



Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style

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BRIAN HENDERSON

Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style

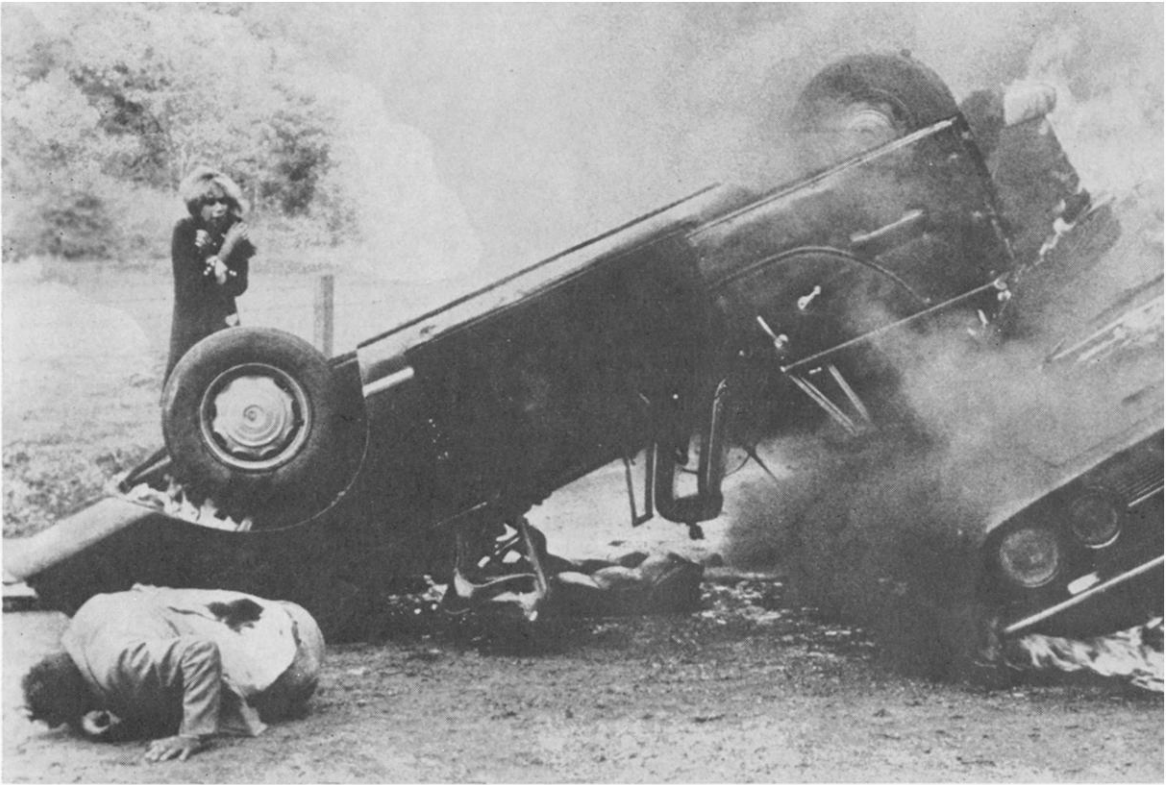
Godard has developed a new camera style in his later period. Its prime element is a long, slow tracking shot that moves purely laterally—usually in one direction only (left to right or right to left), sometimes doubling back (left to right then right to left, right to left then left to right)—over a scene that does not itself move, or strictly speaking, that does not move in any relation to the camera's movement. Examples of this shot are the automobile trilogy or triptych: the backed-up highway of cars in *Weekend*, the wrecked cars piled up in *One Plus One*, and the auto assembly line in *British Sounds*; most of the studio scenes with the Stones in *One Plus One*; several of the guerilla scenes in *Weekend* ("I salute you, old ocean"); and the shot of the University of Nanterre and environs in *La Chinoise*. Before we consider this shot as part of a stylistic complex and in the various contexts in which it appears, we must consider the shot in itself—its structure and implications as shot.

First we must distinguish Godard's tracking shot from other such shots in the history of cinema. It is not, first of all, forward camera movement, proving the depth of space, as in Murnau. Godard's tracking shot moves neither forward nor backward in space, nor in any diagonal or arc, nor at any angle but 90° to the scene it is shooting. That is, Godard's track lies exactly along the 0°/180° line. The scenes or subjects which these shots address lie also along a 0°/180° line, which, furthermore, is exactly parallel to the camera line. This extreme

stylization, wherein a plane or planes of subject are paralleled exactly by the plane of art, is unusual in cinema and gives the shot very much the form of a planimetric painting. A partial exception to the rule is the camera's sinuosity in the traffic jam shot in *Weekend*, its slight "angling" to left and right as it moves laterally, getting slightly behind or ahead of the scene it is filming, a kind of warp in the shot's even, continuous space-time. The base line of the camera's movement remains exactly straight, however, and exactly parallel to the scene. More fundamental departures from the lateral track are the Action Musicale sequence-shot in *Weekend*, in which the camera remains in the center of the scene and turns 360°, and the shot in *One Plus One*, in which the camera tracks 360° around the studio in which the Stones are playing. In the first the camera is at the center of a circle, in the second at the periphery, but in both there is the sense of a circular subject rendered flat and linear: these shots look like the lateral tracking shot and fit easily into formats which align them end-to-end with such shots.

The shot, secondly, is not like Ophuls's tracking shots which—though often lateral and hence formally like Godard's—are essentially following shots. Ophuls tracks in order to follow his characters, to give them movement or to attend their movement. His tracks center on, are filled with, derive life and motion from his characters, that is, from individuals. Godard, like Eisenstein, repudiates "the individualist conception of the bourgeois hero" and his tracking shots reflect this. His camera serves no individual and prefers none to another. It never initiates movement to follow a character and if it picks one up as it moves it leaves him behind as haphazardly (the workers and Wiazemsky in

This article is part of a longer critical study, "Weekend and History," which considers that film in its various historical contexts—cinema and dramatic history, history of the bourgeoisie, human history.



Godard's long shot: WEEKEND

the Action Musicale and the shot with Juliet Berto in and out, in *Weekend*). Also—though some may dispute this—Ophuls's tracks are essentially uncritical of their subjects, whereas the essence of Godard's tracking shot is its critical distance from what it surveys. Also, Ophuls frequently uses the composition-in-depth technique of interposing objects in the foreground, between character and camera. Godard never does this.

Thirdly, the shot is not like Fellini's pans and short tracks, though the latter also survey persons fixed in space rather than moving ones, that is, "discover" them in place as the camera moves. There are two chief differences. First, Fellini's camera *affects* his characters, calls them into life or bestows life upon them. Godard's camera does not affect the reality it unfolds and is not affected by it. There is a different camera dialectic in each: Fellini's

camera interacts with reality, touches and is touched, causes as well as registers effects; Godard's camera assumes a position over against reality, outside, detached. Secondly, Fellini's tracks are frequently subjective—in the sense that the camera eye is a character's eye. In 8½ the reactions of characters to the camera are their reaction to Guido; the pain we feel when we see them is Guido's pain. Because subjective, Fellini's tracks are most often in medium close or closeup range, sometimes with only faces coming into view; Godard's tracks, which are never subjective, are usually in long shot, taking in as much of an event and its context as possible. Also, Fellini introduces depth by arraying characters and objects in multiple planes, some very close to the camera, others at a distance, making for surprise and variety as the camera moves over them. Godard avoids depth: he arranges his characters in a single plane only—

none is ever closer to the camera than another. The resulting flatness of Godard's shots, particularly in *Weekend*, is discussed below.

Godard's tracking shot is a species of long take*, very often of sequence shot†, but it has few or none of the characteristics in terms of which André Bazin discussed and defended the shot and cinematic styles based upon it. In Godard's shot there is continuity of dramatic space and time, the irreducibles of the long take (indeed its very definition); but there is strict avoidance of composition-in-depth, for Bazin the essence of the shot—or that of greatest value in its use. As mentioned, Godard's frames are flat, composed in relation to the plane occupied by his characters. Other planes, where present, are used merely as backdrop to this one. Not only composition-in-depth but the *values* which Bazin found in composition-in-depth are missing in Godard's version of the long take (and in late Godard generally): greater realism, greater participation on the part of the viewer, and a reintroduction of ambiguity into the structure of the film image. It is clear that Godard is no realist; in *La*

Chinoise he specifically repudiates the realist aesthetic (of Bazin and others): "Art is not the reflection of a reality; it is the reality of that reflection." Godard's later style does require the active participation of the viewer, but not in Bazin's sense of choosing what to see within a multi-layered image and, presumably, making his own moral connections within it also. Godard presents instead an admittedly synthetic, single-layered construct, which the viewer must examine critically, accept or reject. The viewer is not drawn *into* the image, nor does he make choices within it; he stands outside the image and judges it *as a whole*. It is clear also that Godard of the later films is not interested in ambiguity—through flatness of frame and transparency of action, he seeks to eliminate ambiguity. Thus Godard uses the long take for none of the traditional reasons; in fact he reinvents the long take, and the tracking shot, for his own purposes.

A camera moves slowly, sideways to the scene it is filming. It tracks. But what is the result when its contents are projected on a screen? It is a band or ribbon of reality that slowly unfolds itself. It is a mural or scroll that unrolls before the viewer and rolls up after him. To understand the nature of this visual band we must go beyond the tracking shot itself. We encounter here the aesthetic problem of parts and wholes: Godard's tracking shot is but one element in a remarkably rich and complete stylistic complex or repertoire. It appears not in isolation, but in formal combinations with other kinds of shots, and with sounds. In short, the tracking shot cannot be understood apart from the varying contexts in which it appears—it has a different meaning and formal function in *La Chinoise*, in *Weekend*, in *One Plus One*, and in *British Sounds*, and even at different places within the same film. Moreover, the matter of "context" is not as simple as it might appear. Each of the latter films is built upon a complex camera/sound conception or *donnée*, and no two of these are alike. Our principal concern is the formal construction of *Weekend* and the specific role of the tracking shot in that con-

* A single piece of unedited film; of course "long" is relative to "short"—the cut-off would seem to be a shot used for wholly independent effect rather than as part of a montage pattern. None of Eisenstein's early films contains a single long take—such was the theoretical purity of his practice; no Godard film is without several long takes.

† A sequence filmed in one take; a one-shot sequence. A sequence is a series of closely related scenes; a scene is a shot or shots that cover a single and continuous dramatic action. We must bear in mind that Godard's "sequences" are not those of conventional narrative cinema, hence the concepts "sequence" and "sequence shot" lose the reasonably clear meaning they had for Bazin. What meanings will take their place, we do not yet know. See André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" (tr. by Hugh Gray), in *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley, 1967), at 23; also contained in *The New Wave*, ed. by Peter Graham (New York, 1968), at 25.

struction; that is, the relation of formal part and whole. We will not understand either aspect of *Weekend*, however, until we see that film's characteristic shot in the alternative contexts of the other late films and understand the formal principles of those works themselves. The use of the tracking shot in the other films clarifies its use in *Weekend* and the formal principles of the other films put into perspective the formal principle of *Weekend* itself.

La Chinoise contains some interesting instances of the tracking shot even though the film is in no sense built upon this shot, as both *Weekend* and *One Plus One* are. (In the latter films, the whole is chiefly a relation among tracking shots; in *La Chinoise* the whole is a relation among many kinds of shots, relatively few of which are tracking shots.) There are, first of all, the remarkable shots from the balcony, in which the action within the apartment is carefully orchestrated in relation to the camera's passage, in various mathematical variations, along the apartment's three windows and two walls, and back. There is, secondly, a usage of the shot as a special kind of documentation. As Véronique describes her awakening to social contradictions at Nanterre, the camera tracks slowly (from right to left) across the shabby, overcrowded dwellings of the Algerian workers who live near the university, coming to rest at last on the modern, efficient buildings of the university complex. The workers' shacks are flat and horizontal, the university buildings high and vertical, but the shot is set up so that the camera does not have to move back to take in the tall, commanding structures—it takes in everything within a single perspective. Eisenstein would have cut from a shot of the one to a shot of the other, making the juxtaposition for the viewer, obliterating time and space relations to make a clearcut social relation. Godard observes the time and space relations and lets the viewer make the social relation. His shot establishes the true proportions of extreme contrast and close proximity. He does this by virtue of the long take's continuity of dramatic space and time, which this usage reveals as itself a form of argumentation or demonstra-

tion; the shot has its own internal relations, its own logic. This instance of the shot seems Bazinian but, far from fidelity to the real, Godard rips this bit of footage from its grounding in the real and puts it down in the midst of a highly abstract film essay. Godard impresses the real into his own service—ignoring the form of the real itself, he subjects it firmly to his own formal construct. Besides the tracking shots, *La Chinoise* also includes several static long takes—the two dialogues between Véronique and Guillaume, the assassination scene—as well as montage (or collage) constructions. (It has become a commonplace that modern film-makers fall between Eisenstein and Bazin, that they combine editing techniques and long takes in various, distinctive styles.) The overall formal principle of *La Chinoise* would seem to be collage, which is also the formal principle of *The Married Woman*, portions of *Le Gai Savoir*, and, in certain senses, of *Pravda*.

The difference between montage and collage is a complex question. Film critics generally use the term collage without elucidating its meaning nor even its difference from montage. There is sometimes the suggestion that the pieces of a collage are shorter or more fragmented than those of a montage, but this does not hold up. Modern film-makers rarely use any shot shorter than Eisenstein's average shot in *Potemkin*. Moreover, collage as practiced by moderns allows long takes and tracking shots; montage as practiced by Eisenstein did not. It seems clear that the difference between montage and collage is to be found in the divergent ways in which they associate and order images, not in the length or nature of the images themselves. Montage fragments reality in order to reconstitute it in highly organized, synthetic emotional and intellectual patterns. Collage does not do this; it collects or sticks its fragments together in a way that does not entirely overcome their fragmentation. It seeks to recover its fragments *as fragments*. In regard to overall form, it seeks to bring out the internal relations of its pieces, whereas montage imposes a set of relations upon them and indeed collects or creates its pieces to fill out a pre-existent plan.

(This point is discussed further in the comparison of the collage principle to the visual organization of *Weekend* and *One Plus One* below).

In *Weekend* the collage principle all but disappears. Intercut titles—showing the day and the hour, the car speedometer, names of sequences such as “Action Musicale,” “Scenes from Provincial Life”—serve as breaks within takes and between scenes, but all within the film’s single-image continuum. They do not interact with the pictorial images to form montage patterns, as in *La Chinoise*. Conversely: whereas in *La Chinoise* the tracking shot is incidental, in *Weekend* it is the master shot: the entire film aspires to the condition of this shot. The cuts are merely connective; once outside the Paris apartment, the film might as well be a single, fixed-distance travelling shot along the highway and across the provincial landscape. *Weekend* indeed approximates this ideal form by its remarkable adherence to a single camera range—it is filmed almost entirely in long shot. Thus *Weekend* is the film in which the structure of the tracking shot and the formal principle of the whole very nearly coincide. Not just its characteristic shot but the whole of *Weekend* itself is a continuous visual band that unfolds itself along a linear axis. *One Plus One* is an interesting variation on the *Weekend* plan. It consists almost entirely of very long takes, nearly all of them tracking shots of the sort described above—slow, fixed-distance, left-to-right and/or right-to-left. Here, however, Godard cuts among two primary situations (the Stones in the studio and the black revolutionaries at the autoheap) and several subsidiary ones, each of which is conceived and shot strictly in terms of a single-band construction. Thus Godard erects a montage construction upon a series of long takes—in the aggregate a montage is created, though all of its ingredients, all the local areas of the film, are long takes.

Put another way, *One Plus One* is made up of parallel visual bands, which correspond to the bands of the song the Stones are recording, the bands of revolutionary experience that the blacks at the autoheap are assimilating, etc.,

all of which correspond to the bands of the viewer’s consciousness of contemporary experience. Recording the song and rehearsing the revolution and watching Godard’s film all involve a project of integration, necessarily unfinished, as the film is unfinished. The function of Godard’s montage construction, switching back and forth among these bands, is perhaps an attempt to hold them in simultaneity and is thus central to the film’s integration project.*

British Sounds is fundamentally different in form from the bands construction of *Weekend* and *One Plus One*. Aside from the montage of fists punching through the British flag, it consists almost entirely of long takes, including several sequences consisting of a single shot; there are also a few of the tracking shots, notably the long opening track along an assembly line and the later, related shot of workers discussing socialism at a meeting. The film as a whole, however, is organized rather conventionally in terms of sequences, each of which is conceived and shot according to its subject. As the film takes up several subjects (factory conditions, worker organization, women’s liberation, right-wing attitudes, etc.) it does not have a single stylistic conception. *British Sounds* is signed not only by Godard but by the Dziga-Vertov group with whom he made the film; this may have made stylistic unity difficult but *Pravda*, also signed by the group, does have overall formal coherence.

Collage and organization by bands are contrasting formal principles. Both are visual organizations, but each is a formal principle of the whole in a different sense. The visual conceptions of *Weekend* and *One Plus One* are prescriptive and proscriptive—they require a certain kind of shot and rule out other kinds. The formal principles of these works not only relate parts, though they do that also, they require and hence create certain kinds of parts,

* It is also possible, however, that Godard’s editing here fulfills the classical function of montage—that of contrast or opposition: the commercial protest of the Stones v. the authenticity of black revolt, etc.

in order to realize a pre-existent or overall scheme. As a result, camera style for each scene of these films is determined not by the distinctive content of the scene but by the overall formal principle of the work. Thus many different kinds of scenes receive similar camera treatment, which we see clearly in *Weekend* and *One Plus One* (the highway scene and guerilla camp scenes in the first, the auto junk-heap scenes and scenes with the Stones in the second). This is formal principle in the strong sense.

Collage, in film as in the other arts, is by contrast the most heterogeneous and permissive of formal principles. Indeed, it is formal principle only after the fact—it does not require certain kinds of parts nor rule any out. Polycentric or decentralized, it relates parts primarily toward each other and only secondarily toward a whole, or ideal unity. (*Weekend* relates parts directly to the whole and only indirectly to other parts or local area.) Collage works from inside, seemingly with pre-existent parts, and seeks to find within them or in their arrangement some unifying principle; or at least some ground on which they can stand together. The collage principle of *Pravda*, it is true, is far more aggressive than this—it marshals and orders its images in accord with an overall formal principle. This principle, however, is not that of the collage itself but that of the sound track, which criticizes and interprets the images, not only as parts but as an aggregate or totality. The sound track both constitutes a formal totality and criticizes or relates to the image collage as a totality. The formal principle of the whole work is the relation between these totalities, but that relation itself seems to be contained within the sound track and in no sense in the images. Also, the organization of the images is far less intensive and coherent than that of the soundtrack discourse, so the latter easily prevails.

The relation to sound is a touchstone of the difference between collage and bands construction generally. Since collage is a weak or weaker formal principle, it is not surprising that use of sounds has a greater impact on it than on the

stronger organization into bands. A *Married Woman*, *La Chinoise*, and *Pravda* are all visual collages, but the overall formal organization of each is very different, in large part because the uses of sound are different. A *Married Woman* uses sound conventionally, as direct dialogue or voice over; *La Chinoise* is frequently a sound as well as a visual collage; and in *Pravda* the autonomous sound track not visual organization is the most important formal principle. This susceptibility to different uses of sound confirms that collage is not in itself a strong formal principle. In *Weekend* and *One Plus One*, both intensive visual organizations, use of sound is subordinate and supplementary to the visual formal principle.

The difference between collage and bands construction can also be expressed as a difference in relation to subject matter. As we have seen, in collage formal treatment of each part is based upon the subject matter of the part itself. In *Weekend* and *One Plus One* formal treatment of each scene relates to the overall visual conception and *this* in turn relates to the film's subject as a whole. In collage there is an immediate or local relation to subject; in bands construction only an overall or total relation. So also in *Pravda* the sound track criticizes not this and this shot, but the totality of the film's images. The sound track is an overall formal principle in the sense that the bands construction is and as collage probably cannot be.

In *Le Gai Savoir*, *Pravda*, and *Wind from the East*, the relation of sound and image becomes the central subject of inquiry as well as the central formal problem. Sound/image relation is also important, however, in the other late films and, predictably, is different in each. Sound collage and visual collage are sometimes synchronized in *La Chinoise*, sometimes not. Two characters recite a slogan one word at a time as the camera cuts rapidly between them, US comic book images are flashed to the sound of a machine gun, etc. At other times sound elements are arranged independently: a Maoist rock song, passages from Schubert, etc. Sound is important in *One Plus One*, but prin-

cially as a supplement to image, very much according to the conventions of screen realism: the sound the Stones are recording, the readings of the black revolutionaries, etc. An important exception are the readings from a pornographic-political novel that are cut into the sound track at several points. Sound seems less important in *Weekend* than in any of the other late films; or at least more conventional in usage and straightforward in meaning, as in the orchestration of motor horns in the traffic jam scene. This usage is paralleled in the first shot of *British Sounds*, with its deafening factory noise that, far more than the image itself, establishes the work conditions in question. Both of these scenes make highly expressive use of more or less realistic sound. A later sequence in *British Sounds* prefigures the sound/image constructions of *Pravda* and *Wind from the East*. A spoken analysis of contradictions faced by the female in capitalist society is run over the static shot of a staircase and landing, through which walks a nude woman. We hear an analysis of concrete conditions; we see the subject under discussion. In a filmed interview, Richard Mordaunt's *Voices* (1968), Godard criticizes American Newsreel films for showing political events without commentary and interpretation. Godard's position is clear: events/images do not speak for themselves.

Le Gai Savoir, made between *Weekend* and *One Plus One*, is something of a puzzle. Its subject is the relation of sound to image but, aside from some intercut photos with writing on them, the style and formal organization of the film have nothing to do with this problem. Several factors link the film to *La Chinoise*: its focus on middle-class young people in an enclosed space working out problems of revolutionary theory, its passages of intellectual collage linking its characters to the outside world and to the problems they are studying, its marking their growth through three stages, which are also the movements or parts of the film. In visual style, however, the films are not similar. Most of the character shots in *La Chinoise* are head-on long takes and each of the film's long

conversations—two between Véronique and Guillaume, one between Véronique and Jean-son—is done in a single long take. *Le Gai Savoir*, devoted almost entirely to conversations about image/sound, consists of dozens of close-ups of Jean-Pierre Léaud and of Juliet Berto and of both of them. As the two converse, the camera cuts around them: from one to the other, from one to both or both to one, from both to a different angle of both, often a reverse-angle. This is something like conventional dialogue cutting (which Godard has almost never used), except that the cuts have nothing to do with the dialogue itself. Perhaps parody is the intention. Or, since the action takes place in a TV studio and the film was made for television, perhaps it is TV style that is parodied. Godard's cutting establishes the pair in 360° depth and in multiple angles and viewpoints, but to what purpose? This is formal variation without evident coherence.* Godard also varies plastic elements, particularly the shadows on his characters' faces, again seemingly without principle.

In *Pravda* and *Wind from the East*, the problem of sound/image relation is realized in the formal principle itself. Whereas the sound track of *Le Gai Savoir* consists mainly of the speech of the characters before us (or just off-camera), in *Pravda* and *Wind* realistic or synchronized sound disappears altogether. Sound track and image track are absolutely separate and independent. It now becomes a struggle, and specifically a struggle of sound or voice, to make a connection between them. In both films the images are those of the imperialist world (in which Godard includes western-contaminated Czechoslovakia) and the sounds are those of dialectical theory seeking to understand and transform that world. Sounds criticize and negate images, and frequently themselves also. The autonomy of sound vis-à-vis image is

* An interesting variation Godard introduces is to cut away from the person who is about to speak, then to hold on the person who is listening. One character says: "In movies you see people talking but never listening."

never questioned but previous sounds are criticized and corrected by later sounds: "We have made many mistakes. We must go back and correct mistakes." In *Pravda* footage of Prague is run over a dialogue in which two Marxist-Leninists analyze the sickness of revisionism which infects these images and the proper cure for the sickness. The shots seem hurriedly taken and even their arrangement somewhat haphazard; it is the sounds of dialectical theory which must provide coherence and order, even in an aesthetic sense. This they do, as mentioned, by developing a comprehensive analysis, not of this or that shot, but of the image-track as a totality.

In *Wind from the East*, it is the film's theatrical action—an ideological Western—which is questioned again and again (seemingly every five minutes) by the sound-track voice. Here it is not images of the imperialist world directly but the film's own conceit for that world that is addressed and questioned. Thus self-criticism is taken a step further. Arguably, the divorce between images and sounds is even more extreme in *Wind* than in *Pravda* in that the sound track does not really discuss the images themselves but the imperialist world which the images symbolize. Thus sounds and images are two sets of symbols dealing with, trying to get at, the imperialist world. In *Pravda* the sounds are tied to the images, in *Wind*—aside from the passages of self-criticism—this is not so. It is possible however, to turn the question inside out and to see the images of *Wind* as tied to, as an illustration of, the sound track discourse. If so, this is not a part-by-part, shot-by-shot illustration but a relation of totalities. In either case—sound and image separation or image as illustration—sounds and images are locally independent totalities or symbol-structures, dealing with each other only as totalities.

We may draw two tentative conclusions regarding the formal principles of the late films. One is that intensive visual organization and intensive sound organization are probably not possible within the same films. That is, either

one or the other must be the dominant formal principle; one will tend to organize and dominate not only itself but the other also. It may be argued that not either sounds or images but precisely their relation is the formal principle of some or all of the late films. Such a balance as this suggests may be possible, but it has not yet been achieved. Perhaps when we understand *Wind from the East* better it will be seen to come closest. Secondly, visual and sound organizations represent important ideological differences as well as aesthetic ones. Visual organization is as fully an interpretation and critique as sound organization, though it stands on different ground and has certain different emphases. Indeed, regarding *Pravda* and *Wind*, some dialecticians would question the disembodied critical autonomy assumed by the sound-track voices. Others would demand that these anonymous voices identify themselves and place themselves within the socio-historical totality they are analyzing. Such questions concern the nature, scope, and autonomy of revolutionary theory and other dialectical problems which cannot be pursued here. These questions, however, are central to the understanding and analysis of the later films.

We have found that *Weekend* is the one film among the later works in which the structure of the tracking shot and the formal principle of the whole are nearly identical. Because the shots of *Weekend* deal with a single situation

WIND FROM THE EAST



(rather than two or more), they are not juxtaposed (as in *One Plus One*), but merely linked—as though to form one long composite tracking shot. This continuity is emphasized by the near-constant camera range of long shot, which renders the entire film, even static shots, into a single band of reality. In our discussion of the tracking shot as long take we distinguished it from composition-in-depth shots and thereby characterized the tracking shot in terms of a certain kind of flatness. If the overall structure of *Weekend* parallels that of the tracking shot, then the film as a whole must exhibit flatness also. In light of our distinction between parts and wholes, it must also be that flatness of the whole is something different from flatness of the part; and in *Weekend* this is found to be true. Nevertheless—flatness seems an odd category in which to discuss the formal organization of a work, partly because it seems a negative concept, partly because “flatness” has no meaning except in relation to “depth.” In fact, however, *Weekend* itself is negative—regarding its subject, the bourgeoisie—in several important respects. And, as we shall see also, the “flatness” of *Weekend* has specific relation to a previous “depth”—composition-in-depth, the principal mode of bourgeois self-presentation in cinema.

If we now propose to discuss the formal organization of *Weekend*, part and whole, in terms of flatness, the effect may well be one of anti-climax and disappointment. If this is so, it is due in large measure to the imprecision that such terms, and especially this term, carry in film analysis. What this means, since the category of flatness comes up inescapably here and elsewhere, is that some theoretical clarification needs to be done. This task cannot be undertaken here but minimal clarification must be done to permit our analysis of *Weekend*. There is no single sense of flatness in cinema but in fact several senses, not only in regard to different films but often in regard to the same film. A single work may be flat in several senses, or now in one sense and now in another; so we must ask not simply which films and scenes are “more flat” than others but in precisely which

senses they are flat. An equally great problem area is how critics use the judgment of flatness—the correlations they make between flatness and other matters, particularly those of subject and meaning. Clearly an undifferentiated judgment of flatness cannot be the basis for an adequate interpretation or discussion of subject. A correlation between the “flatness” of *Made in USA* or *Weekend* and Herbert Marcuse’s theory of a One Dimensional society is too general—in regard to both elements—to be of much use. Criticism must cut finer than this or it is not helpful. Rather we must ask in each case which of several kinds of flatness has/have been achieved and what is its/their specific relation to the subject of the part and/or whole to which it relates.

Cinema, like painting, is a two-dimensional art which creates the illusion of a third dimension. Painting is limited to its two dimensions; cinema is not. Cinema escapes the limits of two dimensions through its own third dimension, time. It does this by varying its range and perspective, by taking different views of its subject (through montage and/or camera movement). Cinema overcomes two-dimensionality through its “walk-around” capability, which is also a prime feature of ordinary human perception. E. H. Gombrich says: “While (one) turns, in other words, he is aware of a succession of aspects which swing round with him. What we call ‘appearance’ is always composed of such a succession of aspects, a melody, as it were, which allows us to estimate distance and size; it is obvious that this melody can be imitated by the movie camera but not by the painter with his easel.” (*Art and Illusion*, pp. 256–7). Cinema can take several views of a subject, go from one camera angle to a reverse angle or other angle, from long shot to close-up, etc. It can take the measure of a character or object from many sides, in short, in three dimensions. Both montage and composition-in-depth accomplish this walk-around project, both create and explore three dimensions, though in two-dimensional steps or segments, so to speak. It is obvious how montage accomplishes this—through a succession of shots from

different angles and at different ranges. It is equally clear that a moving camera can accomplish the same succession of aspects within a single shot. Even in those long takes which do not involve a moving camera, the actors themselves may move with respect to the camera; that is, they walk back-and-forth, or at diagonals, changing in relative size, etc. In short, the actors *turn themselves* around for us, creating different angles and perspectives on themselves. Instead of the camera's walking around, they walk around in relation to the camera. This also is well beyond the two dimensions of painting, whereby we see only one side of a figure, which must stand for and suggest his entirety.

It is precisely cinema's capacity for depth which Godard excludes in *Weekend*. His moving camera, by adhering rigidly to the single-perspective, one-sided view of painting, eliminates the succession of aspects. The tracking shot's lateral motion *extends* this single perspective rather than alters it, very much as a mural does. The movement of Godard's camera creates not a succession of aspects, but a single aspect upon an unfolding subject matter. Both montage and the usual moving camera multiply aspects or perspectives *in regard to a single subject*. To borrow a term from music, the succession of aspects is a kind of *elaboration*. The subject in question is put through multiple variations (or views), toward some *exhaustion* of its nature, meaning, or appearance. Godard's tracking shot does not elaborate in this sense. Its variations through time open up ever new subject matter; they do not elaborate or take multiple views of the same subject, as both montage and composition-in-depth (nearly) always do. Throughout the duration of a tracking shot, a one-to-one relation is maintained: a single perspective per stretch or segment of subject matter, with never a doubling or curving of perspective on a single subject.

It should be emphasized that this flatness of the single aspect is a formal quality of the whole, not of the part. We cannot judge aspect succession or constancy on the basis of the

part alone since the succession of aspects is often a succession of *shots*. It is true that each tracking shot in *Weekend* is flat in this sense of singleness of perspective, but what is done in one shot may be undone, or complemented, by another. This is the method of montage, whereby the angle and range of one shot give way to those of another and another, until a totality of aspects is accumulated. Even with lateral long takes, a subsequent tracking shot may provide a different view of the subject of a previous tracking shot. Thus we do not know until a film is over whether a given subject is elaborated multiply or not. We must look at *all* the shots of a sequence or film before we can say whether they present a succession of aspects on a single subject or, as in *Weekend*, a single aspect on a single, unfolding subject. Thus the flatness of the mural effect is an attribute or quality of the whole.

We have argued that *Weekend* is flat in an overall or structural sense in that it eliminates the succession of aspects, by which cinema approximates the third dimension. This is an absolute flatness—a sequence, a film either varies aspects or it does not. Generally speaking, the frames of *Weekend* are also relatively flat in several painterly respects, and this is always a relative flatness, a question of more or less. The clearest case of this kind of flatness is achieved by posing a character or characters against a short wall or background, as Godard does in *Masculin Feminin*, *Made in USA*, and other films, and as Skolimowski does in all his films. *Weekend* has certain of these shots, but it also has others with considerable depth—

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the camera follows its subject, the bourgeois couple, across a continuous background/landscape that is sometimes flat (thick foliage behind the pair), sometimes deep (the highway back-up).

But there are other kinds of flatness. The shallow wall shot achieves flatness simply by eliminating the long shot range, and perhaps also the medium-shot range. Godard's tracking shot achieves a converse flatness by eliminating the close-up, medium-close, and often medium shot ranges—by arranging his subjects(s) and background all within the long shot range. The point may be clarified by a comparison with composition-in-depth, which aims for maximum visual and expressive use of depth, in that both a close-up and a long shot can be included within the same shot. Composition-in-depth achieves its illusion of great depth by arranging its subject through all possible ranges of the deep-focus shot and, of course, by making dramatic relations among these subject ranges. Godard achieves flatness using only a portion of the depth which deep-focus lenses permit—he uses the long-shot range and leaves the shorter ranges “blank,” so to speak. Thus, even where there are several planes in a *Weekend* shot—highway, countryside, tree-line, etc.—they are all relatively flattened together, because all lie within the long-shot range. (Moreover, Godard does not achieve this flattening by using telephoto lenses, as Kurosawa did in *Red Beard*.)

Secondly, Godard's planes, even where multiple, are strictly parallel—they do not intersect or interrelate. Consequently the eye is not led back into the depth of the frame nor forward to its surfaces. How we have to “read” a painting or frame is one aspect of its depth; to read the frames of *Weekend*, the eye moves strictly from left to right (sometimes from right to left), never from front to back or back to front. What is true in a compositional sense is also true of the subject of these frames: the film's action. The characters, their movements and activities, never take us into or out of the frame but always from side to side. Neither in a compositional sense nor a narrative sense are we ever required to relate

foreground and background in *Weekend*. Strictly speaking, there is no foreground and background, only background, just as in the shallow wall shot there is only foreground. In another sense, foreground and background are here merged into a single plane. Again, composition-in-depth provides a definitive contrast. Like the baroque in painting, composition-in-depth makes a great deal of foreground/background relations, of foreshortening, of huge objects in the foreground, etc. It is not too much to say that foreground/background relation is the axis of composition-in-depth expressivity. As we have seen, it is its moral base also.

Thirdly, the non-intersection of planes in *Weekend* is the result not only of their strict parallelism but also of the fixed, 90° camera angle, which arranges all planes in parallel to the borders of the frame itself. Of these planes, all are inert or non-operative in both a narrative and a compositional sense, except that occupied by the characters. All interest and movement reside in the characters and they occupy (or constitute) always the same plane; they do not move between planes. *Weekend* is single-planed in the sense that the camera and the viewer's eye fix upon only one plane, that occupied by the characters, and follow it out, in one direction only, at infinite length. The frame may contain several planes, but the film as a whole is constructed in relation to only one of these.

Weekend's single-plane construction sets it apart from either school of film aesthetics, montage or composition-in-depth; comparing *Weekend* to them will help us understand the various senses of the film's flatness historically. It is clear that montage editing (and overall film construction) involves or results in a series of planes or planar perspectives. Cutting among close-ups, medium close-ups, medium shots, and long shots, in any order or combination, is obviously an alternation of the planes of a scene, and the result when assembled a sequence of planes.* The scene or event is broken

*As it happens, this phrase also appears in Stuart Gilbert's translation of André Malraux's *Museum*

into its component parts or planes, then these are reconstructed in various patterns, in accord with a structural montage principle—rhythmic, emotional, or intellectual. Besides changes of camera range, there are also changes of angle, which can alternate planar perspectives rather than particular planes. Cutting to a different angle on the same scene, however, is also a rearrangement or reordering of the planes bearing upon the action. This ordering or sequence of planes is the very texture of Eisenstein's art. Composition-in-depth is not fundamentally different in principle and overall purpose. Composition-in-depth internalizes the sequence of planes within the shot; its ideal, as Bazin presents it, is the inclusion of all planes bearing upon an action within a single camera set-up. With all the planes of a situation before or available to the camera, the entire action of the scene may be worked out within a single shot. As with montage cinema, dramatic action is advanced by way of the alternation and interaction of planes, but now this is done by camera movement and/or by the movement of actors, themselves planes or parts of planes, through or in relation to the planes of the scene. At the same time the camera must organize these planes in terms of importance, dramatic interest, etc. By composition-in-depth the succession of planes is greatly fluidized, proceeding in a smooth flow rather than in jumps, but the right solution to a given scene becomes

Without Walls (Garden City, 1967, page 75): "The means of reproduction in the cinema is the moving photograph, but its means of expression is the sequence of planes. (The planes change when the camera is moved; it is their sequence that constitutes cutting.)" A similar mistranslation of the French *plan* (shot) as plane occurs in Gilbert's translations of Malraux's variants of this passage in *The Psychology of Art: I: Museum Without Walls* (New York, 1949–51, page 112) and in *The Voices of Silence* (New York, 1953, page 122), in which Malraux is made to assert that "the average duration of each [plane] is ten seconds." But Malraux was simply expounding the classical view that cutting, the sequence of shots, is the source of expressivity in cinema.

more difficult and complex. Implicit in the shot's first image, or accessible to it, must be all the scene's action and the full exploitability of its planes. Shots must be worked out carefully and carefully rehearsed. An example of the way that composition-in-depth orders planes within the frame is given by Bazin—the scene in *The Little Foxes* in which the steel box sought by several characters occupies the extreme foreground of the frame while its seekers are arrayed in multiple planes behind it. A more extreme case is the scene in *Citizen Kane* in which Mrs. Kane learns about her son's inheritance. Shot with a static camera, the shot is very narrow and very deep, virtually a visual corridor. Within the squeezed cabin room we see the mother huge in the foreground, the banker from the East behind her, the window in the wall of the cabin behind them, and in the far distance, young Kane playing with his sled. Not only the composition of the shot but its dramatic action requires the eye to move continually back and forth. It is clear that Godard's treatment of planes in *Weekend* is directly opposite to that of this shot, an extreme in the opposite direction. Godard's visual field has little or no depth and has—or aspires to—infinite length; that is, it exists in a single lateral plane.

Consideration of *Weekend* points up underlying similarities between montage and composition-in-depth and serves to set Godard's film apart from either school of film aesthetics: both montage and composition-in-depth define cinema in terms of a multiplicity of planes and both see the problem of form or technique as the inclusion or relation of planes in a meaningful format. Godard in *Weekend* renounces the multiplicity of planes as a project of cinema and hence rejects both schools.

What are the implications of these shifts from three dimensions to two, from depth to flatness? An ideological interpretation suggests itself—composition-in-depth projects a bourgeois world infinitely deep, rich, complex, ambiguous, mysterious. Godard's flat frames collapse this world into two-dimensional actuality; thus reversion to a cinema of one plane is a demystification, an assault on the bourgeois

world-view and self-image.* *Weekend's* bourgeois figures scurry along without mystery toward mundane goals of money and pornographic fulfillment. There is no ambiguity and no moral complexity. That space in which the viewer could lose himself, make distinctions and alliances, comparisons and judgments, has been abrogated—the viewer is presented with a single flat picture of the world that he must examine, criticize, accept or reject. Thus the flatness of *Weekend* must not be analyzed only in itself but in regard to the previous modes of bourgeois self-presentation, particularly of composition-in-depth. The subject of *Weekend* is the historical bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie in history; the film's flatness must not be seen statistically, as a single moment, but dialectically, as a *flattening*. Given this overall correlation, the specific correlations of the several senses of flatness fall into place. The succession of aspects not only multiplies viewpoints on the bourgeois world so that final judgment and any kind of certainty become impossible, it projects a bourgeois world infinitely inexhaustible and elaborable. Godard's tracking shot format insists on a single perspective and on the sufficiency of a single comprehensive survey for

understanding of the transparent, easy-to-understand bourgeois world. Whereas in montage and composition-in-depth, complex form works on simple material, working it up as complex also, in Godard simple form works on simple material. The tracking shot and single-plane construction suggest an infinitely thin, absolutely flat bourgeois substance that cannot be elaborated but only surveyed. Finally, the single camera range represents not only a refusal to participate in bourgeois space, through forward camera movement, intercutting camera ranges, etc., it also has to do with the maintenance of critical perspective. Given that the film's subject is the historical bourgeoisie, Godard keeps his subject before him at all times. He refuses to pick and choose within the bourgeois world or to prefer any part of it to any other—even for a moment—because that involves partial eclipse of the whole. The nature of the bourgeois totality and the project of criticizing it require that it never be lost from view, or broken up into parts and aspects, but always be kept before the viewer as single and whole. Obviously the long-shot range is the range of the totality and the tracking shot the instrument of its critical survey. For this reason also Godard does not allow the close-up and medium-close ranges to be filled, for a face or figure huge in the foreground literally obstructs the whole and distracts attention from it in an emotional and intellectual sense also. Flatness in *Weekend*, in its various senses, is in fact the result of a formal totality that refuses to relinquish total perspective on the socio-historical totality that is its subject.

* This transition is more than a formal one. The practitioners and advocates of composition-in-depth genuinely believed in this moral depth and ambiguity. Bazin points out that the conception and interpretation of *Citizen Kane* depend on the composition of the image. It could hardly be otherwise in a great masterpiece. William Wyler's composition-in-depth films, which (as Bazin says) have little or no ambiguity, are not masterpieces. In such a case composition-in-depth becomes merely an imposed format, a style without internal correlates. (Wyler's better films, such as *The Letter*, are not structured around composition-in-depth). Welles, the greatest composition-in-depth director, is also the director who has made the most of the theme of inexhaustible mystery. Not only *Kane* but many or most of Welles's other films center on impenetrable mystery and several, also like *Kane*, proceed through a multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives which nevertheless fail to yield certainty concerning the underlying questions.