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Technique of Film and Video Editing
ry and Practice Second Edition
Dancyger

chnique of Film and Video Editing is the best training for directors-to-be, providing ed, precise look at the artistic and aesthetic principles and practices of editing for both and sound. Analyses of and photographs from dozens of classic and contemporary nd videos provide a sound basis for the professional and student editor. Practical skills unded by an exposition of the ideas and styles of editing, through which the director derstand the visual tools at his/her disposal. This book puts into context the storytelling an editor will have to make against a background of theory, history, and practice.

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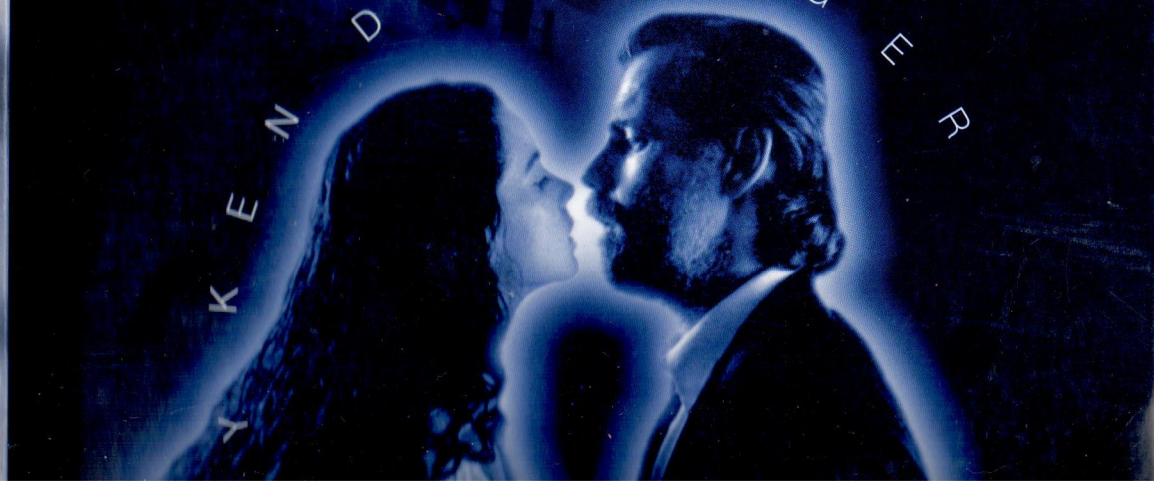
KEN DANCYGER



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The Influence of Psychoanalytic Ideas on Editing

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There has always been a symbiotic relationship between conventional film stories and psychoanalytic thought. Movies were a technological discovery of the industrial age, but they grew up in a century whose intellectual engine was psychoanalysis. However, this chapter is not about films whose themes are emotional anomie, or characterological disorder, or the quest for self-deception. Although many films have made these issues their subject matter, subject matter alone is not the concern of this book. Rather, we are concerned with how stories are told and how editing choices, their classical presentation as well as their novel possibilities, shape and alter meaning.

The subject matter, therefore, of this chapter is how psychoanalytic ideas have actually altered storytelling. In this chapter we will concern ourselves with particular psychoanalytic ideas and how specific filmmakers tell their stories in unusual and innovative ways. We will explore ideas about instinctual drives and their conflict with the reality in principle in the work of John Cassavetes and Terence Davies. We will examine issues of identity diffusion and integration in the work of Maya Daren and Su Friedrich. We will explore the interplay between the unconscious and discovery in work by Atom Egoyan. And finally we will explore the ideas about archetypes and the collective unconscious in the work of Julio Medem.

Again, what is critical about the work of these filmmakers is that the structure of their films is quite unique, and that uniqueness relates to an unwitting relationship of the structure they use to prevailing psychoanalytic ideas.

☐ THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FILM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

It was G.W. Pabst who directly took up the ideas of psychoanalysis in his films *Secrets of a Soul* (1926) and *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929). Their impulse

Three Faces of Eve (1957). Whether from the perspective of personal trauma (*Home of the Brave*, 1949), characterological disorders (*The Manchurian Candidate*, 1962), or national paranoia (*The Parallax View*, 1974), psychiatric disorders have provided dramatic material for films. And stereotypes about mental disorders have fuelled public perceptions about mental illness. Madness is a prerequisite to creativity in the biography of Vincent Van Gogh in *Lust for Life* (1956). The oedipal complex is at the heart of a gangster's will to kill in *White Heat* (1949). And only the insane are truly sane in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). All of the above exemplify how mainstream film has turned to psychoanalysis for subject matter.

On a more subtle level, however, film storytelling and psychoanalysis have much in common. Both have struggle as their mainstay. And although psychoanalysis is less prone to the happy ending, the dynamism of both is conflict. In a conventional film story, the main character has particular goals. The struggle to achieve those goals is in essence the storyline of the film. Editing is used to involve the audience; this is the point of view of the main character. Pace, the interjection of close-ups, the choice of camera motion over immobility, all help the audience translate the emotions the main character feels in the scene. Understanding the main character so intimately allows the audience to identify with her.

Conflict in psychoanalysis resides in the struggles between impulse (id) and conscience (superego). On another level, the instinctual struggle is between the life instinct and the death instinct, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Whether the drives are characterized as sexual or aggressive, the dynamic is one of struggle, of conflict. In psychoanalysis, the ill patient is not capable of resolving the conflict; the sign of health is the ability to balance drive and reality and to resolve conflict.

Another dimension of the relationship between film stories and psychoanalysis is the capacity of both to generate from the unconscious into the conscious world. Films are very often characterized as dreams or dream worlds. The unconscious is most often characterized as that sphere of life that is inhibited because of its predominant element of dream, desire, the world of wish fulfillment, and fear, unchecked by reality. This could characterize most film stories.

Finally, films are often tales of drives (instincts) and the consequences of acting on those drives. This is why so many film stories are taken up with unabashed sexuality (*Last Tango in Paris*, 1973) and aggression (*Natural Born Killers*, 1994). The passion and rage of these tales are excessive in order to provide a cautious tale of excessive instinct for the viewers.

☐ STRUCTURE AND SUBJECT MATTER

An important aspect of the use of psychoanalytic ideas in editing is the structure various filmmakers have used to yield new or unusual meaning to

powerfully in character-driven stories, we do see it applied in gangster-police stories, which are essentially plot-driven. A recent example is Peter Medak's *Romeo Is Bleeding* (1993).

As a baseline for this subject, we start with the more typical straightforward structure. A good example of such a film is Robert Redford's *Ordinary People* (1980). Redford tells the story of an adolescent's post-traumatic stress disorder—his brother died in a boating accident. The adolescent's journey from self-destruction to a healthy appreciation of his role in the accident and of his mother's and father's strengths and weaknesses as parents and as people, is the subject of *Ordinary People.* Although there are flashbacks to the accident, the story is presented in chronological order. The roles of the father and of the psychiatrist support the young man toward healing; the mother, in her rigidity and anger, stands as the antagonist in this intense and insightful story. *Ordinary People* represents an example of structure serving very directly the narrative intention of the story.

In order to understand how structure can layer, subvert, illuminate, or shade, we turn first to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941). *Citizen Kane* begins with the death of Charles Foster Kane. At the moment of death, he whispers the word *Rosebud.* The remainder of the film follows a journalist who interviews four people who were closest to Kane in order to understand the man and the expression—Rosebud—at the moment of his death.

From a point of view of narrative logic, the film's structure should increasingly yield insight into the meaning of Rosebud and somehow explain the life of Kane. The structure, although it moves through time, does not illuminate; in fact, Kane remains a more mysterious figure by the end than he did halfway through the narrative. *Citizen Kane* exemplifies a structure which does not layer the narrative but actually obscures its meaning.

Joseph Mankiewicz's A *Letter to Three Wives* (1949) uses a similar structure. One morning, three suburban wives receive a letter from their best friend. She tells them she is going to run away with one of their husbands today. Who will it be? The structure of the film allows us to hear each of the women explore their marriage. We do see the other characters. A chronology of sorts is created. Mankiewicz uses the structure to create a meditation on suburban marriages, the roles of men and women, the roles of class, of money, and of sex. The structure of *A Letter to Three Wives* facilitates an ironic exploration of modern marriage without being prescriptive. In this sense the structure clarifies at least the editorial voice of the writer, more than can be said of Welles and his writer, Herman Mankiewicz, in *Citizen Kane.*

A third example that exemplifies the voice of the writer and director is Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970). In this film, written by Calder Willingham, Willingham and Penn use an interview with an aged white man (Dustin Hoffman) who lived with the Indians and who sympathized more with the Indians than with his own people. This interview is interspersed with expository scenes of the young character being taken by the Sioux, by his growing affection for the people, by his marriage to a Sioux woman, and

the loss of his wife at the Sand Creek massacre. The climax of the film is the Indian slaughter of Custer and his Seventh Cavalry at Little Big Horn.

The structure of the film allows the old man to use humor to offset the tragedy of the second half of the narrative. This contrast distances the narrator/main character from his role as participant, and it allows us, from a modern perspective, to view historic events through the narrator's eyes. A similar approach is used by Peter Medak in his film *Romeo Is Bleeding* (1993). In that film, a crooked cop who has gotten away with various crimes and the attendant booty, meditates whether the personal losses—his marriage, his girlfriend, and the assassin mistress he both loved and murdered—were worth the price. What was a gangster film becomes a meditation on values, because of the structure.

Nicholas Roeg's *Performance* (1970) is another gangster film, this time set in London. In that film, the main character is an assassin who refuses to kill a close friend. The result is that he becomes the pursued. His flight away from a strongly rooted identity results in an identity diffusion, both in terms of profession and gender. He literally loses himself. Roeg uses a structure of juxtapositions—past, present, and future clash. Fantasy and reality clash. The result is a structure that promotes identity diffusion. We, as well as the character, are confused and troubled.

A far more subtle use of juxtaposition is the structure of Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal* (1990). In that film, an acting troupe decides to perform the Passion Play on a mountain in Montreal. The acting troupe is led by a Jesus-like character with a powerful, creative sense as well as a sensitivity to injustice in the world around him (Lothaire Bluteau). He gathers his actors, and they perform so well that the sponsoring church leaders feel the play is blasphemous and cause it to be cancelled. They perform in spite of the ban and during the performance, with police attempting to halt it, "Jesus" is injured. He dies from an untreated concussion in an indifferent modern hospital.

Arcand skillfully weaves artifice and reality into the structure of the film. They are presenting a performance; and yet the actors become the characters of the Passion Play. And in the end their genuineness as people aligns with the characters they portrayed. The result is that *Jesus of Montreal* functions as a modern version of the Passion Play. Here, structure facilitates the additional layer of meaning.

A last example is Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). Allen tells two stories—a melodrama about an ophthalmologist who is being blackmailed by his mistress. To preserve his economic and social life, he has her killed, as he continues to be a pillar of the community. The second story is about a documentary filmmaker who has ideals but no money. He has a poor marriage but a famous brother-in-law, a TV producer. His brother-in-law hires him to make a documentary about himself. On the shoot, he falls for the network producer but loses her to his brother-in-law. He makes the film he doesn't want to make; his marriage ends; and by the end of the film he is alone, a false idealist without a life or a wife.

Each of these tales comments on the other—the man with no ideals succeeds while the man with ideals fails. As in *A Letter to Three Wives*, Allen's structure succeeds in creating a meditation on values. The result is a sum far greater than the two parts, the individual stories. Structure has succeeded to illuminate and expand the narrative.

☐ INSTINCTUAL DRIVES AND THE REALITY PRINCIPLE

The dynamic interplay between the id (instinct), the ego (the reality principle), and the superego (the conscience) underpins Freud's theories on the instinctual drives and the reality principles.[1] The world of the instincts, the unconscious, is a world of primary processes, filled with dreams, fantasies, and wish fulfillment. The conscious world where the ego and the superego reside is the world of secondary processes—thinking, perceiving, remembering, cognition. The two worlds are in conflict, in a struggle for dominance, with the personality penalized for an excess of either. Balance or resolution arises from a responsive interplay between the two worlds.

The conflict between the instincts and the reality principle is presented most creatively in the work of the filmmaker John Cassavetes. In his films, the main character seems dominated by instinct and it is the secondary characters who represent the reality principle.

Whether it is Mabel Longhetti in *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), or Myrtle Gordon in *Opening Night* (1977), or Cosmo Vitelli in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), or Moskowitz in *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971), the characters of John Cassavetes live out their fears and their desires. In *Husbands* (1970), a group of husbands let loose; in *Faces* (1968), it is a married couple. All of these characters are not much prey to their instincts; they become their instincts. And that is part of their appeal. They rail against their society and its reality principle. They want, they are, and in that intense moment lies the power and creativity of Cassavetes's work. Using an improvisational style, a hand-held camera, minimal lights, and a conscious use of the jump cut, Cassavetes creates a world of instinct (the character) surrounded by a world of the reality principle. His characters celebrate one world and reluctantly acknowledge the existence of the other.

Terence Davies chooses the family as the focus of his film *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988). The film focuses on the death of the father. The wife and three grown children, a son and two daughters, ruminate on the loss and nature of their relationship with a man who was essentially abusive. Whereas Cassavetes focuses on the power of instinctual drives, Davies focuses on the reality principle—the society, its mores, its traditions of emotional expression or avoidance. In a very ritualized style focusing on rituals—the funeral, weddings, Christmas—Davies moves back and forth

over time. The father is their reality principle and he is angry and censorial. When the children, the wife, and other members of the community wish to fantasize, wish, or feel, they turn to song, popular songs of the day. These songs allow them to express their hopes and wishes. For the son and the older daughter the inability to feel spontaneously and freely with their father has stunted them and we see their pain.

Davies's style is straightforward and austere. Like Cassavetes, he uses many close-ups, but he does not use a hand-held camera. Instead, camera movement is slow and controlled. And cutting is not sudden, but formal and deliberate. The style of the film affirms the primacy of the reality principle over the instincts of the characters in *Distant Voices, Still Lives.*

☐ IDENTITY DIFFUSION AND INTEGRATION

Psychoanalysts have long been concerned about the issue of identity in personality development. For Freud, identity was formed in the first five years of life. For the British Object Relations theorists (Klein, Fairbairn), the first year of life was the most crucial. Erik Erikson identified adolescence as the crucial period of the development of identity.[2] Otto Kernberg has made identity diffusion and integration a pivotal feature for human emotional growth. In identity integration, there is a sense of self and a sense of object (other people) which is integrated and consistent over time, and not dependent on the immediate situation or feeling.[3] Identity diffusion is the opposite. The sense of the self is victim to the circumstance and particularly to the feelings of the moment. Similarly the sense of the object is vulnerable to redefinition in terms of the feelings of the moment.

When the personality is too oriented toward destruction of the other (family, authority figures, society), it is the result of not having incorporated the necessary parts of the other (mother, father, siblings) to go on and make meaningful relationships and have meaningful work. The result is dysfunction and mental illness. This state of identity diffusion is a primary characteristic of the borderline personality, more than neurotic, not quite psychotic. In order to function, to grow, to engage society in a less destructive manner, the person must achieve a degree of identity integration, in order to move on in life. Issues of identity then, for Kernberg, are a critical indicator about the prognosis for the future of the character.

Although many films take up the issue of identity, few develop a style that captures the human struggle between identity diffusion and identity integration. Two filmmakers who developed a style that suggests the dimensions of the struggle and the character of each state are Maya Daren and Su Friedrich.

Maya Daren's *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1943/1959) explores the story of a young woman. She is being followed to an apartment where she is to meet a man. The key to the apartment, a knife inside the apartment, and the bed

are the important artifacts. The woman, the woman who is following her, and the man are the only characters. The woman who follows her is hooded and has a mirror over her face. Whether she is a reflection or the woman's conscience, is subject to interpretation. By the end of the story the woman is dead in the apartment. Was it a crime of passion, a suicide, or the emotional, inevitable consequence of her own passion?

Meshes in the Afternoon is rife with images that suggest identity diffusion around issues of sexuality and gender. Her inability to accept herself, her womanhood, and her sexuality, leads to her destruction at her own hand or through projection, his hand.

In order to suggest the degree of diffusion, Maya Daren uses unsettling camera angles and motion. The camera turns not horizontally but on a U-axis in order to simulate the woman's feelings of diffusion. The extreme close-ups of the woman removing the key from her mouth suggest the clandestine implications of the key, as well as the key's sexual subtext. Daren also highlights the violent and sexual character of the knife in the same visually powerful manner. Her use of jump cuts conveys the heightened emotional state of the woman. Although the images of flowers and the seashore imply a romantic dimension of the tryst, the overwhelming number of close-ups of the woman (portrayed by Daren herself) heighten the sexual-violent atmosphere in the apartment and in the man-woman interface. The tragic ending confirms the primacy of identity diffusion. The woman's death, rather than romance, is the outcome.

Su Friedrich's *Sink or Swim* (1990) is an autobiographical film of memory about the woman's relationship with her father. Beginning with conception, Friedrich, in diary form, traces the chapters of that relationship to the point of her adulthood. She uses the diary form so that the narration of the young girl (8–10) forms the storyline of the film. She uses a free form approach to the visuals. At times, there is a synchronicity between voice and image, such as the birthday skating party or some of the swimming scenes. More often, however, the visuals proceed on a poetic evocation of an idea, such as the moment of conception, with the images of sperm and egg, and the emotional response of the visual, Friedrich naked, hiding in a bath, while the narrator speaks of the adult "Friedrich" meeting the young daughter, aged 11, of her father's third marriage.

The chapter headings Friedrich uses—Witness, Virginity, Utopia, Seduction, Quicksand, Nature, Memory, Loss, Kinship, Journalism, Insanity, Ghosts, Flesh, Envy, Discovery, Competition, Bigamy—suggest an evocation of familial identity, sexual identity, and the constant press of events pushing the young girl into a larger view of her world beyond the family constellation. Just as the narration and the visuals occasionally relate to one another, so too the chapter headings. In the Flesh chapter, the adolescent "Friedrich" goes on a vacation to Mexico with her father. His new wife, at the last minute, stays home. She has her father to herself, but she meets a young man on the beach in Acapulco and two days in a row is late to meet

her father. He sends her back to Chicago, cutting short a rare time to be together. In the chapter Ghosts, the visual in negative rather than positive image, the adolescent writes and reads a letter she writes to her father.

Often the images are home movies of an earlier time. These home movies relate to the time when the family was whole, and they have an energy that the later images are stripped of. In the Utopia chapter, the young girl speaks of going to a neighbor's home to watch one hour of television (there was no television at home). The image of Don Ameche's Flying Circus show, and in later sections the television images of Donna Reed and Robert Young, conjure up the ideal American family, a TV family, ironically far from the dreaded reality of growing up in the Friedrich family. Another idealization is the use of a mythic tale on the soundtrack while the images record a woman's weightlifting competition.

Perhaps the most sustained, recurring images and sounds go back to water—swimming, the freedom of swimming, and the danger. At one point the father sustains the loss of his sister while swimming, at another the story of a professor (like her father) who swims in a mid-east pond and dies from the bites of water moccasins. In spite of these dangers, the water and swimming are one of the precious, shared experiences between father and daughter. In this sense, the water is a source of identity integration for the daughter. Because it is so important, the filmmaker has conjured the title to reflect not only on the relationship with her father, who taught her to swim, but also the cost of that relationship. Friedrich can sink or swim through life. This is the theme of growing up, of surviving divorce, of a mother who threatened suicide with the children to gain her leaving husband's attention.

By using a variety of images—home movies, optically printed or reprinted images, by mixing documentary and experimental styles, all unified by a young girl's diary narration—Friedrich has personalized the struggle between identity diffusion (sink) and identity integration (swim). Indirect, always surprising, the film manages to evoke the struggle without being prescriptive. Su Friedrich has found a style that evokes the issues of diffusion and integration.

□ THE UNCONSCIOUS AND DISCOVERY

The process of therapy may be, as Freud suggests, to reconcile the unhappy patient with the realization that life is not a utopia but rather a mixed experience of unhappiness punctuated by the occasional happiness. At the very least the goal is to alleviate profound unhappiness from the act of making conscious that which was unconscious. The resulting discovery modifies behavior that was destructive, makes palatable fears that were not based in reality, or makes less daunting wishes that are realistically accessible.

Whether through a psychoanalysis or a less intensive therapy, the patient begins in a state of unawareness and in the course of the analysis or therapy,

a process of discovery marks the successful experience. Experiencing Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994), the viewer is like the patient at the outset of a therapeutic relationship. All is distant, anxiety-provoking, unconscious. Through the course of the film we discover, as do the characters of the film, the key, the secret that has remained below the surface. Through this process of discovery, the characters are liberated and the resulting epiphany is so surprising as to suggest a whole new structural approach to story-telling—the narrative as psychoanalysis.

Exotica tells the story of five characters, each with a secret that compromises their lives (Figures 12.1 through 12.4). Thomas (Don McKellar) owns a pet store. His secret is that he illegally imports the eggs of rare birds in order to sell the eggs in Canada. He is under suspicion of illegal smuggling from the opening of the film, and the secret is used against him by government officials in order to manipulate Thomas.

Zoe (Arsinee Khanjian) owns a club called Exotica. At the club, table dancers (young women) entertain men. Having inherited the business from her mother, Zoe wants a child of her own. She contracts with Eric, the host of the club, to impregnate her and to give her all rights to the child. Zoe clearly prefers women to men sexually; for her, the sexual transaction to become pregnant had to be contractual, business. It could in no way be associated with pleasure.

Figure 12.1 *Exotica*, 1994. Photograph by Johnnie Eisen. © 1993 Johnnie Eisen. All rights reserved.

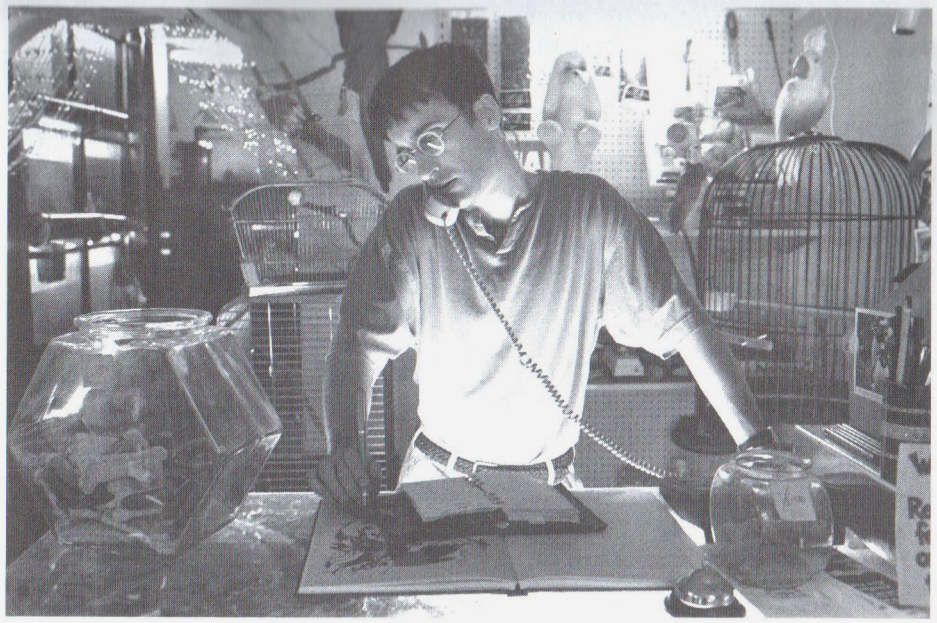

Figure 12.2 *Exotica*, 1994. Photograph by Johnnie Eisen. © 1993 Johnnie Eisen. All rights reserved.

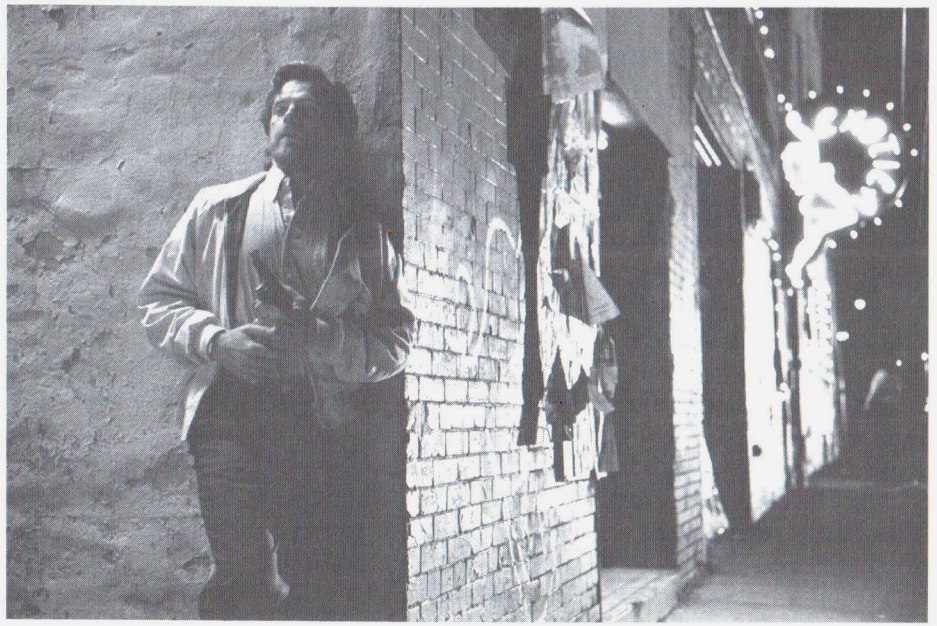

Figure 12.3 *Exotica*, 1994. Photograph by Johnnie Eisen. © 1993 Johnnie Eisen. All rights reserved.

Francis Brown (Bruce Greenwood) is the most complex character in the film. He is a tax inspector for Revenue Canada, a position that brings him into contact with Thomas. He is the auditor of Thomas's business. But it is Francis's unorthodox nightlife that makes him the through-line that connects all the characters to one another. At night, he picks up a young babysitter, brings her to his home where she practices piano and he pays her for babysitting, in spite of there being no one at home. Then he proceeds to Exotica, where he pays a young woman, Christina, to dance for him. What we learn later is that a few years earlier his young daughter had been abducted and killed. Initially, he was suspected but was released when the real killer was captured. Six months later, his wife, who had been carrying on an affair with his brother, was killed in a car crash. His brother survived. Consequently Francis is a tormented man.

Eric (Elias Koteas) is the host of Exotica. Christina was his lover and he seems extremely tormented by her attention to Francis. He manipulates Francis to touch Christina and when he does Eric throws Francis out of the club (touching is not permitted). Eric's secret is that he was the person who found the body of Francis's daughter. He was on a hike with Christina. It's where they met initially. Eric is tormented by guilt. The discovery and his possessiveness of Christina link the two together, losses he can't face.

Christina (Mia Kirschner) is a table dancer. Dressed as an adolescent private school student, she provokes her customers with her sexuality and her youth. She is volatile and the one person in the narrative careful about boundaries. She knows what she is doing and circumscribes those who can't maintain boundaries—Francis, Eric, and Zoe. She seems most comfortable with the homosexual Thomas because he wants nothing more from her than conversation. Christina's secret is that years earlier she was the babysitter of Francis's child. At that point in their lives, Francis was a "good father" to her troubled teenager. Now she is "the daughter" he couldn't protect. The sexual feature of her relationship with Francis is ironically the only way Francis can interact with a key person from his past life.

These five characters intertwine to present characters trapped by their secrets. The only freedom they experience is when another acknowledges insight into their secret—Francis for Thomas, Zoe for Eric, and most profoundly, Eric for Francis. A brief recounting will explain how this works in the narrative. There is a moment in the story when Francis is distraught about being thrown out of Exotica for touching Christina. He discovers that Eric manipulated him into doing so. Learning this, he takes a gun that belongs to Thomas and coerces Thomas into being an accomplice to kill Eric. Gun in hand, Francis waits for Eric to exit the club, but Eric is no longer in the club. Eric sees Francis and approaches him. We expect a killing but this is not what happens. Instead, Eric tells Francis that he knows all about his pain. And he confesses that it was he who found Francis's dead daughter. Francis puts aside the thought of murder and embraces Eric. This transcendent moment of two people acknowledging each other is the instant of

Figure 12.4 *Exotica*, 1994. Photograph by Johnnie Eisen. © 1993 Johnnie Eisen. All rights reserved.

discovery. Eric has confessed his secret and Francis is somehow relieved of his burden, his pain, and his anger.

The entire structure of *Exotica* unfolds in this surprising way and by its end we accept these five characters for who they have become.

☐ THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS AND SELF-REALIZATION

Carl Jung believes that every human being carries in his unconscious memory the past experiences of every other being. This collective unconscious memory is a feature that explains, for example, why a human being born inland, a person who has never seen a whale or a shark, innately fears that animal. A human predecessor had known and feared the whale and the shark and that feeling becomes a part of the collective unconscious. Societal taboos that are common to many historical and geographical groups also become a part of the collective unconscious. Certain recurring personae and themes of the collective unconscious manifest themselves so profoundly that they are considered archetypes, important benchmarks of the human experience—the hunter, the healer, the mother, the father, the prodigal son, the good son, the bad son, and so on.

Jung's ideas about personal development embraced superstition, religion, the feminine and masculine sides of personality, and the notion that every-

one had potential for self-actualization. That potential in the healthy person was realized in middle age. The thwarting of human potential or self-actualization was caused by neurosis and psychosis.[4]

Ritual, religion, the distant past in the present, create a less scientific, more animistic psychoanalytic framework eminently suitable to the work of Julio Medem, a Basque writer-director. Medem's films include *Cows* (1991), *Red Squirrel* (1993), and *Earth* (1996). The symbolism so critical in Jung's work is a vital part of Medem's visual and narrative style.

Cows is a narrative that covers the period from 1875 to 1935, from the Carlist Wars to the Spanish Civil War. The story is generational and regional in the agricultural north of Spain. Following three generations in a single family, Medem begins at the Carlist Front, Biscay. The young men, Carmelo and Manuel, are introduced. Carmelo is brave and Manuel is a professed coward. Carmelo, in an effort to encourage Manuel to fight, shows him how to fire his rifle. At that instant, Carmelo is mortally wounded. As he lays dying, Manuel smears his face with Carmelo's blood and pretends he too is dead. Their bodies are stripped and the cart loading bodies is moved over Manuel's leg. He doesn't cry out. His body is loaded onto the cart. As the cart moves through the forest, Manuel slides out from beneath the stacked bodies. A cow stares at his rebirth.

The film moves forward 30 years. Manuel is now a grandfather. Partly crippled, he paints pictures of cows. Manuel has a son, Ignacio, who is a woodchopper. He is challenged to a woodchopping contest by his neighbor, Juan. The actor who portrays Ignacio also portrayed the young Manuel, and the actor who portrays Juan was the same actor who portrayed Carmelo at the Carlist Front. The struggle between the two original characters, it seems, carries on, 30 years later. Ignacio wins the contest, an act much resented by Juan.

The animosity between them grows deeper as Ignacio falls in love with Juan's sister. Shortly, they have a child together.

The film moves forward 10 years and the sister has a child, Peru, who is illegitimate. Juan is insanely jealous of his sister and her ongoing relationship with Ignacio, now famous as an undefeated champion of woodchopping. Juan is so threatening that Ignacio and the sister plan to run off to America. Only there can Peru have a life and can they sustain their love. Juan almost kills Peru and sadly for Manuel and his granddaughter, Christina, the lovers leave with their son. Manuel is almost mad; Peru and Christina swear they will write to one another.

The movie then moves forward 20 years to 1935. The Civil War rages, with Juan on the nationalist side. Peru returns, now a photographer from America. He is portrayed by the same actor as Ignacio in 1905 and Manuel in 1875. Christina, a young woman, has not aged visually since 1915. There in the forest while many die, Peru is saved from death by his uncle Juan. Peru and Christina swear to love one another. They leave to escape to France. *Cows* ends.

This plot synopsis can't do justice to the vigor of the images in *Cows*. The wielding of the axe in the woodchopping contest is a male ritual as symbolic of primacy as the struggle to the death of two lions to become the dominant male. The rebirth of Manuel in the forest, already mentioned, is matched by a series of other rebirths—a young cow, Peru when he sees Christina after 20 years. And why has everyone aged but Christina, waiting for her love to return? Time has stood still for her, again a symbol immune to scientific rationalization.

Often, Medem will use the point of view of a cow, or an axe, or a scarecrow, or a pit, to distance us from too realistic an identification with the character. By doing so, he affirms the collective unconscious context for all the characters across time. And by focusing so often on cows, the animal who gives much more than it takes to the continuity of humanity, Medem provides an ironic context for the primacy of the human in his struggle with nature.

In the struggle of all of these characters for self-realization, Medem illustrates how art for Manuel is a tool to find peace with nature. Largely ignored by his children, indeed never forgiven for his cowardice, he is tolerated by the generation of his grandchildren. Interestingly, his grandson becomes a photographer. Not as famous as his father, Peru nevertheless seems more likely to follow the path of his grandfather. Art in this sense is an important tool for self-realization. What is most interesting about this position is that in spite of the politics of the period, the personal issues of survival, love, and fulfillment far transcend the social and political themes that swirl about this story. Medem has also framed the story in chapters—The Axes, The Lighted Pit, The War in the Forest. These chapters identify a symbolic framework for the narrative, but do so in an elliptical fashion. The generational story, the struggle for life, for love, continues in spite of politics, with the aid and often the indifference of nature. But together with art, the struggle transcends the individual and provides a through line from one generation to the next. If self-realization is not achieved in one generation, no matter, the next will have the same opportunity. This is the powerful emotion that ends *Cows*.

□ NOTES/REFERENCES

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