

TOWARDS A CINEMATIC OBJECT

Mani Kaul

Contrary to all formally systemised pre-industrial art forms, un-disciplined film products gravitate into the commodity market producing social distortion. Cinema is the most contemporary aesthetic encounter with reality. However its contrary facets of realism and magic (i.e., its paradoxical surface-intensive capability) restricts the medium from realising for itself an objective discipline.

Pre-industrial Aesthetics and Cinema

The difficulty springs from the 'formal' necessity of utilising unabstracted or highly specific reality as material for all its artistic abstraction. The extreme particularisation of image/sound denotation (permeating physical configurations) inhibits any finite cinematic linguistic. To begin with, in order to reach the significant cinematic object it is essential not to consider cinema as a 'composite of disciplines'. It is only when the specificity of the image/sound formation is treated as substantial and unique that a *violation* of this specificity becomes disciplined and positive: open to development.

A cinematic moment creates the connotative extra-space by the impact of its moving or shifting explicitness, unless a word which is intrinsically implicit in character. The unseen outside of a film-frame is negligible in its evocativeness if compared to what is created upon or within the theatre space, in front of or around an audience. Sufficient stylisation in an actor's performance against the *inert* theatrical space leads his activity into extra-spatial rituals of significance. Space in cinema is encountered in a mobile, differentiated continuum, not set off against neutral space norms to allow its variations any measure. (A barren landscape as a background for a complete film is still a borrowed 'measure' from theatre. Now if the cinematic movement were considered from its own temporal limits, exercised by the inevitable editing pattern, there is, unlike in music, no *shruti* structure that could be concocted and imposed upon the real-life-flux. A word, on the contrary, is already situated in a linguistic abstraction. The specific significance it achieves in an artistic composition really celebrates a violation of the established norms (Social, moral, economic, semantic etc.), by the artist. Here the artist pushes significance into an unknown but possibly a new sensuousness of a future.)

The Course of Cinematic Specificity

In cinema the significance and its linguistic abstraction tend to occur

simultaneously. For a cinematic process of abstracting to develop we require an inversion of the convention of aesthetic methods. In pre-cinema art forms significance attempts transformation into specific modes (the search for physical correlatives), whereas in cinema, the meaning does not seem to precede the 'gesture' (activity) in such a complete way. An activity determined by its own thematic function must struggle to break the inert didactic form and open out into a meaningful, pulsating process. In case of films where the space reigns diversified, it may take place by the introduction of an altogether different thematic function upon the intended thematic function of film, seeking an extended relatedness (in Godard's films violence, romance, gangsterism, romanticism interchange planes). In case of films where space remains unified, it may take place at a more classical level when the thematic function itself becomes the formative principle, characterising space. Here the theme is activated into becoming content (films of Bresson, Ozu and Jansco). The two, respectively, attempt profane and sacred idioms.

Space-time Variance and Ideology in Cinema

The object of this project is to broadly delineate qualitative *space-time variance* as the basis of all cinematic achievement; to bring the variants into manageable relations. In itself the notion of space-time is void—an unsignifying assumption. But in its impact upon any relative ideology (system of knowledge) it shapes itself into definite relations, creating a concrete universe of connectedness, precisely in the manner the subject, the intermediary sense and the object correlate into a *quality* of perception (and not by being a law unto themselves) but as inspired by a totalising ideology. No ideology in itself is absolute, but it definitely knows change only slowly and painfully. These systems of knowledge qualify themselves into being disciplines for cinematic use only when they treat reality totally (thereby providing a totalizing mechanics in practice). The question whether the totality dealt with is physical or metaphysical, materialist or idealist should never be raised in a mechanical fashion. In the view projected in this work it is thought impossible to remain narrowly committed to any one discipline and fix the reality one-sidedly. Of course, a stress on a particular discipline (or space-time variant) is essential in realising a dynamic form. No variant could truthfully be absolutised. The invariant is indescribable. If at deeper level of our social sensibility there is a strong opposition to inhibiting and oppressive impulses and there is no anxiety through insignificance, then cinema is safe from the orthodox fear of eclecticism. Historians of contemporary intent converge upon sociology and sociologists in turn relate their work to psychology. Art, (and cinema at that), more than any other social means of development, must remain open—systematically open, by constantly interrelating.

Aspects of Space-time Variance in Cinema

Aspects of space-time variance design:

The movement embraces the following variants,

Primary space-time variant

Meta-space-time variant

Socio-historical space-time variant

With a further break up: primary means of primary material, individual psychological (motivational) extension and collective mythology, the individual as a social being and the collective historical determination of a society. The attempt is to form a total view of the natural, spiritual and social dimension of being and society, ultimately concretised in cinematic space-time.

The primary variant and its corresponding rhythm is grasped from a specific natural (or 'existential') matrix of reality. An unsignifying (or non-specific) apprehension of a mode, in its primary (not absolute but inertial) condition has been dealt with here. For example, without specifying the contents of a dream the modality of an event experienced as dream can be conveyed. Here a particular modality forces objects, begins movement, relations, space quality, sounds, juxtapositions . . . the whole flow to unfold in a certain definite mode and rhythm. Dominant space-time formation common to human attention are graduated here on a scale (without implying hierarchy). These cinematic rhythms conceived in our primary experience of reality proceed from a chronological sequential mode (with solidly connected cause/effect chain) of movement to developing non-chronology, expressed in leaps, disconnections, containing substantial information in a limited space (with subtly connected cause/effect sequence), to an almost achronological juxtaposition, not even subtly connected.

Evocative designations to the following integral and differentiated rhythms is deliberate. The quality of interval suggests the divide. This parallel can be indicated specifically in a film sequence in relation to attention-response: 1. Waking sprout; 2. Waking; 3. Waking extreme; 4. Waking dream; 5. Dream fifth; 6. Dream awake; 7. Invariant deep sleep.

From the point of view of 'ego' we can explain that *Waking Sprout* is a rhythm of suspense, suspended space-time, its object of attention is never direct or present, it is continuously shaping in future. *Waking* makes the object of investigation free to develop (or perform) an autonomous course of logic; time is divided; past and future take shape, a notion of present emerges. *Waking Extreme* leads to an identification of attention with the object, while maintaining the relative performing autonomy of the object. *Waking Dream* is 'dwelt' space-time rhythm, encased in the 'opacity of memory/desire', a halt to development, an enclosed liberatedness characterised space here—alienation from the object and, therefore, awareness. *Dream Fifth* enters into cessation of time-divide, into an unreality of multiple occurrence in a relatively shorter space-time verging on disbelief. *Dream Awake*—the object disappears against the attention itself glowing

at the ends and beginnings of events—a bodiless attention pervades the rhythm here. *Invariant deep sleep* is the disappearance of all the preceding variant rhythms. The invariant is indescribable, it must occur and cannot be achieved.

A relation of signal (determined), sign (adaptational) and symbol (decisional) underlines relations of a traffic signal, a hoarding, a literary text. Both sound and image invariably result into a specific characterisation of these three basic modes.

The temporal content, past and future in cinema, are not present as verbal tenses. Instead, attention preoccupies differently: the past is characterised when the spatial rhythm is composed of 'a store of sensual objects' and the future 'a conjunction of sensually satisfying objects' (both definitions from W.R. Bion), with 'store' as contained and 'conjunction' as containing clues to past/future—internal/external—presentation.

For the primary position the project reviews necessary technical means to capture space-time variance through image formation, sound system, and editing.

Movement in an image or a sequence of images is formed differently on a zoom lens if only certain points in the focal length range are aligned as a variant. The project proposes experiments in this direction. Along with the focal length variance, the volume variance (or one constant over the other varying) moves to yet another aspect: angle in image construction. The 'dome' surrounds the event and the potential of the event is unfolded through correctness of the angle employed. Direction of movement. The tonal (black-grey-white) and colour quality conceived as mobile. Aspects such as line, masses, contrast and texture can only be creatively used and not as formative cinematograph. Upon a symmetrical or non-symmetrical or even asymmetrical space material (houses, cloth, landscapes . . .) and lighting which is in the natural intensified or artificial . . . examples and specific usage that promotes specific primary rhythms—are worked out in the project.

Similar variance is discussed in regard to sound components: natural effects (by clash or disjoint), words (speech or language), music (synchronous, asynchronous qualities)—progression in sound from its natural, realistic position to its formalised condition. Relation of re-recording to sound recording pitch (high and low), volume (loud and soft), length (short or long) coloured by specific timbre contrasts, has been demonstrated.

A relation between socially abstracted visual material (having social connotation) and language that is already abstracted to unformalised sound and images is also shown.

The tradition of non-acting of a non-actor and acting of the actor in their specific impact upon the quality of cinema is further discussed.

In editing, 'activity' is considered basic and described as abandoning the wearing-out preceding space and totally embracing the next desired space. In production of space-time variance this activity and the crystallised rest in space itself is shown in juxtaposition of fragments creating one seg-

ment to one segment containing in one flow all the fragments. From several to one shot treatment.

It may now be emphatically repeated that the primary space-time variance does not constitute its parts as components of a linguistic system with which to construct the significant cinematic object. On the contrary the variants act as instruments of measure, negotiating significant cinematic movement. The object *exists*; it needs to be *internalised*.

For cinema the project proposes a total inversion of the traditional aesthetic methods. The social object is directly situated in society and is significant and complex. It is *not* to be made significant any more. Rather it requires a break-up, an opening of its inner reasonings. Unblocking the significant object required that a thematic function be adopted to limit the field, a relative area is selected thereby. The movement is from complex to concrete.

The two other variants are the meta-space-time and the socio-historical space-time, forming for our use, the subtle and the solid significations. The subtle is freed from the divided time and, therefore, contains all possible spaces. It is a 'primary mover' and freely wills, but it cannot will against the solid mass which develops in a determined course of its own socio-historical determination. On the other hand the solid mass cannot will. Without losing the material shape of either, cinema must provide itself a platform for an *encounter* between the solid and the subtle, forcing a new sensible relation and destroying the false sensuousness of the existing one. The subtle, therefore, does not alter reality directly but in coincidence with the solid.

An example for cinematic use:

In feudal social formations it was adequate to respond to oppression as an internal phenomenon, since the external social structure was absolutely fixed. An internalised violence totalised the imagined and lived world of mythos. With the disappearance of the feudal order a violent reality externalised solidly, upon the social landscape. The course of the individual in society suddenly appeared hazardous. The older subtler myths now appear meaningless with the collapse of an outmoded world... the solid mass is not able to will: nothing moves. A new abstraction.

The dimension of the solid as a function of aesthetic formation is contemporary—as an internal reality it is outmoded. The traditional superstructure of belief (subtle) may continue to will against the changed solid mass of externality, despite human anguish and suffering. Encounter alone leads to inter-action between the two. It is sensuousness (or interest) for a historical knowledge and existence or a changed sensuousness for a changed historical knowledge and existence that really provides the link between the subtle and the solid (knowledge and existence). Subtle space-time solidity and solid space-time are mythologised: both for progress and regression.

The subtle space-time variant, unlike the first primary and inertial variant, is highly active and mainly internalised. It deals with the hidden or the secretative continuum. Myth presents itself in dream-like generality—

receding into a static amoral archetype. Into irreducible contradictions. Here connectedness is through magic, contents of intuition, lack of choice. The social dynamics is subtly formed here in an almost frozen meaningfulness: unlocking a fairy story to connect a collective compulsion. From one plane to another, within this impossible transposition a certain indescribable connectedness exists. Multiplicity of disconnected imagery moving or organising space in bare primordial revelation. The problem here is to *solidify* psychological/anthropological ideas of a specific society into spatial/temporal objects. It may create individual (and therefore diverse) contexts, not yet socially explicative. The plane of memory and desire are interlocked into an indistinguishable new whole—without any 'present' understanding of their mutual occurrence. A lack of being contemporary. An opacity saturates attention. Memory/desire are present *within* the rhythm of this variant and not the other way: rhythm objectifying them. Individual meta-space-time as expressing, willing memory and desire through motivation directly found in the subjects and their relations in the film are placed parallel to the collective willing in mythology, in the belief of the myth as integral and moving.

The solid space-time variant is at once concrete, social, historically determined and, therefore, moral—where the principle of contradiction as an instrument in shaping reality achieves a crucial position. Time divides itself into consciousness: past and future take existence. Past configurations remain maintained in the present as the future potential struggles to break into new directions. A complex and key space-time variant to cinema. A schematic sketch (as devised by L. Goldmann) describes the *total* material of this variant: 'the specific importance of economic life, the predominant historical function of social classes, and the notion of potential consciousness'. The cinematic object is directly constituted of this space-time specificity. The significance of a historical occurrence alone enables the film maker to reconstruct the basic event truthfully—in specific space-time rhythmic flow. One social space may be demonstrated to have several 'times', several moralities from different times, embedded in it. Sociology/history make cinema discover changing social spaces, conflicting masses in the social landscape; localised in historical time... a unique location.

Specific interrelation between these different variants would, it is hoped, really enable cinema into complex patterns of internalising contemporary reality. Space-time in broad relations totalises a structure, without the traditional unity of a narrative, its plot and characters. A particular historical time and its correspondences in space which together project a certain rhythm to the motion of a society and beings, contains parallel mythical/psychological space linked to a still greater archetypal fixity. Endless permutations are possible.

The real purpose of any discipline is to provide the artist with a constant capability to *intuit*. Short sporadic brilliance not realising itself in a completely concrete way is not enough. To intuit compre-

hensively now is not to reach a partial sacred definitiveness of any thought: it is rather to struggle against all one-sidedness distentions to engage oneself into a dialectic of struggle and significance, to intuit new methods of struggling