

## Otto Preminger and the Surface of Cinema

Christian Keathley

In *100 Semesters*—a lively, readable memoir of half a century in academics—William Chace describes a challenge he faced early in his teaching career as an English professor at Stanford. No sooner did he become a comfortably skilled college instructor than Chace began to suspect that his lectures on classics by Hemingway, Wharton, Fitzgerald, and the like were “saying no more than what a reasonably attentive and responsive reader could get out of those books unaccompanied by my help. I paused to think: was there anything to understand about *The Great Gatsby* that needed my guiding hand?” Chace’s response was to trade these (allegedly) “obvious” books for something more opaque—“a subject the ordinary reader would not read easily, or read at all, without help”—and so he began teaching a seminar on Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

While the analogy between teaching literature and teaching film is obvious, Chace’s experience is exactly the opposite of my own. I find it far easier to teach “difficult” works like *Vivre sa vie* or *L’Avventura* than it is to teach transparent works like *Casablanca* or *Winchester 73*—and I’m talking about formal and aesthetic analysis here, not ideological. With the former films, students come in confused, perplexed, maybe irritated, but always in need of help understanding—help that I am well-equipped to give. But the latter films, so it seems, require no critical explication: they are so obviously what they are, and what they are is obvious. And therein lies the challenge. Jean-Louis Comolli got at this critical conundrum in his review of Howard Hawks’s *Sergeant York*:

The difficulty for any critical approach and the astonishing particularity of Hawks’ art lies in its clarity and its simplicity. Everything has been already assimilated, felt and understood to such a degree; everything is said without mystery and without symbols, without cinematographic expression serving any other ends than telling a story, without any possibility of dissociating *mise en scene* and scenario, everything is shown to us so immediately that no formal or thematic problems remain to get hold of, virtually no way into the film: it escapes us even as we understand it.<sup>1</sup>

Comolli’s remarks about Hawks could apply to any number of films and filmmakers of the classical era. In recent decades, however, the dominant critical approach has been to avoid tackling the manifest features of many films, opting instead for a redirecting of critical interest onto latent features. With this move, certain filmmakers were considered in great depth, others virtually ignored. Let me review this shift of critical priorities in greater detail, taking as my case in point Otto Preminger.

Preminger began his career at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox in the 1930s, and until the 1960s, he was a figure of primarily commercial attention—a producer/director with a comparatively high media profile who had his fair share of critical and commercial successes and failures. The 1960s, however, saw the first wave of auteurism, and with it

Preminger became a figure of serious critical consideration. In Andrew Sarris's seminal *The American Cinema*, which ranked directors according to merit, Preminger was included in the second tier of filmmakers, "The Far Side of Paradise," along with the likes of Nicholas Ray, Douglas Sirk, Vincente Minnelli, Anthony Mann, and Samuel Fuller. In many important ways, this second tier of Sarris's is where real battles of auteurism were fought—that is, not over the likes of Sternberg, Chaplin, or Welles, but over the likes of Ray, Sirk, and Preminger.<sup>2</sup>

Auteurism got film studies into the academy, but it was 1970s "semiotic" theory (with its amalgam of structuralism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and feminism) that secured film studies a position as a discrete discipline. With this critical shift, however, the obvious became obscure: for in effect, the semiotic approach rendered in need of interpretation many films that appeared transparent. But while films by directors like Ray, Sirk, and Minnelli seemed tailor-made for this method—with their implicit interrogation of the social relations of post-war life in America (bourgeois, patriarchal, heterosexual, capitalist)—Preminger's films aren't, due to their both narrative and stylistic approach. While Ray, Sirk, and Minnelli mounted their critique of American capitalist society indirectly, through their carefully designed mise-en-scène that communicated visually things that couldn't then be addressed directly, Preminger took the opposite approach: addressing controversial social issues (sexual affairs, drug abuse, homosexuality) head-on, so that any "symptomatic" interpretation was rendered superfluous. The social issues under interrogation in Preminger's films were not subtextual—they were the manifest content. Indeed, to point out that there is a subtext of incest in *Anatomy of a Murder*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, and *Bunny Lake Is Missing* is merely to state the obvious.<sup>3</sup> As a result, since the early 1970s, Preminger has been a severely under-examined filmmaker.

Even the strongest of Preminger's work seems to require not interpretation or explication, but simple witnessing and appreciation. But does this mean that there is nothing to be said? Describing the limitations of some of Preminger's films—the ones adapted from "bloated novels on big subjects"—Sarris acknowledged that, regardless of the overall aesthetic success of the film, "Individual scenes can be magnificent—the prison raid in *Exodus*, the shipboard sequence with the President in *Advise and Consent*, the Viennese ballroom scene in *The Cardinal*, and the opening dance scene in *In Harm's Way* invoking in one slowly moving shot the entire Glenn Millerish *Zeitgeist* of the forties."<sup>4</sup> All these scenes are indeed undeniably memorable, but (with the exception of the scene from *Exodus*) none is made of the stuff of which "memorable" scenes so routinely consist. Once again—and this is typical of Preminger—these scenes are marked not by any stylistic virtuosity, but by a simplicity that shows the desire for lucidity, clarity, fluidity. Thus, we face a mystery: if there is nothing stylistically conspicuous about these scenes, nothing that is particularly striking or distinctive in cinematic terms, nothing requiring interpretation, then how can we critically account for, and do justice to, their beauty, power, and memorable nature?

In an interview with Stanley Cavell, Andrew Klevan proposed a first step: begin with individual response to some striking moment, one whose "meaning" is not necessarily at issue. Their discussion provides insight into how one might proceed from such experiences.

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**AK:** I find that after I've watched a film I normally have a few moments or maybe just one moment that really strikes me.

**SC:** Start there...

**AK:** Yes, I'll start there. [...] It feels intuitive. Anyway, I'll have only a dim sense of what it is about that moment. I'll just go 'hmmmm.'

**SC:** A moment you care about, however apparently trivial, can be productive. Why did the hand do that? Why did the camera just turn then?

**AK:** And why is this niggling me? Our direction of thought here reminds me that you have discussed Emerson's feeling that primary wisdom is intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. The occurrence to us of an intuition places a demand for us on tuition. You call this wording, the willingness to subject one self to words, to make oneself intelligible. This tuition so conceived is what you understand criticism to be, to follow out in each case the complete tuition for a given intuition. There's a moment that really struck me in Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra, 1936, US). I read your piece on the film after re-watching it, and was pleased to see you mention this moment. It is when Mr. Deeds (Gary Cooper) is lying on his back on his bed talking to Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) on the phone. He has his right calf and ankle resting on the knee of the other leg, and he's playing with his foot while he's talking to her. The camera is behind his head so that most of his face is obscured (this shot is repeated a number of times). Then when the phone call is over you see him playing his trusty tuba and his face is even more hidden than in the previous version of the shot. Why did they think to execute it like that...*like that?*

**SC:** *Like that...*

**AK:** And why was I drawn to these shots? [...] I didn't only think the shots were unusual, or striking, I thought they were gently mysterious, and that they were significant. They asked questions of me. As the film continued, the memory of the shots kept returning. My intuition was that because the shots were *like that* they might give me a key to the whole film, and open it up in new and rewarding ways.

**SC:** I like it. I share it. It is always important that one is drawn, that a memory keeps returning.<sup>5</sup>

So, following Sarris's insight about Preminger, working on individual scenes and shots—moments that strike us, that perplex us, that gently call our attention to the fact that they are *like that*—may be the best approach. Doing so, as Klevan suggests, might open up the very surface of these films in new and rewarding ways. It might also alert us not just to the way these individual films work, but to larger issues of the way cinema

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functions. Let me offer an example of this method by considering a scene from *Whirlpool*, one of the films noir Preminger made at Fox in the 1940s. Most would agree that it is not the strongest of these films, but it is also surely not without significant interest. There is one scene from it that stays in my memory, and that intuition tells me is worth exploring in greater detail.

\* \* \*

*Whirlpool* is the story of Ann Sutton (Gene Tierney), the beautiful wife of Bill Sutton (Richard Conte), a distinguished young psychoanalyst. They seem to be the perfect couple, but Ann has a terrible secret: she's a kleptomaniac. In the film's opening scene, Ann is caught shoplifting a gold pin from a local department store, but she is rescued from scandal by Korvo (Jose Ferrer), an unorthodox lay hypnotist/therapist.

After this incident, Ann returns home in a panic, insisting to the secretary that she must see her husband, who is with a patient. She pulls off her gloves and scribbles a note to her husband; then she pauses, tears it up, and races upstairs, leaving her gloves behind. Ann enters the bedroom, tosses her purse on the bed, and puts her hat on the dresser. She runs her hand through her hair and then, seeing herself and the purse reflected in the mirror, she turns and moves back to the bed. She opens the purse and removes the stolen pin; then she returns it, closes her purse, and moves to a chaise lounge, where she hides the purse under a pillow. She stands and worries her hands, then whispers to herself: "I must tell him." She begins moving slowly across the room: "Right away." Something on the bedroom desk catches her eye and she stops. She picks up a photo of her and her husband and gazes at it longingly. They appear to be dressed in swimwear, suggesting a honeymoon, or at least a vacation—at any rate, happy times. She hears a door slam and turns, alarmed. She leaps from the desk and rushes into an unseen recess of the bedroom, behind a white curtain.

It is the second part of this scene that interests me most. In particular, I am fascinated by the actors' business—that is, the physical activities they are engaging with while talking—and in particular by the fact that this business goes unacknowledged by the two characters. But this attention to business leads to other issues as well, such as framing and movement, rhythm and performance. As Andrew Klevan has suggested, close attention to elements such as these "may enhance the *density* of our interpretations because we are responsive . . . to physicality and texture. Taken along with the movement of the performer, we are sensitive to the movement of meaning.<sup>6</sup> That last phrase is crucial: meaning itself is not in question here, for that is obvious; my interest here is in the ways in which the obvious meanings are established, colored, subtly altered. I would take issue only with Klevan's phrase "density of our interpretations" (though this is really semantic quibbling), for I feel my examination of the scene in question is less a matter of interpretation than of comprehension: pinpointing how obvious meaning is constructed. I am also interested here in those features of the scene that lie outside meaning, but that contribute to the overall aesthetic effect. None of these various elements is hidden: they are, so to speak, on the surface of the film. But stopping to consider what is on the surface, we become attentive to just how complex the obvious can be. Getting to the heart of all this will require a careful, thorough examination of the scene.

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Bill, showing urgent concern, bursts into the room carrying the gloves Ann had inadvertently left downstairs. He is framed in a medium shot (shot 1a).

B: Ann?



**Shot 1a**



**Shot 1b**

Bill moves screen right (1b), the camera panning with him, and finds Ann standing before her vanity mirror, relaxed, brushing her hair (1c).

B: Anne, are you all right?



**Shot 1c**



**Shot 1d**

She turns and looks at him.

A: Hello, darling.

B: What's wrong, dear?

A: Nothing, darling.

She puts down the brush, and turns and moves toward him, the camera dollying in slightly as she does. The medium shot now favors Ann, looking over Bill's shoulder. Bill offers her the gloves (1d).

A: Thanks. Nothing.

She kisses him.

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A: You look terribly handsome in the middle of the day before all your chattering patients wear you out.

Cut to reverse angle (shot 2a), over Ann's shoulder, favoring Bill. She removes his pen from his jacket's outer pocket and puts it in the inner pocket—an action Bill does not notice (2b).



**Shot 2a**



**Shot 2b**

B: Miss Hall told me you came in very disturbed. She said you insisted, violently that...

A: Oh, that's so silly, "violently." Darling, I just stopped to ask her if you were busy.

She crosses screen right, the camera panning with her (2c). She drops the gloves on the dresser and slides open the top drawer (2d).



**Shot 2c**



**Shot 2d**

A: I wondered if you wanted to go to the concert tonight. It's Haifitz. You haven't heard any real music for such a long time. I thought it might relax you.

Cut to full shot of Bill (shot 3a). The camera follows him as he moves screen right to join Ann at the dresser. The two are framed in a loose medium shot (3b).

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**Shot 3a**



**Shot 3b**

B: Hall must be losing her grip on reality. I guess she's so used to my poor patients that everything sounds like hysteria to her. I'd like to skip the concert if you don't mind too much.

Ann pulls out a white handkerchief and begins folding it.

B: I want to do some writing tonight.

Ann turns and, folding the hanky, places it in the breast pocket of his jacket, where his pen had been.

A: Of course not, darling. And I'm terribly sorry you had to leave a patient like this, for no reason.

Ann turns to shut the drawer, and Bill removes the pen from his inner pocket and begins working it in his hands (3c).



**Shot 3c**



**Shot 3d**

B: It's no harm done.

Bill turns and moves a few steps left, the camera following (3d).

B: He won't miss me. It's that young veteran I told you about.

Cut to medium shot of Ann (shot 4) standing with her back to the dresser.

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A: The one who won't talk?

B: Mmm Hmm.



**Shot 4**



**Shot 5**

Cut to medium shot of Bill, pacing slowly back and forth as he speaks.

B: After two weeks, he still comes in every day.

Bill sits down on the edge of the chaise lounge (shot 5).

B: Sits down, can't talk.

Cut to medium shot of Ann at the dresser (shot 6a). She moves toward Bill, the camera panning with her, and sits on the arm of the chaise beside him (6b).



**Shot 6a**



**Shot 6b**

A: But why does he come to you, if he won't let you help him?

B: Oh, he will eventually, it's just that it's difficult to begin unloading fears and secrets and guilts.

Bill then places his pen back in the outer pocket of his jacket along with his clean white hanky.

B: Poor fellow, the war was an easier conflict than the one he's in now.

Ann moves and sits in his lap. The camera dollies in closer to frame the pair in a medium close-up (6c).

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A: Oh, Bill—struggling all day with those sick people and their wretched complexes. How you must hate them.

B: I don't hate them, darling. I'm trying to help them. They're my job, they need me.

A: No, your job is using your brain and finishing your book. You said so yourself.

Bill takes her hand in his and kisses it.

A: They interfere.

B: Stop worrying about me as a frustrated genius; I'm not. I'm a busy doctor and a happy husband—an enviable combination. I wouldn't trade it for a dozen books.

He kisses her hand again.

A: Oh, Bill, you're wonderful. You've always been so very wonderful to me. I just wish that...

B: Wish what?

A: That I could help you. If I were only brighter, and you could talk to me about your scientific problems.

B: Just stay as you are, as you've always been—healthy and adorable.

He kisses her cheek, but she looks troubled (6d).



Shot 6c



Shot 6d

\* \* \*

As noted above, much in this scene is relevant to the main characters' situation. Like Bill's client, the young soldier, Ann has "fears and secrets and guilts" that she cannot express to her husband, even though she wants to. She fears that Bill will reject her if she reveals her neurosis: indeed, in spite of the empathy he displays for his clients, he makes clear at the scene's conclusion that he does not desire a wife who is a person of complexity (including some weakness), but rather one who is "healthy" (read: not neurotic) and "adorable."

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Bill's desire—and the resulting pressure Ann feels to satisfy it—relates to the theme of appearance that dominates the film's first half, and in this scene the theme is made evident the moment Bill enters the room: in order to calm herself, in order to make it seem that everything is normal, Ann busies herself by adjusting her appearance—brushing her hair. She then moves to Bill and, after first remarking on how handsome he looks, begins making a minor adjustment in his appearance: she moves his pen from his jacket's outer pocket to the inner pocket, and then replaces it with a white handkerchief. The theme of appearance is clearly linked in this action, via a neat Freudian word-slip (pen/pin), to the problem of Ann's kleptomania. She hides Bill's pen in his inner pocket, just as she hid her stolen pin under the chaise's pillow at the start of the scene.

The importance of this moment—when Ann sees and then hides Bill's pen—is underscored formally by Preminger's reversal of the 180-degree axis. Throughout the first half of the sequence, from the time Ann first enters the bedroom, the camera is positioned roughly where the beds are, looking across at the door and the dresser, with the chaise lounge to the left and the bathroom out of frame on the right. The scene is played out respecting this established axis until the moment Ann looks down and sees the pen in Bill's outer pocket (see shots 1d and 2a). The reverse angle that follows—an over-the-shoulder shot that reveals what Ann sees—moves the camera to the opposite side of this axis, so that we are now looking across at the beds. This reorientation of the axis allows Preminger to exploit the full 360 degrees of the set, eliminating the often deadening effect that the camera position is but the “fourth wall” of a theater—but he cannily saves the reversal for this important dramatic moment.

Bill removes the hidden pen from his inner pocket only when the issue of his mute patient is brought up, and his absent-minded fiddling with it signifies that he is deep in thought (and this thoughtfulness is in turn linked to his plan to spend the evening working on the writing of his book). His replacement of the pen once again into his outer jacket pocket near the scene's conclusion signifies two things. First, Bill does not trouble unduly with appearances—at least not his own—because he has an intellectual depth that would consider such preoccupations to be shallow. (Unless, of course, it's the appearance of his wife, whose primary function, it would seem, is to look good alongside her husband.) Second, the action suggests that the problems represented by the pen/pin cannot stay hidden for long.

Beyond this scene, we can note that the business here with the pen is representative of the way in which, throughout the film's first half, business with props is linked to the theme of appearance, which is in turn linked to Ann's secret kleptomania. In virtually every scene in the first half, the actors busy themselves with some kind of accessory related to appearance: hats, gloves, scarves and handkerchiefs, powder compacts, lipstick, combs and brushes, purses, cigarette holders, and so on. It should be remembered, of course, that this film is explicitly about psychoanalysis, and that these accessories are typical of the dream/memory objects that are routinely the subject of psychoanalytic interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, in spite of their ubiquity, the accessories in the film are almost never acknowledged with a word from the characters. Nevertheless, they circulate through the scenes right there on the surface, as clear but

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unacknowledged signifiers of Ann's illicit relationship to the world of things—a relationship that manifests itself in her kleptomania.

But at the film's mid-point, these objects disappear. Soon after the shoplifting incident, Ann is approached by Korvo, who secures her trust to the point that she allows him to hypnotize her in an effort to be cured of her kleptomania. Instead, Korvo instructs the hypnotized Ann to steal the recordings of Bill's sessions with a patient, Teresa Randolph, a disgruntled former client of Korvo, and take them to Randolph's home. Ann arrives at the house to find Teresa dead, strangled with a monogrammed scarf of Ann's that Korvo had surreptitiously stolen from her earlier. Soon after, the police arrive and arrest Ann for the murder. When Bill meets with Ann at the police station, she naturally insists on her innocence—but more importantly, her kleptomania is revealed. At this point, the accessories that have circulated in the film's first half disappear; for once Ann's neurosis has been revealed, the objects that stand as its secret signifiers are no longer necessary.

Something else also happens at this point in the film: once Ann's secret is out and the objects disappear, the movie isn't very good any more. There are perhaps many reasons one could point to that could account for the weakness of the film's second half. (The fact that Gene Tierney isn't in it nearly as much as she is in the first half, and that Richard Conte is in it a lot more, could be one very good reason.) Nevertheless, it is my sense that, beyond the extent to which these objects clearly signify something about the main character, and thus perform an important function in the enrichment of the plot, they perform another important function—one related not just to meaning, but related still very much to the art of cinema.

In those scenes in the first half of *Whirlpool* that employ this business with objects and accessories, a second level of action is created, one that is interwoven with the primary narrative action. We can think of the relationship between these two levels as being somewhat (if not exactly) like the distinction Bazin once made between “real action” and “pretext action”—offering as he did the famous kitchen scene in Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* as exemplifying this dynamic. In that scene, Bazin wrote,

The real action is the suppressed anxiety of Aunt Fanny, secretly in love with Eugene Morgan, as she tries with feigned indifference to find out if George and his mother traveled with Eugene. The pretext action—George's childish gluttony—which floods the entire screen, submerging Aunt Fanny's shy but distressed vibrations, is deliberately insignificant.<sup>8</sup>

There are no scenes in *Whirlpool* in which the business with objects functions as the real action, as opposed to the pretext action of the dialogue, in quite the way Bazin describes here, but the bedroom scene comes closest—for it is in this scene only that the expressive function of the business with accessories is clearly communicated. Objects appear routinely at a secondary level in other scenes, but it is the bedroom scene that makes clear their significance.

Another way that this analogy with Bazin's insight is relevant comes when we consider Preminger's style. As Bazin explained,

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Treated in the classic manner, this scene [from *Ambersons*] would have been cut into a number of separate shots, in order to enable us to distinguish clearly between the real and apparent action. The few words that reveal Fanny's feelings would have been underlined by a close-up... In short, the dramatic continuity would have been the exact opposite of the weighty objectivity Welles imposes in order to bring us with maximum effect to Fanny's final breakdown...<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Preminger treats the *Whirlpool* scene more conventionally. Whereas Welles's scene is a single take lasting over four minutes, Preminger's employs six shots, including several standard reverse angle shots, in a scene lasting just over two minutes. Nevertheless, neither the cutting of the scene nor the framing of the action emphasize the significance of the pen and the handkerchief. That is, whereas another director might have underscored the importance of these objects with close-ups, Preminger refuses, opting instead for medium shots when the objects are being handled. As a result, these accessories do not merely signify: they appear here as "real," concrete, seemingly insignificant objects that nevertheless perform another important function.

In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell explains, "Early in its history the cinema discovered the possibility of calling attention to persons and parts of persons and objects; but it is equally a possibility of the medium not to call attention to them but, rather, to let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight."<sup>10</sup> In *Whirlpool*, the deployment of these accessories at the secondary level, through Preminger's reserved style, allows them to possess their own material weight, not just the weight of their significance. With this point, we return to Bazin. In "An Aesthetic of Reality," Bazin argued that in the great neo-realist film, the basic visual component "is not the 'shot', an abstract view of reality which is being analyzed, but the 'fact.' A fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity."<sup>11</sup> It was this level of ambiguity that Bazin wanted to see reanimated in objects alongside any function they possessed in the narrative. But reanimating this ambiguity means bringing forth its physical, textural qualities. Describing a hypothetical scene in which the opening of a door is of dramatic significance, Bazin suggests that, for the director of "shots," the door knob is "less a fact than a sign brought into arbitrary relief by the camera, and no more independent semantically than a preposition in a sentence." For such a director, "the color of the enamel, the dirt marks at the level of the hand, the shine of the metal, the worn-away look are just so many useless facts, concrete parasites of an abstraction." For the director of "facts," however, these concrete characteristics are as conspicuous as the doorknob's dramatic significance.<sup>12</sup> In films such as these—those of the neo-realists or, I would suggest, the first half of *Whirlpool*—the status of things-as-facts threatens continually to supersede their status as things-as-signs.

The natural weight of these objects—in their combination with the other elements—brings to the *Whirlpool*'s first half what we might describe as a quality of *texture*: a feature that is most certainly not hidden, but right there on the surface, to be felt. Lesley Stern has explored this quality of cinema, reflecting on the mysterious "mutability of

things in cinema,” the way in which an object on film “partakes of both a fictional and a documentary identity, it is real and imaginary, a thing and a commodity, an object incarnated as a sign, and an unremarkable quotidian thing.”<sup>13</sup> But if it is clear how objects acquire the value of meaning, it is less clear how they acquire what we might call the value of presence. “How do things grab our attention?” she asks. “Is it a question of how they themselves are grabbed—by the camera, but in such a way that cinematic mediation inaugurates a circuit of touch and affect that is primordially human?”<sup>14</sup> The absence of accessories in the *Whirlpool’s* second half—the absence, that is, of scenes that possess this additional level of action—means that the film’s second half lacks the quality of texture that its first half displays so richly. It’s not just that the elimination of these accessories means a level of dramatic significance has been eliminated, but that the crucial element of texture has been lost as well. The surface is less complex, the obvious less rich. The mysterious quality of the texture of things has been sacrificed for pure signification.

These two levels that I have been discussing create different kinds of challenges for the film analyst. The primary level—of actions, and their representation in the frame and through editing—is so obvious that we can easily see past it at the same time that we see it. To appreciate its complexity, we must stop ourselves and articulate in detail that which we have so effortlessly understood. The second level—of texture—is equally obvious, but in spite of the fact that it is so clearly felt by the viewer, describing it (and locating its points of origin) can be a remarkably challenging task. William Chace’s feelings about teaching Hemingway vs. teaching Joyce suggest that he thinks that because readers don’t need help understanding a text, there’s nothing that needs to be said about it. In fact, it is the transparent, obvious text that can most benefit from this kind of careful attention. Hovering over all such critical endeavors is Christian Metz’s brilliantly obvious insight: “Movies are difficult to explain because they are easy to understand.”<sup>15</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> William Routt, “L’Evidence,” *Continuum* 5, no. 2 (1990), <http://kali.murdoch.edu.au/~continuum> (access date: 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, how the claim of auteur status for Preminger has provoked the likes of Pauline Kael (“Circles and Squares,” *Film Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 3, 12-26), Dwight MacDonald (*On Movies*, Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 152-154), and John Simon (in various negative reviews).

<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes so obvious a subtextual theme that it can be mistaken for fact. John Orr—in an otherwise fine essay on Preminger—writes that “incest between a murder victim and his adult daughter is a key trial revelation in *Anatomy of a Murder*.” Not so.

We are led to believe that Mary Pilant was the secret lover of the murdered Barney Quill, but the revelation that she was his daughter offers the true explanation for the closeness between the two. John Orr, "Otto Preminger and the End of Classical Cinema," *Senses of Cinema* issue #40 (July-Sept 2006), 4. <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/06/40/otto-preminger.html>

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, 105-106.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Cavell, "Stanley Cavell in conversation with Andrew Klevan," in *Film as Philosophy*, ed. Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (London: Palgrave, 2005), 180-181.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance* (New York: Wallflower, 2005), 11.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be remembered that this film was co-scripted by Ben Hecht, who also co-scripted Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, another film about psychoanalysis, and who was an enthusiastic proponent of the practice.

<sup>8</sup> André Bazin, *Orson Welles*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 24.

<sup>11</sup> André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality," *What Is Cinema? Volume II*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Lesley Stern, "Paths That Wind through the Thicket of Things," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn 2001), 319-320.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 321.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in James Monaco, *How to Read a Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 130.