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Bart Testa *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992)

That intellectual history has had a privileged place among academic disciples in Canada should not be surprising. The work of A. B. McKillop, Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott—work that has done much to make Canadian Studies more historically self-consciousness—demonstrated the centrality of the Idealist tradition in Canadian intellectual life up to the 1950s, when the embrace of the American empire of taste enfolded Canadian culture. The Idealist Tradition stressed the relation between being and history, between what something is and how it evolved. It also accorded the life of ideas a paramount role in the historical process. Furthermore, it showed how the spirit of the age informs all cultural forms from the most elementary to the most complex—from how we dress to our beliefs about the nature of reality. It even accomplished the basic task of instructing us how all cultural forms, including science, logic, and other apparent bases of our understanding of the world have a history and that they are not set by fixed Platonic essences, but discover their being in their histories.

No one should wonder, then, that film studies in Canada should have turned towards inquiry into the process by which the cinema formed itself as the ideological machine that it is. In Montréal, the painstaking work of André Gaudreault has put him at the forefront of research into early cinema. At the University of Toronto, Charles Keil has been hard at work. It is surely significant that it is to this field that Canadian scholars have made their most distinguished contribution.

The maturation of the study of films' first two decades is not reason for unalloyed delight, for the movement manifests the same tension that pervades all areas of our culture. Powerful forces threaten our intellectual tradition, and the situation has come to the point that the fad for empirical methods that still, unhappily, holds sway in our cultural institutions, including the university nearly has displaced it. It is likely that, after a brief interregnum in which theory-gone-mad held sway, empirical methods have reasserted themselves more strongly than before. The new empiricists can hold up the craziness of the last antiempirical moment in our intellectual history as testimony to the importance of labouring, painstaking, cautious, unspeculative work—and lest anyone forgets the lesson, they seem to keep the Deleuzians around to make the point.

An interested observer can get a sense of how far down the spiral we have spun by perusing the phlegmatic special issue of *Persistence of Vision* on early cinema (No. 9), edited by Tom Gunning and including articles by Charles Keil and André Gaudreault. On the opposite end of the spectrum of quality is a work by the Toronto film scholar Bart Testa, *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde*. Testa's book takes it, more or less, that common interests have motivated academics in their investigations of the history of early cinema and film artists in their reuse of imagery from early cinema, and goes about the job of exfoliating those common interests. It is by far the finest work this movement has produced in English Canada and, more simply, it is among the finest works the current wave of interest in early cinema has produced. That there are such common interests I found unlikely (a fact Testa hints at in the acknowledgements); yet his careful analysis of Malcolm LeGrice's lovely film, *After Lumière*, makes the case convincingly, for that film at least. The book is beautifully written; the rest of us writing on cinema can only envy Testa's skill as a writer.

However, the study of early film, worldwide, presents a dreary prospect. It is not just that much of it is of the old who-wrote-the-letter-proving-priority school of humanistic studies that drove many like me into studying mathematics and science in university. The new historicism is that, again, and the prevalence of that dreary, senseless work in academic film studies is having

the same effect this time around. Reading the historians of early film such as Tom Gunning and Charles Musser reawakens in me the feelings I had as a teenager, quarrelling daily with my parents to allow me to quit school and play jazz, and reading André Hodeir's *Jazz: Its Evolution and Its Essence*, Winthrop Sargeant, *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*, Ramsey and Smith's *Jazzmen*, Gunther Schuller's *The Evolution of Jazz*, and others like them. For me, jazz became an art music with Charlie Parker, Charlie Mingus, and John Coltrane, and others of their generation. Almost anything earlier was entertainment music, some better, some worse. The question I wanted answered was how artists such as Parker, Mingus and Coltrane transformed popular cabaret and dance-hall music into an art-form that sustains the same rigours of attention as Claude Debussy. The books offered little information on that topic. They described how early jazz laid down formulas that, through the history of jazz, underwent a nearly mechanical process of elaboration and development. The question of the relation of the individual talent (or, what is yet significant, of genius) to tradition is difficult, admittedly, but I have remained convinced from the time I searched these books for some clue to Coltrane's genius to this day that no such mechanical description of history of an art as was offered in those books—the first books on art I read with any sense of calling—can be of much use in explaining the phenomenon of art.

It wasn't just that that approach seemed so musty, though it did, as musty as the works of Charles Musser seem now. There will always be aficionados who are enthusiastic to tell you who first played jazz trombone in that snarly, growly, rolling, getdown style and how this style jazz trombone playing changed, or who played first played in the sweet Teagarten style, and the historical consequences of the Teagarten style, in elevating jazz trombone from its position of marking the harmonic rhythm, of time-keeping (and occasionally of playing the clown) to being, when the occasion called for it, a lead melodic instrument. There is nothing wrong with such interests. There is something wrong, though, when teachers mistake such empirical history for the study of art and when humanities abdicate teaching life-giving art for technical arcana.

A basic problem with the approach results from its failure to acknowledge that the greatest achievements in art—the art that really matters—are always strange, odd, unusual, different, unique, weird, far out-of-the-ordinary. Not the least of the difficulties of writing art criticism (writing on the *real* art, and not the deluge of minor pieces that perennially serve to keep the field alive) is that each object one writes about is singular, and calls for a new set of responses. Anyone who takes the task seriously has experienced repudiated ideas and rejected forms becoming, against all one's desires, cogent, moving, challenging, and rich as he or she worked through the feelings a piece excited. Our mind works defensively when confronted with strange ideas, wild forms, exotic experiences; and it tries to erect defences against their intrusion into the recesses of our being, by taming and domesticating them through intellectual mastery—by seeking out common themes, patterns of historical development and the like. If you take criticism as important, you try to avoid succumbing to such defensive urges. You know that if you try to account for Johann Sabastien Bach in terms of the normal practices in baroque composition you miss what makes him a singular phenomenon, the greatest artist, possibly, in the history of humankind. If this is true of J.S.B., whose artistic outlook was not revolutionary, it is more true of a Beethoven. Similarly, one avoids attempts to figure Edgar Allen Poe as prototypical of detective fiction, for such an approach will miss how truly strange, weird, singular and therefore marvellous a talent his was.

The literature on early cinema is like the literature on early jazz in this respect, too: it describes the development of an increasingly regimented, conventionalized, formulaic cinematic practice. Such an approach will not help us to understand what is important—how a Dreyer, say, manages so consummately to escape such a rigid, formulaic practice. No account of Dreyer that tries to account for his work merely as an extension of the filmmaking practices of the twenties or thirties will have anything interesting to say about his art, in just the same way and for just the same reasons that no amount of study in Elizabethan literature can explain how Shakespeare

soars so far above even good poets like Dowland and Campion, to say nothing of a hoard of mediocre poets and playwrights of his time. The primary lesson we learn by studying Shakespeare against the background of his contemporaries is how rare, how unusual, how different, how weird, how completely odd genius really is. These are ideas that offend the present, I know, but just try reading Campion some evening after spending the day with Shakespeare.

Testa is as much a committed film viewer as he is a scholar, with a fine, responsive body (when his mind does not overtake it). He knows the dangers of conceiving the history of film, or any art form, as a single, teleological process. The first two chapters of *Back and Forth* are undoubtedly the finest, and the second, by any reasonable measure one might choose, is outstanding writing on film. The claims of the second chapter are that an unwritten thesis subtends much writing on film, that “when film finally learned to tell stories, it gained its specific language . . . that the development of narrative language is the condition for film for meeting its artistic destiny.” The claim Testa really wants to make is not that the avant-garde and the new historiography share a common, elaborated programme, but that film viewers can see them as cooperating in prising open this closed model of cinema on which, as he beautifully puts it, “it is as if the art of film is to be defined by proximity: as film gains the power of narrative, it becomes an art.” Referring to this “myth” of cinematic development, and specifically to the period which conventional film history posits as pre-narrative, he writes with impressive eloquence:

The invention of cinema was radically contingent in respect to art, and the early cinema, says Rhode, “hovered between life and death” like a shivering orphan out of a Dickensian novel. Waiting for its artistic career to begin, the illegitimate waif of technology fell into bad company and developed questionable morals in the era of penny arcades and second-string music halls. Film does not feel the pull of its narrative destiny strong enough until, after brief stints in the foster homes of Méliès, Porter and other “primitives,” the orphan is adopted by its firm stepfather, Griffiths, who secures a proper education for the foundling. (p. 33)

Part of what Testa intends when he proposes that we consider the avant-garde to have a pedagogical character is that it shows that cinema can, and perhaps should, be non-narrative. When one considers how common the view that film’s destiny is narrative is, and how uncommon the view that film can, or should, be something else- is-or when one considers just how much film teaching rests on the assumption that films’ destiny is narrative, one realizes how radical Testa’s discussion is. One sees its radical nature even more clearly when he or she recognizes, as the quotation above suggests, that Testa intends to use the association between the new, academic film histories and the avant-garde to argue that the academy’s “bad object,” non-narrative film, has at least as legitimate a claim to attention as its “good object,” narrative film.

Testa modestly refers to his treatment of the new historiography as reportage, but it is more. His real project is to mine the work of new historiographers for indications that this simplistic teleological history, on which film became art when it associated with narrative, is too narrow, that the most rigorous recent research into early film points out that there are a the variety of conditions film might have taken on, conditions that the avant-garde both intimates and assumes. Thus, he credits Laval University film historian André Gaudreault for analyzing the range of narrative modes that early film developed. Too, he defies orthodoxy when he proposes that it is not the new historiographers who have offered the most suggestive, and brilliant, insights on early film, but the playfully speculative filmmaker Hollis Frampton, who—though Testa coyly refrains from pointing out the fact—in his theoretical writings, treats narrative in mode of irony (even arguing through an analogy in the mathematics of set theory that Stan

Brakhage's films are narratives). The claim tells much about where Testa's sympathies lie. Even the overarching layout of the thesis, unfolding across chapters that sets out increasingly complex views of the forces that shaped the cinema, is a series of steps towards demolishing the unwritten assumption that a single, "internal, self-caused principle" explains the evolution of film.

All efforts to downgrade the appeal of narrative position are estimable—especially in the eyes of those of us who have interests not in what film happened to become, but in what it might be. However, I do not think Testa carries his insights to a sufficiently radical conclusion. This is partly because Testa's scholarly care prompts him to reject the simplistic anti-history that some of us in the avant-garde would wish to construct—that the cinema was born as an art (the films of Lumière and Méliès are already great), that it was replete with possibilities, and that the acquisition of the language of narrative resulted in its expulsion from the paradisiacal state into which it was born. (In our historiographic myth, Griffiths, far from being the stern, but good, adoptive father who brings the wayward waif within the hallowed halls, is the devil himself, and so I cannot teach his films). An even stronger force in Testa's failure to adopt a more radical position is his refusal to consider that the history of an art is simply a chronicle of singular, strange, monuments, each wholly incommensurate with one another and his reluctance to realize that attempts to enfold these monuments within any evolving system—whether the narrative or the replacement of the "primitive mode of representation" with the "institutional mode of representation"—are bound to fail. Testa would likely view a stance based on such proposals as a refusal to do the work of historiography, that is, to develop explanatory models adequate to the phenomena under scrutiny. For my part, I view those claims as the academic's efforts to reject the singularity of works of art, and to use general principles (like those of evolution of the universe) past the point of applicability. (We need a Stephen Hawking of art history to overtake the work of the Newtons we have had.)

Testa, with the fine care of a scrupulous analyst, and aware of the temptations and dangers in finding connections while none exist, is careful to put a distance between the early cinema and the modernism of the avant-garde. Despite this, he makes extensive use of Burch's idea that the visual compositions of the tableaux of early film are centrifugal constructions that invite viewers to scan the image. He seems unaware that modernist discussions of art have used these terms programmatically (a fact Burch too fails to acknowledge). The best discussion of the issue I know is Anton Ehrenzweig's little read book, *The Hidden Order of Art*. A related limitation is his failure to recognize that the meta-spectator (the spectator occupying a self-contained world set apart from the social realm of class difference, gender difference, etc.) that Miriam Hansen describes is not specific to the classical narrative cinema (her own account notwithstanding); Clive Bell's *Art* and in E. Bullough's famous paper on "psychical distance" describe the same viewer. It is the viewer described in nearly all modernist accounts of aesthetic experience. Because he does not note the identity, Testa falls into the trap of describing the progression from what Hansen labels the empirical spectator to the meta-spectator as a denaturing, as a reduction of the concrete, social agent. Modernists described it as distancing. A similar failure is not recognizing the modernist influence on the early film theorist, Hugo Münsterberg, whose description of the experience of film art is closer to the modernist's description of aesthetic experience than to the work of the gestalt psychologists to whom Testa relates them. Testa charges that the isolation of the experience that Hansen and Münsterberg describe is a deleterious feature of our experience of narratives, when it is simply boilerplate modernism. Modernists proposed that the distancing of experience from its ordinary conditions is requisite for the revitalization of routinized sensation. Testa implicitly rejects this, by accepting the now-common claim that such distancing is deleterious, but he does not provide any reasons that discredit the modernists' claims. The failure to acknowledge the difference of aesthetic experience explains Testa's tendency to describe our encounter with works of art using cognitive

and theoretical categories; it also explains his desire to enfold artworks within an ever-changing field of social forces (no matter how complex) and to refuse to admit the uniqueness of our experiences of those monstrous, weird objects we call works of art.

Testa attempts to use the denatured character of the meta-spectator to criticize the narrative. While I laud any efforts to loosen the stranglehold that narrative film has over film academies, I don't think criticism of our experience of narrative (or art generally) that invoke Hansen's idea of the meta-spectator and her analysis of its character has any chance of succeeding. For one thing, I disagree with Testa (and Hansen) that that spectator is specific to narrative experience; its description is too widespread for that to be so. For another, I believe the account of aesthetic experience that the modernists to be correct in its essentials.

The best parts of Testa's book are his commentaries of individual avant-garde films, on Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* and Ernie Gehr's *Eureka*, or the fine film *Seashore*, by Vancouver filmmaker David Rimmer. Testa's discussion the last work, concentrating on Rimmer's play with centrifugal vectors of entrances and exits from the frame is, I believe, the best writing on the work of that filmmaker. His writing on *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* is the best that I have seen on that work, too. He also provides a better Burchian description of our experience of space in the Lumière's *Arrivée du Train* than Burch himself provides. It is when he slips away from his academic thesis that his writing soars. Testa possesses wide knowledge and a large scope of previous experience with art, and when he writes about films he likes (and it is apparent which films he really "digs") his writing takes off. Then, after a virtuoso performance, he returns to being a good soldier, dutifully developing his academic thesis, a move that invariably leaves one a little disappointed. While I admire the care he takes with the work of Tom Gunning or Charles Musser or Miriam Hansen, I would trade any fifty pages (or 500 if they existed) of them for one sentence on his writings on *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son*.

I must allow that a feature of many avant-garde films may seem to invite us to consider them discursively—or, at least, so many have proposed. Most of the films that Testa considers are self-reflexive works, works that direct attention to their own material nature. One hears it said about such works that they are films about film. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Self-reflexive forms have the fundamental purpose of directing interest towards the material medium that carries the visual forms the work embodies. The difference here is more than a nuance; the common statement proposes that self-reflexivity has a discursive purpose (the very belief I accuse Testa of maintaining when he writes as a scholar). Good art films, like all works of art, are objects whose purpose is to invite a different, more sensuous sort of interest (the very sort of interest that Testa the responsive film viewer pays them).

Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde has many strengths. Its small imperfections result from a mistake Testa made concerning the role of content. He seems to feel that if films contain images from old-time movies, then these are in the most literal way films about the old-time movies. Testa knows enough that such a simple assertion is implausible, and so, in the introduction (p. 19) he disavows any convictions concerning a possible convergence of the avant-garde with the new historiography of cinema. However, in the same paragraph he does this, he brings the idea he just disallowed in through the back door, as he introduces the idea the avant-garde cinema furnishes a metalanguage of early cinema and soon after proposes that the avant-garde's project is essentially pedagogic, for it teaches us look at film in new way. Testa's recognition that several experimental films incorporate images from early films (though these are not large in number, there are enough to prompt a thoughtful film viewer to consider what they have in common and to ask why they should appear in such proximity) undoubtedly encouraged this enthusiastic leap to a connect the work of the new historiography and that of the avant-garde.

One might wonder why several avant-garde filmmakers have made use of old-movie footage in their films, if not to make films about old-time movies. I can think of six (aesthetically

relevant) reasons:

1) Film, because it is based in photography, has an affinity for surrealism, for making manifest the mysterious, the marvellous, the bizarre that is latent in reality. Nothing befits such a purpose better than a medium that makes images mechanically, without human artifice. Furthermore, their low-art provenance gives them the appeal of images whose meanings were produced unconsciously. The lowly status that photographic and cinematographic images had in the first decades of the century adds to their cachet as giving evidence of a counter-tradition whose tastes are decidedly unrefined. The surrealistic nature of “unsophisticated” photographs and films only increases as time passes, for as the era from which they hail becomes increasingly remote, they become increasingly strange, mysterious, magical.

Some filmmakers have strived to create films that reveal the mystery and magic inherent in (and sometimes locked up) the unsophisticated and unconscious products of the image-industry. Ken Jacobs’ *The Doctor’s Dream* is a fine example of this use of found footage.

2) The low-resolution of early film stocks, their lack of fidelity in mapping the complete colour spectrum to grey tones, and the contrasty character of prints many generations removed from the originals results in an image that presents very little illusion of depth.

Pop artists of the 60s and early 70s made images of images that themselves were completely flat—Warhol, Lichtenstein, Johns, etc. There were many motivations for this, but one was creating a work that drew attention to the material of the painting, to the constructions on a flat surface, not to the illusion.

Film is disadvantaged in this respect; except in unusual circumstances it is difficult to make a series of flat or nearly flat film images that are aesthetically satisfying. Of course, this is not a real problem, for it is difficult to make aesthetically satisfying images no matter what, but the difficulty does point up a difference between film on one the hand, and painting and drawing on the other. Some filmmakers have wanted to exploit this illusion, by using images whose illusion of depth is partial—neither complete nor entirely lacking. Thus, while the painter Ken Jacobs was as committed to flatness as others in Hans Hoffmann’s school, the filmmaker Jacobs has worked to introduce a partial illusion of depth into the film image. The attenuated haptic illusion of imagery from early films suits his purpose well.

3) A photograph is bound to a time and place, with a bond stronger than that of any other image. Refilming photographic images has a vastly paradoxical character, for we are actually filming the past—making an image with apparatus that films only what is immediately before it of something that is bygone. Several filmmakers have incorporated footage from early movies into their own films to explore these paradoxes. Ernie Gehr’s *Eureka*, and David Rimmer’s *Surfacing of the Thames* and *Watching for the Queen* are examples.

4) Any work of art transforms the materials that become part of it. A poem takes words from our common, everyday language and gives them wholly new meanings. By incorporating footage from the ordinary products of the image industry, a filmmaker can show this process of transformation at work—how the footage becomes something new by becoming a part in a new system of relation. Many filmmakers used techniques in reprinting old movie footage—for example tinting the image, enlarging its grain, increasing its contrast—to emphasize this process of transformation. David Rimmer’s *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper* is an example.

5) Quite simply, a partially indistinct image from the past elicits strong affects. This is partly because it is incomplete, and invites us to fill in details. (This is, to be sure, a version of McLuhan’s thesis about the appeal of modernism’s paratactical forms.)

6) Many artists of the twentieth century have used found objects and industrial methods of fabrication to create works whose surfaces do not display the personal handwriting of the artists. There are many reasons for this, and most somehow relate to the idea that artmaking should not be emotive or expressive, but an accomplishment in the realm of built form. Found

footage appeals as cinematic material unaffected by the personal styles of camera-handling many artist/filmmakers (including, I suppose I should admit, myself) have adopted. Sometimes this interest goes along with the interest in the surreality of the photograph, for the fact that the work is not a human artifact but a found object suggests that its beauty, its marvellousness, belongs to the order of nature, not of human poesis.

The most radical statement of the sensibility that conceived this aspiration is Walter Benjamin's habit of collecting quotations from everything he read, and reading the resulting collage, out loud, lovingly, to his friends. (Though Testa devotes several pages to Benjamin in chapter 6, he does not see this connection, and treats Benjamin as film studies does, simply as the author of "The Work of Art.") The idea of the artist stepping out of the work, leaving a pure construction of ravishing beauty is common to the Surrealists and the artists who used industrial methods of production. For the Surrealists, the passion for collecting was the purest expression of the desire for hoarding, and what they hoarded contained evidence of the fantastic's hold on everyday objects. The random juxtaposition of the objects in the collector's treasure trove added another layer of already fantastic character of the objects.

The handmade works surrealists possess a distinctive tension, mixing the startling coldness of precision with the intensity of the obsessions (a mixture Duchamp handled consummately). They formulate an object of the irrational, bizarre, fantastic sort, and paint it with the consummate mastery, with a chill that renders the irrationality more extreme. The desire to create works that are cold, remote, aloof allies the interests of the Surrealists with those of the minimalists who fabricated their art objects using industrial methods of production.

These are very different reasons than the content-based reasons that Testa suggests through his comment that avant-garde films engage in a pedagogical project. The basic problem with the content based approach is that it does not acknowledge how completely the form of an artwork transforms the imagery that it incorporates; it fails, in other words, to pay proper heed to the transformative role of the artist's creative work. After showing some of his 3D films based on images from early films, an audience member asked Jacobs a content-oriented question about the scenes in his films, supposing they offered a catalogue of types of "attractions" (to use Gunning's term)—scenes that early films favoured: exotic landscapes, carnivalesque scenes, forbidden views, etc. Jacobs looked at him as at one who has two heads, and no wonder. His films are not some academic taxonomy of the predilections of old-time moviemakers, but about how a small change made to an early film—the creation of a shallow depth by stereoscopy—radically transformed our experience of them. Forms hover in a strange, marvellous space, and figures become fragmented. The violation of the perceptual effect that gestalt psychologists call the constancy of size, characteristic of any photograph, still has effect, even if it is attenuated, for the introduction of a stronger partial illusion of space elicits a stronger expectation of the constancy of size (as the space of the film more closely resembles our everyday experience of the space of the world). The failure to fulfil such expectations makes the fragmentation of overlapping forms fantastically strong. By observing and using such effects, Jacobs seeks to transform our experience—and the questioner asked him questions about how representative his work was. Again, we see the denial of the uniqueness of artwork.

As fine as Testa's comments on Jacob's *Tom, Tom* are, my crabbiness prompts me to cavil that I detect similar constricting effects in it—even while knowing that Testa allows as much when he refers to "the peculiar division [in the film] between analysis of visual language and intimations of a mystery that, as [Jacobs] suggests, makes analysis a fantasy of reading." Testa suggests that the long, second passage of that film, in which image was not still when rephotographed, so one sees a blur on the screen that seems to accelerate and decelerate. Testa attributes its presence to Jacob's concern with the material of film, with what, following Baudry he later refers to as *défilement*, the flow of film through the projector. I suggest it is not

anything so conceptual as this. The effect of the films passing, unregistered, through the gate of the projector is that the scene loses whatever illusory depth it originally possessed and becomes a series of vertical bands that seem to oscillate in a reduced haptic space, and even to flow in contrary directions. The alternation between stasis and motion in the passage creates a rhythmic form. What is more important, it reveals the source material the filmmaker transforms. The excitement that the filmmaker finds in the passage is the exhilaration he feels in his capacity to transform this source material radically using such a simple, demonstrable procedure, and the alternation allows us to participate in that excitement.

There is a filmmaker whose films incorporate footage from early films, and who does use that footage to illustrate ideas about early film history—the Vancouverite Al Razutis, whose work Testa included in the exhibition for which he wrote this catalogue. His works show what happens when a filmmaker makes content of his or her imagery central, not the means he or she uses to transform found footage. The films become media studies, that bane of all art teachers, now that students have identified that discipline as the essence of film and photographic studies. That his best film, *93.8 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm* avoids the media studies' approach, and revels in his capacities—which are not slight—to transform found footage aesthetically is evidence of how great the difference between discursive interest and artistic interest really is.

Because it is so common, and because nearly all commentators on the found footage films (including Testa) have overlooked its importance, I want to dwell on one particular transformative effect of creating films by refilming found footage. We perceive the form of an art object through a (largely unconscious) process of resolving it into its basic units; this process provides the basis for another, the process of forming larger wholes out of these basic units. The latter process is hierarchical and multiform: for global form of a piece usually does not arise immediately from the organization of its minimal units. Rather the basic units are organized into simple forms, these simple forms combine into more comprehensive forms and so on, at increasing higher levels in a hierarchy. Furthermore, a unit, from whatever level in the hierarchy of organizing forms, can play a role in many different organizations, either at the same or at a different hierarchical level.

The paired processes of segmentation and hierarchical integration are fundamental to our apprehension of form, in whatever art we might deal with. Their importance is evident from the use, both analytic and creative, that music theorists and composers have made of the theories of James Tenney, a composer who teaches in York University's Department of Music. In the early 60s, Tenney published *Meta-Hodos*, a theoretical tract that has become legendary. Very near the beginning of the work he states emphatically that:

the first condition described by [gestalt psychologist Kurt] Koffka for the appearance of order, within a "bewildering complexity of stimulation," is the perceptual formation of *units*, "maintained in segregation and relative insulation from other units." This will be the basic assumption in all the arguments that follow. And one of the first questions which must be asked about the various sounds and sound-configurations that occur in music is: what factors are responsible for their unity and singularity, and what factors affect "their relative insulation from other units?"

Out of this, Tenney develops an extravagantly powerful set of tools for the analysis of musical form.

We might ask the same questions of cinematic form. What factors are responsible for our segregating, out of the welter of stimuli with which a film presents us, certain of them, and forming a unit from them? What factors are responsible for their unity and what factors affect their relative insulation from other units? It is usual to consider the shot the basic unit of film construction. While the frame has a basic unit of the film material, film analysts generally argue

that the common film view hardly discriminates this unit, and that a change in point-of-view, change in the size of an object depicted, change of location, or change of time marks off what he or she discriminates as a separate unit. In short, they segregate units on the basis of shot-to-shot changes, while the change from frame to frame they consider an internal change, a continuous transformation that occurs within a basic unit, not between units. The notion that the shot, and not the frame, is the basic unit of film composition receives support from the conventions of film editing, for these conventions concern the relations between shots, not frames.

But what about the shot? What factors are responsible for their grouping the frames that make up a shot together and for discriminating them from the frames that make up a different show, and what factors affect their relative insularity of one unit from other units? The most obvious feature that marks the end of a shot is that the difference between the frames at either side of a cut is greater than that between two successive frames in a shot. This is only a matter of degree, and filmmakers customarily use any one of several strategies for creating continuity between the shots on either side of a cut. Even so, the differences between successive frames are slighter than the differences between the frames on either side of the cut. Whatever measure of similarity we might develop, the degree of similarity between successive frames in a shot will be higher than the degree of similarity between the frames on either side of a shot. Moreover, the degree of difference between any two successive frames will be regular, while the degree of difference between frames on either side of a cut will not be.

Tenney's theoretical framework can help explain one of the more common effects of reusing of historical footage. When rephotographing historical footage, one group of filmmakers has used pans or tilts or zooms or sectioned the original scene into many that they subsequently put together in a new whole, rather in the fashion that D.W. Griffiths analyzed a theatrical scene into several shots and that he subsequently recombined into a whole that possesses new and distinctively cinematic spatio-temporal features. An individual "take" in the rephotography—a passage where the camera remains fixed or pans or tilts continuously—will possess those gestalt features that encourage us to perceive the frames that constitute it as a unit. For the difference from frame to frame will be both regular and slight. Thus we see the work as segmented into units based on a single rephotographed frame.

However, while rephotography attenuates the gestalt factors that lead us to perceive the frames that form a single shot as a unit, it does not reduce them to nothing. The frames shot in single gesture are still more like one another than like frames from another shot, and the movement of the bodies within these frames is still regular, and of roughly equal size between successive frames. There are, thus, two levels of organization, one based on units that result from rephotographing, however many times, a single frame, another, more extended, more marked, but usually less perceptible order that incorporates all the frames produced by rephotographing a single shot of the original. There is a tug between two gestalt orders, one deriving from the original photography and one from the rephotography. Depending on the vicissitudes of the photography and the rephotography, one or the other orders come to the fore. (This again be accounted for partly in gestalt terms, as depending on the degree of similarity between the successive frames of produced in the original photography in comparison with the degree of similarity between successive frames produced in rephotography, with the proviso that the any degree of similarity resulting from the original photography has greater weight than the identical degree of similarity resulting from the rephotography, since it provides the original source material.) Sometimes we see a shot produced by rephotography more as a series of still-life tableaux, sometimes more as step-printed shot, and sometimes as something in between. The shifting relation we have to the sequences is delightful, and no matter what it is, it clearly defies being described in the simple terms we use to describe the construction of a conventional film.

The impression that we sometimes have, in varying degrees, that we are looking at rephotographed still-life tableaux and the impression that we sometimes have, in varying degrees, that we are looking at step-printed live-action footage both have importance. Testa describes our differing experiences of space in film and a photograph; but a photograph and a film also impart very different temporal qualities to us. A photograph seems to present a moment that has been snatched from the past; it allows us to reach back and see what has already happened. A film, on the other hand, seems to bring the past to life again, to re-present, or at least to experience it as peculiar mixture of pastness and presence. A film can make us ignore almost completely the pastness of what it re-presents, make us feel that what we are seeing is almost totally present.

Filmmakers have used optical printing to reveal the spontaneity of a gesture in the original camerawork—David Rimmer's delight in the tilt in *Watching for the Queen* is a case in point. The effect is often paradoxical, of both containing and releasing the energy of the original gesture. It contains its energy because the still frame traps the action of the profilmic event; it releases its spontaneity as keeping the spontaneously composed image on the screen for an extended duration makes the casual nature of the composition evident. Holding an individual frame on screen long enough that its content uncouples from its moorings in narrative, in the representation of incident and even, in the sequentiality of live-action cinematography (which invites us to follow the development of some gesture) reinforces these paradoxical. When a filmmaker does this, our attention focuses on the frame's visual composition. Sometimes this emphasis on composition makes the images seem candid and direct, their beauty almost serendipitous; it makes their beauty seem a product of the natural or animal world, not the result of calculation by the filmmaker and of his remarkable capacity to create form. We return, thus, to the realization that the use of found footage allows filmmakers to step out of the work—to create works whose expressive functions are attenuated, to make way for the perfection of something beyond their control.

This appearance is deceptive, of course, for the found-footage filmmaker can exert control over what image or images out of series appear in the film and the order in which they appear, over camera movement, over the exact duration of each separate image, and over the features of the image that are affected by rephotography, such as how grainy, sharp, contrasty, or saturated it appears or how natural its colours are. However, though deceptive, the impression is important because it suggests a goodness to the order of existence.

No matter what the particular techniques of reprinting a filmmaker uses or what the precise characteristics of the forms into which he or she incorporates it, optically printed footage involves two moments—the moment when the original image was made and the moment when the original footage is rephotographed. When a filmmaker uses an optical printer, he or she is filming imagery from a bygone time. Many modernist filmmakers found the conflict of temporalities disconcerting for their aspiration was to create a form that did not lead the viewer out toward an illusory time but, instead, presented as belonging only to the exact moment we experience it. Avant-garde filmmakers who have used optical printing have, for the most part, done one of two things to contain and limit these conflicting temporal modes. One is to emphasize the contradiction, the other, to emphasize the filmmaker's powers of transformation.

A source of the delight we take in early films is the extraordinary otherness of what we see. We look into the past and see buildings, automobiles, clothing and, most important, bodies that evoke the bittersweet recognition of era that, though perhaps more difficult than our own, has gone, and the variety it added to the world vanished. The otherness of the bodies that we see in early films explains the fascination that most people feel in watching boxing movies, or the innocent serpentine dance films from the periods. How strange those bodies of men and women from the turn of the century seem, if though they are of the same species as our own! Filmmakers emphasized the otherness of the time of the image, to increase the tension

between the now and the then.

When filmmakers inclined to emphasize the otherness of found images did their rephotography, they often step-printed it (as Ernie Gehr did when making *Eureka*). For the gestaltist reasons outlined above, the reprinting has the effect of making the still images more poignantly assert their appeal of the bygone. The second group of filmmakers, those inclined to emphasize the transformative powers of artistic form, did everything possible to transform the footage they reworked, bringing its past wholly into the experience of the present. They emphasized the power of aesthetic devices to transform even the most remote material into the immediate presence of aesthetic experience.

There is a larger issue at stake in the use of old footage—one that is too large for me to do anything but allude to it. It relates to the spirit of the age that produced the cinema. Because it relates the derealization of the world of the senses, it still concerns us today—and still makes us wish to search in the documents of the age when it first asserted itself with terrifying vigour, including old-movie footage. Kracauer's film theory makes clear, by drawing (without acknowledgement) his list of the affinities of photography from the orthodox, Wöfflian, art-historical description of aesthetic rupture that Impressionist painting represents, that photography and impressionism share affinities for subject matter. This is a potentially rich field of research, but the academic research into the early cinema has not followed up such a speculative historical project. Godard waggishly pointed out the importance of the relationship between early film and Impressionism when he points out that the films made by the inventors of the cinema, the Lumière brothers, at the very beginning of cinema, portrayed the same subjects as the Impressionists used: street scenes, scenes of the family in the garden, the fête champêtre, etc. I believe this relation tells us much about what motivated the early development of the cinema, yet analysis of the relation is wholly lacking.

There is also no inquiry into the relation between the Griffiths' application of fragmentation and recombination to the cinematographic scene and the method of Cubist painting. Testa does point out the relation, and that is a step in the right direction—away from the academic film historians. But indicating the relation is different from analyzing it. I believe the similarity results from a crisis in vision that began in the early nineteenth century. Since the rise of modern science in the sixteenth century, an ever-widening split had developed between the world as we see it and the world "as it really is"—i.e., the world made up of the patterns that science uncovers. The world we see seems dense, in many areas immobile, and everywhere at least semi-stable; the world science discovers, on the other hand, is characterized by constant movement—molecular, atomic and subatomic, a field of energy in constant flux. This split resulted in a crises concerning our knowledge of the external world that is reflected in the perceptual studies of Roget and their application of the great pre-cinema animator Émile Reynaud, the protocinemas of Muybridge and a host of lesser figures interested in applying photography in the scientific analysis of human locomotion, the variety of apparati with the fascinating generic name of philosophical toys, and the perceptual studies of the impressionists, pointillists, and Cubists. Most important, it produced instantaneous photography and the motion picture. These considerations could form the foundation of a Hegelian-tinged study of the evolution of cinema (taking up where André Bazin left off in "The Myth of Total Cinema.") Such a history would depict the cinema as Bazin did, born not as waif needing an adoptive father to help her, but as an heir-apparent—a possibility Testa seems not to conceive, though Bazin's writings should have made it venerable. And the distance that separates what that history would be from the empirical history served up by the early cinema movement is the distance that separates Canadian thinking as it was from Canadian thinking as is, an index that measures how far the Idealistic Canadian mind has succumbed to American empiricism.

Testa's book reads as a summing of the usable achievements of the early cinema movement. It is beautiful written, magisterial; and sometimes it is sharp criticism of the early

cinema movement. The special issue of *Persistence of Vision* is so phlegmatic that has the ponderousness of an elegy. Together, the two suggest a movement at its end. We can recall Hegel's words for hope: "The owl of Minerva only takes flight at twilight," and hope that thought will take flight from the mindlessness of empirical history. When it does, Testa, by taking the best ideas from it and applying them some of the greatest films of the past thirty years will have created one of its finest monuments.