The Imaginary Signifier

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I The imaginary and the 'good object' in the cinema and in the theory of the cinema

Reduced to its most fundamental approach, any psychoanalytic reflection might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province: an enterprise of displacement, a territorial enterprise, a symbolising advance; that is to say, in the field of films as in other fields, the psychoanalytic itinerary is from the outset a semiological one, even (above all) if in comparison with the discourse of a more classical semiology it shifts from attention to the énoncé to concern for the énonciation.2

* Editor's and translator's notes are given in square brackets, author's own notes without brackets.

1. [The symbolic, the imaginary and the real: For these key terms in Lacan's reading of Freud, see the 'Presentation', p 11; also the entries 'Imaginary' and 'Symbolic' in Jean Laplanche and J-B Pontalis: The Language of Psychoanalysis, Hogarth Press, London 1973 (this dictionary can usefully be consulted for all the psychoanalytic terminology to be found in this and other articles in this number of Screen).]

2. [Énoncé and énonciation: Both these terms can be translated as 'utterance', but whereas the first signifies what is uttered, the second signifies the act of uttering. The distinction here (perhaps best captured in English by that between 'statement' and 'speech act') is not that between langue and parole, since, first, every énoncé is a piece of parole, and, second, consideration of énonciation involves not only the social and psychological, ie non-linguistic context of énoncés, but also features of langue itself, ways the latter structures the possibilities of énonciation. The most obvious of these linguistic features of énonciation are the symbol-indexes – personal pronouns, tenses, anaphores (see Emile Benveniste, Prob-
A superficial look or a ritual eagerness to detect ‘changes’ as often as possible will perhaps see a surrender or a new direction where, more simply – less simply, of course – I am accepting the temptation (the attempt) to drive a little deeper the approach of knowledge itself, which constantly symbolises new fragments of the ‘real’ in order to annex them to ‘reality’. – ‘There are formulae that are not imagined. For a time, at least, they range themselves with the real’ (Jacques Lacan: ‘Radiophonie,’ Scilicet nn 2/3, 1970, p 75). For a time, at least: let us therefore attempt to imagine some of them.

It has very often, and rightly, been said that the cinema is a technique of the imaginary. A technique, on the other hand, which is peculiar to a historical epoch (that of capitalism) and a state of society, so-called industrial civilisation.

A technique of the imaginary, but in two senses. In the ordinary sense of the word, because most films consist of fictional narratives and because all films depend even for their signifier on the primary imaginary of photography and phonography. In the Lacanian sense, too, in which the imaginary, opposed to the symbolic but constantly imbricated with it, designates the basic lure of the ego, the definitive imprint of a before the Oedipus complex (which also continues after it), the durable mark of the mirror which alienates man in his own reflection and makes him the double of his double, the subterranean persistence of the exclusive relation to the mother, desire as a pure effect of lack and endless pursuit, the initial core of the unconscious (primal repression). All this is undoubtedly reactivated by the actions of that other mirror, the cinema screen, in this respect a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs. But our difficulty – the same one as everywhere else – will be that of grasping in any detail the intimately ramifying articulation of this imaginary with the feats of the signifier, with the semiotic imprint of the Law (here, the cinematic codes) which also marks the unconscious, and thereby man’s productions, including films.

At work in these films, the symbolic is no less so in the proposals of anyone who discusses them, and hence in the article I

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lens of General Linguistics, University of Miami Press, Coral Gables, Florida 1971, Part V). The relation between énonciation and énoncé is the relation between the speaker, his context and what he says; that is, the question of the subject's place in language. In poetics, the relation involves the classic problems of intention, of author/narrator/narrative relations. See also footnote 13.

3. [Desire: French désir translates Freud's Wunsch, in English usually (eg in the Standard Edition) given as 'wish'. It has been translated here throughout as 'desire', because the syntactic properties of the latter correspond more closely to those of the French term, but also because the Freudian concept is much less discrete than the English term 'wish' suggests. See also the 'Presentation', pp 8-10.]
am just beginning. This certainly does not mean that the symbolic is enough to produce a knowledge (see Lacan: 'Sur la théorie du symbolisme d'Ernest Jones,' Ecrits, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1966, p 711), since the uninterpreted dream, the fantasy, the symptom are all symbolic operations. Nevertheless, it is in its wake that we can find hope for a little more knowledge, it is one of its avatars that introduces 'understanding', whereas the imaginary is the site of an insurpassable opacity, almost by definition. Thus as a beginning it is absolutely essential to tear the symbolic from its own imaginary and to return it to it as a look. To tear it from it, but not completely, or at least not in the sense of ignoring it and fleeing from it (fearing it): the imaginary is also what has to be rediscovered precisely in order to avoid being swallowed up by it: a never ending task. If I have only been able to manage here a small part of this task (in the cinematic field), I shall by no means be displeased.

For the problem of the cinema is always reduplicated as a problem of the theory of the cinema and we can only extract knowledge from what we are (what we are as persons, what we are as culture and society). As in political struggles, our only weapons are those of the adversary, as in anthropology, our only source is the native, as in the analytical cure, our only knowledge is that of the analysand, who is also (current French usage tells us so) the analyser (analysant). The posture which inaugurates knowledge is defined by a backward turn and by it alone – a backward turn is the movement common to my three examples, which are more than examples. If the effort of science is constantly threatened by a relapse into the very thing against which it is constituted, that is because it is constituted as much in it as against it, and that the two prepositions are here in some sense synonymous (in a very similar way, the neurotic defences set to work against anxiety themselves become anxiogenic because they originate in anxiety). The work of the symbolic, in the theoretician who would delimit the share of the imaginary and that of the symbolic in the cinema, is always in danger of being swallowed up in the very imaginary which is sustained by the cinema, which makes the film likeable, and which is thus the instigation for the theoretician's very existence (= the 'desire to study the cinema', to use more ordinary terms): to sum up, the objective conditions that give rise to the theory of the cinema are one and the same as those that make that theory precarious and permanently threaten it with sliding into its opposite, in which the discourse of the object (the native discourse of the cinematic institution) insidiously comes to occupy the place of discourse about the object.

This is the risk that has to be run, there is no choice; anyone who does not run it has already fallen victim to it: like certain cinema journalists, he gossips about films in order to prolong their effective and social incidence, their imaginary, that is, perfectly
real power.

In an article in *Communications* n 23, May 1975, 'Le film de fiction et son spectateur', I attempt to show that the cinema spectator has veritable 'object relations' with films. The aim of my contribution to *Hommage à Emile Benveniste* was to specify (following Jean-Louis Baudry, but obliquely with respect to his remarkable analyses in 'Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base,' *Cinéthique* nn 7/8, 1970, pp 1-8, translated as 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly* vol XXVIII n 2, Winter 1974-5, pp 39-47, and in 'Le dispositif', *Communications* n 23 op cit) what the voyeurism of the spectator had to do with the primordial experience of the mirror, and also with the primal scene (with a unilateral voyeurism without exhibitionism on the part of the object looked at).

This is thus the moment to recall certain given facts which will be very important for the rest of this study, facts that pre-exist my intervention and belong to the history of the psychoanalytic movement. The very notion of an 'object relation' – a fantasy relation, quite distinct from real relations to real objects and yet contributing to their construction – constitutes one of Melanie Klein's unique contributions to the Freudian field, and is inscribed entirely within what was to become for Lacan the dimension of the imaginary. Lacan's discourse in fact 'skirts' certain Kleinian themes without coinciding with them (= partial objects, role of the breast, importance of the oral stage, persecution fantasies of fragmentation, depressive positions of loss, etc), but this only on the side of the imaginary. The main grounds for Lacan's criticism of Melanie Klein will also be familiar: her reduction of the psyche to only one of its axes, the imaginary, the absence of a theory of the symbolic, 'failing even to glimpse the category of the signifier' ('La direction de la cure', *Ecrits*, op cit, p 637). – On the other hand, the experience of the mirror as it is described by Lacan⁴ is essentially situated on the side of the imaginary (= formation of the ego by identification with a phantom, an image), even if the mirror also makes possible a first access to the symbolic by the mediation of the mother holding the child to the glass whose reflection, functioning here as the big Other,⁵ necessarily

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5. [The big Other: The mirror phase establishes a dual relation between the child and its mirror image, internalised as the ego; this produces the register of what Lacan calls the imaginary, which constitutes a moment of any relation to an other (with a small o) or object later in life. However, the imaginary relation of ego and other is immediately marked by and subordinated to the symbolic]
appears in the field of the mirror alongside that of the child.

To sum up, what I have analysed, or attempted to analyse, in my first two Freudian inspired studies (written several months before this one) turns out, without my having precisely intended it, to be already established on one of the flanks of the ridge-line, that of the imaginary: cinematic fiction as a semi-oneiric instance, in one of these articles, and in the other, the spectator-screen relationship as a mirror identification. That is why I should now like to approach my object from its symbolic flank, or rather along the ridge-line itself. My dream today is to speak of the cinematic dream in terms of a code: of the code of this dream.

For the spectator, the film can on occasion be a 'bad object': then we have filmic unpleasure, which I deal with elsewhere (in my article in Communications n 23 op cit) and which defines the relation of certain spectators to certain films, or of certain groups of spectators to certain groups of films. Nevertheless, the 'good object' relation is more basic from the standpoint of a socio-historical critique of the cinema, for it is this relation and by no means the opposite one (which thus appears as a local failure of the former) that constitutes the aim of the cinematic institution and that the latter is constantly attempting to maintain or re-establish.

Let me insist once again, the cinematic institution is not just the order through the set of introjections of the ego that culminate in the ego ideal, and the relativisation of any other or object with respect to a primordially lost object which a real object or other can only represent metonymically. Ego and other are then subordinated to an order that is always elsewhere, more radically Other than any other and hence unconscious, the unconscious. The absolute character of this otherness is marked in Lacan's writings by the use of an initial capital. The establishment of this subordination culminates in the resolution of the Œdipus complex, but it begins immediately after, or even during, the mirror phase itself, in the presence of a third party (the mother) in the mirror with the child's image, and in the fort-da game, the child's discovery through repetition of presence and absence.

6. [In Melanie Klein's account of the pre-Œdipal development of the child, its earliest drives, particularly the oral drives associated with feeding and the breast, are primordially ambivalent, both loving and destructive; in one of the earliest phases of development, called the 'paranoid-schizoid position' (position - Einstellung - because these phases structure unconscious fantasy and can therefore recur at any age), the child's weak ego handles this ambivalence by splitting the object (eg the breast) into a good and a bad object, projecting its own love and hate on to its two aspects (gratifying, frustrating); at a later phase, the 'depressive position', the two objects are re-united, the ego being reconciled to the ambivalence by inhibition of the aggression and reparation (Wiedergutmachung) of the object.]
cinema industry (which works to fill cinemas, not to empty them), it is also the mental machinery – another industry – which spectators ‘accustomed to the cinema’ have internalised historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films. (The institution is outside us and inside us, indistinctly collective and intimate, sociological and psychoanalytic, just as the general prohibition of incest has as its individual corollary the Oedipus complex, castration or perhaps in other states of society different psychical configurations but ones which still imprint the institution in us in their own way.) The second machine, ie the social regulation of the spectator’s metapsychology, like the first, has as its function to set up good object relations with films if at all possible; here too the ‘bad film’ is a failure of the institution: the cinema is attended out of desire, not reluctance, in the hope that the film will please, not that it will displease. Thus filmic pleasure and filmic unpleasure, although they correspond to the two imaginary objects shaped by the persecutory splitting described by Melanie Klein, are not in my view arranged in positions of antithetic symmetry, since the institution as a whole has filmic pleasure alone as its aim.

In a social system in which the spectator is not forced physically to go to the cinema but in which it is still important that he should go so that the money he pays for his admission makes it possible to shoot other films and thus ensures the auto-reproduction of the institution – and it is the specific characteristic of every true institution that it takes charge of the mechanisms of its own perpetuation – there is no other solution than to set up arrangements whose aim and effect is to give the spectator the ‘spontaneous’ desire to visit the cinema and pay for his ticket. The outer machine (the cinema as industry) and the inner machine (the spectator’s psychology) are not just metaphorically related, the latter a facsimile of the former, ‘internalising’ it as a reversed mould, a receptive hollow of identical form, but also metonymically related as complementary segments: the ‘desire to go to the cinema’ is a kind of reflection shaped by the film industry, but it is also a real link in the chain of the overall mechanism of that industry. It occupies one of the essential positions in the circulation of money, the turnover of capital without which films could no longer be made: a privileged position since it intervenes just after the ‘outward’ movement (which includes the financial investment in cinematic undertakings, the material manufacture of the films, their distribution, their hire to the cinemas) and inaugurates the circuit of return which brings the money back, if possible with an increase, from the pockets of the individual spectators eventually to those of the production companies or the banks supporting them, thus giving the go-ahead for new films to be made. In this way, the libidinal economy (filmic pleasure in its historically constituted form) reveals its ‘correspondence’ with
the political economy (the current cinema as a commercial enterprise), and it is, moreover—as the very existence of 'market research' shows—one of the specific elements of that economy: this is what is euphemistically translated by the term 'motivation' in socio-psychological surveys directly devoted to sales.

If I am concerned to define the cinematic institution as a wider instance than the cinema industry (or than the ambiguous commonplace notion of the 'commercial cinema') it is because of this dual kinship—mould and segment, facsimile and component—between the psychology of the spectator (which is only apparently 'individual'; as everywhere else, only its most minute variations can be described as such) and the financial mechanisms of the cinema. My insistence on this point may be irritating, but imagine what would occur in the absence of such a state of affairs: we should have to suppose (no less) the existence of some special police force or some statutory arrangement of 'a posteriori' inspection (= a stamp in one's identity card on admission to a cinema) to force people to go to the cinema: a piece of science fiction I have resorted to here simply for its absurdity, but one which does at least have the paradoxically dual advantage that it both corresponds to a situation which is not quite without real examples of an attenuated and localised kind (such as those political regimes in which certain direct propaganda films are practically 'obligatory' for members of the movement or of the official youth organisations), and yet clearly designates a modality of regular cinema attendance very different from that on which the institution depends in the vast majority of cases, ie in what one would (for that very reason) call its 'normal' forms. Here I am touching on political analysis, and the difference there is between a cinema-institution which would be of a fascist type (and has hardly ever existed on a broad scale, even in regimes which might have made a greater call on it) and a cinema-institution which is capitalist and liberal in inspiration, and is broadly dominant almost everywhere, even in countries otherwise more or less socialist.

In the register of the imaginary (= Klein's object relation), the institution thus depends on the good object, although it may happen that it manufactures bad ones. At this point we perhaps glimpse the existence within the cinema of a third machine which I have so far only mentioned (p 16) and even then not named. I shall now leave the industry and the spectator to consider the cinematic writer (critic, historian, theoretician, etc), and I am struck by the extreme concern he often reveals—a concern which gives him an odd resemblance to producer and consumer—to maintain a good object relation with as many films as possible, and at any rate with the cinema as such.
This proposition will immediately 'arouse' a host of counter-examples, but I shall not stop for them since I accept them entirely. Let me recall one of them at least, chosen at random: the representatives of the French 'new wave', when they had not yet made any films and were working as critics for Cahiers du cinéma, based a broad sector of their theory on the denunciation of a certain type of film, the 'French quality' film; this attack was no pretence, it went much further than a mere disagreement at the intellectual level, it conveyed a real and profound antipathy for the films denounced: it constituted them as bad objects, for the denouncers themselves first of all, then for the audience that attached itself to them and a little later guaranteed the success of their films (thus restoring a 'good' cinema). Besides, cinematic literature, taken as a whole, is not sparing in passages where a film, a film-maker, a genre, some general aspect of the cinema itself, are taken briskly to task. Settling accounts is as frequent, probably more so and certainly rougher, in cinema criticism as it is in literary criticism, for example.

It might be enough, and it would not be false, to say that the very violence of these reactions confirms the broadly projective character of the relation the cinema writer often maintains to his 'object' (very aptly named here). But it is essential to go further. What I should like to emphasise is the fact that despite these hostilities which come to be 'imprinted' in cinematic writings and are neither uncommon nor simulated, there is a more fundamental and opposite tendency in cinema writers, an intention to establish, maintain or re-establish the cinema (or films) in the position of good object. Thus cinema criticism is imaginary in both its two main movements, linked together by the bond of a true reaction formation: in the persecutory aspects of blind polemic, in the great depressive plunge in which the cinema-object is restored, repaired, protected.

It is very often to exalt a certain cinema that another has been violently attacked: the oscillation between 'good' and 'bad', the immediacy of the restoration mechanism, then appear in all their clarity.

Another case, and just as frequent a one, is that of conceptions of the cinema which aim to be theoretical and general but in fact consist of justifying a given type of films that one has first liked, and rationalising this liking after the event. These 'theories' are often author aesthetics (aesthetics of taste); they may contain insights of considerable theoretical importance, but the writer's posture is not theoretical: the énoncé is sometimes scientific, the énonciation never. A rather similar phenomenon, varying in the extent to which it is caricatural, and often very ingenious, can be observed in certain young cinéphiles who substantially change their basic opinion of the cinema, sometimes in an exuberant or dramatic way, after each film they have seen which has strongly attracted
them: the new theorisation is cut each time to the precise measure of this unique and delicious film, and yet it is indispensable that it be sincerely experienced as 'general' to prolong and amplify, to sanction the vivid momentary pleasure they obtained on seeing the film: the id does not bring its own super-ego with it, it is not enough to be happy, or rather one cannot be perfectly happy, unless one is sure one has a right to be happy. (In the same way some men can only fully live their present love by projecting it into a mental temporality and persuading themselves that it will last throughout their lives: the contradiction of experience, the precise renewal of the same inflation vis-à-vis the next love are incapable of shaking the disposition they carry with them: for its real mechanism is almost the diametrical opposite of its apparent result: far from the strength of their love guaranteeing it a real future, the psychical representation of that future is the prior condition for the establishment of their full amorous potency in the present; the institution of marriage answers to this need and reinforces it.) — To return to the cinema, the rationalisation of a taste into a theory in its numerous and commonplace forms obeys an objective law which hardly varies in its broad lines. It could be described in Lacanian terms as a slight wavering between the functions of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real; in Kleinian terms as a slight overflow of the unconscious fantasies; in Freudian terms as a slight inadequacy of secondarisation. The real object (here the film which has pleased) and the truly theoretical discourse by which it might have been symbolised have been more or less confused with the imaginary object (= the film such as it has pleased, ie something which owes a great deal to its spectator's own fantasy) and the virtues of the latter have been conferred

7. [Ego, super-ego and id: From around 1920, Freud distinguished three psychic instances, the id or instinctual pole of the personality, the ego, representing the interests of the total personality and cathected (see footnote 12 below) with narcissistic libido, and the super-ego, corresponding roughly to the earlier concept of the ego ideal, a critical instance resulting from the internalisation of parental demands and prohibitions. This second topography does not contradict the earlier division between unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious, but nor do its divisions correspond to those of the first topography; in particular, more than the id is unconscious.]

8. [Primary process and secondary process: Freud distinguished two modes of functioning of the psychical apparatus, an unconscious primary process, dominated by the pleasure principle, ie allowing a free flow of psychical energy from representation to representation and fully recathecting (see n 12 below) desired representations, and a preconscious and conscious secondary process, dominated by the reality principle, in which psychical energy is bound, flowing only in a controlled fashion, with representations more stably cathected, satisfaction postponed, allowing rational thought and the testing of the various possible ways to satisfaction. 'Secondarisation' is the binding process that the making conscious of a representation or desire involves.]
on the former by projection. Thus a simultaneously internal and external love object is constituted, at once comforted by a justificatory theory which only overlaps with it (occasionally even silently ignoring it) the better to surround and protect it, according to the cocoon principle. The general discourse is a kind of advanced structure of the phobic (and also counter-phobic) type, a proleptic reparation of any harm which might come to the object, a depressive procedure occasionally breached by persecutory returns, an unconscious protection against a possible change in the taste of the lover himself, a defence more or less intermingled with pre-emptive counter-attack. To adopt the outward marks of theoretical discourse is to occupy a strip of territory around the adored film, all that really counts, in order to bar all the roads by which it might be attacked. The cinematic rationaliser, locking himself up in his system, is gripped by a kind of siege psychosis; he protects the film, but also, within the shelter of the ramparts of theory, organises his dual relationship with it for a more integral pleasure (jouissance). The traits of the symbolic are convoked since the texture of the discourse is often sufficiently close, but they are returned to the imaginary and work to its advantage alone. The question never posed is precisely the one which would overthrow the whole construction: 'Why did I like this film (I rather than another, this film rather than another)?' A true theory is recognisable among other things by the fact that it would see a problem here, whereas many cinematic conceptions depend on the contrary on the redoubtable effectivity of the fact itself, and hence on a silence established with respect to it: these are deproblematisation techniques and to that extent the exact opposite of the procedures of knowledge, even when they contain some authentically scientific break-throughs.

This 'sanctioning construction' built on to a film and a taste is not the only manifestation of the powers of the imaginary in cinematic writings. There are several others, some of which are so striking that I am amazed not to have thought of them sooner, at least in this light (it would be better were I less amazed: I am myself a victim of what I am criticising). – Consider cinematic historians: they very often act – and this is not to be regretted, for without this cast of mind we should have no cinematic documentation – as real cinema archivists, the keepers of an imaginary archive, in the sense in which Malraux's Museum was imaginary. Their wish is to save as many films as possible; not qua copies, qua celluloid, but the social memory of those films and hence a by no means unfavourable image of them. The history of the cinema often presents the appearance of an easy-going theodicy, a

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9. [Jouissance: The French term means both 'orgasm' and simple 'enjoyment' or 'pleasure'. It has been translated as seemed best from the context, but the ambiguity should always be borne in mind.]
vast Last Judgement in which indulgence will be the rule. Its real aim is to annex to the category of the 'interesting' (a subtly valorising variant of that of the 'notable' as defined by Roland Barthes in 'L'effet de réel,' Communications n 11, 1968, special number on 'Le vraisemblable', p 85), the maximum number of bands. To this end various and sometimes contradictory criteria are called on, in a disparate and gossipy gathering: one film is 'retained' for its aesthetic value, another as a sociological document, a third as a typical example of the bad films of a period, a fourth is the minor work of a major film-maker, a fifth the major work of a minor film-maker, a further one owes its inscription in the catalogue to its place in a component chronology (it is the first film shot with a certain type of lens, or else the last film made in Tsarist Russia): one is reminded of the similarly heteroclite justifications unfailingly offered by Proust’s Françoise for her choice of each day’s menus for the meals at Combray: ‘A brill, because the fishwoman had guaranteed its freshness; a turkey, because she had seen a beauty in the market at Roussainville-le-Pin; cardoons with marrow, because she had never done them for us in that way before; a roast leg of mutton, because the fresh air made one hungry and there would be plenty of time for it to “settle down” in the seven hours before dinner; spinach by way of a change; apricots, because they were still hard to get . . . etc’ (Remembrance of Things Past, Vol I, Swann’s Way, Part One, translated by C K Scott Moncrieff, London 1941, pp 93-4). The true function of this accumulation of criteria practised by many historians of the cinema is to mention as many films as possible (hence the usefulness of their works), and to this end to multiply as often as can be the number of points of view from which a film may be felt to be ‘good’ in one respect or another.

Like critics, like historians, but in slightly different ways, theoreticians often help to maintain the cinema in the imaginary enclosure of a pure love. Thus it is rather rare for the properties of cinematic language to be presented as such, ie precisely as properties, which would be to appeal before all else to an existential judgement (= ‘there is a type of montage called accelerated montage’) and to an inclusive judgement (= ‘the sequence shot is one of the possibilities of the cinema’): to those two forms of judgement whose inaugural importance for all thought of a rational and logical kind was demonstrated by Freud along with their affective roots (‘Negation’, 1925, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed James Strachey, 24 volumes, London 1953-66, Vol XIX, pp 235-9). Much more frequently, the properties are offered to us straightaway as ‘resources’, ‘riches’, ‘means of expression’, and this vocabulary insinuates into the apparently analytic statement the invisible and permanent thread of a very different procedure which is really a plea, a claim for legitimacy and an appeal for recognition (even
before cognition), a declaration of rivalry or candidature with respect to the older, more accepted arts. These movements were more clearly apparent in the theoreticians of the earliest days of the cinema, sometimes quite explicitly so.

What is it in the end that I want to say about these writings whose approach is that of a love? Certainly not that their authors are 'wrong' in every point, or that what they say is always false. That is not the point. Wishing to get rid of the affective gets one nowhere, nor would it get this article anywhere. Even less is the point to forget that these assertive affects are the reversed consequence of the opposite cultural prejudice, still alive today, that sees in the cinema a low-level distraction (and which thus starts by thinking in levels). In a history of contemporary culture the concern for the good object which I have tried to bring out can only be understood in relation to the bad-object status that society initially conferred on the cinema and to which it still confines it to some extent. In doing so it has considerably set back the possibility of a knowledge of the cinematic fact: directly (by neglect or disdain), but also by reaction (which concerns me here), by exacerbating in those concerned with the cinema the persistent drama of an adherence that sometimes becomes a kind of entanglement.

Discourse about the cinema is too often part of the institution, whereas it should be studying it and believes or pretends that it is doing so. It is, as I have said, its third machine: after the one that manufactures the films, and the one that consumes them, the one that vaunts them, that valorises the product. Often, by unexpected paths, unperceived by those who have quite unintentionally taken them, paths which manifest the radical exteriority of effects to conscious intentions, writings on film become another form of cinema advertising and at the same time a linguistic appendage of the institution itself. Like those alienated sociologists who unknowingly repeat the pronouncements of their society, it extends the object, it idealises it instead of turning back on to it, it makes explicit the film's inaudible murmuring to us of 'Love me': a mirror reduplication of the film's own ideological inspiration, already based on the mirror identification of the spectator with the camera (or secondarily with the characters, if any).

Discourse about the cinema then becomes a dream: an uninterpreted dream. This is what constitutes its symptomatic value; it has already said everything. But it is also what makes it obligatory to turn it inside out like a glove, to return it like the gauntlet on accepting a challenge; it does not know what it is saying. Knowledge of the cinema is obtained via a reprise of the native discourse, in two senses of the word: taking it into consideration and re-establishing it.
The turning I am discussing is never anything but a return. In the cinema, too, the product presents us with a reversed image of the production, as it does in the materialist conception of ideologies, or in neurotic rationalisations, as in the camera obscura which, with its 180-degree-turned optical image, is the very starting-point of cinematic technique. The effort towards knowing is necessarily sadistic insofar as it can only grasp its object against the grain, re-ascend the slopes of the institution (whereas the latter is designed for one to ' follow ' them, to descend them), like the interpretation that goes back along the path of the dream work,\(^{10}\) acting by nature in the manner of a counter-current.

To be a theoretician of the cinema, one should ideally no longer love the cinema and yet still love it: have loved it a lot and only have detached oneself from it by taking it up again from the other end, taking it as the target for the very same scopic drive\(^ {11}\) which had made one love it. Have broken with it, as certain relationships are broken, not in order to move on to something else, but in order to return to it at the next bend in the spiral. Carry the institution inside one still so that it is in a place accessible to self-analysis, but carry it there as a distinct instance which does not over-infiltrate the rest of the ego with the thousand paralysing bonds of a tender unconditionality. Not have forgotten what the cinephile one used to be like, in all the details of his affective inflections, in the three dimensions of his living being, and yet no longer be invaded by him: not have lost sight of him, but be keeping an eye on him. Finally, be him and not be him, since all in all these are the two conditions on which one can speak of him.

This balance may seem a somewhat acrobatic one. It is and it

10. [Dream work: The manifest content of the dream is the product of the dream work which transforms (and distorts in the interests of censorship) the materials of the dream: dream thoughts, day's residues and bodily stimuli. Analysis works backwards from the analysand's account of his manifest dream to the materials of the dream. The main mechanism of the dream work are condensation (accumulation of a number of dream thoughts, etc, into a single manifest representation), displacement (shift of cathexis – see footnote 12 – from one representation to an associated one, or replacement of the former by the latter), considerations of representability (translation of abstract thoughts into concrete images) and secondary revision (assembly of the result of the other three mechanisms into a relatively coherent and comprehensible whole).]

11. [Freud's term Trieb, French pulsion, is usually translated into English (eg in the Standard Edition) as 'instinct'. Freud distinguished between Instinkt, meaning an inherited pattern of behaviour, and Trieb, a psychical force or motor relatively independent of its aim and object, representing a somatic excitation or bodily need (see Section IV below). Throughout this article, pulsion has been translated as 'drive'– in order to preserve these distinctions, except for one or two occasions on which the adjectival form pulsionnel has been translated as 'instinctual'.]
is not. Of course no one can be sure to attain it perfectly, everyone is in danger of slipping off on one side or the other. And yet, in principle, considering the very possibility of maintaining such a position, it is not true that it is so very acrobatic, or rather it is no more so than the other (really very similar) mental postures required for tasks more ordinarily evoked. This is forgotten because it is not customary (it is one of the great taboos of scientism, one of its terrors) to mention the metapsychological preconditions of scientific work. But for anyone who is prepared to consider them, the species of deliberate ambivalence I am trying to describe, this special variety of splitting, at once salutary and fragile, this minimum of flexibility in one’s relations to oneself, this economic conversion by which a strong object cathexis\(^{12}\) (here attraction to the cinema), initially molar and opaque, subsequently undergoes an instincual vicissitude that bifidates it and arranges it like a pair of pliers, one pincher (voyeuristic sadism sublimated into epistemophilia) coming to meet the other in which the original imaginary of the dual effusion with the object is retained as a (living, surviving) witness – in short, this itinerary and the present configuration that results from it are not in the end especially exceptional or contorted (even if for some ‘scientists’ they are among those things that must not be stated). It is itineraries and economies of the same kind (tendentially, still, never as a finished result) that also define the objective conditions of the subjective possibility of the ethnologist’s work, or of that of the analysand in the cure, ultimately of that of all work of \textit{interpreta}-\textit{tion} in the semiotic and Peircean sense of the word (= translation from one system into another). What really is uncommon is not the thing itself, but simply the idea that cinematic studies are not in themselves blessed with any special privilege of exemption, any \textit{magical extra-territoriality}, any adolescent immunity from the common requirements of knowledge and symbolic cathexis which are (sometimes) more clearly perceived in other fields.

II \quad \textbf{The Investigator’s Imaginary}

I ask myself what in fact is the object of this article. What is the driving uncertainty without which I should not have the desire to write it, and thus would not be writing it? What is my imaginary at this moment? What is it that I am trying, even without illusions, to bring to a conclusion?

\(^{12}\) \textit{[Cathexis: The term adopted in English (eg the Standard Edition) to translate Freud’s Besetzung, in French usually (as here) Investissement, meaning the attachment of psychical energy deriving from the drives to a representation or object.]}

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It seems to me that it is a question, in the material sense of the word — a sentence terminating in a question mark — and that, as in dreams, it is inscribed right there in front of me, armed from head to toe. I shall unfold it here, with, of course, that slightly obsession coefficient which is party to any aspiration to rigour.

So let me spell it out: 'What contribution can Freudian psychoanalysis make to the study of the cinematic signifier?'

This is, in other words, the manifest content of my dream, and its interpretation will (I hope) constitute my article. I can already see three acute points, three nodal points in it. Let me examine them separately (The Interpretation of Dreams invites us to do so, as does the minimal necessity of having a 'plan'), and associate freely from each of them. They are the words 'contribution', 'Freudian psychoanalysis' and above all 'cinematic signifier'.

II.1 Psychoanalysis, linguistics, history

'Contribution', then, first of all: this term tells me that psychoanalysis cannot be the only discipline concerned in the study of the cinematic signer, and that its offering has to be articulated with others. To begin with, and fairly directly, with that of classical semiology, i.e. of the linguistic inspiration, my main guide in my earliest filmic investigations and today in those of several others.

— Why 'directly'? Because linguistics and psychoanalysis are both sciences of the symbolic and are even, come to think of it, the only two sciences whose immediate and sole object is the fact of signification as such (obviously all sciences are concerned with it, but never so frontally or exclusively). To be slightly cavalier, linguistics — together with its close relations, notably modern symbolic logic — can be regarded as taking for its share the exploration of the secondary process, and psychoanalysis that of the primary process:13 that is to say, between them they cover the whole field of the significiation-fact taken in itself. Linguistics and psychoanalysis are the two main 'sources' of semiology, the only disciplines that are semiotic through and through.

That is why both in turn have to be set within the horizon of a third perspective, which is as it were their common and permanent background: the direct study of societies, historical criticism, the examination of infrastructures. This time the junc-

13. If I see this division as a deliberate simplification (but perhaps that is precisely why it is useful), this is for various reasons, two of which are more important than the rest: (i) psychoanalysis has not introduced only the idea of the primary process, but also the very distinction between the primary and the secondary (hence it has 're-founded' the secondary); (ii) inversely, certain linguists, such as Emile Benveniste, for example, in his studies of the personal pronouns, go beyond the study of the pure 'énoncé' and through their reflections on the énonciation enter on a road which leads closer to the 'primary', to the constitution of the subject, etc.
tion is much less easy (if the other one can be described as easy), for the signifier has its own laws (primary and secondary), and so does political economy. Even technically, if one thinks of the daily work of the investigator, of his reading, his documentation, etc, the 'dual competence' which was not impossible until recently has now become precarious: thus in the case of the cinema, where is the semiotician who could seriously claim, given his education and his specialised conceptual tools, to be able to explain the role of capitalist monopolies in the film industry in as pertinent and rigorous a way as economists like Henri Mercillon and his disciples have? In cinematic studies as in others, semiology (or semiologies) cannot replace the various disciplines that discuss the social fact itself (the source of all symbolism), with its laws that determine those of the symbolic without being identical with them: sociology, anthropology, history, political economy, demography, etc. It cannot replace them, nor must it repeat them (danger of ritual repetition or 'reductionism'). It must take them into account, move forward on its own front (it too is materialist in its own way) and mark the anchorage points in all the cases in which the state of research already makes this possible (for example the spectator's psychism as a historical governor and link in the chain of the money circuit). In other words, it must be inscribed in advance, by a kind of epistemological anticipation (but one which must not become the pretext for a voluntary paralysis), in the perspective of a true knowledge of man — a perspective still only present as a dotted line in most of its circuit, and a knowledge, in the singular, very different from today's 'human sciences', so often gnawed by scientism and yet necessary, for today is not tomorrow — of a state of knowing in which the way the development of technologies and balances of social forces (society in its physical state, as it were) finally comes to influence inflections peculiar to the work of the symbolic such as the order of 'shots' or the role of 'sound off' in some cinematic sub-code in some genre of films, for example, would be known in all the reality of the intermediate mechanisms without which only a global inkling and postulation of causality is possible.

Here I am touching on the famous problem of 'relative autonomies' but not necessarily (although the two things are often confused) on a simple distinction between infrastructures and superstructures. For if it is clear that the cinema is an industry, its modes of financing, the technological development of film stock, the average income of the spectators (enabling them to go more or less often to the cinema), the price of seats and many more other things belong fully to infrastructural studies, it does not follow that, by some mechanical symmetry, the symbolic (primary or secondary) is exclusively superstructural in its order. It is partly so, of course, and even largely so in its most apparent strata, in its manifest content, in those of its features that are directly
related to precise social facts and change when the latter change: eg in linguistics broad sectors of the lexicon (but already much less of phonology or syntax), in psychoanalysis the various historical variants of the Œdipus complex – or perhaps the Œdipus complex itself, which is far from being the whole of psychoanalysis – which are clearly linked to the development of the institution of the family. But signification also has more buried and permanent springs (ones by definition less visible, less striking to the mind) whose validity extends, in our present state of knowledge, to the whole of humanity, ie to man as a biological 'species'. Not that the symbolic is something 'natural', non-social; on the contrary, in its deepest foundations (which are always structures and not 'facts'), signification is no longer just a consequence of social development, it becomes, along with the infrastructures, a party to the constitution of sociality itself, which in its turn defines the human race. The partial 'uncoupling' of the laws of signification from short-term historical developments does not mean a naturalisation of the semiotic (its *psychologisation*), but on the contrary re-emphasises its radical, as it were definitional, sociality. There is always a moment after the obvious observation that it is man who makes the symbol when it is also clear that the symbol makes man: this is one of the great lessons of psychoanalysis,14 anthropology,15 and linguistics.16

Abstracting from the immense sector in which it is specifically cultural (varying in a time scale which is of the same order as that of history), the symbolic is thus not precisely a superstructure. This does not make it an infrastructure,17 unless one departs from the strict (Marxist) sense of the term, and there is nothing to be gained from such a mélange. Rather, in its deeper strata it represents a kind of *juxtastructure*, to use a term which has already been put forward for other phenomena of the same kind, a juxta-structure in which are expressed, in the last analysis, certain characteristics of man as an animal (and as an animal different from all other animals, ie as a non-animal too). I shall only recall two well-known examples of these 'laws' (of these aspects of 'The Law' as Lacan would say) that help underpin all significatory work. In linguistics, in all known idioms, double articulation, the paradigm/syntagm opposition, the necessary duplication of the

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15. Eg Lévi-Strauss: myths think themselves among themselves.
16. See Benveniste's notion that, in a sense, it is *langue* that 'contains' society rather than the reverse ('Sémiole de la langue,' *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, tome II, Gallimard, Paris 1974, p 62).
17. It will be remembered that this is what Stalin said of language, and that Lacan has maliciously recalled it (*Ecrits*, op cit, p 496 n 1; New York 1970, p 104 n 4).
18. cf 'The Insistance of the Letter,' in *Structuralism*, ed J Ehrmann,
logical generation of sentences into a categorial component and a transformational component. In psychoanalysis, in all known societies, the prohibition of incest (and yet sexual procreation, as in all the higher animals) along with the inevitable corollary of these two as it were contradictory facts, the very remarkable relationship (whether or no it consists of an Edipus complex of the classical type) which each human offspring must definitively enter into with respect to its father and its mother (or to a more diffuse world of kin) and thus a variety of major consequences such as repression, the division of the psychical apparatus into several systems which are relatively ignorant of one another, hence the permanent coexistence in human productions (such as films) of two irreducible 'logics', one of which is 'illogical' and opens permanently on to a multiplicity of overdeterminations, etc.

To sum up, a combination of linguistic inspiration and psychoanalytic inspiration may lead gradually to a relatively autonomous science of the cinema (="semiology of the cinema"), but the latter will deal simultaneously with facts which are superstructural and others which are not, without for all that being specifically infrastructural. In both these aspects its relation to truly infrastructural studies (cinematic and general) will remain. It is on these three levels that the symbolic is social (hence it is entirely social). But, like the society which creates it and which it creates, it too has a materiality, a kind of body: it is in this almost physical state that it concerns semiology and that the semiologist desires it.

II.2 Freudian psychoanalysis and other psychoanalyses
In the 'formula' occupying my mind at the moment of writing and that I am unwinding as I write, I feel another point of resistance: 'Freudian psychoanalysis' (= 'How can it contribute to the study of the cinematic signifier?'). – Why this word, or rather why these two words? Because as is well known, psychoanalysis is not entirely Freudian, far from it, and the vigorous 'return to Freud' imposed by Lacan has its origin and its necessity in this very situation. But this return has not affected the world psychoanalytic movement as a whole. Even independently of this influence, psychoanalysis and Freudianism are inter-related in a manner varying from region to region (in France psychoanalysis is as a whole more Freudian that it is in the USA, etc), so anyone claiming to make any use of psychoanalysis, as I do at this moment for the cinema, is necessarily called on to say what psychoanalysis he is talking about. There are plenty of examples of 'psychoanalytic' practices, and more or less explicit accompanying theories, in which all that is vital in Freud's discovery, everything that makes it (should make it) an irreversible achievement, a decisive moment in knowledge, is smoothed out, pared down, 'recuperated' as a new variant of ethical psychology or medical psychiatry (humanism
and medicine: two great evasions of Freudianism). The most striking example (but far from the only one) is that provided by certain 'American-style' therapeutic doctrines (cf Marc Vernet's article 'Mise en scène = USA — Freud = effets spéciaux' in Communications n 23 op cit), solidly installed more or less everywhere, which are in large part techniques for the standardisation or banalisation of character, for avoidance of conflict at any price.

What I shall call psychoanalysis will be the tradition of Freud and its still continuing developments, with original extensions such as those that revolve around the contributions of Melanie Klein in England and Jacques Lacan in France.18

II.3 Various kinds of psychoanalytic study of the cinema
I now return to my question: in what way can psychoanalysis cast light on the cinematic signifier? — Its third acute point is the word 'signifier': why especially the signifier of films, or in other words, why not their signified?

The fact is that psychoanalytic studies of the cinema are of various kinds (already exemplified or clearly conceivable), some of which are illustrated in one or other of the articles in Communications n 23 cited above. We should try to avoid confusing them (try to 'put them into place') in order to be able to designate more precisely the one I have in view myself.

First of all there is the nosographic approach. It would treat films as symptoms or as secondary manifestations that have been partially symptomatised, from which it is possible to 'ascend' to the neurosis of the film-maker (or the script-writer, etc). An undertaking very much in the classificatory spirit of medicine, even if in a moderate form: there will be obsessional, hysterical or perverse film-makers, and so on. This approach breaks the tissue of the film on principle and accords no intrinsic importance to its manifest content, which becomes simply a kind of (discontinuous) reservoir of more or less isolated clues whose immediate purpose is to reveal the latent. Here it is not the film that interests the analyst but the film-maker. Hence everything depends on two postulates, that of the biographical and that of the pathological; it is to contract them into one word that I have spoken of nosography.

18. [In the French text there follows here a section in which Metz categorises Freud's various writings and considers their relevance to the study of the cinema, concluding: 'We should not be surprised if overall the semiology of the cinema turns out to rely more on those texts of Freud's that do not appear to be its special concern (the theoretical and metapsychological studies) than on those that would seem more directly related to the undertaking in its two aspects, aesthetic and socio-historical.']
This theme has a variation in which everything remains the same except the sharp distinction between the normal and the pathological (in this the variation is closer to Freud’s teachings). The concern for classification remains, but it is demedicalised; the result is a kind of psychoanalytically inspired characterology which no longer divides up neuroses but rather metapsychological and economic types which are ‘normal’ or else common to the normal and the pathological (someone’s ‘character’ is his potential neurosis; moreover, this neurosis is always capable of being actualised). The ‘biographism’ remains complete, and with it the indifference to the filmic text as such.

We have not yet had to ‘choose’ between a study of the signifier and a study of the signified, but rather between a study of the text and a study of the non-text. The two approaches I have just rapidly outlined are not defined by their orientation towards the ‘pure signified’, or at least not so immediately as to reveal any naivety, inexperience or blindness about the specific work of the signifier. They are open to such a criticism, but in other directions: they run the risk of freezing and impoverishing the signification of films insofar as they constantly threaten to relapse into a belief in an ultimate signified (unique, static and definitive), here the typological membership by the film-maker of a category, whether pathological or merely psychical; they also contain another inherent threat of reduction flowing directly from this first one: psychologising reduction and the ideology of pure ‘creation’; by definition they neglect everything other than the conscious and unconscious psychism of the film-maker as an individual, everything that is a direct social imprint and ensures that no one is ever the ‘author’ of his ‘works’: influences and pressures of an ideological kind, the objective state of the cinematic codes and techniques at the moment of shooting, etc. Thus they only have validity (and I think they do have validity) if their purpose is strictly signalled from the beginning (= principle of pertinence) and then checked en route: if they are clearly presented as attempts at diagnosis (nosographic or characterological) applied to persons (film-makers), thus explicitly proclaiming their indifference both to the textual and to the social.

But it would be inaccurate to speak of their indifference to the signifier, although this is sometimes done when their literary equivalents are under discussion. Inaccurate in two ways. Not only is it a principle of these investigations to constitute certain aspects of the film into so many signifiers (manifest signifiers of a less apparent psychism), but it may turn out that the filmic features thus selected themselves belong within the film to what the semiologist would rank on the ‘plane of the signifier’. The habitual themes of a film-maker, his characters, the period in which he likes to situate his plots, can tell us about his individual nature, but so can the way he moves (or fixes) the camera, how
he cuts and edits his sequences. — These two approaches of investigation are thus not exactly 'studies of the signified'. What is peculiar to them is the fact that they are interested in persons and not in discursive facts (= filmic texts or cinematic codes): the latter do not concern them in their internal logic but rather as a neutral milieu in which they seek the sporadic indications that improve their understanding of the former.

This leads me to a third orientation which this time attains the film as discourse. It is not so easy to delineate as the first two, and I am not yet sure that I am very clear about it in my own mind; therefore, as a somewhat simplifying first step, I shall call it the psychoanalytic study of film scripts. Of course, it does not always confine itself to the script in the narrowest sense of the term (the written sheets followed in shooting the film); it also extends to a large number of features that do not appear in that written skeleton (which is more or less absent in the making of certain films anyway) and yet form part of the script in the broad sense — in the true sense: a script if need be implicit, a definitive script after editing — insofar as it is still a question of elements with something to do with the plot, 'situations', characters, landscapes, possibly 'period details', etc; in short, the manifest thematic complex of the film, envisaged if necessary in extreme detail. So defined, the script represents a rather ambiguous, fleeting instance, and an all the more interesting one for that.\(^\text{19}\) In certain respects it is on the side of the signified: this is clear if we set facing it, by a kind of commutation, the various codes via which it is grasped by the spectator, cinematic codes (= visual and auditory analogy, editing, etc) or non-cinematic codes such as the langue of verbal language in talking films: so many systems which serve to communicate the script, which should not be confused with it and with respect to which it becomes a signified. A signified that is defined as the set of apparent themes of the film, as its most literal purport (= circumstantial denotation). Obviously it is not the most important signification of the film, but it remains indispensable if one wishes to go further, as psychoanalytic studies of the script do. Hence the first effect of such studies is to transform the script into a signifier and to disengage from it some less immediately visible significations.

To disengage them, or rather to open on to them (I should almost say: engage them). For there can be no claim to unveil a hidden meaning, a kind of second script, armed from head to toe, as clear and peremptory as the first, distinguished from it only by its hidden status; this would turn into a preposterous and

\(^{19}\) 'Interminable script' says one of my students (Jorge Dana), for, in a film, everything can be diegeticised.
childish 'hide-and-seek', with the hidden having the same texture, the same facture as the unhidden (hence it would have to have been hidden deliberately! Dreams themselves have no latent meaning in this sense: there is no second dream beneath the dream, there is only one dream which is manifest and opens on to a never ending series of non-apparent significations). Nor is it a question of wishing to endow the film (to swell it, to make it big) with three or four more and more 'profound' levels of meaning, retaining the notion of a fixed and finite number and the conception of each as an instance with the same order of relationship to explicitness (with differences of degree) as the true script (the script as such: there is only one): this would still be to believe, at a lower gear, in an inclusive signified and so to block the infinite pursuit of the symbolic which, in a sense (like the imaginary from which it is spun), lies entirely in its flight.

On this point I have partly changed my mind — or if you prefer, this is something I regard as a contribution of psychoanalysis to linguistics — about the corresponding passages in my book Langage et cinéma (Larousse, Paris 1971; translated as Language and Cinema, Mouton, The Hague 1974), and especially about the notion of a 'textual system' as I presented it there (Chapters V and VI, pp 53-90 in the French; pp 70-120 in the English). There certainly is textual system, meaning thereby something always of a structural and relational (but not necessarily exhaustible) order, and peculiar to a given film, not to the cinema, distinct from every code and combining several of them. But I no longer believe that each film has a textual system (the one I suggested for a film of Griffith's, Intolerance — pp 81-3 in the French; pp 107-11 in the English — is only one of the systems possible, a stage in the work of interpretation, a stage inadequately presented as such at the time), nor even, a possibility I foresaw in a special chapter (Chapter VI.4), a fixed number of quite distinct textual systems (several 'readings' of the same film). In this (or these) system(s), I now see working conveniences — that is precisely why they impressed themselves upon me in the first place — sorts of 'blocs of interpretation' already foreseen or established by the analysis, sectors of signification (or in some cases a single vast sector) that the analysis has already selected at different moments in its in fact interminable movement from the indefinite thickness of the textual system as I now see it, that is, as this perpetual possibility of a finer, or else less apparent structuration, of a grouping of the elements into a new configuration, of the registration of a new significatory pressure which does not annul the preceding ones (as in the unconscious, where everything is accumulated), but complements or in other cases distorts and complicates them, at any rate points in a slightly different direction, a little to one side (a little or more than a little). In Langage et cinéma, I already attached great importance to the dynamic aspect of the textual
system, a production rather than a product, which distinguishes it from the static character proper to the codes; at present I feel that this pressure, this ‘activity’, come into play not only inside a textual system but for any one film between each and the next one to be discovered; or, if it is thought that there is only one such system in all, then the analyst will never complete his exploration of it and should not seek any ‘end’.

Thus analyses of scripts – the script is one aspect among others in the textual system – wish to go further than the script itself, than what is occasionally called the ‘plot pure and simple’ (inaccurately, however, for this manifest level also includes the characters, their social positions, the diegetic locations, the indicators of period and many other factors that go beyond the action). The instance of the script, in the wide sense I am giving it, now shifts to the side of the signifier, since it is no longer related to the codes of expression that communicate it, but to the interpretations on to which it opens. In order to show, as a recent doctoral thesis does (Danielle Digne: *L'empire et la marque, Mémoire de troisième cycle, 1975*), that one of the ‘meanings’ of Howard Hawks’s *Red River* is to present a justification of private property and the right of conquest, and that another of its meanings is to be found in a misogynist variant of male homosexuality, it is the film script above all that has to be examined for the corresponding clues (signifiers). The script has ceased to be a signified: nowhere in the film is what I have just said plainly inscribed. To study the script from a psychoanalytic (or more broadly semiotic) viewpoint is to constitute it into a signifier.

In this the script is like a dream, as are many human products. The manifest dream, ie the dream as such – ‘dream content’ for Freud, in opposition to ‘dream thoughts’ – is a signifier for the interpretation, and yet it has itself only been established (narrated, and to begin with communicated to the conscious apperception of the dreamer) as the signified of different codes of expression, including the langue of verbal language (one does not dream in languages one does not know). There would be no manifest dream, and hence no interpretation, if, for example, the dreamer failed to identify any of the visual objects in the dream, ie if he was unfamiliar with the code of socialised perception; it is because he recognises some of them that others he is unable to identify take on their true value of enigmas, or that composite objects (= condensations) appear as such, which presupposes some idea, or suspicion, of the different objects superimposed into one, and first of all of their plurality. The imaginary itself needs to be symbolised, and Freud noted (‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, *Standard Edition*, op cit, Vol V, p 499; and ‘Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams’, ibid, Vol XIV, p 229) that without secondary revision (without codes) there would be no dreams, for the secondary process is the condition on which access to perception.
and consciousness is possible. For the same reason, the script, a conscious and perceived instance, must be signified itself before it can be made to signify anything else at all.

Hence analyses of scripts are not studies of the signified. What strikes me is rather the fact that they are sometimes considered as such. An error which is part of another more general one: it is easy to forget that every signifier itself needs to be signified and that every signified, in turn, can but be a signifier (this constant back and forth is precisely the work of the symbolic; it is not possible to constitute some elements as 'pure' signifiers and others as 'pure' signifieds – the adjective 'pure' is a very tiresome one anyway – except with respect to a precise code, a given investigation: to one segment and one only in the indefinite chain of signification). – The result is that two different things are confused with the script: its place in the text, in the film (everywhere a manifest instance), in which it is the apparent signifieds of apparent signifiers, and its place in the textual system, a non-manifest instance whose apparent signifier it is (or at any rate one of its apparent signifiers). At this point the suggestions of linguistics and those of psychoanalysis coincide perfectly. Relying solely on the former I had carefully distinguished between the text, an attested progression, and the textual system, which is never given and does not pre-exist the semiologist's work of construction (see *Langage et cinéma*, especially p. 60 in the French; pp. 78-9 in the English): this was already to define the gap between them as that between a manifest content and its interpretation. The textual system shares the status Freud sometimes called latent and which includes both the unconscious and the preconscious.

Certain studies of scripts are directed above all at unconscious significations, and thus correspond to what is normally expected of a psychoanalytically inspired approach. Others work principally at the level of preconscious significations: eg most of those studies described as 'ideological' (I gave an example a moment ago vis-à-vis Red River), turned towards 'layers of meaning' which do not feature directly in the film but constitute its implicit rather than its unconscious part. It does not follow that studies of the preconscious of the script are necessarily 'less psychoanalytic': it all depends on the way they are conducted, and psychoanalysis includes a theory of the preconscious (Freud did not regard this instance as an accessory one, he showed great interest in it, notably in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; he reckoned that a kind of 'second censorship' dynamically linked to the first.

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20. Eg in chapter I of 'The Unconscious' (*Standard Edition*, op cit, Vol XIV, pp. 167 and 170). I use this definition of 'latent' because it is convenient here. But it is well known that Freud reserved it for the preconscious in other cases; thus in 'The Ego and the Id' *ibid*, Vol XIX, p. 15), or in the distinction between 'latent content' and 'unconscious desire' vis-à-vis dreams.
divided the preconscious topographically from the conscious – see 'The Unconscious', Standard Edition op cit, Vol XIV, pp 173, 191, 193-4 and 'The Interpretation of Dreams', ibid, Vol V, pp 615, 617-8). Nor does it follow that ideology is an exclusively preconscious production: more probably, like many other things, it has its preconscious strata and its unconscious strata, even if the latter have hardly been explored as yet (not at all before Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard) and differ more or less from ideology in its classical conception. Ideological studies at the moment simply stick most often (as a point of fact, not one of principle) to preconscious ideology. As is well known, it is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari criticise them, anxious as they are to trace the imprint of history in the unconscious itself and hence rather sceptical about the very notion of ideology, at least in its current forms.

At any rate, once analyses of scripts are at all profound and do more than state the obvious, they propose the perspective of a 'latent' region which they wish to approach. That is surely why in certain cases they are hard to distinguish from another – fourth – possible kind of psychoanalytic studies of films: those that have the textual system, interpretation as their aim, like the preceding ones, but set out for it from the manifest filmic material as a whole (signifieds and signifiers), not from the manifest signified (the script) alone. It is the film as a whole that is now constituted into a signifier. Thus what is striking in the both ideological and psychoanalytic interpretation proposed by Jean-Paul Dumont and Jean Monod for Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: a Space Odyssey (Le foetus astral, Christian Bourgois, Paris 1970), is that the elements they take as clues come not only from the thematics of the film but also from the specifically cinematic signifier, or at least from the use the film studied makes of it; in the structural grids of occurrences and co-occurrences that the authors establish, we find, for example (p 149), the items 'Track

21. [Gilles Deleuze has written many works of philosophy, including studies of the English empiricists, Spinoza and Nietzsche. In 1973, together with Félix Guattari, he published L'Anti-Œdipe, a critique of Freud (also directed against Lacan) that re-emphasises Freud's notion of a libidinal economy, arguing that human beings are 'desiring machines', mechanisms channeling and rechanneling libidinal flows, that societies are no more than extensions of this channeling, and that Freud's (and Lacan's) insistence on the Œdipus complex represents a blocking of the productivity of these machines in the interests of the institution of the family and the repressive political apparatuses that institution gives rise to. Jean-François Lyotard has written studies of the visual arts from a similar (but not identical) position: cf Discours, Figure, Editions Klincksieck, Paris 1971.]
forward', 'Track back', as well as 'Weight', 'Weightlessness', 'Spaceship', 'Bone thrown in the air by an ape', etc. This approach raises difficulties insofar as the cinematic elements and the script elements are not revealing in the same way (the authors are too inclined to 'diegeticise' the signifier), and what is most revealing, what gives us the most central access to the textual system, is no doubt the relation between the two sets of elements rather than the ones, the others or their addition. But in one point, and a very important one, the method has to be approved: the filmic signifier is as indicative as its signified of the latent significations of the film, the entire apparent material is open to a symptomatic reading (this is to return to the banal but true observation usually rather badly expressed as 'the "form" of a film tells us as much as its "content" about its "true meaning"'). Raymond Bellour's study of Hitchcock's North by North-West, 'Le Blocage symbolique', in Communications n 23 op cit shows, I believe, what is to be expected of a psychoanalytic approach to films which is at once attentive to the signifier, to the script, and to their mutual articulation; the Œdipal structure this analysis brings to light informs the script (as it were on the large scale) but also the montage tables in the sequence, on a smaller scale, so that the (non-manifest) relation between the manifest signifier and the manifest signified of the film is that of a mirror reduplication or an insistence, of a metaphor of microcosm and macrocosm: the latent is doubly anchored in the apparent, it can be read in it twice over, in two sizes, in a spiral movement. With this movement, which is not precisely cinematic and does not concern just the story told but is installed just between the two (and would be different in the other films), we are really getting close to the order of the textual system as I understand it.

Investigations of this kind (the fourth kind on my list) are thus studies of textual systems. Those of the third group, for which I shall retain the name studies of scripts, are also studies of textual systems, but from a narrower angle of incidence: the script is part of the apparent data, but not all of it, one of the elements that leads up to interpretation, but not the only one. Artificially isolating it from the others one runs the risk of falsifying the textual system overall, since the latter forms a whole, and this might be enough to invalidate analyses of scripts on principle. But for many films, and not always ones of no interest, this disadvantage is less than it might seem, since the script dimension plays a considerable part in them while the work of the cinematic signifier is not very great. With other films, on the contrary (I shall return to this point), the analysis of the script is from the start an inadequate approach, inadequate to different degrees moreover, as different as the relative importance of the script in the textual system, which varies greatly from film to film.
The more I unfold (for the moment only at the preconscious level) the scientific imaginary initially expressed in a single sentence, the closer I get to the problems posed a psychoanalytic study by the signifier of the cinema as such, by the level of 'cinematic specificity'. It is a characteristic of analyses of scripts that they disregard this level: the Freudian inspiration finds a place in them as it would in aesthetic studies outside the cinema (and with the same difficulties, which I shall leave aside here because they are so familiar). These investigations may be psychoanalytic but they are not basically cinematic (though very well suited to certain films for that very reason). What they 'psychoanalyse' is not the cinema but a story which happens to have been told by it (and there are many such stories). The script of a film may be treated just like a novel and the already classical dossier of the relations between psychoanalysis and literary criticism could be introduced here en bloc (= the absence of the couch and hence of real transference, the precise scope of the method proposed by Mauron, etc). To sum up, what distinguishes studies of scripts (and also nosographic or characterological studies) from the approach I am trying to define here, and towards which I am slowly making my way via everything which is not that approach, is, as I have tried to show by this traversal, not so much that they are indifferent to the signifier as that they are indifferent to the cinematic signifier.

It will perhaps be thought astonishing that in this lengthy discussion of studies of scripts I have not even thought of recalling that they become impossible in the case of certain films, films without scripts, 'abstract' films, the 'avant-garde' films of the 1920's, current experimental films, etc. Or else (an attenuated version of the same observation) that when these studies are possible, their interest declines in proportion that (even if it retains a 'plot') the film they apprehend escapes the full regime of narration-representation (every possible intermediate case exists; Eisenstein's films are diegetic, but they are less so than most Hollywood productions). — What is peculiar to these films is the fact that in them to one degree or another the cinematic signifier abandons the status of a neutral and transparent vehicle at the direct behest of a manifest signified which alone is important (= the script), and that on the contrary it tends to inscribe its own action in them, to take over a more and more important part of the overall signification of the film, thus more and more invalidating studies of scripts, to the point of making them impossible.

As for studies in the fourth category (complete studies of the textual system), they are marked on the contrary by their concern for the signifier. They even cast a particularly effective light on how it works insofar as, like every textual study, they visualise it within the bounds of a limited corpus (one film, several films by the same author or in the same genre) that can be explored in
great detail. However, psychoanalytic knowledge of the signifier of the cinema (the *cinema-signifier*) is not their sole and specific object (that object is the structure of a film, hence the name I have given them). I have attempted elsewhere (*Langage et cinéma*, especially Chapter VI.3) to show that the textual system, the interpretation of each film in its uniqueness, constitutes by definition a kind of *mixed site* in which specific codes (codes more or less peculiar to the cinema and only the cinema) and non-specific codes (codes more or less common to various 'languages' and a state of culture) meet and combine one with another; indeed, although the figures of the cinema, considered in their most immediate signification, can themselves be analysed into a signifier and a signified, and the cultural figures, too, the former are all ranked with the signifier and the latter with the (manifest) signified, once less instantaneous and *proximate* significations are envisaged, in other words once it is the whole film that is taken into consideration (as in studies of the textual system precisely) rather than the 'value' of a given camera movement or sentence of the dialogue (see *Langage et cinéma*, especially Chapter X.7). The latent signification of a singular 'work' in any art always has something to do with this *coupling* of a global signifier with a global signified, or rather of a specificity and a generality both of which signify; it is an instance — a *pressure*, rather — which is always profoundly and intimately reversible and mixed: what it 'tells' us touches on the particular art itself but also on something else (man, society, the author) and it tells us all this together, at a stroke as it were. The work of art steals the art from us at the same time as it presents it to us, because it is both less and more than it. Every film shows us the cinema, and is also its death.

That is why there is room for a special kind of psychoanalytic reflection on the cinema specifically devoted to the cinema itself (and not to films), to the signifier as such. Of course there will be overlapping phenomena here as everywhere else, and care must be taken to avoid aggressively (fearfully) erecting this orientation of work into a fortified sector, solitary and cut off from the others. The psychoanalytic knowledge of the cinematic signifier can advance on a broad front thanks to textual studies particularly attentive to the peculiar play of the cinema in their texts, and also thanks to the analysis of certain films in which the work of the cinema is more important than it is in others (it is in these two respects in particular that I believe investigations like those of Thierry Kuntzel — eg 'Le Travail du film II' in *Communications* n 23 op cit — are of great interest). Another approach — the one I have had in view and have now reached — consists of a direct examination, outside any particular film, of the psychoanalytic implications of the *cinematic*; I shall make this examination, or begin to make it, in the second half of this article (sections III, IV and V).
It is indeed well known that different 'languages' (painting, music, cinema, etc) are distinguished from one another – and are first *several* – by means of their signifiers, in the physical and perceptual definition of those signifiers as well as in the formal and structural features that flow from them, and not by means of their signifieds, or at any rate, not immediately (see *Langage et cinéma* Chapter X, completely concerned with this problem). There is no signified which is peculiar to literature or on the contrary to the cinema, no 'great global signified' that might be attributed to painting itself, for example (= one more mythical avatar of the belief in an ultimate signified). Each means of expression allows everything to be said: by 'everything' I mean an indefinite number of 'things' (?), very broadly coinciding from one language to another. Obviously each one says them in its own way, and that is precisely why it sometimes seems there should be such a great signified. But a signified which is still very badly named, since it can only be approached in terms of a signifier: the cinematic does not consist of some static list of themes or subjects which are supposed to be especially apt for the cinema and for which the other arts have a lesser 'vocation' (a truly metaphysical conception, proceeding by *essesces*), it can only be defined, or rather foreseen, as a special way of saying anything (or nothing), ie as a *signifier effect*: a specific coefficient of signification (and not a signified) linked to the intrinsic workings of the cinema and to its very adoption rather than that of another machine, another apparatus. – In linguistic terms, I shall say that what calls for psychoanalytic illumination is not just each film (not just films) but also the pertinent features of the matter of the signifier in the cinema, and the specific codes that these features allow: the matter of the signifier and the form of the signifier, in Hjelmslev's sense.

A study of the signifier, but not necessarily of the cinema 'in general' (= the statement of propositions each of which applies to all films). For there are many intermediate stages. Relatively narrow groupings such as the set of all films by one film-maker or belonging to one very historically circumscribed 'genre' give rise to investigations which remain very close to textual analyses. But there are also wider categories, sorts of 'super-genres', which I would rather describe as so many *great cinematic regimes*: each one still corresponds to a group of films, but only virtually, for the group is vast and allows of no explicit enumeration (and also because these regimes are very often intermingled, such that one and the same film belongs to several of them at once). What is paradoxical about these regimes, which correspond to the main *cinematic formulae* so far, is that quite often they are evanescent and uncertain in their boundaries, which break into an indefinite series of special cases, and yet they are very clear and sharply
defined in their centres of gravity: that is why they can be defined in comprehension but not in extension. Blurred institutions, but full ones. The spectator accustomed to the cinema (the native) is quite at home with them, they are mental categories he has and can handle. He may have seen many so-called 'fictional documentaries' (and the expression already witnesses to a mixture of genres, hence to two genres which are distinct in principle), but he has no doubt that the documentary and the 'story film' remain autonomous in their definitions and that on other occasions they are each manifested in a pure, or at any rate purer, state.

It is not my aim here to list these great genres exhaustively; I am interested in their status, not in their enumeration. There are a number of them, some of which are arranged in series. Each series forms a paradigm (in logical terms a sum of complementary classes) the set of which coincides with cinematic production as a whole, but divides it up differently from the other series. Thus the series 'Newsreel/documentary film/trailer/advertising film/"main" film'. Or 'Colour film/black-and-white film', 'Silent film/sound film'. (It is clear that some categories have clearer boundaries than others.) In other cases no real series is constituted; instead there is a certain 'sort' of films, felt socially to be slightly apart (precisely a sort) and opposed en bloc to all other films; the latter become 'ordinary films' (= films not marked in the respect considered). There are 3-D films and the rest, cinemascope films and the rest, cinerama films and the rest, etc.

One of the most important of these various divisions for any study of the cinematic signifier (inaugurator of these classifications), and particularly for a psychoanalytic one, is also, as so often happens, one of the most blurred in its external contours, one of the most difficult (the most impossible) to establish by enumeration. This is the division that puts on one side the films I call diegetic (narrative-representational films) and on the other those that do not tell a story, this pair being connected by a particularly impressive gradation of specific or mixed positions.22 The importance of this distinction, what makes it so real in all types of reflection from the most 'naive' to the most theoretical, despite its fleeting nature, is factors which are essentially historical (= industrial, ideological, psychoanalytic, etc), which are independent of each spectator's taste or distaste for the fiction film (on the contrary, this taste is dependent on what is anyway a complex factual situation). Since its birth at the end of the nineteenth century the cinema has, as it were, been snapped up by the Western, Aristotelean tradition of the fictional and representational arts, of *diegesis* and *mimesis*, for which its spectators were

22. Between my writing this article and the correction of the proofs a book has appeared which provides a remarkable study of one of these intermediate positions: *Muriel*, by Claude Baïlbé, Michel Marie and Marie-Claire Ropars (Editions Galilée, Paris 1975).
prepared -- prepared in spirit, but also instinctually -- by their experience of the novel, of theatre, of figurative painting, and which was thus the most profitable tradition for the cinema industry. Most films made today still belong in some degree to the fictional formula; I have attempted to explain why and how in an article in Communications n 23 op cit.

It should also be noted that the fictional division, in its (historically rather revealing) formal mechanism, acts in a manner opposite to that of the other paradigms I have cited. It distinguishes the narrative films from all the rest, ie the "positive" pole, the one that is given a definition, corresponds to the majority of films and not to the minority, as it does when cinerama films are opposed to "ordinary" films. At the moment it is the film felt ideologically to be ordinary (the fiction film) that serves as a reference point and opens the paradigm, and on the contrary the category of "all the rest" groups fewer films and ones society regards as slightly strange (at any rate when they are full-length films claiming equality with the "main film"). The marking is troubled here: it would seem that it should be the non-fiction film that would be offered as the marked term since it is more uncommon and more "special", and yet (and this is rather uncommon) it is the unmarked term, the fiction film, that is posed first and with respect to which there is a rest. This peculiar disposition of the mark can be seen whenever society opposes a normality to a marginality: the marginal (as the word suggests) comes "after", it is a residue, it could not function as a primary, positive term; but as the positive is also in a majority (and the term "normal" contains both these notions at once), the more uncommon marginal is marked while remaining a rest. Here we see once again that formal configurations are fully socio-ideological in scope (the objectively dominant position of the fiction film has repercussions in ordinary mental divisions), and that the latter open on to something latent which in this passage I have only designated at its preconscious level; there are regions of the preconscious which are kept apart from consciousness in a fairly regular way but without access to them needing an analytic cure or a true removal of repression. One should not be in too much of a hurry to attribute everything implicit or unspoken, even when it is fairly permanently so, to the unconscious. However, this marginal status of the non-fiction film might be traced to unconscious roots. It is enough that these two stages be not confused.

The fiction film is the film in which the cinematic signifier does not work on its own account but is employed entirely to remove the traces of its own steps, to open immediately on to the transparency of a signified, of a story, which is in reality manufactured by it but which it seems merely to 'illustrate', to transmit to us after the event, as if it had existed previously (= referential illusion): another example of a product which is its own pro-
duction in reverse. This previous existence effect – this gentle hum of a ‘once-upon-a-time’, of an essential childhood – is surely one of the great (and largely unconscious) charms of all fiction in the very many cultures where fiction is found. Thus the fiction film represents both the negation of the signifier (an attempt to have it forgotten) and a certain working regime of that signifier, to be quite precise the very regime required to get it forgotten (more or less forgotten, according to whether the film is more or less engulfed in its script alone). Hence what distinguishes fiction films is not the ‘absence’ of a special work of the signifier, but its presence in the mode of denegation, and it is well known that this type of presence is one of the strongest there are. It is important to study this play of presence-absence, which André Bazin already foresaw in his notion of ‘classical editing’, it is important to explore the cinematic signifier in its fictional regime. On the other hand, as I have said, the more a film can be reduced to its diegesis, the less the study of its signifier is important for the textual system. This is not contradictory: the diegetic formula of the signifier is a complex mechanism which is not as yet well understood, but whatever precisely it turns out to be, it concerns a very large number of films and hence none of them in particular.

Thus there are broad categories (fiction film, colour film, cinema-scope film, etc) which seem not to be enumerable sets of films (even if they sometimes are such sets to a certain extent) so much as the different faces of the cinema itself, or at least those of its faces that it has already shown us, for it has others in reserve for us in the future. One can concern oneself with them as such, and still be studying the cinema-signifier via one or other of its great institutional modes. The most pertinent methodological distinction in a semiological perspective is not the opposition between the singular film (= one film and it alone) and the cinema as a whole (= all existing films), but that between studies of texts and studies of codes. In either case one may be dealing with groups of films, reducible to one only for textual analyses, extendable to the whole cinema for analyses of codes. The incidence of the gap which remains is to separate groups which can be mastered in extension from those that cannot be approached by way of the text (ie as a corpus) because of their indefinite character or their enormous size, and can only be grasped by the direct study of certain pertinent features of the signifier (immediately common to an indeterminate number of films), and are besides, from the moment of their historical or sociological definition, less groups of films than aspects of the cinema. Their analysis is related to those that bear on the entire cinema and thus belongs to the same kind of investigation.
What contribution can Freudian psychoanalysis make to the knowledge of the cinematic signifier? That was the question-dream I posed (the scientific imaginary wishing to be symbolised), and it seems to me that I have now more or less unwound it; unwound but no more; I have not given it an answer. I have simply paid attention to what it was I wished to say (one never knows this until one has written it down), I have only questioned my question: this unanswered character is one that has to be deliberately accepted, it is constitutive of any epistemological approach.

Since I have wished to mark the places (as empty boxes some of which are beginning to fill without waiting for me, and so much the better), the places of different directions of work, and particularly of the last, the psychoanalytic exploration of the signifier, which concerns me especially, I must now begin to inscribe something in this last box; must take further, and more plainly in the direction of the unconscious, the analysis of the investigator's desire that makes me write. And to start with this certainly means asking a new question: among the specific features of the cinematic signifier that distinguish the cinema from literature, painting, etc, which ones by nature call most directly on the type of knowledge that psychoanalysis alone can provide?

III.1 Perception, imaginary
The cinema's signifier is perceptual (visual and auditory). So is that of literature, since the written chain has to be read, but it involves a more restricted perceptual register: only graphemes, writing. So too are those of painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, but still within limits, and different ones; absence of auditory perception, absence in the visual itself of certain important dimensions such as time and movement (obviously there is the time of the look, but the object looked at is not inscribed in a precise and ordered time sequence forced on the spectator from outside). Music's signifier is perceptual as well, but, like the others, less 'extensive' than that of the cinema: here it is vision which is absent, and even in the auditory, extended speech (except in song). What first strikes one then is that the cinema is more perceptual, if the phrase is allowable, than many other means of expression; it mobilises a larger number of the axes of perception. (That is why the cinema has sometimes been presented as a 'synthesis of all the arts': which does not mean very much, but considering the quantitative tally of the registers of perception, it is true that the cinema 'englobes' in itself the signifiers of other arts: it can present pictures to us, make us hear music, it is made of photographs, etc.)

Nevertheless, this as it were numerical 'superiority' disappears
if the cinema is compared with the theatre, the opera and other spectacles of the same type. The latter too involve sight and hearing simultaneously, linguistic audition and non-linguistic audition, movement, real temporal progression. Their difference from the cinema lies elsewhere: they do not consist of images, the perceptions they offer to the eye and the ear are inscribed in a true space (not a photographed one), the same one as that occupied by the public during the performance; everything the audience hear and see is actively produced in their presence, by human beings or props which are themselves present. This is not the problem of fiction but that of the definitional characteristics of the signifier: whether or no the theatrical play mimes a fable, its action, if need be mimetic, is still managed by real persons evolving in real time and space, on the same stage or 'scene' as the public. The 'other scene', which is precisely not so called, is the cinematic screen (closer to fantasy from the outset): what unfolds there may, as before, be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is fictive: the actor, the 'décor', the words one hears are all absent, everything is recorded (as a memory trace which is immediately so, without having been something else before), and this is still true if what is recorded is not a 'story' and does not aim for the fictional illusion proper. For it is the signifier itself, and as a whole, that is recorded, that is absence: a little rolled up perforated strip which 'contains' vast landscapes, fixed battles, the melting of the ice on the River Neva, and whole life-times, and yet can be enclosed in the familiar round metal tin, of modest dimensions, clear proof that it does not 'really' contain all that.

At the theatre, Sarah Bernhardt may tell me she is Phèdre or, if the play were from another period and rejected the figurative regime, she might say, as in a type of modern theatre, that she is Sarah Bernhardt. But at any rate, I should see Sarah Bernhardt. At the cinema, she could make the same two kinds of speeches too, but it would be her shadow that would be offering them to me (or she would be offering them in her own absence). Every film is a fiction film.

What is at issue is not just the actor. Today there are a theatre and a cinema without actors, or in which they have at least ceased to take on the full and exclusive function which characterises them in classical spectacles. But what is true of Sarah Bernhardt is just as true of an object, a prop, a chair for example. On the theatre stage, this chair may, as in Chekhov, pretend to be the chair in which the melancholy Russian nobleman sits every evening; on the contrary (in Ionesco), it can explain to me that it is a theatre chair. But in the end it is a chair. In the cinema, it will have to choose between a similar two attitudes (and many other intermediate or more tricky ones), but it will not be there when the spectators see it, when they have to recognise the choice; it will have delegated its reflection to them.
Characteristic of the cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, it is the imaginary that it is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier (the two are not unrelated; it is so apt to represent it because it is it; however, it is still it when it no longer represents it). The (possible) reduplication inaugurating the intention of fiction is preceded in the cinema by a first reduplication, always-already achieved, which inaugurates the signifier. The imaginary, by definition, combines within it a certain presence and a certain absence. In the cinema it is not just the fictional signified, if there is one, that is thus made present in the mode of absence, it is from the outset the signifier.

Thus the cinema, 'more perceptual' than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also 'less perceptual' than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity: for its perceptions are all in a sense 'false'. Or rather, the activity of perception in it is real (the cinema is not a fantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror. – It will be said that literature, after all, is itself only made of replicas (written words, presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does (giving more and taking the same, i.e. taking more). – The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning. More that the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.

III.2 The all-perceiving subject

Thus film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing, and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator’s own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass.

In the mirror the child perceives the familiar household objects, and also its object par excellence, its mother, who holds it up in her arms to the glass. But above all it perceives its own image. This is where primary identification (the formation of the ego) gets certain of its main characteristics: the child sees itself as an other, and beside an other. This other other is its guarantee that the first is really it: by her authority, her sanction, in the register of the symbolic, subsequently by the resemblance between her mirror image and the child’s (both have a human form). Thus the child’s ego is formed ‘by identification with its like, and this in two senses simultaneously, metonymically and metaphorically: the
other human being who is in the glass, the own reflection which is and is not the body, which is like it. The child identifies with itself as an object.

In the cinema, the object remains: fiction or no, there is always something on the screen. But the reflection of the own body has disappeared. The cinema spectator is not a child and the child really at the mirror stage (from around six to around eighteen months) would certainly be incapable of 'following' the simplest of films. Thus, what makes possible the spectator's absence from the screen — or rather the intelligible unfolding of the film despite that absence — is the fact that the spectator has already known the experience of the mirror (of the true mirror), and is thus able to constitute a world of objects without having first to recognise himself within it. In this respect, the cinema is already on the side of the symbolic (which is only to be expected): the spectator know that objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject, that he becomes an object for others: he knows himself and he knows his like: it is no longer necessary that this similarity be literally depicted for him on the screen, as it was in the mirror of his childhood. Like every other broadly 'secondary' activity, the practice of the cinema presupposes that the primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego has been overcome.

But with what, then, does the spectator identify during the projection of the film? For he certainly has to identify: identification in its primal form has ceased to be a current necessity for him, but — on pain of the film becoming incomprehensible, considerably more incomprehensible than the most incomprehensible films — he continues to depend in the cinema on that permanent play of identification without which there would be no social life (thus, the simplest conversation presupposes the alternation of the I and the you, hence the aptitude of the two interlocutors for a mutual and reversible identification). What form does this continued identification, whose essential role Lacan has demonstrated even in the most abstract reasoning ('Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée,' *Ecrits*, op cit, pp 197-213), and which constituted the 'social sentiment' for Freud (= the sublimation of a homosexual libido, itself a reaction to the aggressive rivalry of the members of a single generation after the murder of the father), take in the special case of one social practice among others, cinematic projection?

Obviously the spectator has the opportunity to identify with the character of the fiction. But there still has to be one. This is thus only valid for the narrative-representational film, and not for the psychoanalytic constitution of the signifier of the cinema as such.

The spectator can also identify with the actor, in more or less 'afictional' films in which the latter is represented as an actor, not a character, but is still offered thereby as a human being (as a perceived human being) and thus allows identification. However this factor (even added to the previous one and thus covering a very large number of films) cannot suffice. It only designates secondary identification in certain of its forms (secondary in the cinematic process itself, since in any other sense all identification except that of the mirror can be regarded as secondary).

An insufficient explanation, and for two reasons, the first of which is only the intermittent, anecdotal and superficial consequence of the second (but for that reason more visible, and that is why I call it the first). The cinema deviates from the theatre in an important point that has often been emphasised: it often presents us with long sequences that can (literally) be called 'in-human' – the familiar theme of cinematic 'cosmomorphism' developed by many film theorists – sequences in which inanimate objects, landscapes, etc, appear and which for minutes at a time offer no human form for spectator identification: yet the latter must be supposed to remain intact in its deep structure, since at such moments the film works just as well as it does at others, and whole films (geographical documentaries, for example) unfold intelligibly in such conditions. – The second, more radical reason is that identification with the human form appearing on the screen, even when it occurs, still tells us nothing about the place of the spectator's ego in the inauguration of the signifier. As I have just pointed out, this ego is already formed. But since it exists, the question arises precisely of where it is during the projection of the film (the true primary identification, that of the mirror, forms the ego, but all other identifications presuppose, on the contrary, that it has been formed and can be 'exchanged' for the object or the fellow subject). Thus when I 'recognise' my like on the screen, and even more when I do not recognise it, where am I? Where is that someone who is capable of self-recognition when need be?

It is not enough to answer that the cinema, like every social practice, demands that the psychological apparatus of its participants be fully constituted, and that the question is thus the concern of general psychoanalytic theory and not of that of the cinema proper. For my where is it? does not claim to go so far, or more precisely tries to go slightly further: it is a question of the point occupied by this already constituted ego, occupied during the cinema showing and not in social life in general.

The spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object, but only with some objects which are there without him. In this sense the
screen is not a mirror. This time the perceived is entirely on the side of the object, and there is no longer any equivalent of the own image of that unique mix of perceived and subject (of other and I) which was precisely the figure necessary to disengage the one from the other. At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving. All-perceiving as one says all-powerful (this is the famous gift of 'ubiquity' the film makes its spectator); all-perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it, the constitutive instance, in other words, of the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film). If the most extravagant spectacles and sounds or their most improbable assembly, the one most remote from all real experience, do not prevent the constitution of meaning (and to begin with do not astonish the spectator, do not really astonish him, not in spirit: he simply judges the film as strange) – that is because he knows he is at the cinema.

In the cinema the subject's knowledge takes a very precise form without which no film would be possible. This knowledge is dual (but unique). I know I am perceiving something imaginary (and that is why its absurdities, even if they are extreme, do not seriously disturb me), and I know that it is I who am perceiving it. This second knowledge divides in turn: I know that I am really perceiving, that my sense organs are physically affected, that I am not fantasising, that the fourth wall of the auditorium (the screen) is really different from the other three, that there is a projector facing it (and thus it is not I who am projecting, or at least not all alone) – and I also know that it is I who am perceiving all this, that this perceived-imaginary material is deposited in me as if on a second screen, that it is in me that it forms up into an organised sequence, that therefore I am myself the place where this really perceived imaginary accedes to the symbolic by its inauguration as the signifier of a certain type of institutionalised social activity called the 'cinema'.

In other words, the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, anterior to every there is.

A strange mirror, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like, as Jean-Louis Baudry has emphasised (see p 17 above), because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and super-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it. As an arrangement (and
in a very topographical sense of the word), the cinema is more involved on the flank of the symbolic, and hence of secondariness, than is the mirror of childhood. This is not surprising, since it comes long after it, but what is more important to me is the fact that it is inscribed in its wake with as direct and as staggered an incidence without precise equivalent in other apparatuses of signification.

11.3 Identification with the camera

The preceding analysis coincides in places with others which have already been proposed and which I shall not repeat: analyses of quattrocento painting or of the cinema itself which insist on the role of monocular perspective (hence of the camera) and the 'vanishing point' that inscribes an empty emplacement for the spectator-subject, an all-powerful position which is that of God himself, or more broadly of some ultimate signified. And it is true that as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose post (= framing) determines the vanishing point. During the projection this camera is absent, but it has a representative consisting of another apparatus, called precisely a 'projector'. An apparatus the spectator has behind him, at the back of his head, that is, precisely where fantasy locates the 'focus' of all vision. All of us have experienced our own look, even outside the supposedly obscure chamber, as a kind of searchlight turning on the axis of our own necks (like a pan) and shifting when we shift (a tracking shot now): as a cone of light (without the microscopic dust scattered through it and streaking it in the cinema) whose vicariousness draws successive and variable slices of obscurity from nothing wherever and whenever it comes to rest. (And in a double sense that is what perception and consciousness are, a light, as Freud put it, in the double sense of an illumination and an opening, as in the arrangement of the cinema, which contains both, a limited and fabulous light that only attains a small part of the real, but in return possesses the gift of

24. [Derrière la tête means 'at the back of one's mind' as well as 'behind one's head'.] See André Green: 'L'Ecran bi-face, un oeil derrière la tête,' Psychanalyse et cinéma n 1, January 1970 (no further issues appeared), pp 15-22. It will be clear that in the passage that follows my analysis coincides in places with that of André Green.

25. 'The Ego and the Id,' Standard Edition, op cit, Vol XIX, p18; 'The Interpretation of Dreams,' ibid, Vol V, p 615 (= consciousness as a sense organ) and p 574 (= consciousness as a dual recording surface, internal and external); 'The Unconscious,' ibid, Vol XIV, p 171 (psychical processes are unconscious in themselves, consciousness is a function that perceives a small proportion of them), etc.
casting light on it.) Without this identification with the camera certain facts could not be understood, though they are constant ones: the fact, for example, that the spectator is not amazed when the image 'rotates' (= pan) and yet he knows he has not turned his head. The explanation is that he has no need to turn it really, he has turned it as the all-seeing, as identified with the movement of the camera, as a transcendental, not an empirical subject.

All vision consists of a double movement: projective (the 'sweeping' searchlight) and introjective: consciousness as a sensitive recording surface (as a screen). I have the impression at once that, to use a common expression, I am 'casting' my eyes on to things, and that the latter, thus illuminated, arrive to be deposited within me (we then declare that it is these things that have been 'projected', on to my retina, say). A sort of stream called the look, and explaining all the myths of magnetism, has to be pumped into the world, so that objects can come back up this stream in the opposite direction (but using it to find their way), arriving at last at our perception, which is now soft wax and no longer an emitting source.

The technology of photography carefully conforms to this fantasy accompanying perception, despite its banality. The camera is 'trained' on the object like a fire-arm (= projection) and the object arrives to make an imprint, a trace on the receptive surface of the film-strip (= introjection). The spectator himself does not escape these pinchers, for he is part of the apparatus, and also because pinchers, on the imaginary plane (Melanie Klein), mark our relation to the world as a whole and are rooted in the primary figures of orality. During the performance the spectator is the searchlight I have described, duplicating the projector, which itself duplicates the camera, and he is also the sensitive surface duplicating the screen, which itself duplicates the film-strip. There are two cones in the auditorium: one ending on the screen and starting both in the projection box and in the spectator's vision insofar as it is projective, and one starting from the screen and 'deposited' in the spectator's perception insofar as it is introjective (on the retina, a second screen). When I say that 'I see' the film, I mean thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I only need close my eyes to suppress it. Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, pointed yet recording.

Thus the constitution of the signifier in the cinema depends on a series of mirror-effects organised in a chain, and not on a single reduplication. In this the cinema as a topography resembles that other 'space' the technical equipment (camera, projector, film-strip, screen, etc), the objective precondition of the whole institution: as we know, the apparatuses too contain a series of mirrors, lenses, apertures and shutters, ground glasses, through which passes the cone of light: a further reduplication in which the equipment
becomes a metaphor (as well as the real source) for the mental process instituted. Further on we shall see that it is also its fetish.

In the cinema, as elsewhere, the constitution of the symbolic is only achieved through and above the play of the imaginary: projection-introjection, presence-absence, fantasies accompanying perception, etc. Even when acquired, the ego still depends in its underside on the fabulous figures thanks to which it has been acquired and which have marked it lastingly with the stamp of the lure. The secondary process does no more than 'cover' (and not always hermetically) the primary process which is still constantly present and conditions the very possibility of what covers it.

Chain of many mirrors, the cinema is at once a weak and a robust mechanism: like the human body, like a precision tool, like a social institution. Which is to say that it is really all of these at the same time.

And I, at this moment, what am I doing if not to add to all these reduplications one more whereby theory is attempting to set itself up? Am I not looking at myself looking at the film? This *passion for seeing* (and also hearing), the foundation of the whole edifice, am I not turning it, too, on (against) that edifice? Am I not still the voyeur I was in front of the screen, now that it is this voyeur who is being seen, thus postulating a second voyeur, the one writing at present, myself again?

III.4 On the idealist theory of the cinema
The place of the ego in the institution of the signifier, as transcendental yet radically deluded subject, since it is the institution (and even the equipment) that give it this place, surely provides us with an appreciable opportunity the better to understand and judge the precise epistemological import of the idealist theory of the cinema which culminates in the remarkable works of André Bazin. Before reflecting frontally on their validity, but simply reading texts of this kind, one cannot but be struck by the great precision, the acute and directly sensitive intelligence that they often demonstrate; at the same time they give the diffuse impression of a permanent ill-foundedness (which affects nothing and yet affects everything), they suggest that somewhere they contain something like a weak point at which the whole might be overturned.

It is certainly no accident that the main form of idealism in cinematic theory has been phenomenology. Bazin and other writers of the same period explicitly appealed to it, and more implicitly (but in a more generalised fashion) all conceptions of the cinema as a mystical revelation, as 'truth' or 'reality' unfolded by full right, as the apparition of what is (*l'étant*), as an epiphany, derive from it. We all know that the cinema has the gift of sending some of its lovers into prophetic trances. However, these cosmophanic
conceptions (which are not always expressed in an extreme form) register rather well the 'feeling' of the deluded ego of the spectator, they often give us excellent descriptions of this feeling and to this extent they are partly scientific and have advanced our knowledge of the cinema. But the lure of the ego is their blind spot. These theories are still of great interest, but they have, so to speak, to be put the other way round, as an optical image of the film.

For it is true that the topographical apparatus of the cinema resembles the conceptual apparatus of phenomenology, with the result that the latter can cast light on the former. (Besides, in any domain, a phenomenology of the object to be understood, a 'receptive' description of its appearances, must be the starting-point; only afterwards can criticism begin; psychoanalysts, it should be remembered, have their own phenomenology.) The 'there is' of phenomenology proper (philosophical phenomenology) as an ontic revelation referring to a perceiving-subject (= 'perceptual cogito'), to a subject for which alone there can be anything, has close and precise affinities with the inauguration of the cinema signifier in the ego as I have tried to define it, with the spectator falling back on himself as a pure instance of perception, the whole of the perceived being 'over the way'. To this extent the cinema really is the 'phenomenological art' it has often been called, by Merleau-Ponty himself, for example ('The film and the new psychology', Lecture to the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques, March 13, 1945, translated in Sense and Non-sense, North-Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois 1964, pp 48-59). But it can only be so because its objective determinations make it so. The ego's position in the cinema does not derive from a miraculous resemblance between the cinema and the natural characteristics of all perception; on the contrary, it is foreseen and marked in advance by the institution (the equipment, the disposition of the auditorium, the mental arrangement that internalises the two), and also by more general characteristics of the psychical apparatus (such as projection, the mirror structure, etc), which although they are less strictly dependent on a period of social history and a technology, by no means express the sovereignty of a 'human vocation', but are rather, inversely, shaped by certain specific features of man as an animal (as the only animal that is not an animal): his primitive Hilflosigkeit, his dependence on another's care (the lasting source of the imaginary, of object relations, of the great oral figures of feeding), the motor prematurity of the child which condemns it to an initial self-recognition by sight (hence outside itself) anticipating a muscular unity it does not yet possess.

In other words, phenomenology can contribute to knowledge of the cinema (and it has done so) insofar as it happens to be like it, and yet it is on the cinema and phenomenology in their common illusion of perceptual mastery that light must be cast by the real conditions of society and man.
III.5 On some sub-codes of identification

The play of identification defines the cinematic situation in its generality, i.e. the code. But it also allows more specific and less permanent configurations, 'variations' on it, as it were; they intervene in certain coded figures which occupy precise segments of precise films.

What I have said about identification so far amounts to the statement that the spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but he is also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even 'all-present' as perceiver. At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress. This presence often remains diffuse, geographically undifferentiated, evenly distributed over the whole surface of the screen; or more precisely hovering, like the psychoanalyst's listening, ready to catch on preferentially to some motif in the film, according to the force of that motif and according to my own fantasies as a spectator, without the cinematic code itself intervening to govern this anchorage and impose it on the whole audience. But in other cases, certain articles of the cinematic codes or sub-codes (which I shall not try to survey completely here) are made responsible for suggesting to the spectator the vector along which his permanent identification with his own look should be extended temporarily inside the film (the perceived) itself. Here we meet various classic problems of cinematic theory, or at least certain aspects of them: subjective images, out-of-frame space, looks (looks and no longer the look, but the former are articulated to the latter).

Nicholas Browne's article 'Rhétorique du texte spéculaire (à propos de Stagecoach)' in Communications n 23 op cit makes what seems to me an interesting contribution here.

There are various sorts of subjective image and I have tried elsewhere (following Jean Mitry) to distinguish between them (see section 2 of 'Current Problems of Film Theory', Screen v 14 nn 1/2, Spring/Summer 1973, pp 45-9). Only one of them will detain me for the moment, the one which 'expresses the viewpoint of the film-maker' in the standard formula (and not the viewpoint of a character, another traditional sub-case of the subjective image): unusual framings, uncommon shot-angles, etc, as for example in one of the sketches which make up Julien Duvivier's film Le Carnet de bal (the sketch with Pierre Blanchard, shot continuously in tilted framings). In the standard definitions one thing strikes me: I do not see why these uncommon angles should express the viewpoint of the film-maker any more than perfectly ordinary angles, closer to the horizontal. However, the definition is comprehensible even in its inaccuracy: precisely because it is uncommon, the uncommon angle makes us more aware of what we had merely forgotten to some extent in its absence: an identification with the camera (with 'the author's viewpoint'). The ordinary framings are finally felt to be non-framings: I espouse the film-maker's look (without which no cinema would be possible), but my consciousness is not too aware
of it. The uncommon angle reawakens me and (like the cure) teaches me what I already knew. And then, it obliges my look to stop wandering freely over the screen for the moment and to scan it along more precise lines of force which are imposed on me. Thus for a moment I become directly aware of the emplacement of my own presence-absence in the film simply because it has changed.

Now for looks. In a fiction film, the characters look at one another. As it happens (and this is already another 'notch' in the chain of identifications) a character looks at another who is momentarily out-of-frame, or else is looked at by him. If we have gone one notch further, this is because everything out-of-frame brings us closer to the spectator, since it is the peculiarity of the latter to be out-of-frame (the out-of-frame character thus has a point in common with him: he is looking at the screen). In certain cases the out-of-frame character’s look is ‘reinforced’ by recourse to another variant of the subjective image, generally christened the ‘character’s point of view’: the framing of the scene corresponds precisely to the angle from which the out-of-frame character looks at the screen. (The two figures are dissociable moreover; we often know that the scene is being looked at by someone other than ourselves, by a character, but it is the logic of the plot, or an element of the dialogue, or a previous image that tells us so, not the position of the camera, which may be very far from the presumed emplacement of the out-of-frame onlooker.)

In all sequences of this kind, the identification that founds the signifier is twice relayed, doubly duplicated in a circuit that leads it to the heart of the film along a line which is no longer hovering, which follows the inclination of the looks and is therefore governed by the film itself: the spectator’s look (= the basic identification), before dispersing all over the surface of the screen in a variety of intersecting lines (= looks of the characters in the frame = second duplication), must first ‘go through’ – in the same way as an itinerary or a strait are gone through – the look of the character out-of-frame (= first duplication), himself a spectator and hence the first delegate of the true spectator, but not to be confused with the latter since he is inside, if not the frame, then at least the fiction. This invisible character, supposed (like the spectator) to be seeing, will collide obliquely with the latter’s look and play the part of an obligatory intermediary. By offering himself as a crossing for the spectator, he inflects the circuit followed by the sequence of identifications and it is only in this sense that he is himself seen: as we see through him, we see ourselves not seeing him.

Examples of this kind are much more numerous and each of them is much more complex than I have described them here. At this point textual analysis of precise film sequences is an indispensable instrument of knowledge. I just wished to show that in the end
there is no break in continuity between the child's game with the mirror and, at the other extreme, certain localised figures of the cinematic codes. The mirror is the site of primary identification. Identification with one's own look is secondary with respect to the mirror, i.e., for a general theory of adult activities, but it is the foundation of the cinema and hence primary when the latter is under discussion: it is *primary cinematic identification* proper ('primary identification' would be inaccurate from the psychoanalytic point of view; 'secondary identification', more accurate in this respect, would be ambiguous for a cinematic psychoanalysis). As for identifications with characters, with their own different levels (out-of-frame character, etc), they are secondary, tertiary cinematic identifications, etc; taken as a whole in opposition to the simple identification of the spectator with his own look, they constitute together secondary cinematic identification, in the singular (on these problems, see Michel Colin: *Le film: transformation du texte du roman*, Mémoire de troisième cycle, 1974, to be published).

Freud noted, vis-à-vis the sexual act ('Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety,' *Standard Edition*, op cit. Vol XX, pp 87-8), that the most ordinary practices depend on a large number of psychical functions which are distinct but work consecutively, so that all of them must be intact if what is regarded as a normal performance is to be possible (it is because neurosis and psychosis dissociate them and put some of them out of court that a kind of commutation is made possible whereby they can be sorted out retrospectively by the analyst). The apparently very simple act of seeing a film is no exception to this rule. As soon as it is subjected to analysis it reveals to us a complex, multiply interconnected imbrication of the functions of the imaginary, the real and the symbolic, which is also required in one form or another for every procedure of social life, but whose cinematic manifestation is especially impressive since it is played out on a small surface. (To this extent the theory of the cinema may some day contribute something to psychoanalysis, even if, through force of circumstances, this 'reciprocation' remains very limited at the moment, the two disciplines being very unevenly developed.)

In order to understand the fiction film, I must both 'take myself' for the character (= imaginary procedure) so that he benefits, by analogical projection, from all the schemata of intelligibility that I have within me, and not take myself for him (= return to the real) so that the fiction can be established as such (= as symbolic): this is *seeming-real*. — Similarly, in order to understand the film (at all), I must perceive the photographed object as absent, its photograph as present, and the presence of this absence as signifying. The imaginary of the cinema presupposes the symbolic, for the spectator
must first of all have known the primordial mirror. But as the latter instituted the ego very largely in the imaginary, the second mirror of the screen, a symbolic apparatus, itself in turn depends on reflection and lack. However, it is not fantasy, a 'purely' symbolic-imaginary site, for the absence of the object and the codes of that absence are really produced in it by the physis of an equipment: the cinema is a body (a corpus for the semiotologist), a fetish that can be loved.

IV The Passion for perceiving

Cinema practice is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism), acting alone in the art of the silent film, the desire to hear which has been added to it in the sound cinema (this is the 'pulsion invocante' the invocating drive, one of the four main sexual drives for Lacan – see Le Séminaire tome XI: Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1973, especially pp 164 and 178; it is well known that Freud isolated it less clearly and hardly deals with it as such).

These two sexual drives are distinguished from the others in that they are more dependent on a lack, or at least dependent on it in a more precise, more unique manner, which marks them from the outset, even more than the others, as on the side of the imaginary.

However, this characteristic is to a greater or lesser degree proper to all the sexual drives insofar as they differ from purely organic instincts or needs (Lacan), or in Freud from the self-preservation drives (the 'ego drives' which he tended subsequently to annex to narcissism, a tendency he could never quite bring himself to pursue to its conclusion). The sexual drive does not have so stable and strong a relationship with its 'object' as do for example hunger and thirst. Hunger can only be satisfied by food, but food is quite certain to satisfy it; thus instincts are simultaneously more and less difficult to satisfy than drives; they depend on a perfectly real object that cannot be deputised, but they depend on nothing else. Drives, on the contrary, can be satisfied up to a point outside their objects (this is sublimation, or else, in another way, masturbation) and are initially capable of doing without them without putting the organism into immediate danger (hence repression). The needs of self-preservation can neither be repressed nor sublimated; the sexual drives are more labile and more accommodating, as Freud insisted.

(more radically perverse, says Lacan). Inversely, they always remain more or less unsatisfied, even when their object has been attained; desire is very quickly reborn after the brief vertigo of its apparent extinction, it is largely sustained by itself as desire, it has its own rhythms, often quite independent of those of the pleasure obtained (which seemed nonetheless its specific aim); the lack is what it wishes to fill, and at the same time what it is always careful to leave gaping, in order to survive as desire. In the end it has no object, at any rate no real object; through real objects which are all substitutes (and all the more multiple and interchangeable for that), it pursues an imaginary object (a ‘lost object’) which is its truest object, an object that has always been lost and is always desired as such.

How, then, can one say that the visual and auditory drives have a stronger or more special relationship with the absence of their object, with the infinite pursuit of the imaginary? Because, as opposed to other sexual drives, the ‘perceiving drive’ – combining into one the scopic drive and the invoking drive – concretely represents the absence of its object in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of listening. Psychophysiology makes a classic distinction between the ‘senses at a distance’ (sight and hearing) and the others all of which are exchanges between immediate neighbours and which it calls ‘senses of contact’ (Pradines): touch, taste, smell, coenaesthetic sense, etc. Freud notes that voyeurism, like sadism in this respect, always keeps apart the object (here the object looked at) and the source of the drive, ie the generative organ (the eye); the voyeur does not look at his eye (‘Instincts and their Vicissitudes’, Standard Edition, op cit, Vol XIV, pp 129-30). With orality and anality, on the contrary, the exercise of the drive inaugurates a certain degree of partial fusion, coincidence (= contact, tendential abolition of distance) of source and aim, for the aim is to obtain pleasure at the level of the source organ (= ‘organ pleasure’ – ibid, p 138): eg what is called ‘mouth pleasure’ (see Lacan: Le Séminaire tome XI, op cit, p 153).

It is no accident that the main socially acceptable arts are based on the senses at a distance, and that those which depend on the senses of contact are often regarded as ‘minor’ arts (= culinary arts, art of perfumes, etc). Nor is it an accident that the visual or auditory imaginaries have played a more important part in the histories of societies than the tactile or olfactory imaginaries.

The voyeur is very careful to maintain a gulf, an empty space, between the object and the eye, the object and his own body: his

27. More precisely: lending themselves through their peculiar characteristics to a perversion which is not the drive itself, but the subject’s position with respect to it (Le Séminaire, tome XI, op cit, pp 165-6). Remember that for Freud as well as for Lacan, the drive is always ‘componential’ (the child is polymorphously perverse, etc).
look fastens the object at the right distance, as with those cinema spectators who take care to avoid being too close to or too far from the screen. The voyeur represents in space the fracture which for ever separates him from the object; he represents his very dissatisfaction (which is precisely what he needs as a voyeur), and thus also his 'satisfaction' insofar as it is of a specifically voyeuristic type. To fill in this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject, to bring him to orgasm and the pleasure of his own body, hence to the exercise of other drives, mobilising the senses of contact and putting an end to the scopic arrangement. Retention is fully part of perceptual pleasure, which is thereby often coloured with anality. Orgasm is the object rediscovered in a state of momentary illusion; it is the fantasy suppression of the gap between object and subject (hence the amorous myths of 'fusion'). The looking drive, except when it is exceptionally well developed, is less directly related to orgasm than are the other component drives; it favours it by its excitatory action, but it is not generally sufficient to produce it by its figures alone, which thus belong to the realm of 'preparatives'. In it we do not find that illusion, however brief, of a lack filled, of a non-imaginary, of a full relation to the object, better established in other drives. If it is true of all desire that it depends on the infinite pursuit of its absent object, voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent.

The same could be said, making the necessary modifications of course, about the invocating (auditory) drive, less closely studied by psychoanalysis hitherto, with the exception of writers like Lacan and Guy Rosolato. I shall merely recall that of all hallucinations—and what reveals the dissociation of desire and real object better than the hallucination?—the main ones by far are visual and auditory hallucinations, those of the senses at a distance (this is also true of the dream, another form of hallucination).

However, although this set of features seems to me to be important, it does not yet characterise the signifier of the cinema proper, but rather that of all means of expression based on sight or hearing, and hence, among other 'languages', of practically all the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, opera, theatre, etc). What distinguishes the cinema is an extra reduplication, a supplementary and specific turn to the screw bolting desire to the lack. First because the spectacles and sounds the cinema 'offers' us (offers us at a distance, hence as much steals from us) are especially rich and varied here: a mere difference of degree, but already one that counts: the screen presents to our apprehension, but absents from our grasp, more 'things'. (The mechanism of the perceiving drive is identical for the moment but its object is more endowed with
matter; this is one of the reasons why the cinema is very suitable for handling 'erotic scenes' which depend on direct, non-sublimated voyeurism.) In the second place (and more decisive), the specific affinity between the cinematic signifier and the imaginary persists when film is compared with arts such as the theatre in which the audio-visual given is as rich as it is on the screen in the number of perceptual axes involved. Indeed, the theatre really does 'give' this given, or at least slightly more really: it is physically present, in the same space as the spectator. The cinema only gives it in effigy, inaccessible from the outset, in a primordial elsewhere, infinitely desirable (= never possessible), on another scene which is that of absence and which nonetheless represents the absent in detail, thus making it very present, but by a different itinerary. Not only am I at a distance from the object, as in the theatre, but what remains in that distance is now no longer the object itself, it is a delegate it has sent me while itself withdrawing. A double withdrawal.

What defines the specifically cinematic scopic regime is not so much the distance kept, the 'keeping' itself (first figure of the lack, common to all voyeurism), as the absence of the object seen. Here the cinema is profoundly different from the theatre as also from more intimate voyeuristic activities with a specifically erotic aim (there are intermediate genres, moreover: certain cabaret acts, striptease, etc): cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism, where the two faces, active and passive, of the component drive are by no means so dissociated; where the object seen is present and hence presumably complicit; where the perverse activity — aided if need be by a certain dose of bad faith and happy illusion, varying from case to case, moreover, and sometimes reducible to very little, as in true perverse couples — is rehabilitated and reconciled with itself by being as it were undividedly taken in charge by two actors assuming its constitutive poles (the corresponding fantasies, in the absence of the actions, thus becoming interchangeable and shared by the play of reciprocal identification). In the theatre, as in domestic voyeurism, the passive actor (the one seen), simply because he is bodily present, because he does not go away, is presumed to consent, to cooperate deliberately. It may be that he really does, as exhibitionists in the clinical sense do, or as, in a sublimated fashion, does that oft noted triumphant exhibitionism characteristic of theatrical acting, counterposed even by Bazin to cinematic representation. It may also be that the object seen has only accepted this condition (thus becoming an 'object' in the ordinary sense of the word, and no longer in the Freudian sense) under the pressure of more or less powerful external constraints, economic ones for example with certain poor strippers. (However, they must have consented at some point; rarely is the degree of acceptance zero, except in the case of victimisation, eg when a fascist militia strips its prisoners: the specific characteristics of the scopic arrangements are then distorted by the over powerful intervention of another
element, sadism.) Voyeurism which is not too sadistic (there is none which is not so at all) rests on a kind of fiction, more or less justified in the order of the real, sometimes institutionalised as in the theatre or strip-tease, a fiction that stipulates that the object 'agrees', that it is therefore exhibitionist. Or more precisely, what is necessary in this fiction for the establishment of potency and desire is presumed to be sufficiently guaranteed by the physical presence of the object: 'Since it is there, it must like it', such, hypocritical or no, deluded or no, is the retrenchment needed by the voyeur so long as sadistic infiltrations are insufficient to make the object's refusal and constraint necessary to him. – Thus, despite the distance inaugurated by the look – which transforms the object into a picture (a 'tableau vivant')\(^{28}\) and thus tips it over into the imaginary, even in its real presence – that presence which persists and the active consent which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) re-establish in the scopic space, momentarily at least, the illusion of a fullness of the object relation, of a state of desire which is not just imaginary.

It is this last recess that is attacked by the cinema signifier, it is in its precise emplacement (in its place, in both senses of the word) that it installs a new figure of the lack, the physical absence of the object seen. In the theatre, actors and spectators are present at the same time and in the same location, hence present one to another, as the two protagonists of an authentic perverse couple. But in the cinema, the actor was present when the spectator was not (= shooting), and the spectator is present when the actor is no longer (= projection): a failure to meet of the voyeur and the exhibitionist whose approaches no longer coincide (they have 'missed' one another). The cinema's voyeurism must (of necessity) do without any very clear mark of consent on the part of the object. There is no equivalent here of the theatre actors' final 'bow'. And then the latter could see their voyeurs, the game was less unilateral, slightly better distributed. In the darkened hall, the voyeur is really left alone (with other voyeurs, which is worse), deprived of his other half in the mythical hermaphrodite (a hermaphrodite not necessarily constituted by the distribution of the sexes but rather by that of the active and passive poles in the exercise of the drive). Yet still a voyeur, since there is something to see, called the film, but something in whose definition there is a great deal of 'flight': not precisely something that hides, rather something that lets itself be seen without presenting itself to be seen, which has gone out of the room before leaving only its trace visible there. This is the origin in particular of that 'recipe' of the classical cinema that the actor should never look directly at the audience (= the camera).

Thus deprived of rehabilitatory agreement, of a real or supposed consensus with the other (which was also the Other, for it had the status of a sanction on the plane of the symbolic), cinematic voyeurism, unauthorised scopophilia, is from the outset more strongly established than that of the theatre in direct line from the primal scene. Certain precise features of the institution contribute to this affinity: the obscurity surrounding the onlooker, the aperture of the screen with its inevitable keyhole effect. But the affinity is more profound. It lies first in the spectator’s solitude in the cinema: those attending a cinematic projection do not, as in the theatre, constitute a true ‘audience’, a temporary collectivity; they are an accumulation of individuals who, despite appearances, more closely resemble the fragmented group of readers of a novel. It lies on the other hand in the fact that the filmic spectacle, the object seen, is more radically ignorant of its spectator, since he is not there, than the theatrical spectacle can ever be. A third factor, closely linked to the other two, also plays a part: the segregation of spaces that characterises a cinema performance and not a theatrical one. The ‘stage’ and the auditorium are no longer two polar selections made in a single space; the space of the film, represented by the screen, is utterly heterogeneous, it no longer communicates with that of the auditorium: one is real, the other perspective: a stronger break than any line of footlights. For its spectator the film unfolds in that simultaneously quite close and definitively inaccessible ‘elsewhere’ in which the child sees the gambols of the parental couple, who are similarly ignorant of it and leave it alone, a pure onlooker whose participation is inconceivable. In this respect the cinematic signifier is OEdipal in type.

In the set of differences between the cinema and the theatre, it is difficult to be precise about the relative importance of two sorts of conditioning facts, and yet they are definitely distinct: on the one hand the characteristics of the signifier (alone envisaged here), i.e. the supplementary degree of absence that I have analysed, and on the other the socio-ideological circumstances that have marked the historical birth of the two arts in a divergent manner. I have broached the latter topic elsewhere in my contribution to the Hommage à Emile Benveniste, and I shall only recall that the cinema was born in the midst of the capitalist epoch in a largely antagonistic and fragmented society, based on individualism and the restricted family (= father-mother-children), in an especially super-egotistic bourgeois society, especially concerned with ‘elevation’ (or façade), especially opaque to itself. The theatre is a very ancient art, one which saw the light in more authentically ceremonial societies, in more integrated human groups (even if sometimes, as in Ancient Greece, the cost of this integration was the rejection into a non-human exterior of a whole social category, that of the slaves),
in cultures which were in some sense closer to their desire (= paganism): the theatre retains something of this deliberate civic tendency towards ludico-liturgical 'communion', even in the degraded state of a worldly rendez-vous around those plays known as 'pièces de boulevard' (variety plays).

It is for reasons of this kind too that theatrical voyeurism, less cut off from its exhibitionist correlate, tends more towards a reconciled and community-orientated practice of the scopic perversion (of the component drive). Cinematic voyeurism is less accepted, more 'shame-faced'.

But there are not just the global determinations (by the signifier or by history), there are also the personal efforts of the writers, producers and actors. Like all general tendencies, the ones I have signalled are unevenly manifest from work to work. There is no need to be surprised that certain films accept their own voyeurism more plainly than do certain plays. It is at this point that the problems of political cinema and political theatre should be posed, and also those of a politics of the cinema and the theatre. The militant use of the two signifiers is by no means identical. In this respect the theatre is clearly at a great advantage, thanks to its 'lesser degree of imaginariness', thanks to the direct contact it allows with the audience. The film which aims to be a film of intervention must take this into account in its self-definition. As we know, this is by no means easy.

The difficulty also lies in the fact that cinematic scopophilia, which is 'non-authorised' in the sense I have just pointed out, is authorised however by the mere fact of its institutionalisation. The cinema retains something of the peculiar prohibited character of the vision of the primal scene (the latter is always surprised, never contemplated at leisure, and the permanent cinemas of big cities, with their highly anonymous clientele entering or leaving furtively, in the dark, in the middle of the action, represent this transgression factor rather well) – but also, in a kind of inverse movement which is simply the 'reprise' of the imaginary by the symbolic, the cinema is based on the legalisation and generalisation of the prohibited practice. Thus it shares in miniature in the special regime of certain activities (such as the frequentation of 'maisons de tolérance', very well named in this respect) that are both official and clandestine, and in which neither of these two characteristics ever quite succeeds in obliterating the other. For the vast majority of the audience, the cinema (rather like the dream in this) represents a kind of enclosure or 'reserve' which escapes a fully social life although it is accepted and prescribed by it: going to the cinema is one licit activity among others with its place in the admissible pastimes of the day or the week, and yet that place is a 'hole' in the social cloth, a loophole opening on to something slightly more crazy, slightly less approved.
Cinema and theatre do not have the same relation to fiction. There is a fictional cinema, just as there is a fictional theatre, a "non-fiction" cinema just as there is a non-fiction theatre, because fiction is a great historical and social figure (particularly active in our Western tradition and perhaps in others), endowed with a force of its own which leads it to invest various signifiers (and inversely, to be more or less expelled from them on occasion). It does not follow that these signifiers have an even and uniform affinity with it (that of music, after all, is especially repugnant to it, yet there is such a thing as programme music). The cinematic signifier lends itself the better to fiction in that it is itself fictive and "absent". Attempts to "denationalise" the spectacle, notably since Brecht, have gone further in the theatre than in the cinema, and not by chance.

But what interests me here is rather the fact that this unevenness is still apparent if only the fictional theatre is compared with the fictional cinema. They are not "fictional" in quite the same way, and it was this that I had been struck by in 1965 when I compared the "impression of reality" produced by these two forms of spectacle ('On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema,' Essais sur la signification au cinéma tome I, Klincksieck, Paris 1968; translated as Film Language, OUP, New York 1974). At that time my approach was a purely phenomenological one, and it owed very little to psychoanalysis. However, the latter confirms me in my earlier opinion. Underlying all fiction there is the dialectical relationship between a real instance and an imaginary instance, the former's job being to mimic the latter: there is the representation, involving real materials and actions, and the represented, the fictional properly speaking. But the balance established between these two poles and hence the precise nuance of the regime of credence that the spectator will adopt varies tolerably from one fictional technique to the other. In the cinema as in the theatre, the represented is by definition imaginary, the material being already a reflection. Thus the theatrical fiction is experienced more — it is only a matter of a different "dosage", of a difference of economy, rather, but that is precisely why it is important — as a set of real pieces of behaviour actively directed at the evocation of something unreal, whereas cinematic fiction is rather experienced as the quasi-real presence of that unreal itself; the signifier, already imaginary in its own way, is less palpably so, it plays more into the hands of the diegesis, it tends more to be swallowed up by it, to be credited to its side of the balance-sheet by the spectator. The
balance is established slightly closer to the represented, slightly further from the representation.

For the same reason, fictional theatre tends to depend more on the actor (representer), fictional cinema more on the character (represented). This difference has often been emphasised by the theory of the cinema, where it constitutes an already classical theme. In the psychoanalytic field it has also been noted, by Octave Mannoni in particular (see ‘L’illusion comique en le théâtre du point de vue de l’imaginaire’ in Clefs pour l’imaginaire ou l’autre scène, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1969, p 180). Even when the cinema spectator does identify with the actor rather than with the part (somewhat as he does in the theatre), it is with the actor as ‘star’, ie still as a character, and a fabulous one, itself fictional: with the best of his parts.

It may be said that there are much simpler reasons for this difference, that in the theatre the same part can be interpreted by various actors from one production to another, that the actor thus becomes ‘detached’ from the character, whereas in the cinema there are never several productions (several ‘casts’) for one film, so the part and its unique interpreter are definitively associated with one another. This is quite true, and it does affect the very different balance of forces between actor and character in theatre and cinema. But it is not a ‘simple’ fact, nor is it independent of the distance between their respective signifiers, on the contrary, it is but one aspect of that distance (merely a very striking one). If the theatrical part can have a variety of interpreters, that is because its representation is real and mobilises really present (and hence possibly variant) persons each evening. If the cinemematic part is fastened once and for all to its interpreter, it is because its representation involves the reflection of the actor, not the actor himself, and because the reflection (the signifier) is recorded and hence can no longer vary.

V Disavowal, fetishism

As can be seen, the cinema has a number of roots in the unconscious and in the great movements illuminated by psychoanalysis, but they can all be traced back to the specific characteristics of the institutionalised signifier. I have gone a little way in tracing some of these roots, that of mirror identification, that of voyeurism and exhibitionism. There is also a third, that of fetishism.

Since the famous article by Freud that inaugurated the problem (‘Fetishism’, 1927, Standard Edition, op cit Vol XXI, pp 152-7), psychoanalysis has linked fetish and fetishism closely with

29. See also Octave Mannoni’s important study, ‘Je sais bien, mais quand même . . . ’, in Clefs pour l’imaginaire, op cit.
castration and the fear it inspires. Castration, for Freud, and even more clearly for Lacan, is first of all the mother’s castration, and that is why the main figures it inspires are to a certain degree common to children of both sexes. The child who sees its mother’s body is constrained by way of perception, by the ‘evidence of the senses’, to accept that there are human beings deprived of a penis. But for a long time – and somewhere-in it for ever – it will not interpret this inevitable observation in terms of an anatomical difference between the sexes (= penis/vagina). It believes that all human beings originally have a penis and it therefore understands what it has seen as the effect of a mutilation which redoubles its fear that it will be subjected to a similar fate (or else, in the case of the little girl after a certain age, the fear that she has already been subjected to it). Inversely, it is this very terror that is projected on to the spectacle of the mother’s body, and invites the reading of an absence where anatomy sees a different conformation. The scenario of castration, in its broad lines, does not differ whether one understands it, like Lacan, as an essentially symbolic drama in which castration takes over in a decisive metaphor all the losses, both real and imaginary, that the child has already suffered (birth trauma, maternal breast, excrement, etc), or on the contrary one tends, like Freud, to take that scenario slightly more literally. Before this unveiling of a lack (we are already close to the cinema signer), the child, in order to avoid too strong an anxiety, will have to double up its belief (another cinematic characteristic) and from then on for ever hold two contradictory opinions (proof that the real perception has not been without effect for all that): ‘All human beings are endowed with a penis’ (primal belief) and ‘Some human beings are deprived of a penis’ (evidence of the senses). In other words, it will, perhaps definitively, retain its former belief beneath the new ones, but it will also hold to its new perceptual observation while disavowing it on another level (= denial of perception, disavowal, Freud’s ‘Verleugnung’). Thus is established the lasting matrix, the affective prototype of all the splittings of belief which man will henceforth be capable of in the most varied domains, of all the infinitely complex unconscious and occasionally conscious interactions which he will allow himself between ‘believing’ and ‘not believing’ and which will on more than one occasion be of great assistance to him in resolving (or denying) delicate problems. (If we are all a little honest with ourselves, we will realise that a truly integral belief, without any ‘underside’ in which the opposite is believed, would make even the most ordinary everyday life almost impossible.)

At the same time, the child, terrified by what it has seen or glimpsed, will be tempted, more or less successfully in different cases, to arrest its look, for all its life, at what will subsequently become its fetish: at a piece of clothing, for example, which
masks the frightening discovery, or else precedes it (underwear, stockings, boots, etc). The fixation on this 'just before' is thus another form of disavowal, of retreat from the perceived, although its very existence is dialectical evidence of the fact that the perceived has been perceived. The fetishistic prop will become a pre-condition for the establishment of potency and access to orgasm (jouissance), sometimes an indispensable precondition (true fetishism); in other developments it will only be a favourable condition, and one whose weight will vary with respect to the other features of the erotogenic situation as a whole. (It can be observed once again that the defence against desire itself becomes erotic, as the defence against anxiety itself becomes anxiogenic; for an analogous reason: what arises 'against' an affect also arises 'in' it and is not easily separated from it, even if that is its aim.) Fetishism is generally regarded as the 'perversion' par excellence, for it intervenes itself in the 'tabulation' of the others, and above all because they, like it (and this is what makes it their model), are based on the avoidance of castration. The fetish always represents the penis, it is always a substitute for it, whether metaphorically (= it masks its absence) or metonymically (= it is contiguous with its empty place). To sum up, the fetish signifies the penis as absent, it is its negative signifier; supplementing it, it puts a 'fullness' in place of a lack, but in doing so it also affirms that lack. It resumes within it the structure of disavowal and multiple belief.

These few reminders are intended above all to emphasise the fact that the dossier of fetishism, before any examination of its cinematic extensions, contains two broad aspects which coincide in their depths (in childhood and in structure) but are relatively distinct in their concrete manifestations: these are the problems of belief (= disavowal) and that of the fetish itself, the latter more immediately linked to direct or sublimated erotogenicity.

I shall say very little about the problems of belief in the cinema. First because they are at the centre of my article in Communications n 23 op cit. Second because I have already discussed them in this one vis-à-vis identification and the mirror (section III): I have tried to describe, outside the special case of fiction, a few of the many and successive twists, the 'reversals' (reduplications) that occur in the cinema to articulate together the imaginary, the symbolic and the real; each of these twists presupposes a division of belief; in order to work, the film does not only require a splitting, but a whole series of stages of belief, imbricated together into a chain by a remarkable machinery. – In the third place, because the subject has already been largely dealt with by Octave Mannoni in his remarkable studies of the theatrical illusion ('L'illusion comique en le théâtre du point de vue de l'imaginaire,' op cit), vis-à-vis the fictional theatre. Of course, I have said above that theatrical fiction
and cinematic fiction are not fictional in the same way; but this deviation concerned the representation, the signifying material, not the represented, ie the fiction-fact as such, in which the deviation is much smaller (at any rate so long as one is dealing with spectacles such as theatre and cinema – written fiction obviously presents somewhat different problems). Mannoni’s analyses are just as valid for the fiction film, with the single reservation that the divergences in representation that I have already discussed (at the end of section IV) are borne in mind.

I shall rest content to adapt these analyses to a cinematic perspective, and not feel obliged to repeat them (not so well) in detail. – It is understood that the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it ‘knows’ that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected (or else the fiction film is declared ‘poorly made’), that everything is set to work to make the deception effective and to give it an air of truth (this is the problem of verisimilitude). Any spectator will tell you that he ‘doesn’t believe in it’, but everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really will ‘believe in it’. (I shall say that behind any fiction there is a second fiction: the diegetic events are fictional, that is the first; but everyone pretends to believe they are true, and that is the second.) In other words, asks Mannoni, since it is ‘accepted’ that the audience is incredulous, who is it who is credulous and must be maintained in his credulousness by the perfect organisation of the machinery (of the machination)? This credulous person is, of course, another part of ourselves, he is still seated beneath the incredulous one, or in his heart, it is he who continues to believe, who disavows what he knows (he for whom all human beings are still endowed with a penis). But by a symmetrical and simultaneous movement, the incredulous disavows the credulous: no one will admit that he is duped by the ‘plot’. That is why the instance of credulousness is often projected into the outer world and constituted as a separate person, a person completely abused by the diegesis: thus in Corneille’s L’illusion comique, a play with a significant title, the character Pridament, the naïf, who does not know what theatre is, and for whom, by a reversal foreseen in Corneille’s plot itself, the representation of the play is given. By a partial identification with this character, the spectators can sustain their credulousness in all incredulousness. This instance which believes and also its personified projection have fairly precise equivalents in the cinema: for example, the credulous spectators at the ‘Grand Café’ in 1895, frequently and complacently evoked by the incredulous spectators who have come later (and are no longer children), those spectators of 1895 who fled their seats in terror when the train entered La Ciotat station (in Lumière’s famous film), because they were afraid it would run them down. Or else, in so many films, the character
of the 'dreamer' — the sleeping dreamer — who during the film believed (as we did!) that it was true, whereas it was he who saw it all in a dream and who wakes up at the end of the film (as we do again). Octave Mannoni compares these switches of belief with those the ethnologist observes in certain populations in which his informers regularly declare that 'once the masks were believed in' (these masks are used to deceive children, like our Father Christmas, and adolescents learn at their initiation ceremonies that the 'masks' were in fact adults in disguise); in other words, these societies have always 'believed' in the masks, but have always rejected this belief into a 'once-upon-a-time': they still believe in them, but always in the aorist tense (like everyone). This once-upon-a-time is childhood, when one really was duped by the masks; among adults, the beliefs of once-upon-a-time irrigate the unbelief of today, but irrigate it by denegation (one could say: by delegation, by rejecting credence on to the child and on to former times).

Certain cinematic sub-codes inscribe disavowal into the film according to less permanent and more localised figures. They should be studied separately in this perspective. I am not thinking only of films which have been 'dreamt' in their entirety by one of their characters, but also of all the sequences accompanied by a 'voice-off' commentary, spoken sometimes by a character, sometimes by a kind of anonymous 'speaker'. This voice, precisely a 'voice-off', beyond jurisdiction, represents the rampart of unbelief (hence it is the opposite of the Fridament character, yet has the same effect in the last analysis). The distance it establishes between the action and ourselves comforts our feeling that we are not duped by that action: thus reassured (behind the rampart), we can allow ourselves to be duped by it a bit longer (it is the speciality of naive distanciations to resolve themselves into alibis). — There are also all those 'films within a film' which downgear the mechanism of our belief-unbelief and anchor it in several stages, hence more strongly: the included film was an illusion, so the including film (the film as such) was not, or was so somewhat less.30

As for the fetish itself, in its cinematic manifestations, who could fail to see that it consists fundamentally of the equipment of the cinema (= its 'technique'), or of the cinema as a whole as equipment and as technique, for fiction films and others? It is no accident that in the cinema some cameramen, some directors, some critics, some spectators demonstrate a real 'fetishism of technique', often noted or denounced as such ('fetishism' is taken here in its ordinary sense, which is rather loose but does contain within it the analytical sense that I shall attempt to disengage). The fetish

proper, like the apparatus of the cinema, is a prop, the prop that disavows a lack and in doing so affirms it without wishing to. A prop, too, which is as it were deposited on the body of the object; a prop which is the penis, since it negates its absence, and hence a partial object that makes the whole object loveable and desirable. The fetish is also the point of departure for specialised practices, and as is well known, desire in its modalities is the more 'technical' the more it is perverse.

Thus with respect to the desired body — to the body of desire rather — the fetish is in the same position as the technical equipment of the cinema with respect to the cinema as a whole. A fetish, the cinema as a technical performance, as prowess, as an exploit, an exploit that underlines and denounces the lack on which the whole arrangement is based (the absence of the object, replaced by its reflection), an exploit which consists at the same time of making this absence forgotten. The cinema fetishist is the person who is enchanted at what the machine is capable of, at the theatre of shadows as such. For the establishment of his full potency for cinematic enjoyment (jouissance) he must think at every moment (and above all simultaneously) of the force of presence the film has and of the absence on which this force is constructed. He must constantly compare the result with the means set to work (and hence pay attention to the technique), for his pleasure lodges in the gap between the two. Of course, this attitude appears most clearly in the 'connoisseur', the cinephile, but it also occurs, as a partial component of cinematic pleasure, in those who just go to the cinema: if they do go it is partly in order to be carried away by the film (or the fiction, if there is one), but also in order to appreciate as such the machinery that is carrying them away: they will say, precisely when they have been carried away, that the film was a 'good' one, that it was 'well made' (the same thing is said of a harmonious body).

It is clear that fetishism, in the cinema as elsewhere, is closely linked to the good object. The function of the fetish is to restore the latter, threatened in its 'goodness' (in Melanie Klein's sense) by the terrifying discovery of the lack. Thanks to the fetish, which covers the wound and itself becomes erotogenic, the object as a whole can become desirable again without excessive fear. In a similar way, the whole cinematic institution is as it were recovered by a thin and omni-present garment, a stimulating prop through which it is consumed: the ensemble of its equipment and its tricks — and not just the celluloid strip, the 'pellicule' or 'little skin' which has been rightly mentioned in this connection (Roger Dadoun: '“King Kong” : du monstre comme dé-monstration,' Littérature n 8, December 1972, p 109; Octave Mannoni: Clefs pour

31. I have studied this phenomenon at slightly greater length in 'Trucage et cinéma' in Essais sur la signification au cinéma, tome II, Klincksieck, Paris 1972, pp 173-92.
I'imaginaire, op cit, p 180) — of the equipment which needs the lack in order to stand out in it by contrast, but which only affirms it insofar as it ensures that it is forgotten, and which lastly (its third twist) needs it not to be forgotten nonetheless, for fear that at the same stroke the fact that it caused it to be forgotten will itself be forgotten.

The fetish is the cinema in its physical state. A fetish is always material: insofar as one can make up for it by the power of the symbolic alone one is precisely no longer a fetishist. It is important to recall here that of all the arts the cinema is the one that involves the most extensive and complex equipment; the 'technical' dimension is more obtrusive in it than elsewhere. Along with television, it is the only art that is also an industry, or at least is so from the outset (the others become industries subsequently: music through the gramophone record or the cassette, books by mass printings and publishing trusts, etc). In this respect only architecture is a little like it: there are 'languages' that are heavier than others, more dependent on 'hardware'.

At the same time as it localises the penis, the fetish represents by synecdoche the whole body of the object as desirable. Similarly, interest in the equipment and technique is the privileged representative of love for the cinema.

The Law is what permits desire: the cinematic equipment is the instance thanks to which the imaginary turns into the symbolic, thanks to which the lost object (the absence of what is filmed) becomes the law and the principle of a specific and instituted signifier.

For in the structure of the fetish there is another point on which Mannoni quite rightly insists and which directly concerns my present undertaking. Because it attempts to disavow the evidence of the senses, the fetish is evidence that this evidence has indeed been recorded (like a tape stored in the memory). The fetish is not inaugurated because the child still believes its mother has a penis (= order of the imaginary), for if it still believed it completely, as 'before', it would no longer need the fetish. It is inaugurated because the child now 'knows very well' that its mother has no penis. In other words, the fetish not only has disavowal value, but also knowledge value.

That is why, as I said a moment ago, the fetishism of cinematic technique is especially well developed among the 'connoisseurs' of the cinema. That is also why the theoretician of the cinema necessarily retains within him — at the cost of a new backward turn that leads him to interrogate technique, to symbolise the fetish, and hence to maintain it as he dissolves it — an interest in the equipment without which he would not have any motive for studying it.

Indeed, the equipment is not just physical (= the fetish proper);
74 it also has its discursive imprints, its extensions in the very text of the film. Here is revealed the specific movement of theory: when it shifts from a fascination with technique to the critical study of the different *codes* that this equipment authorises. *Concern for the signifier* in the cinema derives from a fetishism that has taken up a position as far as possible along its cognitive flank. To adapt the formula by which Octave Mannoni defines *disavowal* (‘I know very well . . . , but all the same’), the study of the signifier is a libidinal position constituted by weakening the ‘but all the same’ and profiting by this saving of energy to dig deeper into the ‘I know very well’, which thus becomes ‘I know nothing at all, but I desire to know’.

Just like the other structures that constitute the foundation of the cinema, fetishism does not intervene only in the constitution of the signifier, but also in certain of its more particular configurations. Here we have *framings* and also certain *camera movements* (the latter can anyway be defined as progressive changes in framing).

Cinema with directly erotic subject matter deliberately plays on the edges of the frame and the progressive and if need be incomplete revelations allowed by the camera as it moves, and this is no accident. Censorship is involved here: censorship of films and censorship in Freud’s sense. Whether the form is static (framing) or dynamic (camera movements), the principle is the same: the point is to gamble simultaneously on the excitation of desire and its retention (which is its opposite and yet favours it), by the infinite variations made possible precisely by the studios’ technique on the exact emplacement of the *boundary* that bars the look, that puts an end to the ‘seen’, that inaugurates that more sinister crane-shot (or low-angle shot) towards the unseen, the guessed-at. The framing and its displacements (that determine the *emplacement*) are in themselves forms of *suspense* and are extensively used in suspense films too, though they remain such forms in other cases. They have an inner affinity with the mechanisms of desire, of its postponements, its new impetus, and they retain this affinity in other places than erotic sequences (the only difference lies in the *quantum* which is sublimated and the *quantum* which is not). The way the cinema, with its wandering framings (wandering like the look, like the caress), finds the means to reveal space has something to do with a kind of permanent undressing, a generalised strip-tease, a less direct but more perfected strip-tease, since it also makes it possible to dress space again, to remove from view what it has previously shown, to *take back* as well as to retain (like the child at the moment of the birth of the fetish, the child who has already seen, but whose look beats a rapid retreat): a strip-tease pierced with ‘flash-backs’, inverted sequences that then give new impetus to the forward movement. These veiling-unveiling pro-
 Procedures can also be compared with certain cinematic 'punctuations', especially slow ones strongly marked by a concern for control and expectation (slow fade-ins and fade-outs, irises, 'drawn out' dissolves like those of Sternberg).  

'Theorise,' he says ... (Provisional conclusion)

The psychoanalytic constitution of the cinema signifier is a very wide problem, one containing, so to speak, a number of 'panels'. I cannot examine them all here, and there will surely be some that I have not even mentioned.

However, something tells me that (for the present) I can stop here. I wanted to give a first idea of the field I perceive, and, to begin with, to assure myself that I was indeed perceiving it (I was not certain of it all at once).

Now I shall turn back on this study itself as an unfolding of my initial dream. Psychoanalysis does not illuminate only the film, but also the conditions of desire of whoever makes himself its theoretician. Interwoven into every analytical undertaking is the thread of a self-analysis.

I have loved the cinema, I no longer love it. I still love it. What I have wished to do in these pages is to keep at a distance, as in the scopic practice I have discussed, that which in me (≡ in everyone) can love it: to retain it as questioned. As questioning, too, for the wish to construct the film into an object of knowledge is to extend, by a supplementary degree of sublimation, the passion for seeing that made the cinephile and the institution themselves. Initially an undivided passion, entirely occupied in preserving the cinema as a good object (imaginary passion, passion for the imaginary), it subsequently splits into two diverging and reconverging desires, one of which 'looks' at the other: this is the theoretical break, and like all breaks it is also a link: that of theory with its object.

32. Reading this article in manuscript, Thierry Kuntzel has pointed out to me that in this paragraph I perhaps lean slightly too far towards fetishism and fetishism alone in discussing filmic figures that depend just as much on cinematic perversion in general: the hypertrophy of the perceptual component drive with its mises-en-scène, its progressions-retentions, its calculated postponements, etc. This objection seems to me (after the event) to be correct. I shall have to come back to it. Fetishism, as is well known, is closely linked to perversion (cf p.69), although it does not exhaust it. Hence the difficulty. For the cinematic effects I am evoking here (= playing on the framing and its displacements), the properly fetishistic element seems to me to be the 'bar', the edge of the screen, the separation between the seen and the unseen, the 'arrestation' of the look. Once the seen or the unseen are envisaged rather than their intersection (their edge), we are dealing with scopic perversion itself, going beyond the strict province of the fetish.
I have used words like 'love of the cinema'. I hope I will have been understood. The point is not to restrict them to their usual meaning, the meaning suggested by 'archive rats' or fanatical 'Macmahonites' (who provide no more than exaggerated examples). Nor is the point to relapse into the absurd opposition between the affective and the intellectual. The point is to ask why many people go to the cinema when they are not obliged to, how they manage to 'assimilate' the rules of this game which is a fairly new one historically, how they themselves become cogs of the institution. For anyone who asks this question, 'loving the cinema' and 'understanding the film' are no more than two closely mingled aspects of one vast socio-psychical machinery.

As for someone who looks at this machine itself (the theoretician who desires to know it), I have said that he was of necessity sadistic. There is no sublimation, as Freud himself insisted, without 'defusion of the drives'. The good object has moved to the side of the knowledge and the cinema becomes a bad object (a dual displacement which favours the distances that enable 'science' to see its object). The cinema is 'persecuted', but this persistence is also a reparation (the knowing posture is both aggressive and depressive), a reparation of a specific kind, peculiar to the semiotologist: the restoration to the theoretical body of what has been taken from the institution, from the code which is being 'studied'.

To study the cinema: what an odd formula! How can it be done without 'breaking' its beneficial image, all that idealism of film as an 'art' full and simple, the seventh of the name? By breaking the toy one loses it, and that is the position of the semiotic discourse: it feeds on this loss, it puts in its place the hoped for advance of knowledge: it is an inconsolable discourse that consoles itself, that takes itself by the hand and goes to work. Lost objects are the only ones one is afraid to lose, and the semiotologist is he who rediscovers them from the other side: 'Il n'y a de cause que de ce qui cloche' – a cause is required only when something is not working properly.  

Translated by Ben Brewster

33. [Cf Jacques Lacan: Le Séminaire, tome XI, op cit, p 25. Lacan contrasts a cause, as an occult property, with a law, in which 'causes' are smoothly absorbed as variables in a function; the unconscious, however, will remain a cause in the occult sense, because its order exceeds any particular function: it is The Law rather than a law, énonciation rather than énoncé, 'lalangue' rather than a langue – hence its privileged manifestation in the lapse, the mistake, the point at which discourse 'limps'.]