Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo*

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The title of this essay[1] came by way of, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', an essay by Roland Barthes to which I shall refer later. Recent theory has been very interested in the facts of which my extemporaneous substitution of one phrase for another is an instance: meaning is only ever produced in difference, and the final closure of meaning is only ever deferred - the combination of observations which Derrida enshrined in his neologism, *différance*, but to which C. S. Peirce had already referred in his notion of 'unlimited semiosis'. Meaning is never simply 'there' for our consumption, it is only ever *produced* in a process of substitution of one term for another in a potentially limitless series. In the *social* world, however, meaning must come to rest somewhere; what is it that sets limits on the meanings of images?

The meaning of the photograph in my passport derives ultimately from the authority of the state, which may in the last resort assert its truths by physical force. However, most images we encounter in daily life derive their meanings from more complexly mediated interdependent systems: concrete institutions, discursive formations, scripto-visual codes, and so on. All of these determinations have been, and are being, discussed in theories of representations – they demand a sociology,

a social history, a political economy and a semiotics of the image, and they are concerned with what 'common sense' tells us about an image. However, it has been objected that such theories are unable to account for those meanings which are 'subjective' – irreducibly individual, inviolably private; moreover, it has been maintained that, at least in respect of art, it is these meanings which are the most important.

It is partly in response to this lacuna of theory that, in recent years, a psychoanalytically-informed semiotics has been evolved. There has been considerable criticism of this development of theory, not least from a 'left' which disparages psychoanalysis as being concerned with the 'merely subjective'; it seems to me that a 'progressive' politics indifferent to subjective experience, in *all* of its aspects, is itself a mere parody of the political impulse, but apart from this the charge against psycho-analysis is simply *false*: psycho-analytic theory does not construct a realm of the 'subjective' *apart* from social life, it is a theory of the *internalisation* of the social *as* 'subjective' – and, as such, has profound implications for any theory of ideology.[2] What follows is intended as a sketch account of one aspect of the workings of a putative, 'trans-individual unconscious',[3] characteristically manifested in the form of fleetingly inconsequential subjective affects, but which nevertheless underpins the meanings of images. My point of departure is from some observations by Barthes, observations he leaves untheorised, but which I suggest should be seen as indicating a necessity for a 'psychopathology of everyday representations'. Most particularly, my discussion concerns a type of relation between 'movie' and still images.

I

At the beginning of his 1970 essay, 'The Third Meaning',[4] Roland Barthes speaks of his being fascinated by film-stills – but while he is watching the film, he says, he forgets the stills. Reading this, I was reminded of a recurrent experience of my own: often, having seen a film, all that remains of it in my memory is an image, or a short sequence of images. The film-still, a material entity; the mnemic-image, a psychic entity; what they have in common is that they are both *fragments* abstracted from a whole, but fragments which have nevertheless achieved a sort of representative autonomy. In his 1973 paper, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein',[5] Barthes again touches on the 'representative fragment', this time in discussing a concept in the work of Diderot – *tableau*.

The concept of the tableau has a history prior to Diderot: humanist scholars of the mid-sixteenth century elaborated a theory of painting which they based on isolated remarks in the writings of classical authors. From Aristotle's *Poetics* they took the doctrine that the highest calling of any art is to depict human action in its most exemplary forms; the human body, they held, was the privileged vehicle for the depiction of such 'histories'.[6] The consequent programme of so-called 'history painting', which dominated painting in the West from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, was elaborated in great detail in the body of humanist art theory now known, by the emblematic slogan '*ut pictura poesis*' – 'as is painting, so is poetry' – a device abstracted from the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, which the Renaissance reversed in emphasis to establish the dependency of the visual image on the written text.[7] As the painter of 'histories' had to show in a single instant that which took time to unfold, then that instant had to have a singularly privileged position within the total action. It was therefore recommended that the moment selected by the painter for visualisation should be the *peripateia* – that instant in the course of an action when all hangs in the balance. Thus, for example, Rubens paints Paris in the act of extending the golden apple towards the group of three godesses who await his judgement, and arrests Paris at that precise moment when alternative futures open before him; in the very next instant however *Venus* will receive the

Fig. 1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, c.1632-1635. © The National Gallery, London.

golden apple, and the fate of Paris, and that of his nation, will be irrevocably sealed – committed to war, with Paris himself to be among the dead.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the ideal of discursive clarity, embodied in human gesture, had become lost or subsumed within the increasingly decorative practices we know as Rococo, the work of Diderot 's contemporary, Boucher, exemplifies this transition from the semantic to the decorative body. Where 'history painting' – painting rooted in a discursive programme – survived, it tended to take the form of allegory of an ever increasing complexity and obscurity. Allegory in the Renaissance had begun with conventional symbols whose range of references was legislated by such 'dictionaries' as Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum liber* of 1531 (the first) and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1593 and 1603 (the definitive),[8] by the eighteenth century, however, symbolism had become increasingly esoteric and/or a matter of purely individual invention, to the point where it was often felt necessary to produce extensive explanatory pamphlets along with the paintings.[9]

It was against the Rococo tendency towards formal decorativeness and semantic obscurity that the concept of the *tableau* emerged; first, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, and later, with more elaboration, in the work of Diderot and some of his contemporaries. The concept of the tableau represented, at least initially, a reaffirmation of the values of *ut pictura poesis*; it represented the ideal of a formally unified, centred, *concentrated*, composition whose meaning would be communicated 'at a glance' – intelligible, in Diderot's words, to, 'a man of simple common-sense'. (We should note that Diderot's recommendations for painting here are practically indistinguishable from his ambitions for the theatre, where his intervention was primarily on behalf of the *mise-en-scène*: 'Gesture', he writes, 'should frequently inscribe itself (*s'écrire*) in the place of discourse'; and he speaks of some scenes in his *Père de Famille* as being, 'more difficult to paint', than others.[10] The concept of peripateia once again became central (although the paintings of Greuze, much approved of by Diderot, seem most often concerned with *post*-peripateian triste). Barthes does not use the term 'peripateia' in 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein'; he nevertheless does speak of this moment, he remarks that it is the moment Lessing calls the 'pregnant moment' (we might add that still-photography inherits this concept under the title of 'decisive moment') and he further remarks that Brecht's theatre and Eisenstein's cinema are composed of series of such 'pregnant moments'. The word Barthes takes from Diderot to name *this* moment is 'hieroglyph'.

Western interest in the hieroglyph goes back at least as far as 31 BC, when Egypt became part of the Roman Empire. In the mid-sixteenth century, part of the humanist project of reconciling the texts and artefacts of antiquity with Christian doctrine involved a theory of the hieroglyph. The theory was derived, via the Neo-Platonists, from the Platonic doctrine of two worlds, and the mode of communication operative within each: in the murky and imperfect world in which we mortals are condemned to live, verbal discourse is the appropriately confused medium through which we are condemned, impossibly, to attempt to communicate; in the luminous and perfect 'upper world' however, all meaning is communicated instantaneously and unambiguously through the medium of *vision*. Thus, the humanist Ficino translates this passage from Plotinus: 'The Egyptian sages...drew pictures and carved one picture for each thing...each picture was a kind of understanding and wisdom and substance given all at once, and not discursive reasoning and deliberation.'[11] The hieroglyph then, by definition, communicates instantaneously and stands *outside* discourse; this certainly, is the way in which Diderot understood the term. For Diderot, the syntactically-ordered linear progression of speech and writing is alien to the actual experience of *thought*: 'Our mind does not move in stages, as does our expression'. Such alienating linguistic structures may, however, be partially overcome as language approaches the condition of poetry, where words succeed in effacing themselves *as* words by giving rise to *images*. It is this state of language that Diderot refers to as 'hieroglyphic'; here: 'discourse is no longer simply a suite of energetic terms which expose thought nobly and forcefully, but a tissue of hieroglyphs gathered one upon the other which paint what is to be represented'.[12] We should note that in Diderot, as in the Barthes of 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', the ideal of a radically *extra*-discursive, 'hieroglyphic', mode of communication tends always to be attracted into the gravitational field of discourse, convention, morality. Nevertheless, in 'The Third Meaning' (an essay which complements, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein') Barthes does speak of a meaning which will not be pinned down by words – in his 1970 paper Barthes calls it the 'obtuse' meaning; ten years later, in *Camera Lucida*, he calls it the *punctum*.

Fragments of certain photographs, Barthes says, move him in a way which is strictly incommunicable, purely personal. Certainly there are photographs which many people, in common, may find moving, but here, he says: 'emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture'. The *punctum*, on the contrary, is unpredictable and private, it is that in the image, says Barthes, which is 'purely image', (which is, he says, 'very little'); the meaning of the *punctum* is

perfectly clear, but yet it cannot be made public. The privileged example of the *punctum* offered by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* occurs in his discussion of a photograph of a New York family by James Van der Zee[13] – 'privileged' for my purposes here because, in a book which is not a text of theory, it nevertheless indicates the path a theorisation of the *punctum* must take. The detail which 'touches' him in this image, he says, is the strapped shoes of one of the women: 'This particular *punctum* arouses great sympathy in me, almost a kind of tenderness'. Barthes makes no further comment until, ten pages later, he 'remembers' the photograph ('I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at'); he now realises it was not the shoes which moved him, it was the necklace the woman wore: 'for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family'. The relative he has now been reminded of is a deceased maiden aunt who had spent most of her adult life looking after her mother: 'I had always been saddened when I thought of her dreary life'; after the aunt died her necklace was, 'shut up in a family box of old jewelry'. What Barthes in effect does in this brief account is to retrace, as it were, 'in reverse', part of the path taken in the original investment of the image-fragment (the strap) by a feeling ('a kind of tenderness'). The termina1 point of the cathexis is the ankle-strap, in 'stepping-stone' fashion the next displacement is from the circle around the neck; from here, the movement is from the neck of the woman in the photograph (material image) to the neck of the aunt (mental image): the aunt whose necklace was 'shut up in a box'; whose body in death was, 'shut up in a box'; whose sexuality in life had remained, 'shut up in a box'. We arrive here at a preliminary account of the sources of the emotion in memories circulating around the themes of death and sexuality, played out within the space of the family, which are the substance of psycho-analysis.

In the example of Barthes's commentary on the Van der Zee photograph we might say that a highly-cathected image-fragment 'takes the place of', 'stands in for', a narrative – it is the *representative* of a narrative. Barthes's expansion of the narrative, the written 'transcription', is itself laconic in the extreme, it is only *vaguely* a narrative: 'her necklace was shut up in a box'; what stands out, as if 'in focus' against an incomplete background of indistinct detail, is 'a situation in an image'. We are here in the presence of *fantasy*. What for the moment I can only call an 'ambivalence in respect of movement' is implicit in psychoanalytic accounts of fantasy, something of which I must now resume.

II

Unlike most other animals, the human infant is born into a state of nurseling dependency in which it is incapable of actively seeking its food; nourishment must be brought to *it*, as when the mother provides the breast. When hunger reasserts itself, therefore, the suckling initially has no recourse but to attempt to resurrect the original experience of satisfaction in hallucinatory form; thus Freud writes: 'The first wishing seems to have been a hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction'. We may see in this scenario the Lacanian schema according to which 'desire' insinuates itself between 'need' and 'demand': the infant's *need* for nourishment is satisfied when the milk is provided; the infant's *demand* that its mother care for it is also met in that same instant; *desire*, however, is directed neither to an object (here the substance, 'milk') nor to a person, but to a *fantasy* – the mnemic traces of the lost satisfaction. It should be noted that the origins of fantasy here are inseparable from the origins of *sexuality*. In the 1905, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', Freud posits a 'libido' present, quantatively, 'in full' from birth but nevertheless having, as it were, no 'address' until it progressively colonises, 'props' against, zones of the body associated with important physiological functions. Thus, in the above example, the act of sucking, initially functionally associated with the ingestion of food, becomes enjoyed as 'sensual sucking' – an activity in its own, erotic, right. In this earliest emergence in which it is supported by a life-preserving function, the functional and the libidinal are but two faces of the same experiential coin: on the one side the ingestion of milk, on the other the accompanying excitations. It is at this stage that the infant must construct out of the primal flux of its earliest perceptions that primitive hierarchy in which the breast can emerge as 'object'. Hardly has this been achieved however than the object is 'lost' with the realisation that the breast, in real terms, belongs to the mother. The first fantasy then is most fundamentally motivated by the desire to fill the gap thus opened between the infant and the maternal body, but a body itself already fantasmatically displaced in relation to the real:

> the real object, milk, was the object of the function, which is virtually preordained to the world of satisfaction. Such is the real object which has been lost, but the breast – become the fantasmatic breast – is, for its part, the object of the sexual drive. Thus the sexual object is not identical to the object of the function, but is displaced in relation to it; they are in a relation of essential *contiguity* which

> leads us to slide almost indifferently from one to the other, from the milk to the breast as its symbol.[14]

An important qualification must now be made. From the above schematic account it might seem we could posit a simple parallelism: on the one hand *need*, directed towards an object; on the other hand *desire*, directed towards a fantasy object. Fantasy, however, 'is not the object of desire but its setting...the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he [*sic*] appears caught up himself in the sequence of images'.[15] In this perspective, then, the fact that the infant may be observed making sucking motions even after its hunger has been satiated is not to be construed as the outward manifestation of the intentional aim of a desiring subject towards a fantasy object; rather, what we are witnessing is the display of auto-erotic pleasure in the *movement* itself, to which we must assume an accompanying fantasy not of *ingestion* (functional), but *incorporation* (libidinal). The fantasy-precipitating sequence *having/losing* the object, then, also institutes *auto-eroticism* (it is a mistake to consider auto-eroticism a 'stage of development' *prior* to object choice): 'The "origin" of auto-eroticism would therefore be the moment when sexuality, disengaged from any natural object, moves into the field of fantasy and *by that very fact* becomes sexuality' (my emphasis). Even at the most primal moment, 'satisfaction' (the lost object) is not a unitary experience; in so far as it survives, it does so as a constellation of visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, auditory, olfactory, and so on, mnemic-traces; it is such a fantasy *configuration* which is indelibly inscribed as an ever-present principle of organisation in the psychic life of the subject:

> The signs accompanying satisfaction (the breast accompanying the offering of nursing milk) will henceforth take on the value of a fixed arrangement, and it is that arrangement, a *fantasy* as yet limited to several barely elaborated elements, that will be repeated on the occasion of a subsequent appearance of need,...with the appearance of an internal excitation, the fantastic arrangement – *of several representative elements linked together in a short scene*, an extremely rudimentary scene, ultimately composed of partial (or 'component') objects and not whole objects: for example, a breast, a mouth, a movement of a mouth seizing a breast – will be revived.[17] (my emphasis)

'Incorporation' rather than 'ingestion' – the psycho-analytic concept of 'incorporation' implies a range of objects vastly more extensive than food, as for example

in Melanie Klein's description of the fantasy world of the infant, in which the parental imagos fragment into relatively autonomous 'part-objects', body parts which the child may destroy, repair, identify with, combine, and of *course incorporate*; moreover, the mouth is not the only organ of fantasy incorporation (for example, it would be particularly pertinent here to recall Lacan's discussions of the *eye* as an incorporative organ).[18] The fantasy then, in our 'original' example, albeit metonymically linked to the ingestion of milk and the image of the breast, is not to be *reduced* to such terms, for they will themselves be subject to further substitutions of a metaphorical, as well as metonymical, order. In the above scenario of emergent sexuality, with its emphasis on the *fixation* of 'signifier' to 'satisfaction' we may see exemplified the Lacanian maxim, 'Desire is the alienation of the instinct in a signifier'. It is this *privileged* signifier which stops, 'the otherwise endless sliding of the signification'; it is that which Laplanche and Leclaire, in a much discussed paper,[19] call the 'elementary signifier' of the unconscious, and which in Freud would be one of the senses we may give to 'ideational representative' of the instinct. As I have observed, although the position of 'representative of the instinct' is a permanent one, more than one signifier may be elected to the same post, and these in turn may elect delegates from amongst their derivatives and semblances – a process which will continue throughout the life of the subject as a process of *elaboration*. For example, in Laplanche and Leclaire's paper, 'The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study', we read of a child, during the time he is beginning to speak, experiencing thirst on a beach and addressing a demand to the woman who is caring for him. Become adult, and now in analysis, amongst the elementary particles of one of his dreams are, 'the memory of a gesture engraved like an image' (cupped hands), and, 'the formula "I'm thirsty"'. The gesture here ('enactive') belongs to the kinaesthetic and visual; moreover, the 'verbal' expression is not verbal in the linguistic (lexical, syntactical) sense – the child in question here is French, and at a stage of linguistic development when the use of 'shifters' is not yet fully mastered; the initial sound of '*J'ai soif*' (I'm thirsty), the terminal sound of '*moi-je*' (me-I), and the ultimate syllable of *plage* (beach) become condensed, collapsed together, to result in a dense phonic image – '*zhe*' – inseparable from a meaning purely personal to the child.

We may reasonably suppose that it is this type of process that is at work behind the production of the phenomenon Barthes names *punctum*; just as the phonic fragment '*zhe*' belongs both to, in Saussure's expression, 'the common storehouse of language', and at the same time to a universal meaning which is purely private to

the patient Philippe, so the *punctum* appears at one and the same time: in a public and a private context: In some remarks on Freud's insistence on 'the independence and the cohesion' of the conscious and unconscious systems, Laplanche remarks:

> it is important to note at what level the passage from one system to another operates: it cannot be the global passage of the same structure from one mode of organisation to another, similar to the oscillatory effect at work in the perception of an equivocal image. What passes from one *Gestalt* to another is always *an isolated equivocal element*.[20] (my emphasis)

He finds a more appropriate analogy in,

> those puzzle drawings in which a certain perceptual attitude suddenly makes Napoleon's hat appear in the branches of the tree that shades a family picnic,

observing,

> if this hat is able to appear, it is because it can be related to an entirely different 'anecdote', which is not at all present in the rest of the drawing: the 'Napoleonic legend'.

It is precisely such an 'intertextual' mutual imbrication of 'anecdotes', pinned together by a fragment, which allows Barthes to see his own family history in that group portrait from another time and another culture, and which makes '*je*' more than simply a 'shifter' for Philippe. I say 'allows' Barthes, but he himself insists he has no choice but to feel that *affect* which 'pierces' him; *two* things must be stressed here, not only the *involuntary* nature of the unconscious irruption, but the fact that, like the hat in Laplanche's example, it may also derive from an inscription which may be *trans-individual* in its appeal, rather than, like the *punctum*, exclusively personal – assertions which require some elaboration.

III

In the story which 'begins' (in the arbitrary *découpage* of narrative convention) with Philippe on the beach, we may see historically later stages in the vicissitudes of the oral drive, 'alienated in a signifier', for a particular individual. The fantasy *complex* to which the ramifications of this alienation have given rise has left its

traces in all aspects of the unconscious organisation of the subject. The unconscious knows no time – psycho-analytic accounts of fantasy present us with a *simultaneous* continuum of degrees of elaboration. 'Topographically', the fantasy may be conscious, pre-conscious, or unconscious. Thus the fantasy, says Freud, is encountered 'at both extremities' of the dream – both in the secondary elaboration of the waking report, and in the most primitive layers of the latent content, where it is linked to the ultimate unconscious desire, the 'capitalist' of the dream. Freud finds the fantasy present in the form of the hysterical symptom, in the delusional fears of paranoics, in 'acting out', and, as is well known, he believed such cultural manifestations as 'art' to represent the highly elaborated, disguised, expressions of unconscious fantasies. In a sense, therefore, 'the' fantasy is only ever encountered in the *wake* of continual exchanges, transformations and transcriptions, of and between signifiers. In its most primitive form the fantasy complex will consist of *thing-presentations*, the register of the imaginary; thus, with Philippe, 'a gesture engraved like an image'. Later may be found fragments attracted into the 'gravitational field' of the primitive fantasy at the moment of acquisition of language; for example, the compound sound, '*zhe*'. Later still, the adult Philippe will produce the dream of a unicorn, whose image is the transformation (according to 'considerations of representability') of derivatives of a complex of *words* – that aspect of the fantasy which is ensnared within the *symbolic*.

In bringing Philippe's story to my consideration of the anecdote told by Barthes, however, I face a difficulty – Barthes's book is *not* a case-history. I shall therefore take the liberty of incorporating the anecdote of the 'ankle-strap' punctum into a convenient fiction to illustrate a point I wish to make here: suppose that a very small child is inquisitively playing with a ring on its mother's finger; in a playful demonstration the mother takes off the ring and slips it onto one of the child's fingers; then she takes it back. Other circumstances being favourable, the mnemic-trace of this event could become structurally reinforced and re-cathected by the previously established trace of the mouth circling the nipple, and the nipple's subsequent withdrawal. Later in the history of the subject, knowledge of the significance of the giving of the ring in marriage could, by 'deferred action',[21] further reinforce and intensify the cathexis of this image of the 'encircling of a body-part' – producing the sort of affective and semantic consequences Barthes describes. By juxtaposing this diagramatically simple myth of origin with Philippe's story I wish simply to make the point that although the oral drive will have an effect on the

unconscious organisation of all subjects the particular *form* of the effect will vary according to individual history; but that, nevertheless, such individual elaborations of representatives of the drives coexist alongside, and may becomes imbricated within, fantasy scenarios whose *common* outlines may be detected across differences between individual 'versions'.

Freud was so impressed by the ubiquitous *transindividuality*, of a certain small number of fantasies – which 'emerge' in the history of the subject, and yet which seem always already to have been in place – that he suggested they might be transmitted by hereditary factors. These are the 'primal fantasies', as he first called them – 'primal scene', 'seduction', 'castration' – all of which devolve upon major enigmas in the life of the child, enigmas concerning origins: origin of the subject, of sexuality, and of sexual difference. As Laplanche and Pontalis have pointed out, however, we do not need to invoke the idea of phylogenetic inheritance to explain the ubiquitousness of the primal fantasies. These fantasies are the precipitate of the early familial complex in which each child finds itself - at once irreducibly unique in its historical, cultural, and biographical detail, and universally shared in that every newcomer to the world is lodged under the same sign of interdiction of incest. (At the risk of stating the obvious, to acknowledge the Oedipal nucleus of the primal fantasies is not thereby to place *all* fantasy scenarios on the Oedipal stage. To acknowledge this, though, is not necessarily to embrace the anarchistic voluntarism exemplified by the Deleuze and Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus* – for so long as it makes sense to say we are living in a 'patriarchal society' we may be sure that we remain, at the most fundamental level, locked in the Oedipal matrix.)

It is the privileged 'families' of related signifiers of the desire of the subject which serve as the *points de capiton* (Lacan) 'buttoning down' the otherwise endless dispersions of Derrida's *différance*, Pierce's 'endless semiosis'. In the history of the subject it is precisely this over-all structural *stability* of the fantasy, albeit constantly subject to transformations, which serrves to regulate and organise the otherwise formless displacements of desire; as Jean-Michel Ribettes has put it: 'To such potentially anarchic and polymorphous movements of desire, fantasy opposes the constancy of its forms; to the erratic, fantasy opposes the hieratic'.[22] It is because of the *mise-en-scène* of desire, which is fantasy, that dissemination does not 'centrifugally' dissipate itself but rather 'circles back' on itself to repeat – but differently; which is to say, to extend my metaphor, that the movement describes not so much a circle, closed, but a spiral, perpetually renewing itself by conquering new ter-

ritory while nevertheless tracing the same *figure* (no grammar of the unconscious, but a rhetoric); thus, for example, Freud speaks of the day-dream as having a 'date stamp' on it; or again, in the field of public human affairs, we may think of the popular newspaper, endlessly repeating itself in the form of 'news', or, scandalous to add, in the realm of politics, those 'real struggles' – conflicts which renew and repeat themselves precisely to the extent that the fantasmatic which informs them remains untouched by them. (My slide, here, from the 'internal' to the 'external' world is deliberate – I shall return to this later.)

I have spoken of the quality of 'arrest' in fantasy, by my own argument this very attribution is itself a form of arrest – the abstraction of a notional 'elementary' form of fantasy from the multifarious ways in which 'it' is actually encountered. In speaking of 'arrest', however, I wish, first, to emphasise just this insistence, in psycho-analytic theory, on the structural constancy of fantasy across a 'spectrum' of forms of elaboration. Moreover, although the fantasy is an imaginary *sequence* in which the subject plays a part, or parts (the precise mode of integration of the subject, as Freud has demonstrated, being variable – the subject may be represented as observer, as actor, even in the very *form* of an utterance), the 'sequence' is characteristically of such brevity that it may be summarised in a short phrase – 'her necklace was shut up in a box'; or again, a classic example, the title of one of Freud's essays, 'A Child is Being Beaten'. It is in this that I allow myself to identify the sequence which paradoxically takes on the characteristic of the *still*; for there is no doubt that in this band of the 'spectrum' of elaborations – the band, moreover, of greatest affective density – the fantasy may be represented in an image, and what better word for *this* image, this *mise-en-scène*, than *tableau*. May we not say then that the fantasy is a tableau which stands to the otherwise formless in indeterminacies, dispersions, displacements of desire of the individual subject, precisely as the tableau of Diderot stands the endless dispersions and indeterminacies of the meaning: material events, of 'history'? Two contrasting kinds of claim frequently made in respect of certain images: 'this image captures, in a single visual statement, the essence of an event which would otherwise take many words to describe'; and, 'this image has a significance which transcends its literal content, and which may not be expressed in words'. The first type of claim defines the tableau, the second defines the hieroglyph. The terms 'tableau' and 'hieroglyph', used by Diderot in his discussion of painting and theatre, and by Barthes in respect of theatre and cinema, label concepts which were already long-established in art theory

by the time Diderot came to use them in the eighteenth century, and they are still with us today, albeit they are now less formally described. If we are to account for the longevity of these concepts in the history of theories of representation in the West we might usefully consider the possibility that they are the *projection*, into the field of material representational practices, of fundamental psychological processes described in psycho-analysis.

IV

The question now arises of how, in terms of the analogy I am proposing between certain art-historical and psycho-analytical categories, the relations of the various key terms I have mentioned are to be conceived. In, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', Barthes effectively *conflates* the concepts 'hieroglyph', 'pregnant moment' (peripateia), and 'tableau'; my argument here must separate them. First, peripateia and tableau must be replaced in a logical hierarchy: the relation of peripateia to tableau is a relation of *text* to *staging*, the peripateia is an instant arrested within, abstracted from, a narrative flow; the tableau is a particular realisation of that as yet purely notional instant (the doctrines of *ut pictura poesis* were concerned precisely with detailing recommended 'correct' procedures for such *mise-en-scène*). Further, in belonging to a *common*-ground of meaning, rooted in, in Barthes's words, 'an ethical and political culture', the tableau is clearly situated in the field of what Barthes first calls the 'obvious meaning', and then ten years later, the '*studium*'; the *punctum*, we will remember, is, on the contrary, unpredictable and private; it is that 'very little' in the image which is 'purely image'; as the meaning of the *punctum* takes the form of an affect which cannot be translated into discourse then, equally clearly, the 'hieroglyph' is on the side of the *punctum*. The separation between tableau and hieroglyph which we may see in the history of the concepts, and the oscillation between them in Barthes's paper, maps the distinction we have inherited from Lacan between the registers of the 'symbolic' and the 'imaginary'; to complete the picture we need to take into account that necessary third Lacanian category, the 'real'. As Barthes's account of the punctum is, for my purposes here, incomplete, I have juxtaposed it with the case history of Philippe – a history of 'stages' of transformation of the alienation of the oral drive in a 'succession' of signifiers (with the understanding that 'stage' and 'succession' here in no way imply 'supercession'). Resumed most briefly, and as the story of Philippe illustrates, the fantasy may be considered as 'standing in for' that which is radically

unrepresentable: the absence *in* the real, and the absence *of* the real in discourse. The real then, as Ribettes remarks, is one of the 'three dimensions' of fantasy; the imaginary is that dimension which is outside discourse, attached to (but not assimilable to) the pre-Oedipal; the symbolic is the 'later' dimension of combination, syntax, transcription. In a schematically descriptive 'triangle' of fantasy, therefore, the real would be located at one point, and at the other two could be grouped, respectively, the terms: 'imaginary'/'elementary signifier'/'*punctum*'/'hieroglyph'; and, 'symbolic'/'fantasy scenario'/'*studium*'/'tableau'. This is indeed sketchy, and no doubt in the spirit of a structuralism of which we have grown suspicious, but I believe there is enough accuracy in it to at least serve my purpose here. A major limitation of this schema is its implication of segregation; in fact, more highly-cathected, most primitive, elements will have capacity to 'unfold' upon the very scenarios in which they figure, either directly or in a displaced manner: thus the 'piercing' image of the 'ankle-strap' gives way to the short scene, 'her necklace was locked in a box', which in turn figures..., we know not. Some clarification of what I have in mind here may be gained by reference to Herman Rapaport's essay, 'Staging: Mont Blanc'.[23] Rapaport begins his essay, with a reference to Plato's allegory of the cave, the purpose of which is to communicate the doctrine of pure forms. Rapaport remarks:

> But what is most interesting is the way a prop such as the cave image can suddenly turn into a stage, how an image, itself framed, can suddenly stage itself as stage and in that way absent itself or disappear from the viewer's consciousness as image, object, or prop.

Rapaport then moves to the example of the 'Wolf Man' case history, in which Freud, in Rapaport's words:

> documents what happens to a small child who has been exposed on repeated occasions to a picture of a wolf, an image that can be seen with or through like a kind of optic glass and thus can frame what will become a traumatic fantasy, a nightmare about six or seven wolves in a tree.

Having quoted Freud's transcription of his patient's account of the nightmare, Rapaport comments:

> Here the image of the wolf has been phantomized, has faded out, and frames or stages this dream. *Although the wolf image has disap-*

> *peared in its original form, its effect or impression energizes the dream*, and it is repeated six or seven times within the image's little 'production'. (my emphasis)

With the word 'production' I am returned again to thoughts about the cinema, and particularly to the relation of film to still with which I began.

V

When I first read a short essay by Freud called, 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men',[24] I was struck by the similarities between the syndrome of male desire Freud describes and the pattern of behaviour 'Scottie' (James Stewart) exhibits in Hitchcock's film, *Vertigo* (1958). The first condition determining the choice of love-object by the type of man discussed in Freud's essay is that the woman should be already attached to some other man – husband, fiancé, or friend; in the film, Scottie falls in love with the woman he is hired to investigate – the wife of an old college-friend. The second precondition is that the woman should be seen to be of bad repute sexually; 'Madeleine' (Kim Novak), the college friend's wife, suffers from a fixated identification with a forbear whose illicit love affair, and illegitimate child, brought her to tragic ruin. The type of man described by Freud is, 'invariably moved to rescue the object of his love', and prominent amongst the rescue fantasies of such men is the fantasy of rescue from water; Scottie rescues Madeleine from San Francisco Bay. Finally, Freud observes, 'The lives of men of this type are characterised by a repetition of passionate attachments of this sort: ... each is an exact replica of the other', and he remarks that it is always the same physical type which is chosen; following Madeleine's death, Scottie becomes obsessed by 'Judy' (Kim Novak), a woman who physically resembles Madeleine and who he sets about 'remaking' into an exact replica of Madeleine. Behind the pattern of repetitious behaviour he describes, Freud identifies a primary scenario of male Oedipal desire for the mother – already attached to the father, her sexual relations with whom bring her into ill-repute in the eyes of the little rival for her love. The ubiquitous fantasy of rescue from water represents a conflation of 'rescue' with 'birth': just as he was, at birth, 'fished from the waters' and given life, so will he now return this gift to his mother in a reciprocal act of recovery from water. Finally, the adult man's love-attachments form an endless series of similar types for the simple reason that, as mother-surrogates, they can never match the irreducibly unique qualities of the original.

Fig. 2. Still from: Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*, 1958. Paramount Pictures/Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions Inc.

When I fish Hitchcock's film from the depths of my memory it surfaces in the form of two images superposed as one: Madeleine's face above the shadow of her lifeless body below the waters of the bay; Judy's face floating through the green-tinged gloom of the hotel room where she has just emerged from her final transformation, in the bathroom, into the image of the dead Madeleine.[25] I can of course recall many other images, actions, snatches of dialogue, and so on; but the first, composite, comes as if unbidden; spreading itself as if to form the screen upon which my memory of the *reel*-film (the object of 'criticism' and most film-theory) is projected. Paraphrasing Rapaport, I might say: 'although the film has disappeared in its original form, its effect or impression energises the image'; or beyond, more fundamentally, 'although the fantasy has been repressed, in its original form, the displacement of its cathexis energises the film'. Away from the cinema now, away from the insistence of the film's unreeling, this privileged image opens onto that skeletal narrative I find in both *Vertigo* and in Freud's paper on men's desire; but a narrative whose substance is undecidedly (n)either text (n)or tableau; and this in turn immediately dissolves into a myriad other delegates from a history of Western representations flooded with watery images of women – from the *Birth of Venus* to the *Death of Ophelia*. For example, in pursuit of these last two, I am returned to *Vertigo* by way of the bridge over the bay, in whose shadow

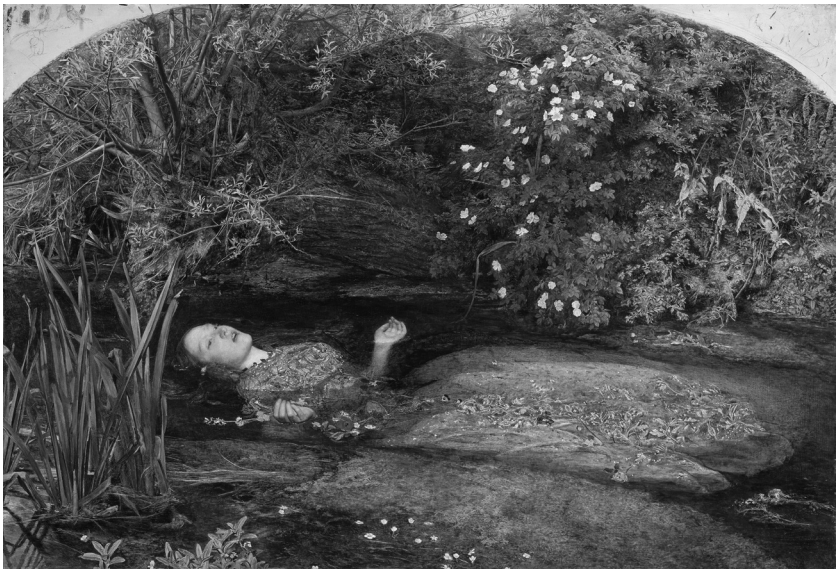

Fig. 3. Sir John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-1852.
© Tate, London, 2009.

Madeleine casts flowers on the water as she prepares to jump, leaping the gap between Hitchcock's and Botticelli's/Millais's images of woman/water/flowers. As I now recall that Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' depicts the goddess at the moment of her landfall at Paphos, eliding the circumstances of her birth out at sea from the bloody foam produced when Saturn casts the genitals of the newly-castrated Uranus into the ocean, I find that my re-entry into the text of the film is by a different route – one destined to take me through a different sequence of images, until I have traversed the text again, to regain another exit into the intertext, from which I shall be returned again...and again, until the *possible* passages have been exhausted, or until I find that the trajectory of associations has become attracted into the orbit of some other semantically/affectively dense textual item, some other fantasy.

In a certain (phenomenological) sense, the cinema is the 'negative' of the gallery (the museums which now house the paintings Diderot wrote about; our galleries of contemporary art): in the cinema we are in darkness; the gallery is light; in the cinema we are immobile before moving images; in the gallery it is we who must move; in the cinema we may interrupt the sequence of images only by leaving; in the gallery we may order the duration of our attention in whatever sequence we wish; the much-remarked 'hypnosis' of cinema suppresses our critical attention;

in the gallery the critical faculty is less easily beguiled. I could continue this list of 'oppositions' but the point is that, as in all positive/negative processes, the one situation implies the other. It is precisely their mutual reliance which concerns me here. Just as Malraux, in assessing the fortunes of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, found it necessary to speak of a 'museum without walls', so there is a 'cinema without walls' in the form of the countless stills and synopses to which we are exposed; these in their turn dissolving into the broader flood of images (from 'news' to 'advertising') issuing from our 'society of the spectacle' – mutually affective *tableaux* which stage not only the legitimating narratives of human existence but also, in the process, each other.

I was once in Padua, and took the opportunity to visit the Scrovegni Chapel to see its famous frescoes by Giotto. In form the Chapel is a simple box, whose interior faces display the 'grand narrative' of human existence in the fourteenth century – the redemption of man, guaranteed by the exemplary lives of the Virgin and Christ. In addition to the narration of the ideal mother and her ideal son we are shown personifications of the Vices and the Virtues; although the father does not make a personal appearance his will is conspicuously seen to be done throughout, and most vividly in the large final scene of the Last Judgement, which (Giotto being no Bosch) appears, appropriately, as quite a *domestic* affair. Only a couple of hundred yards from the Scrovegni Chapel is the Church of the Eremitani, which in 1944 took a direct hit from allied bombs (thereby losing some works by Mantegna). In my fantasy, however, it is the Scrovegni Chapel which explodes, raining its fragments upon the city of Padua like the scattered contents of a huge Giotto jigsaw puzzle. The grand narrative of human existence, the meaning of life, the source of inspiration and legitimation of all social institutions and individual actions, is not destroyed, but it is now encountered in a very different way – as representative fragments whose connections and ultimate meanings must be implied; a material heterogeneity whose narrative/ideological coherence depends upon a psychological investment – largely unconscious, and therefore radically inaccessible to the discourses of an 'ethical and political culture', except in so far as these discourses themselves issue from an unconscious matrix as the heavily elaborated transcriptions of common fantasy scenarios. In Padua today, as in all our Western cities, this is precisely the way in which we encounter the grand legitimating narratives of our existence: on billboards, in magazines, in family albums, in newspapers, on picture postcards, and, of course, outside the cinema – from the

metaphorical and metonymical webs of this most general environment of (mainly photographic) images which *prefigure* the film, to the particular film-poster and film-still; all of that which, 'conducts the subject, from street to street, poster to poster, to finally plunge one into a dark, anonymous, and indifferent cube'.[26] As I have remarked elsewhere:

> the darkness of the cinema has been evinced as a condition for an artificial 'regression' of the spectator; film has been compared with hypnosis. It is likely, however, that the apparatus which desire has constructed for itself incorporates *all* those aspects of contemporary western society for which the Situationists chose the name *spectacle*:...,desire needs no material darkness in which to stage its imaginary satisfactions; day-dreams, too, can have the potency of hypnotic suggestion.[27]

Discussions of fantasy and cinema have tended to concentrate on structures 'near the surface' of the film – for example, the obviously Oedipal scenarios of 'family dramas'. I have suggested how an elaborate film narrative (here, *Vertigo*) may figure an Oedipal scene in a more displaced form (Scottie's behaviour). I have further suggested that, just as the 'manifest narrative' of the film in my example opens onto ('stages', 'frames') an Oedipal scenario, so *this* narrative, in its turn, unfolds upon an *image* (which may well be *extra*-cinematic), of hieroglyphic affect, which is nothing but a point of condensation of the laconic tales which *it* figures ('a woman is in the water', 'I am rescuing the woman', etc.). These, in *their* turn, open onto all those representations which are (male?) fantasies of birth. In all this perpetual motion there is no rest, no arrival at a point of origin. Nor, clearly, is there any point at which we may be sure we have left the domain of the 'political' (Oedipal structures as relations of *authority*) for some other. In a sense, psycho-analysis comes into existence with the recognition that what we call 'material reality', thr 'real world', is not all that is real for us. Unconscious wishes, and the unconscious fantasies they engender, are as immutable a force in our lives as any material circumstance. Freud's observation that unconscious fantasy structures exert as actual a force on the life of the subject as do, for example, socio-economic structures, is signified in his use of the expression *psychical reality*. Psychical reality is not to be equated with the contingent and ephemeral phenomena of 'mental life' in general. On the contrary, what marks it is its stability, its coherence, the constancy of its *effects* upon perceptions and actions of the subject. Severe cases of 'mental

disturbance' are only the most dramatically obvious manifestations of the *fact* of psychical reality. Although, almost a century after the birth of psycho-analysis, it still suits many to draw a line of absolute division and exclusion between such 'abnormal' behaviour and their own 'normality', psycho-analysis recognises no such possible state of unambiguous and self-possessed lucidity in which the external world is seen for, and known as, simply what it *is*.

Common fantasy structures contribute to the construction of 'reality' in the realm of representations. There is no question of 'freeing' representations ('reality') from the determinations of fantasy. There is, however, a considerable benefit to be achieved from an *awareness* of the agency or unconscious fantasy in representations: the representations of women by men; the representations of blacks by whites; the representations of 'homosexuals' by 'heterosexuals'; and so on. The purpose of my remarks has been to argue that the systematic development of such an awareness in the field of theories of representations has been impeded by too restricted a framing of notions of the 'specificity' of objects of study ('painting', 'photography', 'film').

In approaching the phenomenologically-given field of representations theoretically, we have tended to divide it empirically, (and according to an implicit sociologism); beyond a certain limit, however, attention to the 'specificity' of a representational practice – grounded most usually in its material substrate and material mode of production – becomes unhelpful (as, for example, when 'specificity' is fetishised for professicma1 convenience – to conserve the putative sanctity of the 'discipline', or to respect the reality of academic institutions and markets). Certainly, we need a social history of the news photograph, a semiotics of the cinema, a political economy of advertising, and so on; but we should avoid the risk of 'failing to see the wood for the trees' – we need an ecology as well as a botany. 'Ecologically' speaking, we need to take account of the *total* environment of the 'society of the spectacle' – at least if it is a theory of ideology which is at issue; in order to achieve this we must deconstruct not only the supposed absolute difference between 'fine art' and 'mass media' – with its implication of what Benjamin so accurately, and so long ago, identified as, 'this fetishistic, fundamentally antitechnical notion of *Art*' – but also the differences between such almost equally hallowed and uninterrogated academic categories as 'art history', 'photography theory' and 'film studies'. I recommend this, not in the interests of some spurious argument that the objects of these categories – paintings, photographs, films – are

somehow 'the same', but rather in order that we may begin to construe their differences *differently*.

Notes

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[1] In an abbreviated form, this paper was first given at the symposium, *Film and Photography*, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, May 1984.

[2] I am careful to specify psycho-analytic *theory* here, as the history of the *institution* of psycho-analysis, as a professional practice, has tended to elide the socially radical nature of Freud's legacy (see, for example, Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis, Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians*, Basic Books, New York, 1983).

[3] To avoid possible misunderstanding at the start, I would stress that *no* implication of a Jungian 'collective unconscious' is intended here. I do, however, assume a collective *preconscious* (in the sense in which the notion is encountered in both Freud and Lacan). I further assume that the 'mechanisms' of the unconscious (primary processes) are held in common (much as all speakers of English hold English syntax in common, albeit syntax belongs to the preconscious); moreover, I assume that certain unconscious contents (for example, fantasy 'scenarios') will be held in common by all individuals in a given society, in a given historical period – albeit the particular forms of representation of these contents will vary according to biographical circumstances (see section III).

[4] Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', in *Image-Music-Text*, Fontana, 1977, p.52.

[5] Ibid., p. 69.

[6] 'Just the twenty-four letter of the alphabet are used to form our words and to express our thoughts, so the forms of the human body are used to express the various passions of the soul and to make visible what is in the mind.' Nicolas Poussin to André Félibien, cited in Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art: From Plato to Winckelmann*, New York University Press, 1985, p.326.

[7] See Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut pictura poesis: the humanistic theory of painting*, Norton, 1967.

[8] For a succinct account of allegory in Renaissance painting, see James Hall, *A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art,* John Murray, 1983.

[9] See, for example, Thornhill's commentary on his *Allegory of the Protestant Succession*, quoted in R. Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century*. By way of correcting my perhaps over-schematic characterisation of the evolution of allegory as 'simple to complex', see also Rubens's late (1638) letter of description of his *The Horrors of War*, quoted in Wolfgang Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, Harvard, 1968, pp. 87-9.

[10] *Discours sur la póesie dramatique* (1785), quoted in Jean Claude Bonnet, *Diderot*, Livre de Poche, 1984, pp. 182-3.

[11] Quoted in Rudolf Wittkower, 'Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance', in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, Westview Press, 1977, p. 116.

[12] *Oeuvres Complètes* (22 vols), J. Assézat and M. Tourneaux (eds), vol.III, p. 190, quoted in Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime*, Cambridge, 1981, p. 179.

[13] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Hill & Wang, 1981, pp. 43, 53.

[14] Jean Laplanche, 'The Order of Life and the Genesis of Human Sexuality', in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Johns Hopkins, 1976, pp. 19-20.

[15] Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 49, 1968, part 1, p. 17.

[16] Ibid., p. 16. (It is this perspective which allows Derrida to locate the error in Rousseau's condemnation of masturbation as a deplorable ancilliary to sexuality; it is in this 'supplement', the grubby margin to the bright page of human affective relations, that sexuality reveals itself most essentially.)

[17] Jean Laplanche, 'The Ego and the Vital Order', in, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Johns Hopkins, 1976, p. 60.

[18] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Hogarth, 1977, pp. 67-105.

[19] Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, 'The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study', *Yale French Studies*, no. 48, 1972, p. 118.

[20] Ibid., p. 135.

[21] For an account of this concept see J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Hogarth, 1973, pp.111-14.

[22] Jean-Michel Ribettes, 'La troisième dimension du fantasme', in D. Anzieu et al., *Art et Fantasme,* Champ Vallon, 1984, p.188.

[23] Herman Rapaport, 'Staging: Mont Blanc', in Mark Krupnick (ed.), *Displacement: Derrida and After*, Indiana, 1983, p. 59.

[24] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (24 vols), Hogarth Press, 1953-74, vol. XI, p. 165.

[25] For Hitchcock's own fascinating comments on this scene, 'the scene which moved me most', see *Hitchcock/Truffaut*, *Edition Definitive*, Ramsay. 1983, pp. 208-9.

[26] Roland Barthes, 'En sortant du cinéma', in *Communications*, no. 23. Seuil. 1975.

[27] 'Looking at Photographs', in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography*, Macmillan, 1982, p. 153.