

The Third Meaning

Research notes on some Eisenstein stills

For Nordine Sail, director of Cinema 3

Here is an image from *Ivan the Terrible* (I): two courtiers, two adjutants, two supernumeraries (it matters little if I am unable to remember the details of the story exactly) are raining down gold over the young czar's head. I think it possible to distinguish three levels of meaning in this scene:

1) An informational level, which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations, their insertion in an anecdote with which I am (even if vaguely) familiar. This level is that of communication. Were it necessary to find a mode of analysis for it, I should turn to the first semiotics (that of the 'message'); this level, this semiotics, however, will be of no further concern here.

2) A symbolic level, which is the downpour of gold and which is itself stratified. There is the referential symbolism: the imperial ritual of baptism by gold. Then there is the diegetic symbolism: the theme of gold, of wealth, in *Ivan the Terrible* (supposing such a theme to exist), which makes a significant intervention in this scene. Then again there is the Eisensteinian symbolism - if by chance a critic should decide to demonstrate that the gold or the raining down or the curtain or the disfiguration can be seen as held in a network of displacements and substitutions peculiar to S. M. Eisenstein. Finally, there is an historical symbolism, if, in a manner even more widely embracing than the previous ones, it can be shown that the gold brings in a (theatrical) playing, a scenography of exchange, locatable both psycho-analytically and economically, that is to say semiologically. Taken in its entirety, this second level is that of *signification*.

Its mode of analysis would be a semiotics more highly developed than the first, a second or neo-semiotics, open no longer to the science of the message but to the sciences of the symbol (psychoanalysis, economy, dramaturgy).

3) Is that all? No, for I am still held by the image. I read, I receive (and probably even first and foremost) a third meaning¹ - evident, erratic, obstinate. I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this - consequently incomplete - sign is composed: a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up, thick and insistent for the one, smooth and distinguished for the other; the former's 'stupid' nose, the latter's finely traced eyebrows, his lank blondness, his faded, pale complexion, the affected flatness of his hairstyle suggestive of a wig, the touching-up with chalky foundation talc, with face powder. I am not sure if the reading of this third meaning is justified - if it can be generalized - but already it seems to me that its signifier (the traits to which I have tried to give words, if not to describe) possesses a theoretical individuality. On the one hand, it cannot be conflated with the simple *existence* of the scene, it exceeds the copy of the referential motif, it compels an interrogative reading (interrogation bears precisely on the signifier not on the signified, on reading not on intellection: it is a 'poetical' grasp); on the other, neither can it be conflated with the dramatic meaning of the episode: to say that these traits refer to a significant 'attitude' of the courtiers, this one detached and bored, that one diligent (*'They are simply doing their job as courtiers'*),

1. In the classical paradigm of the five senses, the third sense is hearing (first in importance in the Middle Ages). This is a happy coincidence, since what is here in question is indeed *listening*: firstly, because the remarks by Eisenstein to which reference will be made are taken from a consideration of the coming of sound in film; second, because listening (no reference to the *phone* alone) bears within it that metaphor best suited to the 'textual': orchestration (SME's own word), counterpoint, stereophony.

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does not leave me fully satisfied; something in the two faces exceeds psychology, anecdote, function, exceeds meaning without, however, coming down to the obstinacy in presence shown by any human body. By contrast with the first two levels, communication and signification, this third level - even if the reading of it is still hazardous - is that of *signifiance*, a word which has the advantage of referring to the field of the signifier (and not of signification) and of linking up with, via the path opened by Julia Kristeva who proposed the term, a semiotics of the text.

My concern here lies not with communication but with signification and *signifiance*. I must therefore name as economically as possible the second and third meanings. The symbolic meaning (the shower of gold, the power of wealth, the imperial rite) forces itself upon me by a double determination: it is intentional (it is what the author wanted to say) and it is taken from a kind of common, general lexicon of symbols; it is a meaning which seeks me out, me, the recipient of the message, the subject of the reading, a meaning which starts with SME and which goes on *ahead of me*; evident certainly (so too is the other), but *closed* in its evidence, held in a complete system of destination. I propose to call this complete sign *the obvious meaning*. *Obvius* means *which comes ahead* and this is exactly the case with this meaning, which comes to seek me out. In theology, we are told, the obvious meaning is that 'which presents itself quite naturally to the mind' and this again is the case here: the symbolics of the raining down of gold appears to me as for ever having been endowed with a 'natural' clarity. As for the other meaning, the third, the one 'too many', the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive, I propose to call it *the obtuse meaning*. The word springs readily to mind and, miracle, when its etymology is unfolded, it already provides us with a theory of the

supplementary meaning. *Obtusus* means *that which is blunted, rounded inform*. Are not the traits which I indicated (the make-up, the whiteness, the wig, etc.) just like the blunting of a meaning too clear, too violent? Do they not give the obvious signified a kind of difficultly prehensible roundness, cause my reading to slip? An obtuse angle is greater than a right angle: *an obtuse angle of 100°*, says the dictionary; the third meaning also seems to me greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative, it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely. I even accept for the obtuse meaning the word's pejorative connotation: the obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason; it belongs to the family of pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure. Indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the false, the pastiche), it is on the side of the carnival. *Obtuse* is thus very suitable.

The obvious meaning

A few words with regard to the obvious meaning, even though it is not the object of this study. Here are two images in which it can be seen in its pure state. The four figures in II 'symbolize' three ages of life and the unanimity of mourning (Vakulinchuk's funeral). The clenched fist in IV, given in full 'detail', signifies indignation, anger mastered and channelled, the determination of the struggle; metonymically joined to the whole Potemkin story, it 'symbolizes' the working class in all its resolute strength, for, by a miracle of semantic intelligence, this fist which is *seen wrong way up*, kept by its owner in a sort of clandestinity (it is the hand which *first of all* hangs down naturally along the trouser

leg and which *then* closes, hardens, *thinks* at once its future struggle, its patience and its prudence), cannot be read as the fist of some hoodlum, of some fascist: it is *immediately* a proletarian fist. Which shows that Eisenstein's 'art' is not polysemous: it chooses the meaning, imposes it, hammers it home (if the signification is overrun by the obtuse meaning, this is not to say that it is thereby denied or blurred): the Eisensteinian meaning devastates ambiguity. How? By the addition of an aesthetic value, emphasis. Eisenstein's 'decorativism' has an economic function: it proffers the truth. Look at III: in extremely classic fashion, grief comes from the bowed heads, the expressions of suffering, the hand over the mouth stifling a sob, but when once all this has been said, very adequately, a decorative trait says it again: the superimposition of the two hands aesthetically arranged in a delicate, maternal, floral ascension towards the face bowing down. Within the general detail (the two women), another detail is mirroringly inscribed; derived from a pictorial order as a quotation of the gestures to be found in icons and *pietd*, it does not distract but accentuates the meaning. This accentuation (characteristic of all realist art) has some connection with the 'truth' of *Potemkin*. Baudelaire spoke of '*the emphatic truth of gesture in the important moments of life*'; here it is the truth of the 'important proletarian moment' which requires emphasis. The Eisensteinian aesthetic does not constitute an independent level: it is part of the obvious meaning, and the obvious meaning is always, in Eisenstein, the revolution.

The obtuse meaning

I first had the conviction of the obtuse meaning with image V. A question forced itself upon me: what is it in this tearful old woman that poses for me the question of the signifier? I quickly convinced myself that, although perfect, it was

neither the facial expression nor the gestural figuration of grief (the closed eyelids, the taut mouth, the hand clasped on the breast): all that belongs to the full signification, to the obvious meaning of the image, to Eisensteinian realism and decorativism. I felt that the penetrating trait - disturbing like a guest who obstinately sits on saying nothing when one has no use for him - must be situated somewhere in the region of the forehead: the coif, the headscarf holding in the hair, had something to do with it. In image VI, however, the obtuse meaning vanishes, leaving only a message of grief. It was then I understood that the scandal, supplement or drift imposed on this classic representation of grief came very precisely from a tenuous relationship: that of the low headscarf, the closed eyes and the convex mouth; or rather, to use the distinction made by SME himself between 'the shadows of the cathedral' and 'the enshadowed cathedral', from a relation between the 'lowness' of the line of the headscarf, pulled down abnormally close to the eyebrows as in those disguises intended to create a facetious, simpleton look, the upward circumflex of the faded eyebrows, faint and old, the excessive curve of the eyelids, lowered but brought together as though squinting, and the bar of the half-opened mouth, corresponding to the bar of the headscarf and to that of the eyebrows, metaphorically speaking 'like a fish out of water'. All these traits (the funny headdress, the old woman, the squinting eyelids, the fish) have as their vague reference a somewhat low language, the language of a rather pitiful disguise. In connection with the noble grief of the obvious meaning, they form a dialogism so tenuous that there is no guarantee of its intentionality. The characteristic of this third meaning is indeed - at least in SME - to blur the limit separating expression from disguise, but also to allow that oscillation succinct demonstration - an elliptic emphasis, if one can put it like that, a complex and extremely artful disposition (for it involves a temporality

of signification), perfectly described by Eisenstein himself when he jubilantly quotes the golden rule of the old K. S. Gillette: *'just short of the cutting edge'*.

The obtuse meaning, then, has something to do with disguise. Look at Ivan's beard raised to obtuse meaning, in my opinion, in image VII; it declares its artifice but without in so doing abandoning the 'good faith' of its referent (the historical figure of the czar): an actor disguised twice over (once as actor in the anecdote, once as actor in the dramaturgy) without one disguise destroying the other; a multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary - a (two-term) dramatic dialectic that Brecht would have liked. The Eisensteinian 'artifice' is at once falsification of itself - pastiche - and derisory fetish, since it shows its fissure and its suture: what can be seen in image VII is the join and thus the initial disjoin of the beard perpendicular to the chin. That the top of a head (the most 'obtuse' part of the human person), that a single bun of hair (in image VIII) can be the *expression* of grief, that is what is derisory - for the expression, not for the grief. Hence no parody, no trace of burlesque; there is no aping of grief (the obvious meaning must remain revolutionary, the general mourning which accompanies Vakulinchuk's death has a historical meaning), and yet, 'embodied' in the bun, it has a cut-off, a refusal of contamination; the populism of the woollen shawl (obvious meaning) stops at the bun; here begins the fetish - the hair - and a kind of *non-negating derision* of the expression. The whole of the obtuse meaning (its disruptive force) is staked on the excessive mass of the hair. Look at another bun (that of the woman in image IX): it contradicts the tiny raised fist, atrophies it without the reduction having the slightest symbolic (intellectual) value; prolonged by small curls, pulling the face in towards an ovine model, it gives the woman

something *touching* (in the way that a certain generous foolishness can be) or *sensitive* - these antiquated words, mystified words if ever there were, with little that is revolutionary or political about them, must nevertheless be assumed. I believe that the obtuse meaning carries a certain *emotion*. Caught up in the disguise, such emotion is never sticky, it is an emotion which simply *designates* what one loves, what one wants to defend: an emotion-value, an evaluation. Everyone will agree, I think, that SME's proletarian ethnography fragmented the length of Vakulinchuk's funeral, is constantly informed by something loving (using the word regardless of any specification as to age or sex). Maternal, cordial, virile, 'sympathetic' without any recourse to stereotypes, the Eisensteinian people is essentially *lovable*. We savour, we love the two round-capped heads in image X, we enter into complicity, into an understanding with them. Doubtless beauty can work as an obtuse meaning; this is the case in image XI, where the extremely dense obvious meaning (Ivan's attitude, young Vladimir's half-wit foolishness) is anchored and/or set adrift by Basmanov's beauty. But the eroticism included in the obtuse meaning (or rather: the eroticism which this meaning picks up) is no respecter of the aesthetic: Euphrosyne is ugly, 'obtuse' (images XII and XIII), like the monk (image XIV), but this obtuseness exceeds the anecdote, becomes a blunting of meaning, its drifting. There is in the obtuse meaning an eroticism which includes the contrary of the beautiful, as also what falls outside such contrariety, its limit - inversion, unease, and perhaps sadism. Look at the flabby innocence of the 'Children in the Fiery Furnace' (image XV), the schoolboyish ridicule of their mufflers dutifully tucked up to the chin, the curds-and-whey skin (of their eyes, of their mouths set in the skin) which Fellini seems to have remembered in the hermaphrodite of his *Satiricon* - the very same mentioned by Georges Bataille, notably

in that text in *Documents* which situates for me one of the possible regions of obtuse meaning, "The big toe".¹

Let us continue (if these examples will suffice to lead on to one or two more theoretical remarks). The obtuse meaning is not in the language-system (even that of symbols). Take away the obtuse meaning and communication and signification still remain, still circulate, still come through: without it, I can still state and read. No more, however, is it to be located in language use. It may be that there is a certain constant in Eisensteinian obtuse meaning, but in that case it is already a thematic language, an idiolect, this idiolect being provisional (simply decided by a critic writing a book on SME). Obtuse meanings are to be found not everywhere (the signifier is rare, a future figure) but *somewhere*: in other *authors* of films (perhaps), in a certain manner of reading 'life' and so 'reality' itself (the word is simply used here in opposition to the deliberately fictive). In image XVI from *Ordinary Fascism* (by Mikhail Romm), a documentary image, I can easily read an obvious meaning, that of fascism (aesthetics and symbolics of power, the theatrical hunt), but I can also read an obtuse meaning: the (again) disguised, blond silliness of the young quiver-bearer, the flabbiness of his hands and mouth (I cannot manage to describe, only to designate a location), Goering's thick nails, his trashy ring (this already on the brink of obvious meaning, like the treacly platitude of the imbecile smile of the bespectacled man in the background - visibly an 'arse-licker'). In other words, the obtuse meaning is not situated structurally, a semantologist would not agree as to its objective existence (but then what is an objective reading?); and if to me it is clear (to me), that is *still* perhaps (for the moment) by the same 'aberration' which compelled the lone and unhappy Saussure to hear in ancient poetry the

1. [Georges Bataille, 'Le gros orteil', *Documents*, Paris 1968, pp. 75-82.]

enigmatic voice of anagram, unoriginated and obsessive. Same uncertainty when it is a matter of *describing* the obtuse meaning (of giving an idea of where it is going, where it goes away). The obtuse meaning is a signifier without a signified, hence the difficulty in naming it. My reading remains suspended between the image and its description, between definition and approximation. If the obtuse meaning cannot be described, that is because, in contrast to the obvious meaning, it does not copy anything - how do you describe something that does not represent anything? The pictorial 'rendering' of words is here impossible, with the consequence that if, in front of these images, we remain, you and I, at the level of articulated language - at the level, that is, of my own text - the obtuse meaning will not succeed in existing, in entering the critic's metalanguage. Which means that the obtuse meaning is outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution. For if you look at the images I am discussing, you can see this meaning, we can agree on it 'over the shoulder' or 'on the back' of articulated language. Thanks to the image (fixed, it is true; a factor which will be taken up later) or much rather thanks to what, in the image, is purely image (which is in fact very little), we do without language yet never cease to understand one another.

In short, what the obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism). A number of reasons can be given for this. First and foremost, obtuse meaning is discontinuous, indifferent to the story and to the obvious meaning (as signification of the story). This dissociation has a de-naturing or at least a distancing effect with regard to the referent (to 'reality' as nature, the realist instance). Eisenstein would probably have acknowledged this incongruity, this im-pertinence of the signifier, Eisenstein who tells us concerning sound and colour: 'Art begins the moment the creaking of a boot on the sound-track

occurs against a different visual shot and thus gives rise to corresponding associations. It is the same with colour: colour begins where it no longer corresponds to natural colouration . . .' Then, the signifier (the third meaning) is not filled out, it keeps a permanent state of *depletion* (a word from linguistics which designates empty, all-purpose verbs, as for example the French *verbfaire*). We could also say on the contrary - and it would be just as correct - that this same signifier is not empty (cannot empty itself), that it maintains a state of perpetual erethism, desire not finding issue in that spasm of the signified which normally brings the subject voluptuously back into the peace of nominations. Finally, the obtuse meaning can be seen as an *accent*, the very form of an emergence, of a fold (a crease even) marking the heavy layer of informations and significations. If it could be described (a contradiction in terms), it would have exactly the nature of the Japanese *haiku* - anaphoric gesture without significant content, a sort of gash rased of meaning (of desire for meaning). Thus in image V:

Mouth drawn, eyes shut squinting,
 Headscarf low over forehead,
 She weeps.

This accent - the simultaneously emphatic and elliptic character of which has already been mentioned - is not directed towards meaning (as in hysteria), does not theatricalize (Eisensteinian decorativism belongs to another level), does not even indicate an *elsewhere* of meaning (another content, added to the obvious meaning); it outplays meaning - subverts not the content but the whole practice of meaning. A new - rare - practice affirmed against a majority practice (that of signification), obtuse meaning appears necessarily as a luxury, an expenditure with no exchange. This luxury does not *yet* belong to today's politics but

nevertheless *already* to tomorrow's.

Something has still to be said concerning the syntagmatic responsibility of the third meaning: what is its place in the movement of the anecdote, in the logico-temporal system without which, so it seems, it is impossible to communicate a narrative to the 'mass' of readers and spectators? It is clear that the obtuse meaning is the epitome of a counter-narrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative) - an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet 'true'. Imagine 'following' not Euphrosyne's schemings, nor even the character (as diegetic entity or symbolic figure), nor even, again, the face of the Wicked Mother, but merely, in this face, this attitude, this black veil, the heavy, ugly flatness - you will then have a different time-scale, neither diegetic nor oneiric, a different film. A theme with neither variations nor development (the obvious meaning is fully thematic: there is a theme of the Funeral), the obtuse meaning can only come and go, appearing-disappearing. The play of presence/absence undermines the character, making of it a simple nub of facets; a disjunction expressed in another connection by SME himself: *'What is characteristic is that the different positions of one and the same czar . . . are given without link between one position and the next.'*

Precisely. The *indifference* or freedom of position of the supplementary signifier in relation to the narrative allows us to situate with some exactitude the historical, political, theoretical task accomplished by Eisenstein. In his work, the story (the diegetic, anecdotal representation) is not destroyed - quite the contrary: what finer story than that of *Ivan* or *Potemkin*? This importance given to the narrative is necessary in order *to be understood* in a society which, unable to resolve the contradictions of history without a

long political transaction, draws support (provisionally?) from mythical (narrative) solutions. The *contemporary* problem is not to destroy the narrative but to subvert it; today's task is to dissociate subversion from destruction. It seems to me that SME operates such a distinction: the presence of an obtuse, supplementary, third meaning - if only in a few images, but then as an imperishable signature, as a seal endorsing the whole of the work (and the whole of his work) - radically recasts the theoretical status of the anecdote: the story (the diegesis) is no longer just a strong system (the millennial system of narrative) but also and contradictorily a simple space, a field of permanences and permutations. It becomes that configuration, that stage, whose false limits multiply the signifieds permutational play, that vast trace which, by difference, compels what SME himself calls a *vertical* reading, that *false* order which permits the turning of the pure series, the aleatory combination (chance is crude, a signifier on the cheap) and the attainment of a structuration *which slips away from the inside*. It can thus be said that with SME we have to reverse the cliché" according to which the more gratuitous a meaning, the more it will appear as a mere parasite of the story being narrated; on the contrary, it is this story which here finds itself in some sort parametric to the signifier for which it is now merely the field of displacement, the constitutive negativity, or, again, the fellow-traveller.

In other words, the third meaning structures the film *differently* without - at least in SME - subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone, that the 'filmic' finally emerges. The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end. Everything that can be *said* about *Ivan* or *Potemkin* can be said of a written text (entitled *Ivan the Terrible* or

Battleship Potemkin) except this, the obtuse meaning; I can gloss everything in Euphrosyne, except the obtuse quality of her face. The filmic, then, lies precisely here, in that region where articulated language is no longer more than approximative and where another language begins (whose science, therefore, cannot be linguistics, soon discarded like a booster rocket). The third meaning - theoretically locatable but not describable - can now be seen as the *passage* from language to *signifiante* and the founding act of the filmic itself. Forced to develop in a civilization of the signified, it is not surprising that (despite the incalculable number of films in the world) the filmic should still be rare (a few flashes in SME, perhaps elsewhere?), so much so that it could be said that as yet the film does not exist (any more than does the text); there is only 'cinema', language, narrative, poetry, sometimes extremely 'modern', 'translated' into 'images' said to be 'animated'. Nor is it surprising that the filmic can only be located after having - analytically - gone across the 'essential', the 'depth' and the 'complexity' of the cinematic work; all those riches which are merely those of articulated language, with which we constitute the Work and believe we exhaust it. The filmic is not the same as the film, is as far removed from the film as the novelistic is from the novel (I can write in the novelistic without ever writing novels).

The still

Which is why to a certain extent (the extent of our theoretical rumblings) the filmic, very paradoxically, cannot be grasped in the film 'in situation', 'in movement', 'in its natural state', but only in that major artefact, the still. For a long time, I have been intrigued by the phenomenon of being interested and even fascinated by photos from a film (outside a cinema, in the pages of *Cahiers du cinema*) and

of then losing everything of those photos (not just the captivation but the memory of the image) when once inside the viewing room - a change which can even result in a complete reversal of values. I at first ascribed this taste for stills to my lack of cinematic culture, to my resistance to film; I thought of myself as like those children who prefer the pictures to the text, or like those clients who, unable to attain the adult possession of objects (because too expensive), are content to derive pleasure from looking at a choice of samples or a department store catalogue. Such an explanation does no more than reproduce the common opinion with regard to stills which sees them as a remote sub-product of the film, a sample, a means of drawing in custom, a pornographic extract, and, technically, a reduction of the work by the immobilization of what is taken to be the sacred essence of cinema - the movement of the images.

If, however, the specific filmic (the filmic of the future) lies not in movement, but in an inarticulable third meaning that neither the simple photograph nor figurative painting can assume since they lack the diegetic horizon, the possibility of configuration mentioned earlier,¹ then the 'movement' regarded as the essence of film is not animation, flux,

I. There are other 'arts' which combine still (or at least drawing) and story, diegesis - namely the photo-novel and the comic-strip. I am convinced that these 'arts', born in the lower depths of high culture, possess theoretical qualifications and present a new signifier (related to the obtuse meaning). This is acknowledged as regards the comic-strip but I myself experience this slight trauma of *signifiance* faced with certain photo-novels: *'their stupidity touches me'* (which could be a certain definition of obtuse meaning). There may thus be a future - or a very ancient past - truth in these derisory, vulgar, foolish, dialogical forms of consumer subculture. And there is an autonomous 'art' (a 'text'), that of the *pictogram* ('anecdotalized' images, obtuse meanings placed in a diegetic space); this art taking across historically and culturally heteroclitic productions: ethnographic pictograms, stained glass windows, Carpaccio's *Legend of Saint Ursula*, *images d'Epinal*, photo-novels, comic-strips. The innovation represented by the still (in comparison with these other pictograms) would be that the filmic (which it constitutes) is *doubled* by another text, the film.

mobility, 'life', copy, but simply the framework of a permutational unfolding and a theory of the still becomes necessary, a theory whose possible points of departure must be given briefly here in conclusion.

The still offers us the *inside* of the fragment. In this connection we would need to take up - displacing them - Eisenstein's own formulations when envisaging the new possibilities of audio-visual montage: '. . . the basic centre of gravity . . . is transferred to *inside* the fragment, into the elements included in the image itself. *And the centre of gravity is no longer the element "between shots" - the shock - but the element "inside the shot" - the accentuation within the fragment. . .*' Of course, there is no audio-visual montage in the still, but SME's formula is general insofar as it establishes a right to the syntagmatic disjunction of images and calls for a *vertical* reading of the articulation. Moreover, the still is not a sample (an idea that supposes a sort of homogeneous, statistical nature of the film elements) but a quotation (we know how much importance presently accrues to this concept in the theory of the text): at once parodic and disseminatory. It is not a specimen chemically extracted from the substance of the film, but rather the trace of a superior *distribution* of traits of which the film as experienced in its animated flow would give no more than one text among others. The still, then, is the fragment of a second text *whose existence never exceeds the fragment*; film and still find themselves in a palimpsest relationship without it being possible to say that one is *on top of* the other or that one is *extracted* from the other. Finally, the still throws off the constraint of filmic time; which constraint is extremely powerful, continuing to form an obstacle to what might be called the adult birth of film (born technically, occasionally even aesthetically, film has still to be born theoretically). For written texts, unless they are very conventional, totally committed to logico-temporal order,

reading time is free; for film, this is not so, since the image cannot go faster or slower without losing its perceptual figure. The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time (which is only an operational time); it teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific filmic and which is the 'indescribable' meaning. Perhaps it was the reading of *this other text* (here in stills) that SME called for when he said that a film is not simply to be seen and heard but to be scrutinized and listened to attentively. This seeing and this hearing are obviously not the postulation of some simple need to apply the mind (that would be banal, a pious wish) but rather a veritable mutation of reading and its object, text or film - which is a crucial problem of our time.