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**Sounding Snow:
On text and sound in Michael Snow's Rameau's Nephew**

Since the arrival of the sound-film, the dual nature, aural and visual, of the form has vexed filmmakers and film theorists. As early as 1929, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, pointed out, with inexorable logic, the aesthetic dangers attendant on the use of synchronous sound: first, literalness as speech came to dominate all aspects of the film construction; and second, the twin menace of irrelevance and redundancy—irrelevance if the sound did not correspond to the picture and redundancy if it did. Their answer—and it has still a commanding place wherever film is treated as an advanced art—was mainly cautionary: filmmakers must approach sound warily, recognizing that it threatens to undo everything those who laboured to make film a great art achieved. The coming of sound threatened the art of moving picture, for it offered nothing more than an advance in the realism that progressive filmmakers have laboured mightily to overcome. Wherever filmmakers concern themselves not with creating a simulacrum of reality but with constructing an autonomous form and patterns, sound will be suspect. While their answer was only secondarily by a way of a recommendation, they did make some proposals. They suggested that if filmmakers are going to work with sound, they should not use synchronous sound or create parallel movements in sound and picture. Rather they should create a visual equivalent of counterpoint, using contrasting instead of parallel movement.

Rudolf Arnheim, was even more doubtful of the prospects of creating an effectively integrated work in a compound form that combines sound and picture. According to Arnheim, the sound film leaves him with the feeling

that something is not right there: that we are dealing with productions which because of the intrinsic contradictions of principle are incapable of true existence.

Two principles, taken together, explain the conundrum. The first: The nature of the materials of any medium determines the range of forms appropriate to the medium. The second: a work of art should be an integrated whole. Given these truisms, it is difficult to see how one could create an authentic sound film that integrates sound and image. For sound and image are different media with different material bases. Suppose that a work be constructed according to principles that follow from the nature of the image. If these principles are extended, through the use of synchrony or some form of coordination of sound with picture, then principles that derive from the image and are alien to sound govern the construction of the sound. This contravenes the basic principle of materialist aesthetics. If, on the other hand, image-based principles are not extended to the construction of the sound, then independent principles govern the sound and the image construction. It is then difficult to see how the work will achieve the degree of unity that it requires to be a work of art. We can make same argument, mutatis mutandis, starting with principles of construction that depend upon the nature of the sound. Moreover, we can rule out the possibility that principles of construction can be formulated that apply equally well to image and to sound. For the materialist premise that grounds the argument also maintains that the richness of a work's form is in proportion to extent that the work's constructive principles conform to the nature of the medium; so, the more numerous and more essential the material features on which the constructive principles depend, the richer and truer the form is likely to be. Any principles that could apply indifferently to both image and sound would have to ignore the

features that distinguish between the two media.

So the argument went. It seems irrefutable. The apparent rigour of its logical form helps explain why the theory and practice of film sound are as underdeveloped as they are. Rameau's Nephew undertakes to refute it.

Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoën marked a departure for Snow, for it is a work that stresses that it is a composition of parts. Many of Michael Snow's photographic, recorded sound pieces and films employed holistic, unitary structures. Rameau's Nephew on the other hand used a form built from quasi-independent segments. La Région Centrale shows some similarities: it is, after all, a work made up of a series of modules, each presenting a new variation in the camera movement. Looking over his film work, we can see how Snow moved from the severely monomorphic structure of Wavelength to that of $\langle - \rangle$, which contains a series of variations within its monomorphic outline), to La Région Centrale's more evidently variational structure, then to the serial structure of Rameau's Nephew.

Nonetheless, the differences between Rameau's Nephew and La Région Centrale are quite sharp. The variations between the section in La Région Centrale belong to an accretionary series that, paralleling the diurnal progression the structure of the film charts, gives the film its overall shape, while there is no similarly clearly progression from part to part in Rameau's Nephew. Each of the parts differs markedly in visual style, in its use of sound, and in the relation of sound and image. There is no steady development from section to section, as there is in the earlier film. Why did Snow create such a loosely jointed form for Rameau's Nephew.

There is one obvious hypothesis to be offered for the reason why Snow used a segmented form in Rameau's Nephew. That is that film purports to be based on a work of Denis Diderot, and Diderot is best known as an Encyclopedist. This hypothesis garners a degree of confirmation from their being twenty-six sections in the film, the same numbers as their letters in the alphabet. An encyclopedia is a catalogue that contains a series of autonomous articles that exhaustively survey an area of knowledge, sometimes even all knowledge. We might hypothesize that Snow's Rameau's Nephew is also a catalogue or inventory of something. But, we should then have to ask, "A catalogue or inventory of what?" To answer this, we must give Snow's catalogue form, and its contents, further scrutiny.

Snow draws attention to Rameau's Nephew's segmented structure in the credits, which consists of scrolling titles crediting one hundred or more individuals and organizations. The credits appear in superimposition over a train moving leftward on the screen, forming a nice visual rhyme between the scrolling titles, following one after the other, and line of train-cars. The sequence also relies on a tension between direction our eye moves when reading and the direction it follows to the movement of the train. This tensional relation between paired elements is a feature of much of the film. But most importantly, the section as a whole, alerts us to the similarly segmented structure of the film.

The sequence highlights another key aspect of the work. As the titles scroll by, a man reads them out, sometimes stuttering or mispronouncing a name; when he errs in reading, Snow offers a correction from offscreen. Snow and the man who reads the titles engage in a conversation of a sort, and thereby bring into highlight one of the basic structural features of the work, that the film is conversation between two autonomous, but interacting structures. The autonomous character of the interacting elements, sound and image, that enter into a dialogue with one another in the sound film will be one of the bases of Snow's response to the classical film theorists.

Snow underscores the importance of the autonomy of the elements that interact to compose a whole when, near the beginning of the film, Snow highlights the independence of language and its referents when he shows the word "FOCUS" out of focus. The trope points out that there is no necessary connection between an image and that which it depicts; the image of

the word “FOCUS” is not necessarily in focus by virtue of the meaning of the word. As the film progresses, we realize that independence of word and objects that Snow highlights here also characterized the relation between image and sound in film, that a sound in a film is no more bound to its source than a word is bound to the object that it represents. In a similar vein, throughout Rameau’s Nephew, Snow stresses the independence of the film’s aural and visual representations. He shows that the two do not constitute a single, fused, description, but fundamentally different (even if coordinated) forms of representation.

Furthermore, the train’s passing by establishes an alternating series of object/space/ object/space—a series similar to the appearance of word, a space, another word, and a space in language. That the credits are presented in words, both spoken and written, reinforces the relation between the segmented structure and language. We realize, accordingly, that one of the reasons for the film’s segmented structure is that it offers an analogy to the concatenation of words and spaces in sentence. We recognize that Snow’s Rameau’s Nephew is a film about language and that so it has, as its global structure, the articulated structure of language. It is a work whose global form is isomorphic with the structure of the topics of its concern, its content.

The titles that roll over the image of the train claim that Snow based the film on Boccaccio’s Decameron and the Bagavad Gita. Those two texts, together with Diderot’s Rameau’s Nephew make up the three purported literary sources for the work. The film is not, however, anything like a literal adaptation of any of these works. Is the suggestion anything more than joke, a humorous claim to a noble pedigree?

The three works do have several common features. For one, all make use of mise-en-abyme. In the Bagavad Gita there are four interlocutors, not two: Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya, Arjuna and Krishna. Dhritarashtra is blind and a sage, Vyasa (to whom tradition attributes the Bagavad Gita) proposes to restore his sight so he might see the battle. Dhritarashtra refuses, as he cannot endure seeing his clansmen killed. So instead, Vyasa endows Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra’s minister and charioteer, with clairvoyant powers that enable him to see and hear everything that happens on the distant battlefield. The central exchange, between Krishna and Arjuna, is reported to Dhritarashtra through the mediumistic powers of Sanjaya. Similarly, the Decameron is the story of ten people telling ten stories. And Rameau’s Nephew is play (a story of sort) that presents a conversation. And the individual segments of Snow’s Rameau’s Nephew are a series of frames within the frame of the whole piece.

More important, all three works take the form of a conversation. Diderot’s Rameau’s Nephew consists mostly of conversation between two characters whom the text refers to only as “he” and “myself.” The character the text refers to as “he” is thought to be the actual nephew of the important French Baroque composer and theorist of harmony, Jean-Phillippe Rameau, an artist who, like Diderot and Snow, took a rational approach to art, while “myself” refers is taken as referring to Diderot, a philosopher of the Enlightenment and the editor of the well-known Encyclopédie. The nephew, a bit of a rascal and boounder by the name of Jean-Francois, and Diderot debate ideas about art and values. The setting of Boccaccio’s Decameron is the countryside near Florence to which seven women and three men have retreated during a plague and where they exchange stories, ten a day for ten days, to amuse themselves. The Bagavad-Gita has the form of a conversation between Arjuna and Krishna.

The idea of a conversation is central to Snow’s Rameau’s Nephew. The work is, in large measure, a dialogue between sound and image that explores the various possible relations between the two. Notes that Snow made for film suggest that he wanted to conduct systemic survey of all the possible relations between the two, and while the systematic character of the endeavour has been somewhat attenuated in the final product, that there is a large variety of sound-image relations in it is evident; in some parts the sound and image cooperate to create an audio-visual realism, in other parts the sound is voice-over and somewhat independent of the image; at other times the sound articulates the image; and at other times the sound becomes musical

and counterpoints the image. There are, too, a range of temporal relations between sound and image, as sometimes the sound is synchronous with the image, sometimes it precedes the image that depicts its cause—an audio-visual hysteron proteron—and sometimes the sound appears after the image of its source. Similarly, there are variety of spatial relations between sound and image that correspond to the different modalities of temporal relations between image and sound: Corresponding to the use of synchronous sound is sound that seems to emanate within the picture (though even this relation Snow toys with so as to attenuate the correspondence, as when in the “Office” scene he has Jonas Mekas indicate the source of sound, pointing now to a piece of cheese and exclaiming that it spoke, now to the portrait of Winston Churchill, now to the iceberg depicted in the painting hanging on the wall, now to a coffee cup. In having Mekas point toward the source of the source, Snow is indicating how sound in film, and indeed in reality, often draws our attention to a location in space. The notion that works of art are means for channeling attention is one of the constants of Snow’s work. The scene also plays on our ordinary, real-world disposition to connect sounds to their sources; part of the humour of the whole affair, a reason of the absurdity is that sound film disconnects sound and image, so that the natural causal relation between the sound that we hear and the source that we see is destroyed. As the picture falls out of sight, it can be heard to ask “Where am I [i.e., the sound]?” Confronting the blank screen, the answer is startlingly apparent: it is in the loudspeaker. Altogether, the scene serves to demonstrate how the image places the sound within a fictional diegesis.

Furthermore, Rameau’s Nephew also evokes a variety of relations between audience and work. Because the relation between audience and work shifts so often, the relation is thematized. The work and the audience thus engage in a conversation, as the work alters the state of the audience and the audience’s state of attention alters the (perceived) work of art.

The idea of conversation between two autonomous elements raises the idea of two’s, and so the film makes extensive use of doubling. Undoubtedly the most impressive example of doubling is scene twelve (“Teaparty”). The scene looks, prima facie, as it might have been shot by two cinematographers facing each other, one on each side of a room; so it seems to have a recto-verso form similar to Snow’s very important photographic book, Cover to Cover. Actually, the doubling is produced by taking a single, long take of the scene, and printing it twice, first forwards, and then, backwards and flipped left to right. The script for the scene consists of lines like “?DRUWORF “FORWARD” ACE U NACAMORA...KAYO” (phonetized rendering of “Ok Aroma....can you say “druworf” forward?” spoken backwards) and “DRUWORF...NAC I SROAC FUH” (a phonetized rendering of “Of course I can...forward” spoken backwards). The words the actors speak are mostly unintelligible for they are speaking their words and sentences backwards (one of many examples of rearrangement of events in time the film offers), but a few of the words (e.g. “TISH”) are intelligible in their backwards version, and so this makes apparent the method that this part of the scene is based on. The second time, reverses the shot, and flips it over so that left is transposed to right. In this half, we hear the word and sentences in their proper order, though we have trouble making out what the actor say, as their pronunciation, inflection and intonation are peculiar.

If Diderot’s Rameau’s Nephew is a text of conversations, then Snow’s Rameau’s Nephew (and, since Snow surely realized that we would refer to his work this way, rather than by its full title, at least on some occasions, this title is another example of doubling) is a film about conversations that is filled with conversations.

The “Credits” passage contains other intertextual references. Sanjaya has powers of clairvoyance that we could consider telepathic—he can see and feel what is taking place at a distance. Alexander Graham Bell, to whom, the credits inform us, Snow dedicates the film, is the inventor of the telephone, an instrument that allows us to hear at a distance. Moreover, Bell’s as an inventor developed from his and his father’s work with deaf people. There are allusions to

loss of sight and loss of hearing in the titles, and we may speculate that Snow is thinking of film as a hearing-and-seeing aid that provides the powers of television (seeing at a distance) and telephony (hearing at distance.) We might speculate further that Snow connects the various crises that the three books suggest with the loss of sensory faculties.

Still, it is the relation to Diderot's Rameau's Nephew that is most strongly marked, by Snow's including its title and the name of its author in the title of his film. The similarities Snow's work and career have with Diderot's are many and suggestive. Denis Diderot (1713–1784) was a highly esteemed essayist, playwright and philosopher in his time, the Enlightenment. He was also among the first art critics and the editor of the Encyclopédie. He was also a competent mathematician and had considerable proficiency in Greek, Italian and English. He is the versatile thinker of the Enlightenment. Snow himself has been a painter, sculptor, photographer, trumpeter, filmmaker, pianist, videomaker, sound sculptor, holographer, and musician and so could well identify with Diderot's many-faceted career. Further, Diderot's artistic works are novels and plays of ideas rather than of Romantic/Visionary imagination, and ideas are also at the heart of Snow's work. Then there is the encyclopedic aspect of Snow's work, for Snow does frequently undertake a thorough and systematic study of some topic, a systematic approach best exemplified in the Walking Woman works, but in Wavelength, $\leftarrow\rightarrow$, and other works. Diderot's novels and plays have a peculiar pacing—he will interrupt what little intrigue they have to turn over some ideas. The effect of this is to attenuate the importance of their dramatic structures. This effect probably would interest Snow. Snow might have been intrigued simply by the unorthodox temporal form that allows an author such as Diderot to digress from his narrative to go off and explore some idea. Such longueurs in Diderot's literary work have parallels in Snow's use of time in works such as One Second in Montréal, Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film, and Wavelength, among his films, and Falling Starts, a recorded sound piece. Diderot was also an exponent of the belief that a certain critical distance between an audience and work was necessary in theatre. Snow's Rameau's Nephew also builds on the idea of the independence of audience and the work, which enter into a conversation with one another, as the audience strives to interpret what the work says.

It is their similarities of their beliefs on the imagination that perhaps are most important. Diderot proposed that the imagination is the faculty for detecting general connections that one might put forth as hypotheses. Diderot could not have foreseen exactly what the Romantics would make of the imagination in the century and a half after his death. But Snow read Diderot after the Romantics' claims for the imagination had reached their apogee and he might have seen in Diderot's view of the imagination a conception that, after the extraordinary claims of the Romantics, was closer to his own. For certainly, Snow, in his work, has tilted against the Visionary/Romantic conception of Imagination.

Snow's work is often both a testimony to the collapse of Romanticism and its elegy. The Romantic theory of imagination was founded on the idea that imagination could overcome the annihilating effects of time. Its startling power was to bring its products into, nearly full (though, as we shall see, not complete) presence. Its power then was almost divine. Snow could never have accepted these claims for the imagination, even if some of his works suggest an fulfillible longing for them.

Snow's work suggests longing for the powers the Romantics ascribed to imagination, yet returns to the understanding of the self's relation to the world common before that exuberant phase in the history of Western culture. His conception of human knowledge resembles Kant's, yet he longs for the powers of intuition through which the self becomes fused with the world. His works have a striking resemblance to those the Romantics produced when they read Kant (both his epistemology and aesthetics) with a mixture of exaltation and melancholy.

Among his films, it is La Région Centrale that most completely expresses the ecstasy of transcendence, and its immediate successor Rameau's Nephew that presents his most

completely worked out statement of the critical and skeptical side of Snow's work. In the larger context of his work in a variety of media, it is his recorded sound work that has carried the bulk of his critical reflection. What there is in the nature of sound that elicits this response from Snow is something that we soon shall turn to consider. For now, we shall point out while Snow has engaged in skeptical reflections on the status of images, this reflection is balanced by elegaic visual Romanicism. His sound constructions, on the other hand, have been thoroughly critical and skeptical pieces.

One of the ruses Snow employs in the skeptical enterprise that he undertakes in Rameau's Nephew is to suggest that speech, not writing is the form of language central to the film. Answers to the questions why it is a ruse, and how it functions shall have to wait—for now, let us point out that to claim that his Rameau's Nephew consists of conversations was one of the purposes for his pointing out the film's similarities to other works based on conversations. By announcing that his Rameau's Nephew is based on other other works that consist of conversations, he seems to be asserting the central role speech plays in the work. He uses other devices as well to indicate that the spoken rather than written word (i.e., sound rather than glyph) is the concern of the film. For one thing, the credits sequence informs us that the film is intended "for English-speaking audiences only," alerting us thereby to the impossibility of translation and, perhaps, of capturing the fleeting moment of speech through the fixity of the written word and to the importance of the meanings of the language.

Too, the film tallies up the number of times homonyms of "for" appear in it. Homonyms have a special importance within the ambit of concerns Snow worked with in Rameau's Nephew because they expose the gap that separates the glyph from the spoken word, since they are words composed of the same phonemes but different graphemes. Snow also suggests the gap between the written and spoken word in the title sequence, when names that appear in print are mispronounced and Snow offers corrections; sometimes the errors in pronunciation are phonetic sounding-outs of the written form of the word. The use of multiple layers of sound that is so prevalent in the film is also characteristic of our experience of spoken, but not written language.

Finally, the performance nature of the work suggests the idea of direct performance. Many of the scenes have a theatrical form. They use actors, scripts (brought into evidence by several devices), spotlighting, fixed or nearly fixed camera-positions, etc. The use of theatrical form, unprecedented in Snow's previous works, suggests that the work is mimetic, not diegetic—that it presents rather than recounts events.

Another mode of construction that Snow employs to suggest that spoken, not written speech is the film's domain of interest is his use of forms of construction that reveal that speech is a gesture that we make with our bodies. One scene that suggests this is the first ("Whistling"); it shows Snow whistling into a microphone, serially presented from three points-of-view. This scene connects speech with other sounds that we make with our bodies, and it brings a part of the recording apparatus into view, and shows how recorded sound changes as the spatial relation between the sound source and the microphone changes it. It is also a splendid whistling performance, whose virtuosic quality calls attention to the gestural origin of the sound. Scene fourteen ("Pissing Duet") draws an analogy between the flow of speech from one corporeal orifice and the flow of liquids from another and suggest giving shape to liquids, to substances that, by reason of their state, seem shapeless. Another scene that connects sound and gesture is the eighth ("Sink") section. The section shows Snow drumming on a kitchen sink. He turns the tap on; the water flowing into the sink alters the parameters of the performance, forming continuously varying context for it (and continually moulded into a new shape). The area available for drumming decreases as the sink fills, and increases as the sink empties. When the sink is empty again, the performance concludes.

In setting these temporal limits, Snow creates a pun on the word "sink" and its

homonym, “sync.” Filmmakers use the term sync sound to refer to sound that they record along with the picture and that corresponds exactly to the picture—typically, the lips move and matching words appear on the sound track, or a gun fires and produces smoke and the loud report of gun on the sound track coincides with this image. Snow uses sync sound in this passage, and what we hear is the sound of sink—“sink sound,” we might say. But there is a deeper point.

Snow’s use of sync sound cannot but have been somewhat polemical. A common belief in avant-garde film circles is that “sync sound sank the movies,” as Stan Brakhage was fond of saying at just about the same time Snow made this film. The reason for the animosity that innovative filmmakers display toward sync sound is that more conventional filmmakers have allowed the demands of maintaining coincidence between picture and sound to circumscribed experimentation in constructing relations between image and sound and to become the outer limits of experimentation with sound in conventional cinematic forms. Considering John Cage and Merce Cunningham’s well-known collaborations, in which music and dance are composed independently, as two separate events that fill the same time span, points up how the demand for synchronizing film sound to the picture has created a hierarchical relation privileging image over sound and hobbled the development of aesthetic use of sound in film. Thus, the very decision to use sync sound posed a challenge to one of the aesthetic commonplaces among avant-garde filmmakers.

The time it takes to fill and then drain, the sink establishes the duration of the segment of the “sync/sink” section. Circumscribing the action with a definite structure gives the event a definite temporal shape. It also raises questions about how the overall scene fits into a temporal span, and about how actions within the scene fit into the boundaries of time and space that the global form determines.

Such makers of “task-based dance” as Simone Forti used similar forms to bring ordinarily unnoticed and unproblematized features of the performance situation into evidence. A performance has a location in space and time. Accordingly, the makers of “task-based dance” sought to give their works a highly-defined temporal form whose mode of existence, nonetheless, was neither arbitrary nor autonomous, but revealed the interaction of the event and context. For example, Simone Forti created a piece Slant Board in which performers were required to climb inclined planes with the assistance of ropes. The work offers a pure structural analogue to the conflict between will and circumstance that animates many traditional dramas. But it also offers a different relation between event and context than most traditional dance.

Ordinary dance dramas, like traditional paintings, are aesthetic objects that pretend to inhabit an separate aesthetic realm that exists apart from the real world. When props appear in a work, they are subsumed into and controlled by the dramatic action. Generally, in a such a work, the entire performance environment is shaped to accord with the aesthetic demands of the work. In Slant Board and other task-based pieces, the relation between context and event is inverted, the context, rather than being determined by the dramatic action, affects that intrigue, for it forms its basis. Forti conceived the idea of using a certain object in a certain way and, having done so, the context, as much as Forti herself, determined what the performers could or could not do. What is more, the process that determines the form also determines the content; the form the process generates engenders the content of the work rather than merely containing it.

Other task based dances used the context to determine the time of the event. One piece consisted of a dancer walking slowly, on a diagonal across the stage. The piece concluded when the action was completed. Another consisted of a fixed set of actions to be performed. Noises that entered the loft where the event was performed from the street below determined what action would be performed when—a shout prompted one, a siren passing another etc. These choreographers, then, gave over the decisions about the temporal structure of the piece

to its context. Thus, they created temporal forms that were fixed by an event's interaction with its environment. By so doing, they hoped both to indicate how a work fit into the context of which it was a part and to enhance the immediacy they believed was characteristic of the arts of time, for they treated time as material.

The form Snow developed for this "sink" passage functions similarly. The time it takes to fill and empty the sink gives the drumming performance its temporal boundaries. The structure of the section reveals that process determines its form. The context of performance varies continuously and so must the performance. The performance includes a visual indication of the time that has elapsed and the time that remains, for it is time that gives shape to the process and that determines the form of the segment. Thus it belongs with other devices that Snow has contrived for giving a spatial shape to the passage of time. It device also acts a clock that counts down the time remaining, making evident the span that performance event must fill. The water in the sink provides a precise spatial analogy to these temporal structures.

Snow's use of performance, of people in speaking parts, and his modification of speech sound in Rameau's Nephew all indicate the importance of speech in the film. While spoken language is central to Rameau's Nephew, the work has features that make one want to qualify the claim that the spoken, not the written word that is its concern or, at least, not to take that claim too simplistically. For one thing, Snow is interested in exploring the relation between written language and speech. Even the credits section, in which a voice reads out the names that roll by, and is occasionally corrected by Snow, draws attention to the translation from written to spoken language, and the man's slight stammer, and occasional difficulties in pronouncing the names, foreground the difficulties of speech. The many forms that show or suggest that actors are reading from scripts also indicate Snow's interest in relations between the written and spoken word, between reading and speaking.

More generally, Snow's skeptical enterprise undercuts such simple certainties about the privilege claimed by speech, both in Rameau's Nephew and generally, for there is great irony in his use of conversation. One feature of the work that helps to undercut this belief is the film's use of mise-en-abyme construction that Snow hints at in the credit sequence. One purpose we might construct for the allusions to mise-en-abyme constructions that appear there, and for the mise-en-abyme constructions that Snow uses at other points in Rameau's Nephew is that they highlight the unit-after-unit construction of the film. Each unit of the film has a distinct beginning and end, and passages of alternating pure colours separate them from each other. We can think of these divisions as frames within the frame of the entire film.

However, the stress on mise-en-abyme structures has a more important, and more skeptical, role. For Snow connects the form of his Rameau's Nephew to the Bagavad-Gita and and to Boccaccio's Decameron. Both works stress that the speech they appear to present really is not presented directly, but through a relay. Both present speech as framed. Thus, the Decameron and the Bagavad-Gita also use mise-en-abyme forms. Within Snow's Rameau's Nephew there are scenes that include other films, pieces of music or stories: a Beatles' tune plays in the background in the second ("Focus") section of the work; in the fifteenth ("Embassy") scene, videomaker Nam June Paik toys with a Bob Dylan song, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," which plays on cassette tape-player; the twentieth ("Cheap Hotel") section has an old man telling a story and a projection of a pornographic film. But the most impressive use of mise-en-abyme is the tenth ("Record player") section, which offers three successive presentations of the same basic material, but with each successive presentation, puts the predecessor event inside a frame. The first time the event is presented, the actors read from scripts while a Rameau harpsichord piece plays or seems to play in the background. An audio recording of the performance is made during the performance, and then played back as the performers mime to it and, along with Snow, add supplementary aural material, including bells, the sound of a telephone ringing (both of which tie back to the reference in the credit sequence to Alexander

Graham Bell). The third time the scene is performed both the first and second performances are played back on the sound-track, while supplemental verbal material is added from the script and additional harpsichord music is added.

Two factors reshape the sound in each successive re-presentation. One is the acoustical properties of the room. The main determinants of the acoustical properties are the shape of the room, the materials that it is made of, and the objects that it contains. Rameau's Nephew include a number of forms whose primary purpose is to demonstrate some feature of sound's relation with the relation of sound and space—with how a sound becomes situated in a diegetic space, with how sound draws attention to a specific portion of space and with how sound creates the impression of space and of location, so the interest in how space moulds sound is fitting, and this scenes uses one of the major forms Snow has invented to demonstrate that effect.

As important, the room serves as a container that becomes increasing full of sound. So does the auditorium in which the audience sits and watches/listens to Rameau's Nephew. Furthermore, because the actors hear playbacks of previously recorded sounds, the segment of space that seems to project behind the screen was once filled the same sound as the segment of space that adjoins the screen. The identity of these two aural images is a topic we shall soon consider.

In the course of the scene, the sound involves more layers of times, as sounds from the present are superimposed over others from one past that themselves are superimposed over sounds from another, more remote past. The conception of the coincidence of the past and present is, of course, a spatial conception of time. There are other places in Rameau's Nephew in which sound is treated as a temporal structure and time is treated as an spatial form: in section twelve ("Tea Party"), for example, the sound/time is reversed, in the actor's speech, and subsequently, in playback. This conception of sound relates closely to the use of sound recording, for as Snow remarks in "Notes for Rameau's Nephew," "Recording is mapping of time into space. Like drawing or painting." Snow works with this spatial conception of time in section sixteen ("Tabletop description") in what seems direct, actuality sound as a voice-off seems to be describing what is taking place as it is happening. This impression is played with, in humourous fashion, as the voice seems to fall behind in the description of the action. It is also belied when the voice moves ahead of the action depicted in image, something it could not do unless the scene were post-dubbed (the sound added after the scene was shot, often in synchronization with the projected image) or carefully scripted. This descrediting of the impression that the sound in this scene is direct is another of Snow's tactics for stressing the independence of the sound and image, that is, for emphasizing that the sound and image are two autonomous elements that engage in a dialogue with one another, rather than a single, fused entity, which, of course, was the ideal form of unity for sound and image that the classical film theorists proposed. But, at the same time as indicating the autonomy of the two elements, it draws attention to the similarities between sound and image representations by constructing forms the depend upon the spatiality of both.

More importantly, the scene makes clear that the aural and visual images that appear in this film, and any film, is presented through a relay. Even the title of the film suggests the idea of indirection; it refers to a young man, but refers to him only indirectly, through his relation to his more renowned uncle. Furthermore, it suggests that the film is based a book by Diderot; thus the film relays Diderot's novel to us secondhand. Moreover, this film, by Michael Snow comes thanks to Dennis Young (for Dennis Young relayed Diderot's Rameau's Nephew to Michael Snow. Furthermore, the title seems to be the name of another piece, a piece by Wilma Schoen (an anagram of Michael Snow). Thus, it seems that we must refer to the work by Snow indirectly, by referring to another work, by Wilma Schoen, for such an indirect reference is incorporated in the title of the piece by Michael Snow. But to refer to anything by its name is to

make a direct reference to it. Thus, it seems that any direct reference to Snow's film using its title is an indirect reference and the indirect reference to Snow's film, through the name of Wilma Shoen's film, is also direct reference to Snow's film. The seventh ("Airplane") section of the work also raises the idea of indirect discourse, for it begins with a voice saying "Quote" and ends with it saying "Unquote." Snow contrives other devices to suggest that the words that we hear in the film are indirect discourse. In the seventh ("Airplane") section we hear Snow, from off-screen saying "I may be putting words into your mouth, but . . ." The twentieth ("Cheap Hotel") scene begins with actor stating that someone had told him that someone had reported that someone had said. . . . What is at stake for Snow to insist so upon the indirect character of the discourse in the work?

In part, of course, Snow uses these various forms to insist that words we hear spoken are read, i.e., they derive from a written text, and the performance of written texts, and performance generally, is a central topic of this film. One aspect of performance is that transforms apprehended meaning into sound and gesture, something heard and seen. A performance is also a type of representation, and like all representations, it is assembled from several elements. Snow is interested in dismantling the illusory unity of representations, that conceals the facture of the work, to reveal how the work is assembled. The approach serves to make bring the materiality of the real object of our attention, the representation itself, into evidence. But there is more. A cardinal distinction in the Aristotelian theory of art, a theory that in this century again has had enormous influence, was that between mimesis and diegesis. A mimetic work shows the audience the events it recounts, while a diegetic work uses a narrator to recount them. The introduction of the narrator created several possibilities for the relation between the narrator and the events he or she recounts: the narrator can be involved in those events, merely a witness to them, or may only know of them second or third hand; the narrator may be recounting events as they occur, or retrospectively or, may even be forecasting events to come (this is exactly what the narrator in "Tabletop Description" does) ; the narrator may be able to affect the outcome of the events he or she recounts, or may not; the narrator may be in a position to know all there is to know about the story, may be able to see all sides, dispassionately from a distance, or may have only limited knowledge about what occurred. The New Critics held that the author's choice for the narrator's point-of-view and the scope of his or her knowledge was the central choice upon which all other features of the narrative's construction depended. They devoted a good part of the efforts they spent on narrative fiction to analyzing the implications of the choices authors made for their narrators' points-of-view.

When Snow came to make Rameau's Nephew, these critical energies were pretty well exhausted. Still, there existed by then an extensive and rich legacy that revealed how the position of the narrator affected the construction of fictional works. Artists and critics understood how one should go about revealing the way an author has put together a narrative, or so they thought. The means hinged on the analysis of modes of indirection.

If indirect discourse reveals the facture of a narrative, direct discourse elicits a sense of immediate presence—a feeling that the signifier is transparent and that we are in immediate contact with the object represented. When the material of the discourse is speech, direct discourse has an even more remarkable effect, for then the material signifier seems to vanish altogether, and we feel that we have immediate contact not with the referent of the discourse, but with meaning. Direct speech has an idealizing effect that makes us feel that we immediately apprehend the speaker's meaning, his or her thoughts, without any signifier mediating the relation between our mental objects and the speakers. Speech, something invisible and impalpable, something so intangible it seems to be nothing at all, brings the exact same objects into the purview of mental vision, arouses the exact same mental representations in our minds as were in the speaker's mind when the speaker issued the statement. Since we identify our thoughts with the speaker's, we feel an identity with him or her. It is the idea that speech in film

has such immediacy that Snow demolishes in Rameau's Nephew.

One device that Snow uses to undercut any impression we have that conversations might give us of immediacy and directness is to treat his actors as puppets worked by a ventriloquist. In section seven ("Airplane"), Snow actually says, offscreen, "I may be putting words in your mouth but . . ." a boy protests that he feels like a puppet. In scene fifteen ("Embassy"), Michelson, Kaplan and Paik shake Cowan, like a group of puppeteers manipulating a puppet. Later, Annette Michelson plays puppet to Cowan's role as a ventriloquist, when she appears to sing "O Canada," but his voice comes out. In scene twenty ("Cheap Hotel"), Sarah and Eva repeat lines given to them over earphones. In scene nineteen ("English Comedians"), one of the men sits on the others lap, like a puppet.

While Snow does import theatrical forms and devices into his Rameau's Nephew, they are not used for mimetic purposes. Snow uses many forms of construction that highlight the fact that what we see and hear is not reality but a construct, and that, no matter what degree of verisimilitude an image or sound may possess, the presence of its reference is still only a mediated presence. Like so many of the forms Snow constructs for this film, the settings in this work vary on scale of realism. There is the near-realism of the sixth ("Office") and eleventh ("Bus") scenes, the realism of faithful rendering of the exaggeration of the baroque decor of the fifteenth ("Embassy") scene, to the realism of the twentieth ("Cheap hotel suite") scene—a realism that breaks down during the scenes as the point-of-view shifts from shot to shot—to the evidently found simulacrum of the thirteenth ("Indian Village"). Snow's stress on the settings points up the importance of location, for one of the film's central concerns is how sound is placed in an image. Snow even analyzes the various components that work together to create a greater or lesser sense of realism—indicating, in scene twenty ("Cheap Hotel"), that disjunctiveness dismantles it, or in the eleventh ("Bus") scene, as the flares and perforations, some handmade, others of the sort that appear at the end of rolls of films (and that, ordinarily, filmmakers are careful to cut out), that the obtrusion of evidence of the material support of the illusion upon the consciousness of those watching and listening to the film makes any suspension of disbelief impossible. precludes our having faith that the image is a recording.

As part of a series of performance pieces organized by Jonas Mekas in 1964, Snow presented *Right Reader*, a work that anticipated several of the themes of *Rameau's Nephew*. In the work the artist stands behind a sheet of plexiglass, suspended by wires from the ceiling, on which there is a rectangle of black, electrical tape. Behind him is a screen while in front and to the side of the plexiglass, positioned so as to form a diagonal with the screen, the artist and the piece of plexiglass, is a light. The light illuminates Snow's face and upper body and cast a shadow of his head and shoulders on the screen behind him. Because the light is not positioned orthogonally to artist or the screen, some parts of the head are enlarged, others contracted, and we do not get a conventional silhouette that presents either a frontal view or profile. The deviation from the tradition projective geometry of the silhouette creates a strange impression that we are seeing a reflection formed by backlighting bouncing back onto the screen. In short, there seems to be recto-verso relation between the artist and his shadow.

Beside the artist is a table on which are stacked a number of cards of the shape of a film frame. Furthermore, in the course of the performance, we hear a text that concerns Snow's upcoming show at the Pointdexter Gallery in New York, which, among other things, provides a reasonably extensive description of his interests in the *Walking Woman*. The text is read professionally, with the characteristic modulations, inflections and cadences of a radio spot reader and the text has the characteristic style of advertising copy. Snow's lips move in near synchrony with the text, but there is a peculiar disjunction between the movements of his lips — sometimes his lip movements anticipate the sounds, sometimes they follow the sounds, and generally the inflections and emphases they suggest seem slightly askew of the sound. Soon enough we come to realize that, when performing this piece, Snow mimes to a pre-recorded

text. As he does so, he lifts cards from the table the table beside him and displays them by placing them within the rectangle; most of the cards relates to the text and to Snow's upcoming coming show and his artistic interests generally, for several of them present variations on the Walking Woman figure that was the subject of the forthcoming show — by holding them up to the plexiglass, more or less nearly placing them within the rectangle frame bounded by the four pieces of black tape.

The work uses the same principle that informs *Rameau's Nephew*, the separation and recombination of image and voice. And like *Rameau's Nephew*, *Right Reader* works with — and against — the idea that there is an integral relation between flesh and voice. In many respects the piece inverts the concerns that were to shape Snow's "talking-picture" film and so, while the film deals with transformation of substance into image (this surely is part of the significance of the table section of "Cheap Hotel" section), Snow uses the familiar idea that theatre presents the performer's actual body and our desire to believe in the integral association of body and voice. Moreover, *Right Reader* incorporates many allusions to film—with the illuminating lamp, the frame and the screen with the image projected on it; even the recto-verso illusion suggests a relation to film, in which light that originally belonged to the scene that was filmed is reformed by light that appears from behind us, but gives the impression of belonging to the profilmic event. *Rameau's Nephew* conversely toys with the idea of turning the light that derives from a projector and the sound that derives from a speaker into a theatrical illusion—the illusion of actually presenting a space that contains the flesh and voice of real actors. In short, *Right Reader* uses the conditions of theatre to reflect upon the character of film, while *Rameau's Nephew*, among other things, uses the conditions of film to reflect on the nature of the theatrical illusion that "talking-pictures" elicit.

Such an inversion characterizes the relation between several of Snow's works—the progression of the zoom in *Wavelength* and the lateral movement of the pans and tilts in the film designated by a double arrow film, or the continuum of time of suggested by *Wavelength* and the segmented time held with the illusion of *Wavelength's* continuity with discreteness suggested by *Untitled Slidelength* could serve as an examples. As inversion implies identity, so *Right Reader* expounds on several of *Rameau's Nephew* key themes. Like the sound track in *Rameau's Nephew*, the text of *Right Reader* puts words in the speaker's mouth and, in a sense, make the player a puppet. While the sound processing in *Rameau's Nephew* and the emphasis on its material character makes evident that the sound and an image in film are not ontologically bound together as they are in a body, where they are linked through the relation of causality, the varying temporal relation and the lack of correspondences between the emphases and inflections we hear and those suggested by the performer's lip movements suggests the same idea.

Furthermore, the frame marked with black tape on the plexiglass sheet does more than articulate an allusion to the frame in film, for it also makes evident that the film frame delimits space rather arbitrarily (this is one reason for suggesting that the frame alluded to is closer to the frame that the viewer of a camera encloses than the limit of a painting) that the frame acts to direct attention toward a particular segment of space. The succession of cards the Snow presents are an analogue of the succession of shots in a film and, as Richard Foreman suggests in his insightful (and provocatively presented piece on *Right Reader*, Snow's lifting the cards into and out of the frame resembles a film transition. And, while most of the cards present some variation on the Walking Woman form, some of them suggest film devices such overexposure, out-of-focus, and superimposition; a series of three cards also suggests a zoom. The act of lifting them into and out of the frame suggests zooming (or dollying) forward or back. The piece ends with placing a black card in the frame, i.e., with a fade to black.

Right Reader's imitation-commercial form suggests the problematics of *Rameau's Nephew* in another way. Richard Foreman notes about *Right Reader* that it, "enforces a

definition of art as a making-present for reflection of the very section of consciousness brought into play by subject matter.” The question of why a musician and visual artist should have wanted to treat issues of language so extensively as Snow treats them in *Rameau’s Nephew* is a telling one, and Foreman’s insight is relevant to a response. For the text in *Rameau’s Nephew* also activates that part of consciousness that concerns itself with subject matter. Indeed Snow’s art generally involves itself with discursive issues, and so, we might expect Snow to turn to consider issues of language, for that move is keeping with the with self-reflexive character of Snow’s art. Foreman also comments Snow undercuts the activity of “selling” (advertising) in *Right Reader*, so as to make evident the distinction between modes of response appropriate to advertising and those appropriate to art. One can say the same about some of the commentary that *Rameau’s Nephew* contains — it is more significant for the way it undercuts itself than for what it actually states. And more generally, the theatrical content of *Rameau’s Nephew* stands in pretty much the same the relation to the whole that artwork forms as the imitation-commercial form of *Right Reader* stands to the whole that work constitutes.

Rameau’s Nephew is a film that is constructed to employ the various possible relations between image and sound. One of those relations, among the most common in cinema is to have the sounds appear on the sound track along with the appearance of the source in the image, and the most common form of this relation is to have words people speak on the soundtrack appear at the same time that we see their lips moving. Literalizing a pun that Snow actually uses in the “Airplane” section, one could say that sound track puts words into the mouths of speakers. Snow surveys the possible means by which the film can fill the mouths of the speakers that appear in it: in the “Airplane” scene, Snow coaches the actors on the words they are to say; in the “Embassy” scene people read from scripts; in the twentieth (“Cheap Hotel”) scene, two women, Sarah and Eva, repeat lines that they hear through earphones—and even the lines that are given derive from another source, Mao Tsetung’s “Where Do True Ideas Come From?” and Pride and Prejudice. He also he substitutes musical sounds for words and words for musical sounds in scene twenty (“Cheap Hotel”), and at another point, gives the piano a human voice, so it could orgasmic moan.

The idea of putting words in someone’s mouth suggests the notion of filling, and Rameau’s Nephew, makes extensive use of the ideas of filling, of containers and the related ideas of passing through a conduit and of a conduit shaping what passes through it. The “Sink/ Sync” section is only the most obvious example. In section thirteen (“Indian Village”), the actors mime words with their mouths, while the soundtrack fills their mouths with other words; in section fifteen (“Embassy”), the room is filled up with sound; in section fourteen (“Pissing duet”), pails are filled with urine; and in section twenty (“Cheap hotel suite”) a vagina is shown filled with a penis (for intercourse is another form of conversation). Even the segmented structure of the piece suggests so many sections that must be filled. But in most sections, the container that Snow fills is spatial, while in this section it is temporal. The interchangability of spatial and temporal forms is a idea that appears recurrently in Snow’s work, including Rameau’s Nephew.

The ideas of filling containers, of passing through a conduit, and of the conduit shaping of what passes through it, might seem remote from issues of language, but for the clarifications the film’s structure offers. Rameau’s Nephew makes evident that film is constructed by placing elements—blocks or containers—in relation to one another. This raises the question of the minimal elements of the syntagmatic structures formed from sounds and images in film. Snow suggests that the units are the syllable and the frame—hence the allusions to framing in his mise-en-abyme constructions. Snow remarked,

“ . . . starting to think about what a talking picutre could or should be, made me think of what would be the units of that, like instead of it being dramatic or comic dialogue I started with the units of syllables and frames. So that the think is built

out in a molecular way, in terms of syllables, words, phrases and sentences. Everything comes from that. The entire film is itself a sentence, see, so that as far as I am concerned, it's really a unified speech film, and its subject is partly speech and of course partly language, and that means, partly, culture."

The syllable (or rather the place of the syllable in a syntagma) and the frame are containers that need to be filled up, and placed in relation to other containers, which also need to be filled, and these need to be placed in association within other units, which also need to be filled. At the largest level of organization, the units that make up the whole are the sections of the work. It suggests to that language is conduit that shapes both the sounds and meanings that it conveys.

Thus, the segmented structure of the work suggests the phonemic, morphemic, lexemic, syntagmatic and propositional aggregations of language and the frame after frame, shot after shot, scene after scene construction of a film. Snow recognizes the homology between cinematic and linguistic aggregates. Thus the cutting in scene fifteen ("Embassy"), in the portion in which Annette Michelson mouths the words to "O Canada" and the shot changes with each new sentence or speaker or phrase, the changes are marked by differing compositional properties, different intensities of light, and different kinds of balance and scene twenty ("Cheap Hotel") when the camera changes its position and the violin plays a new note with every syllable. The emphasis on difference he points out that both sentences and cinematic structures are compounded through the aggregation of difference.

But the idea of filling might also prompt an association with touching, and touching is another theme of the work. Intercourse, shown in a movie depicted within Rameau's Nephew, is a species of touching. Touching, furthermore, is another sort of exchange, a conversation. Snow uses the idea of exchange in touching in section twenty ("Cheap Hotel") when the woman gets into bed, takes off her top; a man (Ray) feels her breasts and exclaims, "Gee, my hands feel soft now." This raises the idea of exchange through touch. An irony here is that while the film's thematic of conversation produces references to touch, a film cannot convey the sensation of touch, but only evoke a recollection of the experience. But then, neither can recorded sound convey the real sound, nor can images convey their models. As though to convey the idea of something on the other side of representation, of a noumenal world behind the phenomena that we observe, Snow has Gloria, in section fifteen ("Embassy") say, "I'm worried that the people next door may have wine glass up against the wall and be listening to us," but nothing justifies this speculation about something being on the other side of the wall. Snow also raises the idea of touching when, in a discussion in that scene he has people say, "Seeing is not believing," "Hearing is disbelieving," "Eating is believing," and "Touching is believing." Given the epistemological interests that are so evident in the film, we might conjecture that Snow may too have in mind that Biblical metaphor of knowing a person and the traditional philosophical conception of knowledge as form of incorporation of an object through the senses.

Snow makes it clear that we are watching not conversations themselves, but constructions that resemble conversations to a greater or less degree, but are not conversations. Thus, although the audience does get involved in giving meaning to the challenging constructions that Snow creates, and is a partner in a dialogue in that sense, the film cannot address the audience the way that people address one another, nor can people address the film in that way.

Most importantly of all, putting words in the actors' mouths suggest that the resemblance of sound to the space of an image in film resembles the relation between a ventriloquist and his or her puppet. For the relation is really an artificial, constructed relation, not a natural causal relation as that that exists between the physical activities that produce utterances and the sounds of the utterances. In film, what appears to be coming from the mouths of actors on the screen actually is conveyed to us through a variety of transducers and electro-magnetical storage

devices—through microphones, tape-recorders, speakers, optical sound track, etc—several of which Snow includes in Rameau's Nephew.

Snow's interest in constructed nature of images and of image sound relations explains the lecture that takes place in section eleven ("Bus"), in which what we now call virtual reality are presaged, as the lecturer, speaking with a lisp and in slightly peculiar, and highly mannered style that serves to bring the actual material of speech into evidence, forecasts the arrival of a machine reproduction so accurate that we will not be able to distinguish illusion from reality. In fact, Snow uses all manner of forms in Rameau's Nephew to shift our interest away from the reality of the represented object to the reality of representing object. He brings the material of speech, with as Plato's arguments in the Phaedrus make clear are ordinarily so inpalable as to seem insubstantial, into evidence. Thus, a splendid irony in the "Bus" scene is that, for all the remarks on total realism that the lecturer offers, the scene is utterly implausible—utterly unreal (in the aesthetic, not ontological sense). People sitting in a bus are not likely to be listening to a lecture on the quest for total realism. Snow likely choose a bus as the venue for the scene because people sitting in a bus somewhat resemble people sitting in a lecture hall. But the implausibility of the scene makes evident that in film sound and image are separate entities, without any necessary ontological relation to one another as source and sound in nature have. The topic of the lecture, total or integral realism, prompts us to consider how films use the illusion of necessary relation between sound and image to sustain the classic realist effect. It also makes us realize that most of the forms that Snow creates in Rameau's Nephew depends one the use of constructive, rather than reproductive potential of sound-image relations in film. In life, we cannot separate a sound from its source. The ability to separate the two, and yet to present sound and image simultaneously, is something only film can do. Snow makes use of the creative potentials the sound film offers; he uses the potentials that the sound film affords to creates something new, not a likeness to something that already exists. Finally, Snow makes use in this scene of the temporal features of response, of how our response to something unchanging changes through time. While watching the scene, we are likely to become quite conscious of the independence of the picture and sound in this scene. When we do so, our response to the scene changes; rather than responding to as a piece of integral realism we attend to it as a polyphonic work. The two hemispheres of our brain are simultaneously, but independently, excited. The relation of sound to image creates a tension as we realize that cannot direct our attention to the text without being distanced from the image (an effect that the peculiar manner in which the speaker delivers the text augments), and we cannot pay attention to the image (either to its surface marks or to its composition, which makes so apparent the linear perspective, or to the tiny details of deportment of the people on the bus) without being distanced from the text, even to the extent of losing its meaning. As a result, we tend to bring either sound or image into the foreground and to let the other recede into the background.

It is through his deconstruction of the apparent verisimilitude of the photographic image and of the photograph's power to encourage a suspension of disbelief that Snow was able to make such arguments. Those arguments depended on the opposing ways we understand photographs and constructions of other sorts, and this contrast is, most simply put, is the contrast between the photograph's supposed realism that results from its being a reflection of reality and the artificial nature of the construction. The connection points to how central the concept of realism is to the work.

In fact, as I noted above, the various scenes in Rameau's Nephew propose a scale of styles that span an axis that ranges across a span from nearly realistic to evidently constructed to nearly abstract—or, if we count the modulating homogeneous colour fields that frame the various section, to pure abstraction. from the allusive near-realism of scenes three ("Woman at piano"), five ("Mental Profumo L'Álito"), six ("Office"), eight ("Sink"), sixteen ("Tabletop description") and, especially, eighteen ("Woman at window"), through what in Image and Identity

I called metaleptical realism—in Rameau's Nephew this is really more an simulacrum of realism than that we see in the eleventh, ("Bus"), fifteenth ("Embassy"), though it has many of the self-reflexive and critical features of metaleptic realism—to the artifices of scenes thirteen ("Indian Village") and twenty ("Cheap Hotel"). While the classic realist effect depends upon our belief (which certainly is never complete, but, however limited, does admit of variation in degree) that the real presents itself to us without mediation, Snow uses devices in every scene to indicate the role of the material. Again, the roles the material play vary, from acting as the material support for the image to being the actual material from which the perceptible is forged; Snow's desire to stress the latter role, which Snow evidently considers primary, also helps accounts for the presence of the thirteenth ("Indian Village") section, which gives evidence of its artificiality in its use of the museum diorama. No matter what role the material plays, it is always makes its presence felt—and always insists on throwing into relief its role in mediating between the audience and the real. In scene three, with the woman at a piano, the presentation of the biographical information about Rameau in a language, Spanish, most film viewers would not understand and, even more, the fact that the content of text had previously been presented in Canadian French, and German, distances the viewer/listener, making him or her aware that the scene enacts a set piece, and so attend to it as a representation rather than a presentation of reality. Furthermore, it makes us conscious of how language, i.e., sounds with meaning, promotes identification, while pure sound, sound divorced of meaning as music is, creates a different, more distanced but more active, response. Scene five ("Mental Profumo L'Alito") distances the viewer by its longeur. That quality and the lack of sound, make the viewer consider it as relatively empty duration; this sense of the significance of the passage is confirmed when in section twenty three, the Mental Profumo L'Alito box is opened and shown to be empty. The unlikeliness of the conversation in the sixth ("Office") scene, its evident relation to the theme of locating sound, and the self-reflexive references to image-sound relations the scene contains draw our attention to the materials of the medium. The eighth ("Sink") foregrounds the performance, while its conceptual form makes the facture of both sequence and performance evident. The scenes evident relation to the theme of filling also makes us aware of its character as a staged, set-piece. The spatial treatment of time in in scene sixteen makes of aware of the autonomy of the image and sound, and so draws our attention to the medium. "Woman at window" is the most realistic. However, its form alludes to a genre of painting and so is historically mediated. What is more, there is a self-reflexive allusion, as painters since the Renaissance have conceived of the frame through the metaphor of window. This allusion suggests the constructed character of the scene. Even more importantly, its relation to the "Pissing duet" articulated in the water that rises over the scene and, especially, its fulfilling the dire predication made in song played in scene fifteen ("Embassy") that a "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," make the contrivance evident. In the "Bus" section, end-flares and perforations in the film make the viewer conscious of the film material.

The discrepancy in scene thirteen ("Indian Village") between what we what we see people doing with their mouths at the beginning and the words that the soundtrack imputes to them has a distancing effect. This anomaly, by its very unnaturalness (as one character in the scene says, "This is really artificial, there nothing natural about it.") makes us conscious that the independent existence of spoken sound and the body is possible only in film, and that in real life a sound's existence is inextricably bound to the source that produces it. (Snow refers obliquely to the idea that any art, including the art of film, depends upon the differences between the work of art and the world when, in the twentieth scene ("Cheap Hotel"), he has Ray ask, "Is this film art?" and Eva respond, "No. This is not art. It was once, but now nature is art." As the "Indian Village" scene progresses, and more sounds are added (the theme of filling, again), the image is rephotographed time and again (an visual analogue to the layering of sounds that occurs in the "Record Player" scene, and the whole becomes increasing distorted and abstracted, the

materials that ordinarily in cinema support the illusion become more and more evident until their presence eclipses the images, both aural and visual, that the materials previously presented. Scene twenty (“Cheap Hotel”) evidences the material by its extraordinarily disjunctive and constructed character.

“Cheap Hotel” is the last major scene in the film—the six that follow are series of end-pieces that offer pithy aperçus. It incorporates many of the themes and concerns of the film and acts as a kind of summary. Among the more prominent tropes of the section is the use of a multitude of references to a table. Snow incorporates references to the table into forms that present simultaneously aural and visual events that in reality could only occur at separate times. Thus, we hear the tables being smashed while we see the table, intact, with earphones sitting on it. Later, we see Ray smash the table, but hear dialogue from an early scene in the movie. The scene also incorporates numerous references to art, illusion and reality. This reference, the punning questions about whether the table is a “veri-table” and the many jokes in the scene about beds and tables and about tables usually being used to demonstrate reality, make us realize that Snow is consciously invoking Plato’s most famous argument against art, one of several he offers in the Republic. Plato starts the discussion at what he calls its customary point, and taking the multiplicity of existing couches and tables, points out the existence of a single and eternal form of couches and tables (596a). He goes on to argue that that the artist’s product has only a low-grade reality, that there is a form of the bed (or bedness) that God made, the craftsman’s imitation of the form in real-world materials, the perspectival appearance of the craftsman’s bed, and the painter’s imitation of that appearance. Snow plays on Plato’s claim that the table or couch that the painter or artist produces is three times removed from the real table or couch (i.e., the form of the table or couch) by offering a visual isomorphism for Plato’s argument that first shows a table (which is already at one remove from reality, as what we see is an image of a table, not a table of wood, wrought iron, plastic or whatever), and then layers it with a superimposed copy of the image (a second remove from reality).

There are several reasons for Snow to invoke Plato’s famous argument here. Firstly, he built Rameau’s Nephew on the idea of scales of reality and Plato’s argument invokes his famous conception of various levels of existents, some of which are more real than others. Furthermore, the argument against art that Plato offers in this part of the Republic centres on the concept of mimesis, and that concept is fundamental to Rameau’s Nephew as well—it even appears in “Cheap Hotel,” when Ray asks Leon about an article on illusionism (i.e., mimeticism). Furthermore, to demonstrate the low-level reality of the couches and beds that painters produces, Plato has Socrates propound this argument:

But tell me now this about the painter. Do you think that what he tries to imitate is in each case the thing itself in nature [i.e., the form of the couch] or the work of the craftsman?

The works of the craftsman, he said.

Is it the reality of them or the appearance? Define that further point.

What do you mean, he said?

This. Does a couch differ from itself according as you view it from the side or the front or in any other way? Or does it differ not at all in fact though it appears different, and so of other things?

That is the way of it, he said. It appears other but it differs not at all.

Consider, then, this very point. To which is painting directed in every case, to the imitation of reality as it is or of appearance as it appears? Is it an imitation of a phantasm or of the truth?

Of a phantasm, he said.

Then the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and this, it seems is the

reason it can produce everything, because it touches or lays hold of only a small part of the object, and that a phantom. . . (598a-c)

But if Snow went back to the good book, the Republic, to refresh his memory on Plato's exact words (and knowing something of Snow's care, we can speculate that he did), he might have taken notice of the following:

When anyone reports to us of someone, that he has met a man who knows all the crafts . . . our tacit rejoinder must be that he is a simple fellow, who apparently has met some magician or sleight-of-hand man and imitator and has been deceived by him into the belief that he is all-wise, because of his own inability to put to the proof and distinguish knowledge, ignorance and imitation. (598d)

Plato is referring to the illusion that an artist gives of having the skills to produce all the goods that many craftspeople produce severally, but read literally, it could sound apposite to Snow's own multifaceted enterprise. If so, he also offering a charmingly modest bit of self-mockery.

The various sounds that Rameau's Nephew incorporates also span on a scale of realism, from versimilitude to abstraction. He engages in much play that suggests the similarities and dissimilarities between sounds at various points on this scale, just as he does with the relations between sound and image. In scene twenty ("Cheap Hotel"), a line of trumpet music stands in for a line of dialogue, and a character exclaims, "I didn't know you spoke trumpet." The category error here opens up the fact that each form of construction has a appropriate response. More generally, it proposes an idea central to Rameau's Nephew, that different forms of construction elicit different modes of belief. Thus the classic realist effect elicits one type of belief, metaleptic realism another, pure abstraction another set of beliefs about another reality, the reality of the materials. In a similar vein, in scene twenty ("Cheap Hotel"), Leon uses the cliché "If that table could talk" and we hear the sound of smashing. Picking up on the themes of recollections and category errors in interpretations, Sarah responds, "It only remembers the pain."

In the same scene, Snow replaces a note on the guitar with the word "Armageddon" (a deliteralization of the Dylan's song lyrics?) and later, replaces the word "Armageddon" with a sound from a guitar. These replacements indicate key points about the scale of realism for sound, namely, that sounds that lack meaning we consider as music, about our differing responses to music and speech and about the different kinds of belief we have in "truth" and "form." In a similar vein, at the end of scene nine ("Dennis Burton") first a voice (actually Snow's, though no feature of the scene establishes the fact) comes from offscreen, asking a question, Burton replies, then the sound of human imitating a bark appears, to which Burton replies "Whorf," in manner that suggests a play on the sound "woof." The bark has the purpose of demonstrating the difference between meaningful sounds and sounds that lack meaning, the central issue of the section. It points up that speech is animal product of humans. But it also serves to suggest the different places on a scale of representation different sounds have.

A comment that Snow made in his notes on Rameau's Nephew explains a part of what is at stake here. He writes, "Echoes reverberate to "language", to "representation" in general, to representation in the sound cinema, to "culture", to "civilization". Via the eyes and ears it is composition aimed at exciting the two halves of the brain into recognition." The remark suggests that Snow accepts theories about the developmental differentiation of brain tissue results in different mental activities and different responses to events being located in different hemispheres, that language use and pattern recognition, for example, involve activities of different hemispheres. While I believe Freud's less concrete, and more functional and formal

description of primary and secondary processes opens a broader range of understandings of different types of mental activities (and especially the primary process' way with language that illuminates so many of the forms Snow employs that treat language as material form), Snow's description does nonetheless sheds light on his intentions for Rameau's Nephew.

Snow's note leads one to conjecture that the various techniques for emptying sound of meaning are strategies that excite the non-linguistic hemisphere of the brain, while the use of unmeaningful sounds in contexts in which meaningful sounds do appear are attempts to trick the mind into constructing meaning for sounds that are otherwise pure. These ideas about brain function claim that language, as meaning, excites one of the hemispheres of the brain, and images, patterns and shapes activate different hemispheres of the brain. Rameau's Nephew proposes that to convert speech almost into pure music, into pure aural patterns, and to structure series of images on the analogy of language. More exactly, it proposes to use language as meaning, to address one hemisphere, and to use language as patterned sound to address the opposite; it also proposes to treat images as both images and language. Thus in this matters, as with many others, Snow demands to have it both ways. More generally, the different forms of construction are designed to elicit different forms of response and Snow ties the different forms of response—different systems of belief, one might say—to the different areas of the brain. In all, one suspects that the film is designed to exercise all the parts of the brain. Thus it is meant not only as an exhaustive survey of possible relations between sound and image, but also to correlate these different possibilities with all the possible types of belief.

Of particular interest in this regard is the use of voice-off. The split-brain theories that Snow alludes to in this remark suggest imagery appeals to one hemisphere of the brain and language to the other. Ordinarily, films limit the effects of that result from exciting different modes of response by creating the appearance of close correspondence between sound in image. Even voice-off, conventionally used, maintains a relatively close relation between image and sound; nonetheless, in voice-off, the sound and image are evidently ontologically separate, a fact that films generally attempt to mask. Snow recognized an important consequence of the use of voice-off—that its nature reveals more truly the actual relation between sound and image in film than does that stable of mainstream cinema, synchronous, direct sound. Many of the image-sound relations that Snow constructs intensify and radicalize the implications that he discovered in the use of voice-off. We might surmise that Snow believes that among the most important reasons why those forms possess the intensity they do is that they address both hemispheres of the brain, separately but simultaneously.

Since film sound and image separately span a range of possible types, they can be independently related to one another. Only a well-defined, very specific type of relation can produce the classic realist effect. That relation depends on the illusion that film sound and image have an intrinsic relation with one another, that they are bound together ontologically, as are a sound in nature and its source. We have seen that Snow creates various forms that demonstrate the falsity of this illusion and shows that film can unite a sound from one source and image from another. Secondly, it depends on the coincidence of sound and image. Film theorists often talk as though this coincidence were exclusively temporal—that actions on screen must coincide in time with the corresponding sound on the soundtrack. However, spatial location is equally important. Films achieve the classic realist effect by locating sound within a diegetic space (usually within the image itself, but sometimes within an off-screen space whose relation to the space on screen is mapped by the fiction). The idea of placing sound into a spatial container is one that Snow deals with extensively in Rameau's Nephew, as is the idea of the arrangement of elements in relation to one another—scene sixteen (“Tabletop Description”) demonstrates elements being rearranged, in space and in time.

Snow goes to great length in Rameau's Nephew to break down the natural relations between sound and image. His desire to do so relates to his desire to make us see that what

appears to be direct discourse is really indirect; both help makes us recognize the skeptical proposal that is at the heart of this work, that in perceiving we do not have direct, unmediated access to the real that exists outside the medium of representation. By offering us a series of ways of representing an event, in image, in sound, and in sound-image relations, Snow suggests that none of our ways of perceiving the world, or of representing it to ourselves, really conveys the world as it is. The world is always an absent other, stood in for by a representing token. All perception and understanding is actually interpretation. Just as indirect discourse does not reveal events themselves, perception and thought do not represent the world as it is. At the same time, Snow points out, still, somewhat less skeptically, that what we do have an immediate relation with the object that exists within the medium of representation—the construction that the artist fabricates. Still, Snow's sound works are generally more skeptical in character than his visual art. What accounts for Snow's use of sound to propose the Kantian conjectures just given? What is there in the nature of sound that invites such reflection?

Among art media, sound has an especially great power to evoke such identification. Sounds have duration, and so the art of composing sounds takes temporal structures into account, and the most basic of the structures that give form to time, one that is only barely avoidable, is rhythm. Rhythm involves the nearly, but not exactly, periodic return of similar or identical elements. It works by creating a pattern of elements whose periodic return we come to expect and in whose comforting regularity we take pleasure; some force then disturbs the pattern, preventing exact repetition, and so creates a dialectic between the pattern and instance, law and individual occurrence, form and content. Such a dialectic plays on the desire for identification, for merging with what is always the self-same, and the excitement induced by approaching that condition of complete identification but never quite achieving it. The dialectic of identity and difference in the pattern and actual material of rhythm parallels our own desire for self-identity, our desire to merge with what always wholly present, on the one hand and our need for individuation on the other.

Sound and rhythm have great power to evoke identification, too, because of our sensation of them evokes something primitive. The fetus hears the mother's heartbeat and internal organs, and even, dimly, an outside world before he or she can see the world. While the space formed in sight is made up of differentiated and bounded expanses, the space of sound is undifferentiated, oceanic. Vision marks out differences between its objects, while hearing allows the entities it reveals to merge with another and become another.

In creating a work whose overall form presents as diegetic episodes that individually appear mimetic since they seem to present conversations, Snow creates a similar dialectic between distancing and identification. We can discern a similar dialectic in several other works in Snow's oeuvre, a dialectic that, in its essence, is no different from that between the desire for unity and the difficulty of achieving it. What sets Rameau's Nephew apart from Snow's other works is his reliance in this work on the potentials of sound and his use in it of features of the discourse to give structure to the work

Several passages of Rameau's Nephew share a common source of tension: they evoke the sense of the immediacy of direct speech, but thwart it, using a variety of means to make us aware of the material nature of the signifier of oral language. In doing so, Snow evokes the desire for identification, for merging with the uncharted and unmapped realm that sound of any sort creates, and simultaneously, thwarts that desire. We can classify the various sections of Rameau's Nephew in broad categories according to the manner Snow handles their sound. One type of sequence presents situations in which a small group of participants engage in verbal exchanges of an impressively wide range, but many of them language games. The other type comprises sequences in which the sound processing is so intense that the words spoken become nearly or completely incomprehensible.

Sequences of the first sort involve playing games with language. These games often

depend upon material characteristics of the signifiers, for, as in seventh (“Airplane”) and the fifteen (“Embassy”) sequences they often involve puns, plays on the sound of words or on clichés, and jokes, sometimes bad jokes. Clichés have an interesting power to prise literal and figurative meanings apart, to separate the meaning of individual components of an expression and the meaning of the whole expression, and so to literalize and to confirm Ludwig Wittgenstein’s claim that the meaning of expression depends only on its use, not on a single, essential relation between language and the world. This is a key aspect of Rameau’s Nephew. Its language-games give weight to the material of the signifier; this has the effect of turning language in upon itself so that it gets involved with its own material characteristics. Snow uses related devices to show how the phatic use of speech drains language of its referentiality. Furthermore many clichés, and some bad jokes, make use of figures of speech that have become so common they are almost like an object, not something we form through the creative use of language, but something we just use, often only half-awares. Their familiarity makes them like words of language that we use to express some conventional idea or to fill in some empty space in a conversation.

The later Wittgenstein’s ideas about language are central to Rameau’s Nephew. Wittgenstein’s devoted his later theory of language to an effort to refute the view that language corresponds exactly to the world—that an homology between the structure of language and the order of things explains the phenomenon of meaning. Wittgenstein’s principal adversary was the same as Kant’s—the entire philosophical tradition which had constructed futile questions and unanswerable problems by a misuse of language. A secondary adversary was the philosophy of logical atomism with which he once had been prominently associated. We can construe his theories as a corrective to the Romantic conception of the power of the word.

That conception had its roots in the belief best expressed in Wordsworth’s The Prelude, that conventional language alienates us from immediate perception. One response was the notion of the creating word—the idea that the energy carried in the sound of the poetic word was creative, that a word actually discloses what it refers to. What poetic language refers to is not some referent external to language; what it refers to is immanent to the sound of language. Poetic language relies on the sound-meaning of words; it is therefore a form of music that discloses realities beyond those of which conventional language can speak. The idea that the musical qualities of language have noetic value has produced some of the greatest art of this century, for it is central to the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Celan. From this there developed, as a fascinating offshoot that we cannot go into here the idea that music as language recreates the immediate relation we had with things as children, that it actually discloses the world in which we live, that music makes fully present what it presents. To reawaken this most vital relation with things in themselves is the most important function of poetic language.

This was one conception of presence in language that the later Wittgenstein’s theory of language combatted. However, it had a more immediate adversary, the view that meaning can be identified with another presence, that of mental representations. According to this theory, when someone utters a word, it creates a mental representation in the mind of the listener that is very similar to the mental representation which was in the mind of the speaker. The resemblance between the two mental representations explains how we can have a common language. This was the view of meaning that the English empiricists and Diderot put forward.

Soon after the empiricists advanced it, philosophers pointed out that the mental representations words invoke can be of two related sorts only—they must be reactivations of memory images or constructions assembled from memory images. Since each person’s experience is different from every other’s, each person’s memory must be different. The memory image a word evokes in one person’s mind will be different from that which it evokes in another’s. The dream of a common language had collapsed, and the spectre of solipsism

emerged from the rubble to haunt our age.

Wittgenstein strived valiantly to formulate a theory of language that would dispell this despairing conclusion. He proclaimed that mental representations are unnecessary to explain the meaning of words. What we should do to understand meaning is to look to the way we use words. Consider a builder and his or her helper, he suggested. In building, they make use of blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. They have a language consisting of “block,” “pillar,” “slab,” and “beam.” The builder calls out one of these words, for example “block” and the helper goes over and gets a block. It does not matter what image was in the builder’s mind or in the helper’s, or how different they were, or whether there even were pictures in their minds. All that matters to the meaningfulness of this language is that the word “block” can be used to do this work.

Wittgenstein’s theory of language is a potent weapon against those who treat the meanings of words as though they belonged to the mind instead of social reality. However, it had other implications on which Snow must have deliberated. Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning as use leaves language peculiarly evacuated. It depicts the word as empty of meaning, lacking all the powers the Romantics associated with the creating word, lacking exact correspondence with the real, lacking even a relation to internal representations, the exchange of which is the communicative task of language. If the meaning of a word is its use, and we can think of the use of words as governed by rules, as games are, then the meaning of words is simply diacritical; words have no more inherent meaning than the tokens we use to play games.

Snow’s thought has an affinity with these ideas. Snow has frequently made use of systematic structures—often generated by rule-guided processes—in his work. In Rameau’s Nephew, Snow demonstrates time and time again (for example in the counting of the homonyms of “for,” or in the passage with Dennis Burton) that we understand the meaning of such forms when we grasp the rules that govern them. The ideas of language and meaning implied by such construction is close to Wittgenstein’s. Another common aspect of their view on language, and more important, I believe, is the sense Wittgenstein and Snow share of language as inherently empty of meaning. In some passages of Rameau’s Nephew, Snow layers sound over sound until the composite becomes unintelligible. In these sections, as art critic Walter Klepac pointed out in his fine piece on Snow and postmodernism:

What is so striking and poignant about these sequences is the desperate if not necessarily pitiful efforts on the part of the viewer to penetrate, to somehow structure and comprehend his surroundings in order, as it were, to get outside of his head and into the world. In his published notes on Rameau’s Nephew Snow refers to speech as thought’s body and remarks that speech and thought are not generally considered to be separate activities. Snow has managed in these sequences to elicit from the viewer a self-conscious awareness of the operations of the mind deprived of language.

Wittgenstein’s theory is a demonstration-piece of the effect of separating thought and language, of separating the body of thought from the soul that animates, as Snow’s metaphor would have it. Several sections of the film convey the sadness that attends hearing sound lose its sense.

The approach Snow has taken to sound in Rameau’s Nephew and in many of his recorded sound pieces is strikingly similar to the approach he took to constructing visual forms. Both his visual art and recorded sound work reveal a similarly material conception of the medium, a similar belief in the importance of constructing that material into forms that, instead of depicting the world, elicit experiences from us that we could not have were it not for that material, a similar tension between abstraction and representation, and a similar recognition of the space the signifier opens between consciousness and objects in the world. Among Rameau’s Nephew’s many charming features is Snow’s completely literal manner of

transposing forms of construction from his visual art to aural art. Snow stresses the parallels between sound and image and the idea that Rameau's Nephew is work that balances sound and image in its fifteenth ("Embassy") section. In that portion of the film, Snow includes within the frame a person holding the microphone and a person holding a small spotlight; their positions change with every shot, but they are nearly equal in importance. Their actions show that sound and light can play equivalent roles in picking out the subject of interest from space and focusing attention on it. The microphone and spot light seem to animate the figures that, one after another, become the principal players in the scene. The microphone and the spotlight change position to pick out a figure and then that figure becomes the focal point of the scene and begins to speak. More importantly, the overexposure lights up the face in such a manner that the speech we hear seems to emanate from a patch of light. This form is a brilliantly conceived on Snow's part, for it is remarkably rich in suggestions about sound/image constructions in film. In synchronous sound films, the sound track is synchronized with the image, that is, with forms moulded in light. Furthermore, the the patch of light also makes a reference to the projection beam, and in any film, the waves of sound that fill an auditorium are synchronized with the projection beam; too, the projection is what speaks when sound seems to emanates from a film image.

Two related devices make the significance of this clear. One is having Nam June Paik and Helene Kaplan shake Bob Cowan; the other is having Annette Michelson, puppet-like, mouth the words to "O Canada." The use of sound, and this manipulation of Cowan and Michelson make clear that the actors are not the real source of the discourse that is present, that they are spoken. Thus these devices serve to make evident the discourse is indirect and that the actors or speaking words that were scripted for them—that they convey (say are synchronized to) a script. It also furnishes a series of metaphors for the materials of the medium, as Snow suggests that the light and the microphone, the image and sound, and actors whose bodies are the source of the sound all mediate between the spectator and the point of origin of the ideas that give the work its shape. These metaphors dispel whatever tendency we may have to consider these images and sounds as transparent, as conveying reality in the raw, and make us aware of their materiality and their facture. In other passages, too, Snow creates constructions that have similar significance. The picture in the ninth ("Dennis Burton") section breaks up and changes colour when the volume of the sound changes or certain consonants appear. The nineteenth ("English Comedians") section, for example, has three alternated shots, all portraying the same two men and a woman, but each lit differently, two from the side and one from the front. Snow coordinates the shot changes with the sound, cutting where a different person begins talking, or where there is applause or laughing. In the part of the twentieth ("Cheap Hotel") section devoted to the old man, Snow cuts to another object or person on each syllable.

Both sections have some of the qualities of a cubist artwork—a fact the film testifies to, as one of the performers suggests (Royden Rabinowich) states that this film is Cubist and is corrected with, "Cubism hasn't been invented yet," a play on the anachronisms that sometimes appear in period pieces; Jacques also states that "this film looks like it was hewn with an axe," forming what we might take as allusion the the faceting of objects in Cubist painting and sculpture, and Leon responds by making a substitution for "hewn"—"Edited with an axe is the way we in the movies would put it." The shot-to-shot changes of lighting in the nineteen section suggest that we are seeing the comedians from different points-of-view, and so in alternating the shots, Snow is alternating between different vantage points, after the fashion of cubist painting. The radical dismemberment of space of the twentieth section is likely the cubist's best-known legacy to art. The parallels of Rameau's Nephew with Cubist art are telling. The art of Cézanne and the Cubists disassembled the illusion that the surface of a canvas presented a seamless whole, that unity of incident, time, mood, point of view, strengthened by the integrative powers of

geometry and rhythm, by the subordination of all details of the painting to the dominant forms and motives and by the illusion-bolstering effects of Imaginary relations that this material unity of the work encourages us to develop. The fragmentation of the painted scene, the dispersal of the point-of-view, the anti-Imaginary effect of the loss of a consolidated point-of-view, and the consequent foreground of the material basis of the work and its facture shifted the course of twentieth-century art. There is an unbroken line of development between the notion of unity that Cubists developed, a notion of unity that tolerates a greater degree of dispersal than any previous art and that relishes the tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces in painting as no era since the Baroque had, and the notion of unity that underpins the segmented construction of Rameau's Nephew.

Snow's means of handling sound, and their implications, are remarkably uncommon. While the idea of making the material of painting, sculpture and cinema evident has attracted the allegiance of most of the best artists in those fields for more than three-quarters of a century, analogous ideas for sound have been surprising few and have garnered remarkably little support. The idea of submitting image and sound to parallel forms of variation and of having the image affect the sound or the sound affect the image are ideas that only a Snow would be likely to conceive, for they are the result of taking ideas whose role in painting had been much discussed and applying them to sound.

The use of sound that has been layered, processed, or fragmented and recombined to such an extent that it has become nearly or wholly incomprehensible defines the other type of passage. In Rameau's Nephew, Snow works with the spectrum of possibilities of sound-image construction. One end of the spectrum is the pole at which the sound medium is transparent—as speech, transparent to meaning, as recorded sound, transparent to the represented objects—to abstract constructions in the relations intrinsic to constructed object are the focus of our aesthetic interest. As concerns the words—and, as a talking picture, Rameau's Nephew, concerns itself primarily with speech sounds—the spectrum ranges from oral sound as meaning to sound as object.

Snow's use of the full spectrum of possibilities in Rameau's Nephew has interesting implications. When the young Mr. Snow was a student in the mid-1950s, there were three leading influences on art education and young artists. One, represented in Toronto by Carl Schaeffer and Fred Hagan, was socially committed art exemplified in the work of Ben Shahn, an artist the younger Snow is unlikely not to have seen and considered. While this influence almost certainly assures that the young Snow gained a basic understanding of the techniques of realist art, its influence on him was likely slight, as its energies were nearly spent by the time they reached artists of Snow's generation. A second, large influence was the work of Picasso, and the colossal energy that Picasso directed towards the human form and the human face, and the huge varieties of forms he created from the single focus could well have marked Snow and his earlier undertakings. Furthermore, the analytic, self-reflective character of Picasso's art, his concentration on the visual analysis of the phenomenal world, and his willingness to risk appearing casual in order to get at something deeper, and to risk defying conventional conceptions of beauty, especially those that depend on coloristic effects associated with the Venetian or earlier Parisian schools, could all have resonated in Snow's consciousness. But the most prominent, and most progressive, method for teaching and analyzing art derived from the theories of the modernists that were then in vogue and proclaimed the virtues of "truth to the materials." It preached that by dispensing with all those aspects of the conventional forms of art that lacked grounding in the material of media in which they were realized, artists accomplish what must be seen as a redemptive task: By banishing all alterity, they align art's being wholly with itself; by eliminating all taint of otherness from its art's nature, they could convert art into a form of truth, albeit a tautological one.

If one were unfamiliar with Snow's other works, while first watching Rameau's Nephew

one might be disposed to formulate an interpretation of the “noise/pure sound” passages along these lines, proposing that, collectively, they form an impressive demonstration piece on treating sound as an abstract form. Some passages have characteristics that would lend support to this interpretation, and if all that there were to them was the design of arrangements of pure sound, they would be interesting just for that reason.

But there is more to them. The differences between object and representation (as commonly formed) in recorded sound is narrower than it is with any other medium. In painting, photography and film, the image of an object is profoundly different from the object itself since the image is two-dimensional while the object exists in three-dimensions. The alterations the appearance of an object undergoes when translated to a two-dimensional surface are the source of many of these media’s potential, and especially those of photography and film. Moreover, the material instance of a sound recording, the actual magnetic oxide on mylar or the microgrooves in vinyl or the series of digits stored on a laser-readable material, has a different status than the painting or photograph, or even, than film. The physical painting or photograph is the likeness itself, while the arrangement of magnetized particles or the array of microgrooves in vinyl, the black band varying in width and density on a roll of 16mm film, or the laser readable list of numbers that specify the characteristics of waveforms is not the likeness, at least not in the same way that the painting is a likeness. We must play the recording to form an image of the thing recorded. The recording is a score or a script for mechanically creating a likeness, not the actual likeness itself.

The aural image created when some apparatus performs the score or carries out the set of recorded instructions has puzzling features. It exists as vibrations whose characteristics vary through time. These vibrations are invisible and impalpable, and do not invite being thought of as material, though of course they are. No matter how justified we may be in thinking of them as material, considering them so clashes with common sense. Furthermore, it is difficult to discern what the actual difference between the image and the object it represents really is. For the object the image represents is itself a set of vibrations whose characteristics vary through time, and the more accurate the image, the more alike the two sets of vibrations are. We could take as a limit case the situation where the two sets of vibrations were identical in all their intrinsic features.

Three possibilities for distinguishing between the image and object present themselves: First, we could distinguish between image and object on the basis of the actual source. If a set of waveforms issues forth from the mouth of a dog, it is a bark—the object. If the same set of waveforms issues from a speaker-horn that is pushed and pulled according to instructions encoded in a table of numbers, then that set of waveforms is an image rather than an object. This manner of distinguishing the two is odd, for it conflicts with our understanding that internal constitution determines identity — our common-sense version of Leibniz’ principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Second, we could distinguish between image and object because the second set of waveforms exists at a time after the first set existed and that when the initial set existed, someone made use of an apparatus to store information about it so that it could later be recreated. This position is more plausible, as it accords with our notions of what a recording is. It explains why we should take the one set of sound waves to be an image of an event, the other the event itself. However, it still leaves unexplained what the intrinsic differences between the two sets of waves are. The third possibility is that we could dismiss the example as hypothetical, arguing that the limit case is a physical and probably even conceptual impossibility, that any aural image, no matter how well made, must have intrinsic features that distinguish it from its model. The suggestion that there could be an image that we distinguish from its model only on the basis of extrinsic features is absurd.

Snow uses sound constructions to develop the last two positions. He points out that an aural image is always delayed, always comes after an event. No small portion of his recorded

sound works exploit the affects evoked by this belatedness, by the fact that an image exists only when the object has disappeared (for sound is transient). He also uses devices to foreground the features that distinguish sound images from their models by including microphone noises, raising the usual level of tape hiss, emphasizing the perspectival effects microphones create, etc.

Snow has never conformed his work to the materialist aesthetic that presided over art-making and art teaching when he was a young man. His work has relentlessly criticized the received doctrine. His demonstrations of the limitations of that position has two parts. The first makes apparent the variety of ways that representation inflects abstraction and the variety of representational features that abstract forms possess. The second shows that longing for meaning is characteristic of our perception of form, even our perception of absolute forms.

The rhythms, cadences, and pauses—the temporal flow generally—of the abstract passages have features that are peculiar to the spoken word. When we listen to them, we know that we are hearing processed speech and not, say, electronically generated sound. Snow foregrounds such features even while he uses methods for processing sound that turn actuality sound into abstract sound; we can find evidence of this in the tenth (“Record Player”) and twelfth (“Tea party”) sequences. There he highlights features that reveal that the sound we are hearing is articulated noise, noise that possesses the formal, though not the syntactical, relations of verbal sounds. In making this clear, he points out that there is really no such thing as an abstract form (abstract in the sense of having drawn back entirely from reference altogether) that the sign inevitably appears within the mark, that sense persists in the realm of the mark and so, as our efforts to make sense of the passages reveal, that the hermeneutical endeavour invests our relation to all articulated marks.

We can see now how Snow has answered the accusations that classical film theorists made against the sound film. In Rameau’s Nephew, Snow works with a scale of realism that spans a range from near-versimilitude to nearly pure abstraction and has correlated a range of responses, or beliefs, that corresponds to the scale of realism. This approach is not uncommon in Snow’s work; he uses it often to suggest the objects, or forms, or styles, or attitudes that we take to have opposing features actually possess common features. The classical film theorist argument against the sound film was that the two media have fundamentally different characteristics and so the imperatives governing the construction of forms that suit one of the media cannot be reconciled with the imperatives governing the construction of a form that suits the other. Snow’s method of refuting the arguments of the classical film theorist relies on relaxing the conception of mediumistic specificity that the advanced arts in the 40s, 50s and most of the 60s so tautly formulated. He does this by isolating deep features that two or more media share and by conceiving conceptual structures and forms that serve as containers for strategies for the regular and systematic alteration of these features, often taken one at a time. Sometimes he applies such structures to two media simultaneously, as he does sometimes does in Rameau’s Nephew. More often, Snow applies forms whose use is familiar from one field of endeavour to another to expose the two media’s deep similarities. The reason for the strength of his method is that it respects the principle that form must be true to material while it overcomes the limitations of the orthodox conception of mediumistic specificity, which insisted that only the features that differentiate one artistic medium from all the others could be considered essential characteristics of that medium.

Snow answers this by noting that film sound and picture share ontological and phenomenological characteristics. Both are indexical media, media whose features are bound up with those of the world recorded on film. Artists and designers have used the indexicality of both media to evoke a sense of presence. These media have a capacity to evoke a sense of presence that is so potent that it often has been taken as demanding the use of forms that render the medium transparent. Snow, to the contrary, notices that because both motion picture

and movie sound are recording devices, both involve a tension between their objective and reproductive natures, that is, between their character as material constructs, unconstrained by any requirement to create a simulacrum of the world, and their capacity to create a likeness. He recognizes, in sum, that both are material and their material may be formed to give a likeness of the real. This way of forming the material is not so much untrue to the nature of the material (for the capacity of these media to create a likeness of the real belongs to their natures) as it is limiting, for it is only one among many ways that we can form the material. Since the forming of material is the essence of artmaking, and the integrity of the resultant form, not its accuracy, is the basis on which we judge its aesthetic value, there is no reason we should privilege those forms that yield an impression of reality over those forms that do not. Thus, in all the arts that he has worked that have the capacity to provoke an impression of reality, Snow has created forms that modulate between presenting a likeness of reality and presenting themselves as nearly completely abstract material constructions. Rameau's Nephew does exactly this with the sound picture. It modulates from realistic passages (e.g., section 8, "Sink";) to passages in which the recording apparatus distorts—or better, moulds—the actuality sound to sounds that, while entirely unintelligible, maintain the rhythms and intonational patterns of speech, to nearly completely non-representational sound. The forms of construction that lie nearer the middle of this spectrum, sounds that represent the world, but whose medium material support obtrudes upon our consciousness, serve not to only make us aware of the material basis of the illusion but also to create tension between the Imaginary's desire for fusion with the sounds represented and our need to individuate ourselves, to preserve our boundaries, not to lose ourselves in the other. In short, these forms of construction work with tensions between the lure of the Imaginary's suturing effect—a lure that can, and in Snow's work sometimes does, become the threat of the loss of our selfhood—and our desire to remain within the Symbolic so as to maintain the illusion of our autonomy.

Snow also points out, through his insistent use of forms that concern the temporal relation between sound and image in film that both moving pictures and movie sound are arts of time. This basic feature of the medium justifies Snow's frequent use of forms of construction that stress the interaction of sound and image. Another reason for his use of such forms is more complex, but no less important. The argument against the possibility of creating well-integrated forms in a compound medium depended upon the idea that the structuring principles derived from whichever medium had the lead in a particular passage. The assumption is questionable. The structuring principles could depend not on the material of the sound or picture, but on the interaction of sound and picture. At least, they could, if we relaxed the principle of mediumistic specificity somewhat from its taut formulation by the modernists of the 40s, 50s and 60s. This is exactly what Snow does, when he points to the features that the materials of sound and image have in common. That both are arts of tension, that both exploit tensions that result from articulating structures in time, that the temporal structures can be made more important than the contents they contain (a point Snow established in One Second in Montréal and Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film) are themselves grounds for creating forms that stress that interaction of sound and image. This is just what he does in the first ("Whistling"), second ("Sink"), seventh ("Airplane"), ninth ("Dennis Burton"), nineteenth ("English Comedians") and twentieth ("Cheap Hotel") sections of Rameau's Nephew. Snow also creates forms that invert the customary relation between sound and image, according sound the leading role to foreground its material nature and to make it seem that sound is animating the picture—a notion Snow cleverly toys with several times in film.

The classical film theorists doubted that the coming of sound would result in artistic advances in film because, they believed, that its only effect would be, as Arnheim put it, to introduce a bargain basement realism. Snow recognized a fundamental difference between the relation of sound to image in film and the relation of a sound to its source in reality, that in the

latter, the two have an ontological bond, while in film they do not. Because they do not, because they are independent elements, the filmmaker can construct new relations between sound and image that have no basis in reality. The sound film introduced new possibilities for creating forms that have no pattern outside the work. It is to avail himself of these creative potentials that Snow stress film sound and image are autonomous elements that enter into a dialogue with one another rather than an intrinsic unity.

Finally Snow points towards a different conception of unity than the one the classical film theorists held. For them, the unity of a work depended upon a hierarchy of superordinate and subordinate elements. Snow's was a decidedly different. A number of movements in twentieth-century art, from serial music to abstract expressionist painting, had created forms that, while still highly unified were not as hierarchically organized as was "the organic work of art." Snow recognized that the richness of forms that can result from the interactions among a number a quasi-discrete, quasi-autonomous elements and structures, that are not ranked in an hierarchy. The quasi-independence of sound and image in Rameau's Nephew and the quasi-independence of its section reflect a common source. The classical film theorists assumed that, in order to create a properly unified work of art, principles based on either sound or image would have to be to determine the structures of a film, including those opposite modality; consequently, either sound or image will be structured according to principles that are not true to its nature, or the work will not fail to possess the requisite unity. Snow shows that there is plenty of ground for the use of related structures in image and sound and, as importantly, that there is no need for sound/image relations to involve hierarchical arrangements in which either image or sound is dominant and that a non-hierarchical relation between autonomous parts, interacting—conversing—with each other will serve as well or better.

The conventional notion of unity depended on the idea of the idea of presence. It was designed to consolidate all the elements in a solid, dense existent. To be is to be present. Or so Western metaphysics, from its origins with the Pre-Socratics up nearly until Martin Heidegger in our time, construed the relation between being and time. Romanticism, in all its various forms, was largely the struggle to identify being and consciousness. The present is the region in which being and consciousness are aligned. Therefore, the present became a highly privileged zone among the Romantics.

But not the present present. The famous passage on the dialectic between master and slave in Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes provides good evidence of the Romantics' tormented conception of the emergence of the idea of the other within the idea of the self, and then, in turn, the tormented recovery of the self from the other. This passage is metaphoric, and it requires many levels of interpretations. Unfortunately, Kojève's monumental influence has led writers to emphasis its sociological and anthropogenetic meanings above its logical and metaphysical meaning. The passage really suggests that the role of the non-identical in creating identities of any sort, including the identities of the antithetical terms in dialectical logical and of opposing concepts in the formation of strong ideas, and the emergence of identity from nonbeing, or better, from the opposition between being and nonbeing with which the dialectical process begins. The Master/Slave passage has many significances but two are primary, and of neither Kojève gives proper account. One is to provide an account of self-consciousness and self-identity that overcomes the poverty of the traditional philosophical view that the self is known in or through or behind experience, through an act of immediate intuition. Hegel argues that only the power of opposition to another self-consciousness can account for the genesis of self-consciousness. We cannot have self-consciousness without the mediation of other people, Hegel states. The second concerns the activities of forming ideas. The passage gives an account of how only the conflict between determinant concepts can bring any one to full development, that we cannot have determinant ideas at all except for their relation with other ideas.

The point is crucial to Hegel's logic. Each idea, each person, each term of the dialectic exists only by its opposition to an antithetical term. Hegel did not claim that the dialectic synthesis ended the opposition between self and other, but only that it "sublated" the opposites. The nonself-identical had another, more concrete importance in the Romantics' conception of imagination, that we also see in Hegel's philosophy. For if any single image defines Romanticism, it is the image of the self dividing itself and then coming back to itself, or more generally, of identity dividing against itself and then returning to itself. An exemplary presentation of that image is the Master/Slave passage in Hegel's phenomenology, but the image shapes Hegel's logic. The heroic mental power that plays an important role in bringing the Absolute to self-recognition, is memory, Hegel suggests.

One could write a considerable part of the history of Romanticism as the struggle to overcome this alterity—as a struggle for complete self-identity. Such a story could as well be told of Hegel's philosophy as it could the whole of German Romanticism. But one feature that sets Hegel's philosophy apart from the other major achievements of German Romanticism is that, unlike them, he believed that this task was finite (indeed that his philosophy had brought it to completion.) The dialectic of self and other is an aspect of memory. For memory reaches back into the no-longer present and brings it into the present again. The pastness of the objects of memory reveals the power of memory and imagination to negate the otherness of the past by returning it to present. Though the past present, the present present and the future present are all distinct modalities of time consciousness, all share a quality of presence, one being the "having once been present," another being "present now," the last "the will later become present." Romantics understood the work of memory and imagination to be the overcoming of the alterity of past and future by bringing them into presence; were it not for the pastness of the present past or the futurity of the present future, the negative power of the imagination would never be revealed.

Accordingly, it was not the present present that the Romantics made a zone of privilege, but a past present or, more rarely, a future present—a past or future event restored to reality in the world-creating imagination. To rediscover and represent the knowledge that lies buried in memory, the Romantics searched the farther reaches of time and space—searched in that favourite of the German Romantics, Athens, in ruins whose ravaged character spoke of the endurance of the past, however eroded, in the present, in exotic tropics, wherever there was an other that they could bring into a critical relation to the present. The interest also harboured the fate of Romanticism, for the presencing of the past is a task one cannot realize. Our experience of the presence of absence is proof enough that the presencing of absence never overcomes the absence's absentness, that absence can never be made to coincide with presence. The power of negation cannot convert the alterity of the other into the self-identity of presence.

Snow's work alludes to the vaulting power of the Romantic imagination. A feature of his earlier films was the use of the diagrammatic structures that allow us to consider them synoptically and, by giving time a spatial form, to negate the effects of its passing. That form is an ideal expression of the Romantic conception of time. Furthermore, the dialectic of inner and outer that gives earlier parts of Wavelength some of its tension is a familiar figure in Romantic literature, as it suggests the division between self and other, the undoing of which is the imagination's most important work.

A basic tension in Snow's work arises from the conflict between the desire to reconcile the self with the other and a skepticism, conditioned by a critical assessment of the limits of knowledge, about ever achieving such a reconciliation. Some of Snow's works, most notably La Région Centrale, convey the exhilaration we feel when, however fleeting, we attain the unity of self with other; some other works, for example Present, elicit a feeling of sadness and loss through his formulating a tragic relation between beauty and loss. One form of beauty in art pertains to representation, Snow suggests, and representation exacts a price in lost immediacy.

The other form pertains not to the reality of the object represented, but to the reality of the representing object. Rameau's Nephew concerns itself with the latter form, and is rather skeptical about possibilities of the former. When we attend to a work of art, the object that we experience immediately is the art object itself, not what it represents. Snow brings these materials into evidence, using a large array of devices. Nonetheless, as this object comes into evidence, so the fact that our relation with the object of representation is a mediated relation becomes all the more evident.

While Rameau's Nephew is a work that appears to deal with speech in all its immediacy, it really evidences the materiality of all sound, including speech, and the indirection of all artistic discourse. There is another revolution this wheel must go through, for an important implication of the serial structure of the work has not been given an account. As I noted at the beginning, Rameau's Nephew has a different—a more dispersed—structure than his other films do. Why? Because Snow has constructed the work on the model of the sentence. Word follows word in the construction of the sentence, just as in the work segment follows segment like the cars of a passing train. The meaning of a sentence emerges through the syntagmatic relation of unit to unit. But the units of a sentence that is spoken are not co-present. One disappears as the other appears. The unity of the sentence is something ideal; it exists in the mind, in memory and imagination, and not concretely. So it is with the segmentary structure of Rameau's Nephew. We can apprehend its structure, as we do the meaning of a sentence spoken to us. Like meaning in speech, the unity of Rameau's Nephew is ideal: we can grasp the film synoptically, as something wholly present, presented all at once, immediately, in the moment of presence, but we can do so only retrospectively like the sentence whose sense is separated from its enunciation by an instant. The sentence as a material form has vanished by the time the ideal, meaningful sentence appears. It is the same with Rameau's Nephew: apprehending the ideal structure, in its all-in-all immediacy comes at the cost of the immediacy of our sensuous relation with its materiality. We grasp its all-in-all only after the segments have gone by.

Every work of art lies near a region that is unthematized, unspoken, unpictured, and unconscious. In Rameau's Nephew, the relation between language and death maps out that region. Only the gods and humans speak. Only the gods and animals do not know death—and the one speaks, the other doesn't. Only the word's breaking silence releases beings into the lighted clearing of appearance. Where there is no word, beings are not, only silence. This silence we name death.

Perhaps it is in language that truth is gathered. Even so, we can understand the truth enfolded in this gathering together only when the process of gathering truth together is completed, and the process by which language gathers truths together is endless, for any truth whatsoever.

To end with a note for my colleagues, it was a baseball player who said, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Or, as Snow puts in Rameau's Nephew, "It's always nearly over."