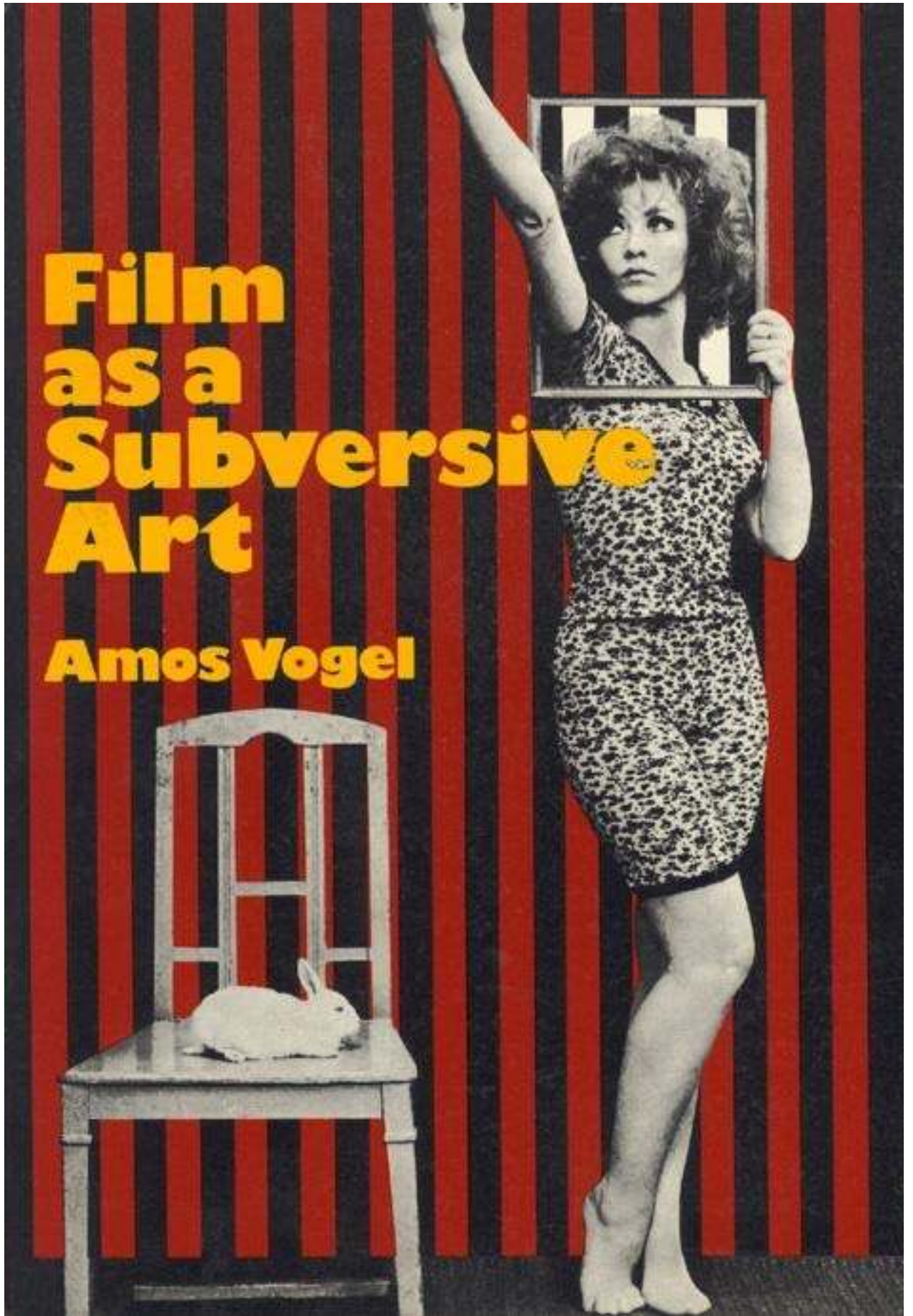


**Film
as a
Subversive
Art**

Amos Vogel



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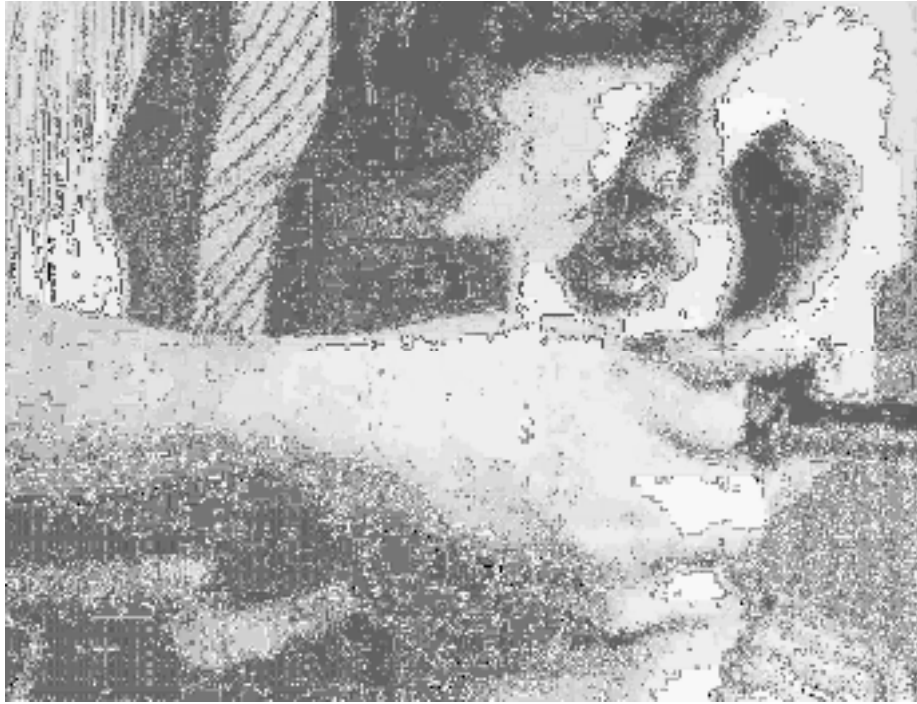


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THE FILM EXPERIENCE

This is a book about the subversion of existing values, institutions, *mores*, and taboos -- East and West, Left and Right -- by the potentially most powerful art of the century. It is a book that traffics in scepticism towards all received wisdom (including its own), towards eternal truths, rules of art, "natural" and man-made laws, indeed whatever may be considered holy. It is an attempt to preserve for a fleeting moment in time -- the life of this book -- the works and achievements of the subversives of film.

Subversion in cinema starts when the theatre darkens and the screen lights up. For the cinema is a place of magic where psychological and environmental factors combine to create an openness to wonder and suggestion, and unlocking of the unconscious. It is a shrine at which modern rituals rooted in atavistic memories and subconscious desires are acted out in darkness and seclusion from the outer world.

The power of the image, our fear of it, the thrill that pulls us toward it, is real. Short of closing one's eyes -- in cinema, a difficult and unprecedented act -- there is no defense against it.

When Lumiere's immortal train first pulled into that station in 1895, moving directly towards the camera, the audience shrieked. It did so again when Bunuel sliced a woman's eyeball with a razor, when Clouzot quite literally made the dead return, when Hitchcock committed sudden murder in a shower, when Franju killed animals before its eyes. The audience fainted during films of operations, vomited during birth sequences, rose in spontaneous enthusiasm at propaganda films, wept while the heroine died protractedly from leukemia, shouted with delicious anxiety during Cinerama's rollercoaster ride,

and even felt twinges of concern at being exposed to screen cholera. In the light of these manifest responses, why assume that the countless other fantasies dreamt in silence in the cinemas of the world during the last seventy years -- fantasies of lust, violence, ambition, perversion, crime, and romantic love -- were any less powerful?

"It is at the movies that the only absolutely modern mystery is celebrated", said Andre Breton. (1) It is appropriate that it was a surrealist who so well expressed the curious combination of technology and metaphysics that is cinema; for modern science's realization of a continuum from the rational to the irrational relates directly to the very nature of the film-viewing process. This entails a darkened theatre, greater openness to suggestion, the semi-hypnotic trance of the viewer, the surfacing of deeper desires and anxieties, and the inhibition of reasoned response in favor of "gut-level" reaction. Far from representing a defeat in man's struggle towards consciousness, the acceptance of this inevitable duality (the flowing into each other of rationalism and irrationality) is itself a step toward the future.

The mechanics of the film-viewing process have been discussed by Mauerhofer, Kracauer, Stephenson-Debrix and others, (2) though a comprehensive analysis remains to be undertaken. The viewer enters the theatre willingly, if not eagerly, ready for surrender, (and deeply dissatisfied if the film is "bad" and the illusion does not "work"). The film experience requires total darkness; the viewer must not be distracted from the bright rectangle from which huge shapes impinge on him. Unlike the low-pressure television experience (during which the viewer remains aware of room environment and other people, aided by appropriately named "breaks"), the film experience is total, isolating, hallucinatory. The viewer "forgets" where or who he is and is offended by stray light, street or audience noises which destroy the anticipated, accepted illusion.

As soon as the lights are lowered, the huge rectangle of the screen -- previously noted without interest -- becomes the viewer's total universe. What transpires here in bursts of light and darkness is accepted as life; the images reach out to him; he enters them.

The many mysteries of film begin at this moment; the acceptance of a flat surface as three-dimensional, of sudden action-, scale- or set-changes as ordinary, of a border delimiting this fraudulent universe as normal, of black- and-white as reality. The spectator, Rudolf Arnheim points out, (3) experiences no shock at finding a world in which depth perception has been altered, sizes and distances flattened and the sky is the same color as the human face.

But the mysteries are only beginning. The very darkness enveloping the viewer is more complete than he realizes; for the essence of cinema is not light, but a secret compact between light and darkness. Half of all the time at the movies is spent by the transfixed victims of this technological art in complete darkness. There is no image on the screen at all. In the course of a single second, forty-eight periods of darkness follow forty-eight periods of light.

During this same infinitesimal period, every image is shown to the audience twice; and as a still photograph; for the film comes to a dead stop in the projector forty-eight times in the course of a single second. Given the retina's inability to adjust quickly to differences in brightness, an illusion of movement is created by this rapid, stop-start series projection of still photographs, each slightly different from the one before.

Thus, during half the time spent at the movies, the viewer sees no picture at all; and at no time is there any movement. Without the viewer's physiological and psychological complicity, the cinema could not exist.

The "illusion" of film -- so platitudinously invoked by journalists -- is thus revealed as a far more intricate web of deception, involving the very technology of the film process and the nature of its victim's perceptions. Could it be precisely during the periods of total darkness -- 45 out of every 90 minutes of film we see -- that our voracious subconscious, newly nourished by yet another provocative image, "absorbs" the work's deeper meaning and sets off chains of associations?

It is in this alien environment that the viewer willingly permits himself to be invaded by strong images, created and manipulated by a director-magician who entirely controls his vision. True, all vision, even undirected, is dynamic, and reflects, as Arnheim emphasizes, an invasion of the organism by external forces which upset the balance of the nervous system. (4) But while in daily life the viewer can shift his focus of attention as he wishes (without losing a sense of continuity regarding his surroundings), in cinema his attention is "riveted" on a pre-ordained succession of images, whose nature, tempo, sequence, and duration have been carefully constructed for maximum impact by a third party.

Removed from the real world, isolated even from fellow-viewers, the spectator falls to dream and reverie in the womb-like darkness of the theatre. Flooded by images, his unconscious is freed from customary constraints and his rational faculties are inhibited. Stephenson and Debrix point out that except for seeing and hearing, body and other senses are at rest

in the cinema, thus allowing imagination, stimulated by the filmmaker's emotionally charged, expressly-selected material, to exert deeper and more lasting influence. Mauerhofer refers to the viewer's voluntary passivity and uncritical receptivity; and Kracauer emphasizes the dialectical wavering between self-absorption (leading the viewer away from the image, into personal associations triggered by it) and self-abandonment (the movement toward the image). Perhaps the state of the viewer (as Mauerhofer, the psychologist, and Breton, the surrealist, both agree) is closest to that between waking and sleeping, in which he abandons the rationality of daily life while not yet completely surrendering to his unconscious.

And the image is powerful; he cannot turn from it. For man, perhaps in response to an atavistic memory of fear or child-like joy, cannot resist the attraction of movement (when he enters a room or cinema, his eyes are inevitably drawn to the moving shapes). He cannot "resist" the shocking changes caused by editing, the sudden intrusion of shapes into the frame, the cascading bursts of images flashing by at a rate faster than life, the sensuous power of the close-up looming over him. It is so much easier to turn from the action into a live play. Here the spectator has accepted its unreality (just as he accepted the film's "reality") and since he knows it cannot "reach out" and attack him, he never flinches from stage as he does from screen violence. In both cases, the murdered man rises to be killed another time; but cinema is "closer" to the viewer -- strange tribute to the faculties of a brain more affected by two-dimensional reflections on flat canvas than by live actors performing in three-dimensional space.

And it is a tribute to the power of visuals as such. For in man's evolution, images antedate words and thought, thus reaching deeper, older, more basic layers of the self. Man begins with what he sees, progressing to visual representations of reality. Their transmutation into art does not seem to diminish the images' impact. As holy today as in man's pre-history, the image is accepted as if it were life, reality, truth. It is accepted on a feeling - rather than mind- level. Significantly, it is only if the "suspension of disbelief" is broken by dissatisfaction with a given film that the viewer emerges from his hypnotized state.

And yet, however "authentic" the image, it remains a distortion of life. Not only does it lack depth or density, the space-time continuum, or the non-selectivity of reality, but it emphasizes certain aspects to the exclusion of others by isolating them within a fixed frame in a constantly evolving concatenation of blacks and whites, objects and grounds. This magical invocation of concrete images that seemingly reflects reality while actually distorting it, sets up additional tension between film and spectator;

it increases his sense of dislocation and disquiet and permits further inroads into his ever more vulnerable subconscious.

It is the powerful impact of these brightly-lit images moving in black space and artificial time, their affinity to trance and the subconscious, and their ability to influence masses and jump boundaries, that has forever made the cinema an appropriate target of the repressive forces in society -- censors, traditionalists, the state. While the result has often been its inability openly to project fundamental human experiences or insights, neither repression nor fear seem able to stem an accelerating, world-wide trend towards a more liberated cinema, one in which all previously forbidden subjects are boldly explored. This evolution from taboo into freedom is the subject of this book.

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THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

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SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM

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BLOW UP

(Michelangelo Antonioni, Great Britain, 1966) (F)

Reality can no longer be apprehended by the "naked eye"; the truth hides in the shadows. A seemingly innocent photograph of two lovers in an empty park slowly yields -- in its dot configurations -- a truth not previously apparent: a corpse. To reveal the dirty secret, three levels of created reality are necessary, all involved with vision: the (photographed) photographer; the picture he and we view; and the detail discovered only by the magnifying glass. [SC](#)

THE WORLD VIEW OF SUBVERSIVE CINEMA

The notion of the "virginal" artist is untenable. In order to understand the subversion of modern cinema, we must go not merely beyond film but beyond art and explore the evolution of the contemporary world view. This constitutes the inevitable matrix within which the artist's creativity and originality operate.

THE NATURAL SCIENCES

The 20th century has brought renewed questioning of the nature of the "objective" world. We do not know what the next hundred years will bring, but we do know that 19th-century notions of reality and science represent a stage of human development already superseded.

We now understand that absolute truth is an unachievable goal.

Quantum physics and the theory of relativity have transformed cause and effect" into statistical probabilities. Instead of reliance on a so-called "objective" world picture, we now stress the subjective nature of all experience (only God, said Robbe-Grillet, can claim to be objective). Our "knowledge" of the world first comes to us through our senses, and these are primitive, deceptive, and limited. Though this was already recognized by the early Greek philosophers (1), it is only in our time that the split between perception and cognition has become so shatteringly evident. The "solid" objects surrounding us are, we now know, but swirling masses of electrons, protons, neutrons, and sub-atomic particles: smell, sound, color, and taste are not inherent in these objects but exist only relative to the observer; and mass and energy are equivalent and transformable, as we learned at Hiroshima.

What we know of the world comes to us primarily through vision.

Our eyes, however, are sensitive only to that segment of the spectrum located between red and violet; the remaining 95 per cent of all existing light (cosmic, infra-red, ultra-violet, gamma, and X-rays) we cannot see. This means that we only perceive 5 per cent of the "real" world; and that even if we supplement our primitive vision with our equally primitive senses of hearing, smell and touch, we are neither able to know everything nor even realize the extent of our ignorance. (2) P.W. Bridgman points out that "there are so many phenomena beyond the range of our senses that the world of modern physics has become predominantly the world of instruments". (3)

Hence, what we refer to as reality, is only a partial and distorted vision of the "real" world. Recent experiments conducted by Robert Livingston at the Brain Research Laboratory of the University of California offer clear evidence that man rearranges his view of the world to conform to his experience and that different people literally "see" different worlds. (4)

To the modern scientist, "reality" is colorless, soundless, featureless, and impalpable -- a construct of mathematical symbols, based on the mysterious unity of space and time, mass and energy, matter and field. Gravitation,

electromagnetism, energy, and atom are revealed as theoretical metaphors, constructed to help man grasp an underlying reality which his sense organs do not otherwise allow him to picture. (5) Hence the order we so happily perceive in the cosmos is no more than a reflection of the structure of our minds.

It is therefore possible to question -- without resort to religion -- whether we shall ever fully "know" the objective world. The contemporary answer -- as always subject to revision -- remains unassuring. To the fifty leading scientists and scholars attending a 1972 symposium at the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, it seemed "that the possibility of understanding all of nature -- which is after all, the loftiest goal of all science -- was in question because, through the computer, many disciplines have discovered hitherto unknown strange phenomena. The 19th-century hope that just a little more investigation would reveal the ultimate truths about the workings of the natural world is now virtually gone. Each layer of the onion that is removed reveals not the irreducible core but yet another layer." (6)

We do have more theoretical knowledge than ever before; but as we learn more about structures of underlying reality, we confront growing complexity instead of simplicity and add more to the unknown than to the known. Every solved mystery of the physical world immediately points to another one beyond it. (7) (There is no need to invoke the supernatural; the processes of science -- the unravelling of mysteries -- are as eternal as the universe.) Finally, our inevitable "presence" in nature compromises our necessary scientific objectivity; protagonists and observers, we are what we attempt to observe. (8)

Werner Heisenberg's "principle of indeterminacy" (1927) seems to introduce a further, perhaps ultimate barrier to our attaining knowledge of the world; it is impossible to observe atomic events without changing them in the process.

The high-frequency gamma light rays -- the only possible light source -- damage the electron during observation, preventing us from ever determining its position or velocity. We are "in the position of a blindman trying to discern the shape and texture of a snowflake -- as soon as it touches his fingers or his tongue, it dissolves." (9) The investigation of the most basic particles of the universe therefore can never lead to certainty but only to probability -- a fundamental revision of man's cognitive methodology.

Einstein has revealed a universe in which space and time are relative.

The incessant movements of bodies in space can be described only in relation to other bodies, for in space there are no directions or boundaries. Absolute time does not exist; time is only a form of perception and requires an observer. An hour or a day is nothing without an event to mark it and nothing without an observer to observe it. Space is thus simply a possible series of material objects and time a possible order of real events. (10)

Time and space represent a "continuum"; to think of them as separate is arbitrary. Inextricably one, they eternally "flow" into each other, compromising such rickety human constructs as beginning, end, past, and future. "The only definite location of "now" is "here". In fact, every man's "now" is "here" (the "here" meaning where he is)." (11)

All reality exists in both space and time; all measurement in time is really a measurement in space and vice versa. Looking through one of our large telescopes means looking not only into space but also "into time" -- the unbelievably distant past (at present, up to 500 million years "back"). (12)

Einstein's universe is incomprehensible to "common sense". It is a universe in which straight lines do not exist, only great circles. It is a finite, yet unbounded universe, curved back into itself; an expanding universe, filled with galaxies that hurtle away from us at 35,000 miles per second. (13)

And there are other universes. To be a scientific rationalist in the 20th century means to acknowledge that most irrational and real universe inhabited by man: his own subconscious. With Freud and those beyond him we are only beginning to unravel the laws governing the demonic ambiguities and incalculable ambivalences of human character, motives, and relations.

Since Einstein, we have continued to discover major new mysteries of the universe; pulsars (pulsating radio-sources) and quasars (quasi-stellar objects), the brightest and most distant objects yet found, whose radiation fluctuates erratically in an unprecedented manner; the variation is equivalent to the sun's multiplying its power several times within a few seconds. No explanation exists as yet as to their nature or source of enormous energy. Processes unknown to contemporary science may be at work, for a single quasar is brighter than an entire galaxy (i.e. a million-million stars) while its mass is estimated at 100 million times the size of the sun. Increasing evidence for the existence of neutron stars (super-dense dead stars weighing ten billion tons per cubic inch), of objects moving faster than light (hitherto considered an impossibility), and of "black holes" (invisible objects of tremendous density and miniscule radius) raise the question whether natural laws as presently understood are "sufficient" to other regions of time and space.

Calamities have befallen man's view of his role in the universe. Our forefathers rested content in the knowledge that the earth was the center of the universe. Under scientific duress they uneasily shifted this center to the sun. But today, in Shapley's beautiful phrase, it is "necessary to write the obituary of anthropocentrism altogether. For now we know that our sun is a simple, very ordinary star, out of billions (100,000 million like it exist in our galaxy alone). Our entire solar system, of which the sun is the proud center, has been relegated to the position of a small glob at the edge of one ordinary galaxy out of billions."

Is man unique perhaps because he is alive? To imagine that life would arise on only one ridiculous planet in the sublime expanses of the universe is in itself a monstrous anthropocentric conceit. Life can and must arise on any planet illuminated by a star on which certain conditions in the evolution of gases and liquids combine properly. In 1953, Stanley Miller, in a celebrated experiment at the University of Chicago, synthesized amino acids, the basic constituents of living matter, by subjecting hydrogen gas, ammonia, methane, and water --

the primeval atmosphere of earth -- to an electric discharge.

Since all galaxies are similar in composition, there is a very high probability that there may exist billions of planets on which life is possible.

(14) We have no reason to assume that these planets, if inhabited, are at or near our level of civilization; after all, if the entire life span of earth is represented by a clockface, man appears in all his splendor approximately one second before midnight. Since the average life span of a planet is in the billions of years while -- as in our case -- the change from a primitive into a highly technological society can take place in the brief space of two centuries, the chances of other civilizations being at different stages of development are enormous.

The recent discovery of seemingly artificial energy emissions from small well-defined ares and of infra-red objects of extraordinary intensity, invisible to the eye, have once again reminded astronomers of the possibility that highly technological societies may exist elsewhere in the heavens. (15)

But however "frequent" life may be in the cosmos, it is also tenuous; only one two-billionth part of the radiation of one minor star constitutes the difference between our world civilization (Beethoven, Christ, Hitler) and nothingness, not to speak of our newly developed capacity to destroy all life on earth within seconds of nuclear war. There is no evidence that the life expectancy of technologically advanced societies with nuclear capabilities exceeds a few decades: the explosion in the sky looks like any other stellar catastrophe, ironically reaching other civilizations hundreds of thousands of years later as an impenetrable message instead of as a warning.

It is symptomatic that Macbeth's soliloquy on the insignificance of human life has in our century been transposed into a cosmic plaint in Olaf Stapleton's legendary science-fiction novel *The Starmaker*, with its journeys to untold numbers of cosmic civilizations:

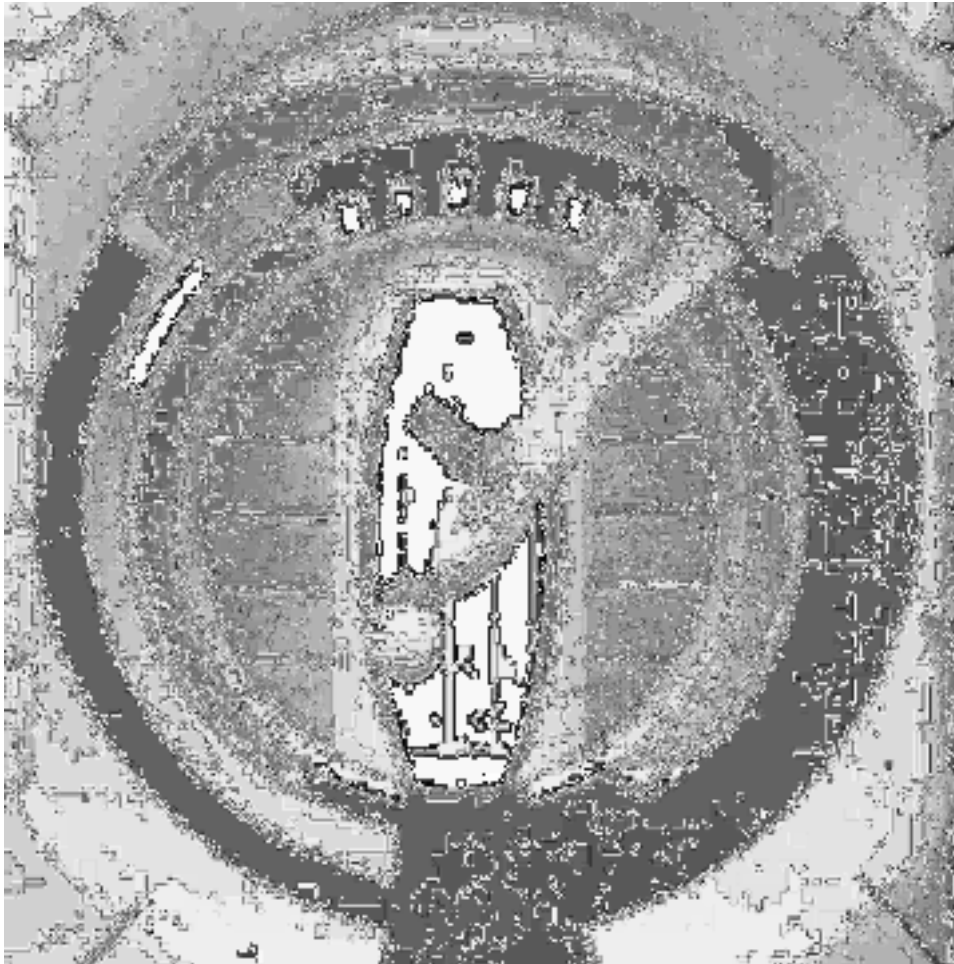
In every one of these worlds, thousands of millions of persons were flashing into existence, one after the other, to drift gropingly about for a few instants of cosmic time before they were extinguished. (16)

Perhaps, then, we must take heart and in an outburst of proud humility, recognize ourselves for what we are in the cosmos: primitive, peripheral, temporal; late arrivals, with a stubborn drive towards great achievement and spectacular evil, struggling to make ends meet in a barely noticeable location in an ordinary island galaxy. And perhaps the cosmos itself is merely an atom in some unimaginable super-universe and electrons the galaxies of microscopic worlds below the realm of comprehension.

But in losing our exalted, God-like position in the universe -- a position based on ignorance -- we are now at last given the opportunity to realize ourselves as part of nature and the cosmos.

There can be no better laboratory for the elaboration of thoughts on man's orientation in a complex world than a flowing meadow or a noisy brook or a spiral galaxy. For the green leaves of the

meadow are sucklings of a star's radiation. The rapids in a brook, responding to universal gravitation, perform erosions such as those that have worn down to oblivion the lofty pre-Alps and the primitive Appalachians. The 100-ton maple tree that calmly dreams through the decades is in the same universe as the Andromeda Galaxy with its billions of seething stars. The tree heeds the impulses of gravitation according to the same rules as those subscribed to by the stars in a globular cluster. Further, the tree is made of the same complex molecular aggregates as are the birds in its branches, the parasites on its roots, and the philosophers who wonder about it. (17)



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1968) (F)

Inside the spaceship earthly truths no longer hold. The "positioning" of the figure is fully explicable and "scientific"; the resulting visual shock is not and opens us to a sense of cosmic consciousness.

A NEW GOD ?

Faced with the immensity of the cosmos and its mysteries, scientists experience a sense of awe which offers them a

dialectic synthesis between rejection of a personal Earth-God and acceptance of the ice-cold, unapproachable new deity of space. Einstein expresses this most succinctly:

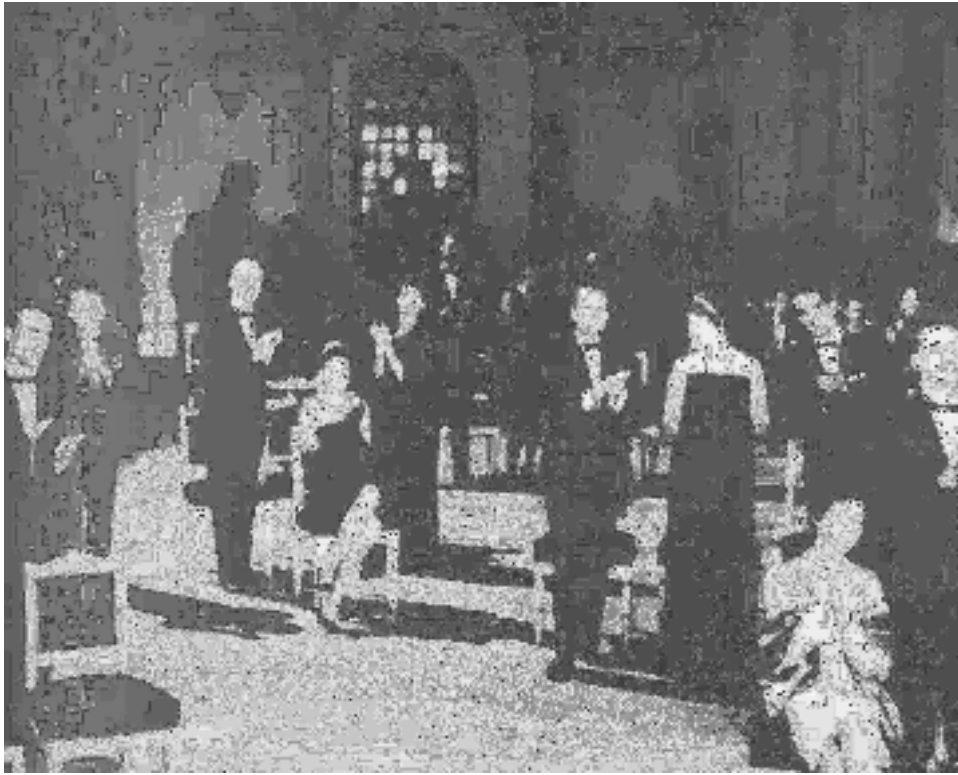
The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms -- this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense only I am a religious man.

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable super spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God. (19)

It is fascinating that one of the greatest scientists here invokes "the impenetrable" and "the incomprehensible", two notions presumably at odds with the scientific spirit for which no ultimate mysteries exist.

But they are also at odds with our age-old concepts of a personal God. As the scope of His presumed kingdom has been revealed to encompass the infinite reaches of the cosmos, it seems ever more presumptuous to believe in the efficacy of a personal prayer or in the appearance of His son on one planet. And Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Vietnam pose the possibility of a God who is neither benevolent nor omnipotent, but too subtle or cosmically too preoccupied to concern himself with one tiny planet.

But even if we substitute "nature" for "God", we are left with a series of presently or, given our limited sense organs, perhaps eternally unanswerable questions: where did matter "originally" come from? And space? If the universe is curved back into itself, that is the nature of the space "beyond" it? What are its boundaries? We are confronted with the ironic dilemma of postulating two hypotheses, equally untenable for human minds; a universe of infinite duration or one that "ends", with no explanation as to what happens to empty space thereafter.



LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD

(Alain Resnais, France/Italy, 1961) (F)

The upper class "as if" mobilized; perfectly groomed, well-bred puppets, applauding an invisible spectacle, casting ominous shadows ... background to Resnais' intricate web of memory and desire set in a total time-space continuum.

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, PSYCHOLOGY

If in our century the modern world view has undergone fundamental transformations in cosmology and science, the same is true of politics, philosophy and psychology. For we have been confronted not merely with the break-up of empires, the decline of Christianity, the horror of two world wars, and the rise of a new barbarism in the technologically most advanced European nation, but also with the betrayal of the first Communist revolution, the philosophical crisis posed by concentration camps and atomic weapons, and the decline of Western hegemony and of bourgeois civilization. The rise of Marxism as a methodology of social science has introduced the notions of relativity and historicity into the very concept of society itself, positing change as the only constant. And the realities of Hiroshima and Vietnam constitute the end of the myth that other nations are less capable of genocide than was Hitler's Germany. Indeed, America has updated the concept to encompass the destruction of entire countries.

In terms of the collective unconscious of mankind, the result of these developments is a crisis of uncertainty and impermanence, a total questioning, if not destruction, of all values.

The humiliations suffered by man at the hands of modern science and the possibility of impenetrable mystery have led to a search for meaning in a world which has none except that which we are able to give it. It is now clear that no master plan exists for the cosmos, no prior intention, no inevitable progress, no pre-ordained harmony between man and universe. And the cosmos is meaningless not only for us. Even more unfathomable, this monstrous, splendid construct of circling, radiating, exploding, expanding masses of matter embodied in a matrix of emptiness, carries no meaning for itself as well; it merely is. Were all life to cease, it would continue in its cycles unobserved.

To Nobel-prizewinner Jacques Monod, the scientific basis for such philosophy resides in recent discoveries about basic organic matter. These demonstrate that life is the product of chance and necessity, thus abolishing the possibility of religious or other systems that assume a masterplan of creation.

Armed with all the powers, enjoying all the wealth they owe to science, our societies are still trying to practice and teach systems of value already destroyed at the roots by that very science. Man knows at last that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe, whence he has emerged by chance. His duty, like his fate, is written nowhere. It is for him to choose between the kingdom and the darkness. (20)

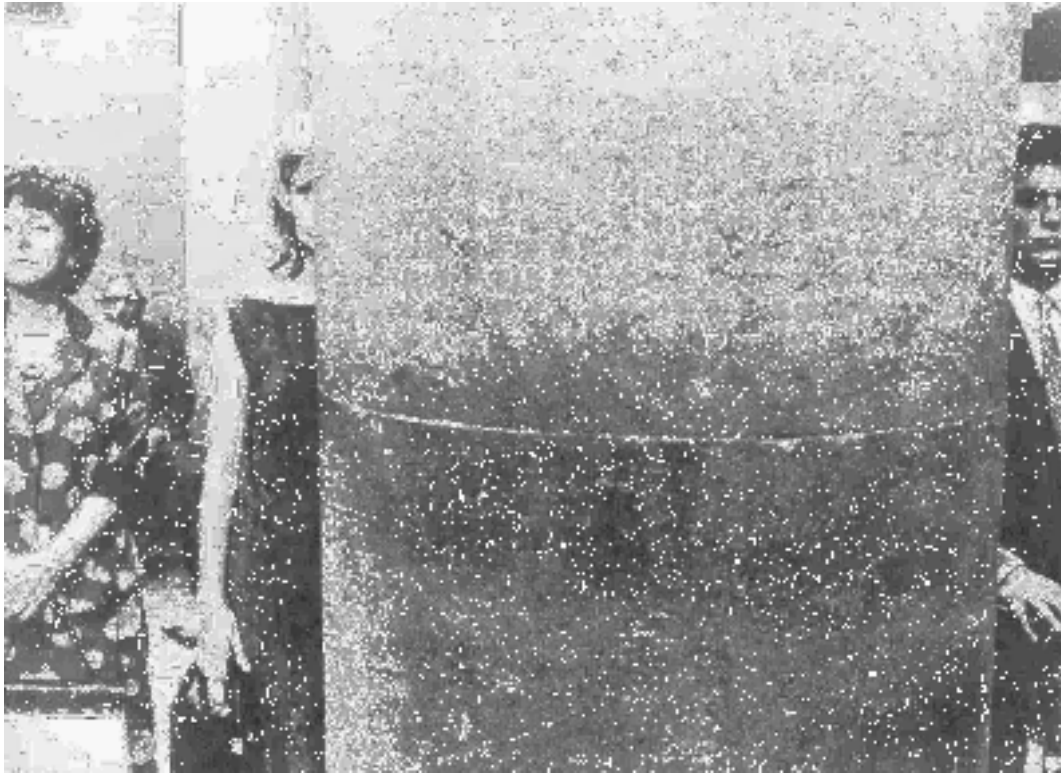
Man has no divine or secular right to the world. Instead, between birth and death, he is forced into an adventure for which no happy end is guaranteed. This is what, in Camus' view, transforms Sisyphus' unceasing, doomed attempt to push the rock up the mountain from punishment into challenge.

The universe, henceforth without a master,
seems to him neither sterile nor futile.
The struggle itself toward the heights
is enough to fill a man's heart. (21)

This bleak "optimism" of existentialism is even more clearly conveyed by Robbe-Grillet: once we deny significance to the world, we also deny it absurdity. There is nothing "absurd" about man's attempt -- against the most severe odds -- to impose his purpose on a world indifferent to him.

But these revelations have proven too horrifying or too difficult for man. As yet another example of his weak cognitive faculties, his consciousness lags far behind existing realities. He therefore clings to such outdated and comforting philosophical tenets as the predominance of Western civilization, the supremacy of reason, the concept of simplistic causality, absolute truth, and fixed certainty; isolated identity and permanent states. (22) Neal Postman propounds as far more appropriate symbols of the nuclear space age a series of concepts almost sadistically designed to repel the conservative mind; relativity, probability, contingency, uncertainty, structure as progress, multiple causality, non-symmetrical relationships, degrees of difference, incongruity.

To withstand these, we need a new breed of man: flexible, tolerant, innovative, questioning. (23) Only these will be able to dissolve the false antitheses we have unsuccessfully attempted to live by: matter and form, objectivity and subjectivity, imagination and reality, memory and presence. What is perhaps most needed is the quality praised above all by Einstein in his mentor, the Austrian philosopher-scientist Ernst Mach: "incorruptible scepticism".



THE ECLIPSE

(Michelangelo Antonioni, France/Italy, 1962) (F)

Antonioni's entire work projects visual metaphors of non-communication, alienation, solitude -- and desperate attempts to break through to others. But man is overpowered by objects, structures, and the physical world; and people rarely face each other except in tension. [SC](#)

MODERN ART: TRUTH THROUGH SUBVERSION

It is thus no longer possible for an artist creating within this historical period to portray reality along mimetic lines (art as the imitation of reality) or to view it as a coherent, fully intelligible construct, capable of apprehension through his sense organs and in its documentary aspects, a valid representation of the universe. "In our age, as never before, truth implies the courage to face chaos." (24) The discoveries by Marx, Einstein, Freud, Eisenberg, and Planck, and the decline of a capitalist civilization, previously viewed as immutable, have destroyed forever the myth of stability and permanence and have devalued realism. At the same time they have revealed poetry and non-linear art as more suitable to the complex fluidities of the modern world view.

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