image’s conscious perception is that a horizon forms around the body, allowing the body to organise a response to the perception received. Bergson argues that this occurs because “as my body moves in space, all the other images vary, while that image, my body, remains invariable. I must therefore, make it a center, to which I refer all other images” (46). In this way, the body prepares itself to react to the stimulus it has received. The subtractive nature of perception allows us to form images that frame what is of interest to us such that it can be consciously recognised, and a horizon is thereby formed within which the relationships between perceptions and actions are clearly determined.

Cliché, Continuity, and the World

The final chapter of *The Movement-Image* describes the crisis of the action-image, that image most often associated with cinematic realism. According to Deleuze, such realism is a result of spatio-temporally fixed milieux and modes of behaviour that reveal or alter a state of things: “The action-image is the relation between the two and all the varieties of this relation” (*Cinema 1* 145). The consciousness of clichés, he argues, is one of five characteristics that make this crisis apparent without themselves being enough to constitute a new type of image. Clichés, Deleuze argues, have not only come to proliferate in an exterior world full of photographic, cinematic, and televisual images, but constitute our interior world, “so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which he thinks and feels, is thought and is felt, being himself a cliché among the others in the world which surrounds him” (*Cinema 1* 213). Clichés hold things together when people are no longer united by collective causes, and thus Deleuze links the crisis of the action-image, dominant in Hollywood filmmaking practice, with that of the American Dream, and claims responses to this crisis can be found in the work of directors like Martin Scorsese and Robert Altman.

The cliché appears in the places left vacant by “the healthiest illusions”, illusions that allow us to believe in a situation that could give rise to an action capable of modifying it, or actions through which a situation reveals itself (*Cinema 1* 211). Such illusions were already shattered in Europe after World War II; therefore, Deleuze argues, filmmaking strategies that extended the intervals between action and reaction began to appear earlier there. It is also true, however, that various filmmakers—notably Orson Welles, Jean Renoir, and Yasujiro Ozu—had already moved outside the regime of the movement-image before and during the war. What may have motivated Ozu’s move away from the movement-image is of particular interest with regard to Deleuze’s claims that the regime of the time-image is dependent upon the breakdown of the sensory-motor schema.

Noël Burch argues, in a text that Deleuze cites a number of times in the *Cinema* books, that it is as a result of a fundamentally Japanese perspective that Ozu rejects the two key principles of the “Western” mode of representation developed in Hollywood. This rejection is, according to Burch, a sign of dissent from the anthropocentric worldview inherent in the Western mode of cinematic representation, which is centred upon human beings and their actions. The two principles “symbolically challenged” by Ozu, are those of continuity and the inclusion of the viewer in the diegesis “as a transparent relay in the communion between two characters” (Burch 159). According to Burch, already in *That Night’s Wife* (1930), a silent film, Ozu had prominently incorporated the two aspects of his practice that break with these principles. These aspects are “bad” eyeline matches between shots and the deployment of cutaway still lifes, which Burch calls pillow-shots. He gives them this name because he judges them loosely analogous to pillow-words in classical Japanese poetry, which usually occupy a short five-syllable line and modify the first word in the following line. Sometimes though, as Burch notes, their meaning is unclear, in which case they function rhetorically to elevate the tone, and, to some degree, as images. Mismatched eyelines and pillow-shots break up the diegetic flow, the first since they do not assure the spectator’s sense of orientation to diegetic space, and pillow-shots because they are images in which no human beings are present, and are not attributable to the vision, or interests, of any character.

The appearance of hiatuses in the diegetic flow introduces breaks that cannot be assimilated into a sensory-motor schema. The still lifes of Ozu are optical images that cannot be assigned a position in relation to the interval linking perception and action. We absorb them, so to speak, without knowing what they oblige us to take from them. In fact, Ozu uses them in many different ways, and they generally reference spaces where the characters are, have just been, or will shortly arrive. Nevertheless, as Burch argues, the “space from which these references are made is invariably presented as outside the diegesis, as a pictorial space on another plane of ‘reality as it were’” (161). This space is also outside of any reference to a sensory-motor schema that would normalise the aberrant movement it presents by relating it to what takes place among the characters.

Sensory-Motor Images and Pure Optical Images

Deleuze claims that the sensory-motor image of things is a cliché. In it “we perceive only [...] what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés” (*Cinema 2* 19-20). A cliché is an image that presupposes a particular link between what is seen or heard, and what will then be felt, thought, or done. It is not a matter of clichés penetrating into our minds and hearts from outside, but of a cliché-making activity internal to our faculty of perception. With regard to cinema, this link between perception and action pertains to the activity of both spectators and the fictional characters of narrative films. In movement-image cinema, characters react to situations, perceive what it is in their interest to do in a situation, quickly or gradually, and do it. The spectators in turn identify to varying degrees with the agents on screen, and with relative ease, they grasp (though sometimes retrospectively) that which was in the image to be taken hold of, the pieces crucial to the understanding of the whole.

How are we then to understand Deleuze’s enthusiasm for so many films constructed according to the regime of the movement-image? He in fact claims that neither of the two regimes of cinema is superior to the other (*Cinema 1* 259). Certainly, a great amount of invention went into making the images on screen accord with the system of perception native to us. This is the function of what Burch calls the Western mode of representation: to ensure a continuity of the narrative and the filmic world across cuts, and to situate the spectator such that the thought she internalises will not be interrupted by spatial or temporal disorientation. However, Deleuze suggests three reasons for the need to turn away from the regime of the movement-image. The first is the mediocrity of the majority of productions, and the second its degeneration into manipulation and propaganda. The third reason Deleuze cites is the need to explore whether or not there is a type of thought that is essentially cinematic, which would not be dependent upon the laws of the sensory-motor schema (160). It is this last question that is bound up with the cliché.

Deleuze turns to Antonin Artaud to formulate an essentially cinematic type of thinking. Artaud initially saw great possibilities in the cinema, but he eventually turned away from it, ceasing to believe that it could go beyond the clear thought developed in the regime of the movement-image. In “Witchcraft and the Cinema” (1927), he argues, “Clear thought is not enough. It allocates a world which has been utterly consumed. What is clear is what is immediately accessible, but what is

immediately accessible is the mere skin of life” (66). The thought formed by the regime of the movement-image is a particular kind of what Deleuze calls “spiritual automatism”. He adopts this term from Spinoza, who formulated it in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. In relation to the regime of the movement-image, Deleuze uses it to designate the process wherein a totality that is differentiated and divided up in each shot at the same time integrates the disparate images into a totality open in a nonlocalisable dimension. The whole is a duration, a continuum of time, open at both ends, produced in the thought on the screen that the spectator interiorises. Movement-images are clichés because they always refer back to intervals of movement that make the action they represent seem to obey the laws of a fixed space-time. It is for this reason that the potential power of modern cinema lies in its moving outside of this schema, so that perceptions are not always motivated by the actions that will arise in response to them. As in Ozu, this leads us into situations in which we see without knowing what it is we are supposed to be seeing. His still lifes, though still invested in human affairs, move toward a horizon outside the sensory-motor connections by which those affairs are given form.

Deleuze draws an important distinction between sensory-motor images and pure optical images. In the case of the sensory-motor image, we automatically recognise that which interests us. To illustrate his point, Deleuze writes that the cow sees grass in general, as that which it can eat. The pure optical image, on the other hand, presents us with specific features of a particular field of grass, and we are unable to take in everything or reduce the image to that element which extends directly into action. The pure optical image, in other words, offers a different kind of description. The relationship between image and reception is not organic, as it is in the sensory-motor schema, where a chair is made for people to sit on and grass is meant to be eaten; rather, the pure optical image is inorganic or “physical-geometrical.” Pure optical images “bring the thing each time to an essential singularity, and describe the inexhaustible, endlessly referring to other descriptions” (*Cinema 2* 43). The same image could be described in any number of ways, and these descriptions would multiply if we consider the descriptions that could be made of the other images with which it is linked. Therefore, even though it may seem that the sensory-motor image is richer, since we know what we are meant to see in it, it is actually the pure optical image that is richer because we are unable to subtract from it that which has no bearing on our interests.

Still Lives and Empty Spaces

According to Deleuze, in order to combat the cliché, a film must do more than disturb the sensory-motor links within and between images. Films must introduce a new type of image that opens onto forces not manifested through the regime of the movement-image. It is not that the movement-image disappears with the appearance of the time-image, but that it comes to exist as “the first dimension of an image that never stops growing in dimensions” (*Cinema 2* 21). These dimensions are not spatial; they are rather new powers of the image, powers that do not belong to world images—which make up the expressive material of perception-, affection-, and action-images in the regime of the movement-image—but constitute cinematic images that operate to varying degree outside of their reference to a pre-existing world. Deleuze argues that it is in coming into relation with the forces

released by these new images that the optical sound image can escape from a world of clichés (22). The three new types of image detailed by Deleuze are chronosigns, lectosigns, and noosigns: the time-image, the readable image, and the thinking image. The last of these is of principle interest in this paper, but a brief explanation of the chronosign is necessary to understand the concept of the noosign.

The still lifes of Ozu are time-images, or chronosigns, according to Deleuze. He differentiates these from shots of empty spaces and landscapes, which Burch had grouped with them under the name pillow-shots, while acknowledging that these images share many functions and transition imperceptibly into each other (*Cinema 2* 16). For example, in Ozu's work, the empty space or landscape, like the still life, usually exceeds its typical function as an establishing shot, which orients the spectator to the space-time in which the characters act. The question that Deleuze poses is whether some of these pillow-shots go beyond simply disturbing sensory-motor relations, or, in Burch's terms, whether they go beyond introducing an effect of hiatus that suspends the diegetic flow and become directly temporal. Deleuze argues that Ozu's still lifes are the correlate of the optical images presented by empty spaces and landscapes. "An empty space", he writes, "owes its importance above all to the absence of a possible content, whilst the still life is defined by the presence and composition of objects which are wrapped up in themselves or become their own container" (*Cinema 2* 16). We can take as an example, as Deleuze does, the famous shot of the vase in *Late Spring* (1949), which is interpolated into the nocturnal conversation between Noriko (Setsuko Hara) and her father, Professor Somiya (Chishu Ryu), as they lie in their beds with the lights out in an inn in Kyoto. This image, according to Deleuze, is an image of fullness rather than emptiness, a distinction, he notes, that accords with the nuanced relation between these two terms in Chinese and Japanese thought. Whether empty space or still life, the image disrupts the sensory-motor links, but it is in becoming "full" that it constitutes a kind of thinking outside of what Artaud called clear thought.

According to Deleuze, it is at the point at which the cinematic image most closely resembles the photograph that it grows most radically distinct from it. Where all movement is absent within the image, the image, through its duration, realizes a temporal movement directly. In the case of the shot of the vase, it is the image's duration that first strikes us, guiding us nowhere, distending the moment of the present (*Cinema 1* 16). It brings out a direct image of transformation in which movement is temporal, in which time becomes the measure of movement. Such is Deleuze's argument when he claims that the vase in *Late Spring* is an image of change presented through the pure form of that which never changes, but in which all change takes place: time. For, the first shot of the vase comes between Noriko's tentative smile, after finding that her father has fallen asleep while she was talking to him, and her eyes filling with tears. A qualitative change occurs in the temporal movement of the image. The transformation occurs within the interval, rather than in the images of the characters through which the largely eventless diegesis is developed. The event arrives without being grounded in the image, but as the image itself. Nevertheless, for this image to constitute such a change, it must stand in relation to the images to which it is linked. It is part of a regime, or system, of cinematic thought.

Learning to See in Hong Kong

Burch argues that Ozu's films after World War II, including *Late Spring*, suffer from an academicism that results from the very stylistic traits—pillow-shots, 180-degree matches, mismatched eyelines—that had made his earlier films radical (Burch 182-183). He appears to think that they ossified into clichés in ceasing to play a dynamic formal role and becoming merely signifiers of an “Ozu film.” I disagree with him, and think rather that they continue to be a part of an inventive style of cinematic thought that limits narrative and technical possibilities in order to combine them into endless permutations. The existence of clichés is necessary for such a practice, since this practice allows for clichés to be undermined, not through an ironic treatment or parody, but by allowing difference to emerge between images that appear similar, and that we might otherwise be tempted to associate with one another. It is the closeness, or interplay, of the image and the cliché that it eludes that give us a glimpse of the false horizons that clichés establish.

This perspective does not seem to me totally incompatible with that put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?*, but it is nevertheless distinct from it. There, Deleuze and Guattari claim, “Artists struggle less against chaos (that, in a certain manner, all their wishes summon forth) than against the ‘clichés’ of opinion” (204). An important struggle for contemporary filmmaking is to keep the cliché close enough so that it is revealed as such. If filmmakers need to court chaos to do so, it is that chaos described by Deleuze in *The Time-Image*: the indiscernibility of the true and the false, the imaginary and the real. Narrative films are of course fictional, but it is those types of fiction that accord with no model of truth, instead playing on the clichés that maintain such a model, that allow the spectator to get a glimpse of the limits within which clichés position thought.

Some of the preceding claims can be clarified with a consideration of Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000), since it plays on the clichés of continuity and the primacy of actions and responses in a number of interesting ways. As commentators such as Rey Chow and Giuliana Bruno have noted, we often know that time has passed in the film only because Su Li-zhen (Maggie Cheung) has changed her cheongsam, her dress. These costume changes often tell us, for instance, that an image we had expected to belong to the same evening as the previous image actually belongs to another evening altogether. Sometimes it is even difficult to know whether we have moved into the past or the future or if an image belongs to the diegetic reality, or the fantasy life of one of the characters. This is the case, for instance, when Mo-wan and Li-zhen first go out to dinner together and each discovers that the other is aware that their respective spouses are having an affair. As the sequence in the restaurant comes to a close, a Nat King Cole song, “Te quiero dijiste (Magic Is the Moonlight)”, begins to play. There is a cut to an image of the two walking on the street, away from the camera, and we can see that Li-zhen is wearing a different dress. The music continues to play until this shot comes to an end and then Wong cuts to another meeting between the two, in which Li-zhen wears yet another cheongsam.

Usually, such a musical bridge would assure us that a period of time is passing in which nothing important to our understanding of the relations between characters is happening, and if something is happening during those intervals, we will generally be told about it later. *In the Mood for Love* does not at all assure us that we are seeing the events most important to understanding the relationship between Mo-wan and Li-zhen. The establishment of an intimacy between the two is

dependent upon sequences that bring together music and slow-motion to create an affective density that bleeds into the rest of the film. These are the sequences of the two passing on the street, or on the steps to the noodle bar where they both go to eat alone, scenes accompanied by Shigeru Umebayashi's waltz, "Yumeji's Theme." While their not leaving their spouses and getting together is a sort of non-event captured in snippets of conversation, these autonomous image/music sequences present directly the melancholy event of a love that fails to materialise. Rather than a sensory-motor representation that develops the event through the rearrangement of bodies on screen, we are presented directly with an affective event that resists any final description.

Even when the two do embrace, after Mo-wan has decided to leave for Singapore, it is in a practice farewell, in which they pretend to be their future selves. That Li-zhen breaks into tears only serves to highlight the disjunction between the situation and the response. The simulacrum, the rehearsal, induces a real emotional response and becomes the event that expresses what has until that point remained unseen. This is already the case when the two pretend to be their spouses in order to discover how their affair began, and Li-zhen is taken aback when Mo-wan, acting as her husband, makes the first move. The signs of emotion the two exhibit make it evident that a real event has taken place, but the scene is also a little fiction, given life by two performers acting as characters they are not themselves playing. But Wong, of course, often makes the relations between chronological events perceptible. Even if we are not sure what happens between the images, in the interstices of the film, we know that after the two meet at the restaurant their friendship, or perhaps romance, progresses, and that eventually Mo-wan falls in love, realises Li-zhen will not leave her husband, and moves to Singapore. It is in the play between sensory-motor relations and what operates outside them that the clichés that ensure a "realistic" continuity are revealed to us.

In a famous passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche lays out the tasks for which we require educators—learning to see, think, speak and write. "Learning to see", he writes, means "habituating the eye to repose, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgment...not to react immediately to a stimulus, but to have the restraining, stock-taking instincts in one's control" (76). The power of the regime of the time-image is precisely that it introduces a thought that is carried outside of the sensory-motor schema, leaving us in the position of learning to see without reacting automatically to what we perceive. In *In the Mood for Love*, Wong, like Ozu, does not cease to make connections between characters or to develop situations, but these developments tend to occur by way of dialogue, while the image often manifests the power of a vision that is not subject to its relation to the characters in the narrative. Such a vision can itself constitute an event of transformation and can shatter the continuity of clear thought, its processes of integrating the difference introduced by each image into the self-sameness of a totality. It is the presence of such an unspecified difference, a glimpse of the world outside its ordering by human thought, that allows us to see without recourse to the clichés with which perception reduces the world to its potential human interests. Though, as Nietzsche argues, it is in our interests to learn to do so.

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