

Gilles Deleuze

Seminar on Cinema: The Movement-Image

Lecture 18, 11 May 1982

Transcribed by Erjola Alcani (Part 1) and Farida Mazar (Part 2) (total duration, 1:24:36); additional revisions to the transcription and time stamp, Charles J. Stivale

Translation: Billy Dean Goehring

Part I

Deleuze: ... we were saying...?

Student: You were saying we'd reached something beyond movement-images.

Deleuze: Yes?

Student: I was a bit [*unclear*]... because at one point I could see the connection [*unclear*] a dispersed and dispersive reality, in the form of wandering¹, [*unclear*] I thought that we were getting back to what you had said at the very beginning of the course regarding movement-images, namely, the different levels of the movement-image, the movement-image as the interaction between images.

Deleuze: Mm-hmm?

Student: Well, I'm not sure if what you're saying now is that we've come to a vantage point where all that's obvious now. Thus, [*unclear*] is kind of the heart of the determination, the perspective of the camera. Transposing all of that from the world of movement—which would suggest, well, that we'll be working with Bergson to some extent.

Deleuze: Yes, perfect, that's an absolutely fair question to ask. One thing—there's one thing I'd change about that last sentence. It's not that we'll need Bergson for only a particular aspect, because we're still on our toes, as I've said since the very beginning: we must be careful, because in Bergson, for example, the movement-image is only one “instance” of an image. For Bergson—the main Bergsonian distinction is that there are movement-images [on the one hand], and then there are memory-images, which are different in nature. Thus, even though we ultimately go beyond movement-images, we will still very much have need of Bergson.

But when it comes to the root of your question, I think your question is a fair one to ask, because I've described a few characteristics that more or less do correspond to a new type of movement-image—wandering, walking about, going on a stroll, etc. We're no longer dealing with action-images like before, but it is still a movement-image. And here I'll have to ask for your patience, "Where is this all headed?" But I'd also add that this is where we brush up against not only the end of action-images, but the end of movement-images as such. So, I think all of your interventions have presented us with very good questions. However, again, from where things stand at the moment, you're absolutely right to note that—well, we might have gotten past a certain view of action-images, but we haven't yet left movement-images behind. You're absolutely right! Absolutely right!

And today we'll have to try and see, try and make some headway—but carefully, oh so carefully, because... Some of you—me too, honestly, but at the same time, I don't have the texts in front of me—some of you reminded me that I ended a previous session, a while ago now, with the example of burlesque,² and I claimed, right, that burlesque is necessarily linked to the small form.³ I wasn't claiming to have offered a theory of burlesque, but I had said—simply because that's how it seemed at the time—anyway, there was something that really stood out. There was one instance, one example of "large form" burlesque, even though the large form and burlesque seemed mutually exclusive—there was one example of large form burlesque: Buster Keaton. I mentioned it, but it was at the end, and I dropped it because I'm always so worried about rushing for time. Heh... I have no problem with you bringing me back around to it, but I don't have the text in front of me. So, a short tangent on Buster Keaton before picking back up... on where we left off.

Actually, I was talking about burlesque in general; I'm not about to pin down what, in particular, is brilliant about Charlie Chaplin, or Laurel and Hardy, and so on. All I'm doing is asking: Why is it that burlesque assumes the small form, ASA? I'm only offering that as one possible formula, not something to get hung up on. We shouldn't dwell on it; what I'm interested in is what makes Buster Keaton an exception. I said that when it comes to burlesque in general, if you will, what generally accounts for a 'burlesque' effect is when an infinitely small difference is suggested between two actions; at the same time—these being inseparable—as the burlesque character suggests an infinitely small difference between two actions (A and A'), they do so such that the situations corresponding to both actions (S and S'), are infinitely far apart. It's because burlesque—in the very same act, the same gesture—both posits an infinitely small difference between two actions and simultaneously highlights the infinite difference between their corresponding situations, that it comes across as so funny.

And my examples were completely... I asked, How is it—How is Chaplin able to make us laugh at World War I, at trench warfare, despite not shying away from how horrible it was? This isn't innocuous slapstick; it's not... the film, *Shoulder Arms*, is powerful. I suggested that we look at his process, or one aspect of it—this certainly doesn't cover everything—look at one aspect of

Chaplin's process. [*Pause*] He suggests an infinitely small difference between two different actions. For example: between shooting a rifle at a human adversary and shooting pool. The image offers an infinitely small difference; again, such an image has to be created! Charlie does so when he fires his weapon—every time he shoots, he adds to the tally on a blackboard, as if he were playing pool, and when he gets grazed by a bullet, he figures he must have missed, so he erases one of his tally marks off the board. All through the story — [*Deleuze softly mutters something to someone nearby*] it lines up with my rough definition—an infinitely small difference separates two actions, presented such that this infinitely small difference highlights just how incommensurate a battlefield is with a pool table.⁴

Thus, we're simultaneously caught in a double movement of narrowing in on infinitely small differences and, at the same time, the situation that's spun out. I said the same about that famous scene from one of Chaplin's short films, where he hangs onto a sausage in a lunch wagon as if he were on a streetcar. So, generally speaking, let's assume that this is how burlesque operates: playing with infinitely small differences in order to make the incommensurability between different situations more palpable.

Someone—they warrant a closer look—someone I really like from the world of burlesque is Harold Lloyd. He was a real genius; there are scenes where his particular style of burlesque is unmistakable. He's one of the most innovative. Whereas the infinitely small difference in Chaplin's case was the action-image, with Harold Lloyd, the infinitely small differences reside—strangely enough, in his films the infinitely small differences are always conveyed by *perception-images*. For example: in one film, he's framed as if he were in a car, a luxury car. The framing is really effective—he's there, sitting in the car. So, I'll call that A. That's one set up, it's an action—he's in the car; he's sitting in the car, A. And then we get to a stoplight, and the car goes away, and we see that he's not in a car at all—he's a poor bum on a bike. Follow me? It's a wonderful scene. One really famous scene with Harold Lloyd is—it starts with a scene where he looks like he's in dire straits: you see the bars, there's a noose beside him, and there's a young woman sobbing. And then the picture clears up: Yes, he's on a platform... there's some sort of officer with a hat, ostensibly announcing that he's being sentenced to death. [*Laughs*] But it turns out that the scene is completely different: the officer is the stationmaster, the woman crying is the fiancée, the rope—unquestionably a noose—is some sort of luggage rack, etc.⁵ So, using an infinitely slight difference, we get two incomparable situations.

Let's make that a formula for burlesque in general. What is so exceptional, what is it that makes Buster Keaton—I'm not at all saying that others aren't modern—but how might we characterize Buster Keaton's unique sort of modernity? I claimed that it came down to the scale and power of Keaton's non-burlesque scenes. In most of his films, there are non-burlesque scenes that have a sort of beauty to them—a Griffithian beauty, as it were—as well as a dramatic intensity. At first blush it makes you think, "Really? Well, that might be a problem." I brought up—I was just making a list—I brought up a scene from *Our Hospitality* (1923), one of the first scenes that look

like they're pulled from Griffith: the depiction of the vendetta between two men, men who killed each other, at a cabin on a stormy night. It's wonderfully shot, it's just wonderful... some beautiful images, there's the tearful woman protecting her baby, the two men killing each other and falling down dead. The only bit of comedy is the fact that they *both* die, otherwise there's nothing even remotely burlesque about it. It's a very dramatic situation, culminating with the narrator's declaration that the feud between the two families is inexpiable.⁶

[This sort of moment] comes across like an exception, but what's so "exceptional" about it?⁷ I had mentioned another example—I brought up *Battling Butler* (1926): an, again, extremely violent boxing match, not at all a burlesque fight; the film includes a burlesque training sequence, and then there's the match itself, one more violent than anything I'd ever seen in the news—so violent that it becomes... it's a damning depiction of boxing as a spectacle. Appalling, an appalling... a match so violent... it's certainly not trying to be funny! You can see our problem: why doesn't it even pretend to be funny? I mean that this film doesn't even pretend to be funny, yet it's absolutely of a piece with the rest of Buster Keaton's career. It isn't an exception; it falls outside his kind of burlesque, but it's not beyond the scope of his style in general.

And there were other examples: there are burlesque elements in the long, funny sequence from *The Navigator* (1926), the scene with the diver: at one point the natives come onto the boat, and one of them blocks his air hose, and Buster Keaton is left suffocating at the bottom of the sea; there's absolutely nothing burlesque about that, to say the least! Then... In another film, in *The Cameraman* (1928), there's the Chinese riot where we first run into—for the first time in cinema, in my opinion—the question of betraying, of tampering with live footage, of pseudo-live footage, since the cameraman (Buster Keaton's character) does everything he can to escalate things. He sees that people in the Chinatown parade are starting to fight, so he slips a knife into one of their hands, and then things start to get bloody. Right. Anyway.

So, my question, if you're still with me, is whether we should say that Buster Keaton offers us an example, the invention of a "large form" burlesque. What I'm calling "large form" burlesque are the sort of images that fundamentally characteristic of Keaton's films. I brought up one more example: the storm in *Steamboat Bill, Jr* (1928). [Pause] So, assuming you're still on board, we're now dealing with images of truly non-burlesque situations, situations taken to their fullest extent—the storm sweeping through the whole village, the drowning scene that all takes place underwater, the boxing match filling up the whole space—we're dealing with powerful situations. And what I'm saying is that, strictly speaking, these aren't outliers in Buster Keaton's work.

Which raises the question of how to reconcile these ostensibly non-burlesque scenes with the rest of Buster Keaton's burlesque—how do we bridge the gap between them? See, with ordinary, "small form" burlesque, the goal is to leverage infinitely small differences in order to invoke

incommensurable differences. How do you use the infinitely small difference between two actions to demonstrate, to indicate an unbridgeable gulf dividing two different situations?

The challenges Buster Keaton was faced with had to do with technique—I want to emphasize this point, it’s amazing just how ahead of his time he was in terms of technique. Consider that back then, for example, they didn’t have rear projection, no techniques for making composite backgrounds, no traveling mattes. Buster Keaton had some incredible techniques for approximating all of that. Anyway—so, in his case what we need to figure out is how to reconcile huge, non-burlesque situations with burlesque acts. It seems to me that this problem only crops up in his films; it only applies to him.

And then it dawns on me—that explains why I was so drawn in by one of Buster Keaton’s own anecdotes. The anecdote in question, if you remember, is about *Steamboat Bill*, about *Steamboat Junior*, where his producer tells him, “Please, don’t put a flood in the movie; you can’t!” So, Buster Keaton asks, “Why don’t you want a flood?” He says, “There’s nothing funny about something that kills thousands and thousands of people every year!” Buster Keaton replies, “And yet, Chaplin was able to make people laugh at World War I.” And the producer says, “No, no, no, that’s not the same thing!” I think the producer is very astute here, in his own way. True, you can use “small form” techniques to make World War I funny, using an infinitely small difference between two actions—the act of firing a gun and the act of shooting pool. But there’s no way to make World War I funny with “large form” techniques. In that sequence, for those of you who remember *Shoulder Arms*, that awful scene where the soldiers are sleeping in flooded trenches, sleeping in flooded trenches—it’s a really dreadful scene, but the humor still comes down to infinitely small differences. For example, there’s a candle floating on a little board, on like a piece of cork, and it burns the foot of a fine soldier who’s managed to fall asleep—in this case, it’s about the infinitely small differences between [the floating candle] and a rubber ducky floating in a bathtub. That’s what pushes it over into comedy!

Again, that approach is out of the question for Buster Keaton; that’s what I find so novel about him. Hence why his producer says—it seems to me—in a way, “Chaplin *was* able to poke fun at anything, at World War I, at a flood—but you? I’m not so sure. I know you, and you won’t do it that way. You’ll throw an unbelievably violent boxing match at us, i.e., a “large form”, you’ll throw a flood at us, with people dying, perishing, and it’ll take up the whole screen— “large form”—and it won’t be funny at all!” And Buster Keaton compromises and agrees to a storm, chuckling to himself, “Well, he’s okay with the storm; let’s do it.” And he still makes the storm “large form.” Turns out the producer forgot that storms can be just as deadly as any flood; so much the better, since it gave us this scene. But once again, right... back to my question, how do we proceed?

I think Buster Keaton was grappling with a problem unique to his approach to burlesque, i.e., how do you account for the enormity of a difference? Rather than: how do you indicate an

infinitely small difference? See, that's the challenge I think is unique to Keaton's burlesque: How do you bridge such a huge divide? How do we reconcile the boxing match, as violent as it is, with burlesque elements? Between the storm, as violent as it is, and burlesque elements? The solution is nearly implied by the question itself. Buster Keaton is only able to reconcile these differences by inventing machines, [*Pause*] hence what makes Buster Keaton so brilliant—well, part of it. Part of Keaton's genius is having invented something whose only equivalent in art and literature was—not surrealism—but dadaism; his genius resided in his knack for unusual machines.

What unusual machines are we talking about? They're machines with long chain effects. Again, so there won't be any argument, consider Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) since, in *Modern Times*, the machine is indisputable. Chaplin doesn't use machines; "small form" burlesque can't help but include using... it has to include someone using tools. The comedy stems from how one wields or uses tools. That's burlesque in the "small form." But inventing machines to reconcile the difference—to reconcile the infinite gulf separating the lone burlesque individual and the massive situation that exceeds him—this was very prominent in America. I mean, I think of dadaism as European, but these drawn-out machines—they're purely nonsensical—I think such absurd, interlocking machines are unique to Buster Keaton.

An American cartoonist from the same time—one of the funniest, I think, or one of the only ones who can make me laugh, but unfortunately it slipped my mind, and I didn't bring... I should have brought some of his illustrations. Maybe a lot of you are already familiar? It's [Rube] Goldberg. Goldberg made these kinds of machines. For an example that'll make it obvious what I mean by "absurd interlocking machines," there's one designed to play a record. How do you play a record? Well, the most straightforward way is to do it directly: You put the needle on the disc and press the button. It doesn't work that way with Goldberg machines.

The first step—for the first step, there's a Volga boatman; he depicts the Volga boatman with his hat and whatnot, pulling on a rope. Now, there's no inherent relationship between this Volga boatman and the record we want to play, so that doesn't do anything. You'll see how they're related; this is one part of the machine, of this absurd machine. So, to make it so that the Volga boatman pulls the rope, he needs to include a second element, "a tableau"—a canvas depicting the Volga, with boats along the river. Fooled by the tableau, the poor muzhik starts pulling the rope. The rope passes under the tableau, so there are two elements so far: the drunk boatman pulling on the cord, and the tableau which the boatman looks upon in a daze—both parts of the machine.

The rope under the tableau is tied to a rich man eating, eating a huge meal—the third element. When the boatman, inspired by the tableau before him, pulls on the rope, which is attached to the dining billionaire's chair, it pulls on the chair. And the rich guy's stomach was pressed up against the table, but now he's pulled back. Since he was full to bursting, the buttons on the rich

guy's jacket go flying! That's the third component in this crazy machine. An extraordinary, indirect machine!

The fourth component: the buttons popping off the billionaire's jacket hit a gong; they fly through the air and hit a gong. This gong wakes up—at the top of the cartoon; it's great, the drawing goes in a circle. Goldberg was great; he really took his time on it—it wakes up a boxer slumped over on his stool in the ring, who immediately gets knocked out—I missed something—immediately knocked out and falls out of the ring onto a mattress. On top of this inflatable mattress is a little bunny—you know how it usually goes with Dadaist sequences, which aren't at all surrealist, in my opinion; it all has to form a machine—and it's the bunny jumping up that triggers the record and makes it start playing. All of *that* is a Goldberg machine.

I contend that Buster Keaton's machines work the same way. I remember one of Buster Keaton's short films—from the *Malec* series, I believe⁸—where Buster Keaton is at a fair booth and just can't manage to hit anything. He's a lousy shot. See, the deal is that you get your photo taken whenever you hit the bullseye. He really wants his photo taken, but he can't hit the target. So, he invents this same sort of machine. He ties a dog—he rigs a dog up to a pulley system that lowers a bone down. The dog pounces on the bone, pulling the rope—whenever the dog yanks on it, it triggers the bell, and Buster Keaton says, “Bullseye!”⁹ There you have it! Notice that these indirect machines... I think if you look at Buster Keaton's work, you come across these indirect, even infinite, machines, that adapt the large form to the demands of small form burlesque. And that's what's interesting about Keaton's process.¹⁰

For the most famous example of what I'm talking about, consider *The Navigator* (1924). In *The Navigator* he's with a woman, a young woman; he's in this immense, empty boat—this immense, empty boat, and from the look of it, the boat's kitchen is meant to support thousands of people. Right... that's “large form.” And you'll never find Keaton's method in Chaplin's work, in my opinion—never. It's a completely different problem, it's a Keatonian problem. Which is what, exactly? It's about setting up theoretically infinite machines in order to adapt large machines for private use, for two. You get an entire system devoted to figuring out how—in a container meant for a thousand people—how to successfully make one hard-boiled egg! It'll take a whole system of, of... it's a giant Dadaist machine. A huge Dadaist machine! It's a machine that's both recurring and recursive—infinitely recursive, in fact. It's a machine made up of heterogeneous parts—completely heterogeneous parts, like in Goldberg's illustrations. If you prefer, an equivalent today would be [Jean] Tinguely's famous machines. Tinguely machines are the same way. And so, that's his own method for integrating—for making it so that these big scenes, these large forms, which he's done such a fantastic, wonderful job of depicting, are integrated into the burlesque itself. And this, I think, is something unique to him.

Let's take *The Navigator* as an example. He's suffocating on the ocean floor, stumbling around underwater, choking. You trust Keaton; you're primed and ready to laugh, but the image before

us is anything but funny—not funny in the least. And then he goes back up, his story continues, and so on... And what is it that emerges? One of the finest shots, as well as the most famous, I think, in all of cinema: the woman, who in burlesque typically functions as an agent of fate, someone whose every move inherently makes things worse... [*Interruption of the recording*]¹¹

Part II

... Well, then, I'll start with my first observation: a famous neorealist scene—neorealist in Bazin's sense, since Bazin made so much hay with it—the famously neorealist scene from [Vittorio] de Sica's *Umberto D*, the one with the maid—neorealism at its purest. She gets up early—truly, this is day-in day-out banality at its finest; events are just strung together, not even randomly, but sort of by habit—events that the maid isn't consciously choosing: she gets up in the morning, stumbling, she stumbles through the kitchen, it's cold. She sees some ants, she drowns them, she gets the coffee thing... what is it called? A coffee mill. She props it up between her thighs, stretches out her leg—poor girl—to close the door, while sitting down—she strains her leg, etc.... and she starts crying.¹² Bazin made some wonderful observations on the beauty of this scene and on what made it a neorealist image. Can you see what makes it neorealist? It's because, indeed the whole rhythm of the scene—all of its formal characteristics—relies on the *form* of reality instead of merely filming allegedly real *content*. Right, and so I think, okay, what's happening here? An encounter—[Cesare] Zavattini claimed that neorealism was the art of encounters, and that's what accounts for all the tenderness in neorealism. This kind of tenderness is crucial.

Where is the encounter in this instance? If we can find the encounter, we're in the clear. There are all sorts of encounters in [Rossellini's] *Paisan*: an American, an Italian man or woman. Where is the encounter here? We get encounters in “Umberto D,” the poor maid and the poor old man; they cross paths, right, they overlap, there's an encounter, encounters everywhere. Zavattini is right — neorealism is nothing if not an art of encounters. Then what is it that's encountered? Encounter after encounter after encounter. Which encounter is the most profound? I encountered/said [Deleuze says encountered?] that the maid was pregnant; you think, right, pregnant, pregnant, that's works well enough. I mean, that's what we call a motor situation; there have been plenty of depictions of pregnant women in cinema.

What's new about this scene, with the maid? She's exhausted, exhausted from the moment she wakes up, hopeless. She knows she'll be an unwed mother, and there's no hope, she's done for... She doesn't know what to do about this kid; everything about it is miserable. She goes about her daily business, and in this long sequence, she's slumped over, looking out at the sun, reaching out with her leg to close the door. Her gaze meets her belly, and she weeps. Her eyes land on her belly; she begins to weep.

That's not a motor situation¹³; there will be other motor situations. I mean, she could very well go out, try to get ahold of some money, find a doctor, and get an abortion. But not so in this film. That would be an American, an American sort of motor situation: instead—let's call things what they are: that would be a sensorimotor situation—instead, she visits her neighbor, old Umberto.

She says, "Mister, if you only knew what I was going through"—he's an old man, maybe he'll understand. The motivating, sensorimotor situation at the heart of this sequence.

It's not about that, so what is it? That's not what's at issue here. It's about... sitting there exhausted, worn out, she knows she's pregnant; she knows it. Suddenly her gaze falls to her belly; all of a sudden, she sees her belly, and she starts crying. It's a neorealist scene. How so? Because—here I think I'm onto something; true or not, I feel like I'm on the right track. This isn't a sensorimotor situation; it's a purely optical situation.¹⁴ And by purely optical situation I absolutely do not mean that we're any less invested. Quite the contrary. She saw, she saw, she saw something that she had perhaps never seen before. She knew that she was pregnant; she sensed that she was pregnant, but she hadn't "seen" it. In seeing it, when her eyes met her belly, she saw the unbearable, an unbearable as an event that isn't her own doing. Which doesn't mean that the event isn't hers. The event doesn't belong to her. This infant has been thrust upon her, and she finds it unbearable when her eyes meet her belly—a purely optical situation.

Anyway, that could work, only it's not enough; it sounds like I'm reading too much into this scene. How might we prove our case? Could we say that all of that, everything we just said, is just a way of communicating that what this sort of film has done is invent pure optical/audio images? In other words, we've left behind sensorimotor images, and have discovered a whole new domain—we can't pin it on the story, the plot, the script—these images highlight optical and audible situations in their purest form. They highlight purely optical situations. Well, obviously, we'll need proof. We'll find it, obviously; we'll see it confirmed. — I need to go see the secretary real quick... so don't go anywhere, because... [*Interruption of the recording*]

... Now, there's no way we're wrong about this [*Pause*] I'll explain why it is we can't be mistaken. It's because, for better or for worse, we're gotten ahold, we've latched on to a concept. Simply put, the concept—this is what I want to focus on. As far as philosophy is concerned, [*Pause*] I firmly believe that the work of philosophy isn't even close to being—has nothing to do with something like "the search for truth." Truth is absolutely meaningless; it's totally irrelevant. On the contrary, philosophy consists in a very particular task, one no less practical than carpentry: doing philosophy is about making concepts; it's a question of making concepts, and these concepts don't exist beforehand. They aren't ready-made. When you engage in philosophy, you'll be wandering around for a while — "I'm still looking for it," right? When can you say, "I've found it"? You say, "I've found it," when you get a concept, when you start to feel like there's a concept afoot. Then you say, "Hey! There's a concept here." This concept was waiting

on you in order to exist. Philosophers spend their time inventing concepts. They don't invent them without some necessity, without... anyway.

Yet appearances can always be deceiving; it can very often be illusory. You think, "Yeah, I've landed on a concept," and then it falls apart. At best, what you've got is a metaphor, nothing to write home about. So that's possible, we might run into that, or maybe some of you won't feel the same way. But I'm thinking: Alright, here, I think I've found a concept: that of the purely optical situation. What could that mean? I'd like for our discussion, or any criticism, to remain at this level. Where you can't say "you're wrong," or "you're mistaken." What you can say is—God forbid — "No, there's no concept; that isn't a concept," and indeed, I haven't yet demonstrated why this is a concept. All I've got—and I'm hanging onto this for dear life—is a hunch strong enough to make me think it might be a concept. The form it takes—and I've repeated it so much that I barely understand it anymore—is that rather than a sensorimotor situation, we now only have purely audible and optical situations. [Pause] Well, let's make sure, because we'll only be able to say, "Yeah, this ought to be a concept," when we've found enough evidence for it. And all I have to base this on is this moving scene from *Umberto D.*

Moving on—because, it turns out, film critics have done an excellent job of highlighting the peculiar use of children in neorealism. There certainly are films where children play a major role; it's not limited to Italian neorealism, but allegedly children have a special function and presence in Italian neorealism, in *Rome, Open City*, in *Paisan*, and then in De Sica—*Shoeshine* (1946), *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) who takes a long walk through the city with his little boy, *Germany Year 0* (1948, Rossellini), and we notice that we haven't seen children featured like this before. For example, it's not like American children; this is different from American children in action-images. This isn't the same. Why not? What is it—what's so unique about these kids? Do they seek out children because children look innocent, as they say? No, not at all, not even close; that's not what it is—it's not about innocence. If anything, these kids are jaded, mature for their age, children from the war—poor kids. They aren't innocent. It's not about that, so what is it?

It's that children are in a situation such that they're—well, this child, at least, is someone condemned to *see* much more than they're able to *do*. It's a terrible situation for a child to be in. There's a lot that they can do: they'll pickpocket, they'll steal, they'll... But the child of Italian neorealism is one that *sees*—that unforgettable look of the children in *Sciuscia*, the little boy's gaze, accompanying his dad in *The Bicycle Thief*—indeed, they're in a position to see, but they cannot do very much. The child can't do much of anything. You might say the situation is beyond their control. This is very different from the children in Buñuel. I was enthralled by neorealist children. They look on... what do they see? They see—I'm using the same expression because it works well here—they see the unbearable; they're constantly put in a position where they see the unbearable. Of course, they *can* do a few things, but they aren't able to do very much. In other words, the child's situation produces, or the state the child is in, leads to an almost purely audio optical situation. That's at least some proof.

Our third piece of evidence: neorealism blossoms precisely where early critics claimed it no longer existed; that is, not only did Italian neorealism appear in *Rome Open City*, and *Paisa*, and *The Bicycle Thief*, and *Umberto D*, but it appeared in its purest form. I say, “in its purest form,” because this is the only time we see what’s essential about it. Before that, it was covered up. I believe that before this, there were purely optical and audio situations, but they consisted in moments spent wandering [*la balade*], in bits here and there. But with Rossellini’s four-volume series, precisely when many Italian critics claimed that it wasn’t neorealism, wow—because neorealism knew how to bring out, thanks to Rossellini and him alone, in my view, knew how to bring out the purest and the most essential aspects of the neorealist project, i.e., depicting purely optical and audio situations. I’m claiming that we find purely optical audio situations on display in Rossellini’s four-volume series—*Germany Year Zero* (1948), *Stromboli* (1950), *Europe 51* (1952), *Trip to Italy* (1954)—in the very structure of these four films. What form does it take, then?

Oddly enough, with *Germany Year Zero*, Italians said Rossellini—or some Italians said—Rossellini had ceased to be neorealist, that his mistake was his choice of subject matter, Germany, which was out of his depth; *Italy* was what he was qualified to address. That’s where he belonged. It seems to me that this reaction betrays a whole series of misinterpretations, since Rossellini’s Italy specifically represents an Italy that doesn’t belong to anyone, and that, after *Germany Year Zero*, a boy’s visit to Germany, which ultimately ends in his death, is the first time we see neorealism emerge in full form. Here, what was only implicit in Rossellini’s other films comes to light: this, *this* is neorealism—a child who winds up in Germany, in a uniquely optical and audio situation.

And what about *Stromboli*? [*Pause*] The heroine finds herself on an island, and she’s there as a foreigner, a foreigner on a harsh, hostile island surrounded by fishermen. Nothing about it is sensorimotor for her. She’s trapped in a purely optical and audio situation. When a sailor goes to touch her with an octopus, she’s revolted; it’s not part of her motor or tactile world. Later, after a wonderful tuna fishing sequence, a sailor offers to let her touch one; and she does touch the tuna, very tentatively. And Rossellini, who isn’t easily swayed by critics—critics can say whatever they want—he only lost his temper once, when a Parisian critic claimed that this great tuna fishing scene was borrowed from a documentary Rossellini had used; Rossellini’s reaction is noteworthy because it was so instructive. He said: It makes no difference to me whether critics say something’s good or it’s bad—they understand judging to be their job, well and good if that’s what they do. But there’s one critique who doesn’t do his research, i.e., he doesn’t claim that the tuna scene is good or that it’s bad; he says that the tuna scene comes from a documentary, “but,” Rossellini says, “I can’t say how much time and energy into filming it. All he had to do was do his research, you know, critics don’t really do their research; all they do is talk.” “What would make a critic say such a thing? He should have got his information right to begin with?”¹⁵ It’s not that he was unhappy. So, what’s the key takeaway here? It’s that on the one hand, there’s

the inherent beauty of this sequence, but the stranger on the island is obviously in a purely optical situation.

Does that mean she's just there as some kind of tourist? You might be able to tell that something more substantial is starting to take shape. She'd be a tourist if she grasps these images as reality, as "fact-images", as Bazin would put it, if she had understood them as clichés; it's possible, but no! The act of tuna fishing, which wasn't her doing, shook her to her core; why? Something about it was too strong for her, and it leaves her rattled. She's in a purely optical situation; it's this purely optical situation that allows her to do away with clichés. The cliché would have been a tourist in a sensorimotor situation. That would be totally different. A tourist, the poor fool, would get on the dock, see the tuna come in, and say, "Oh, can I touch them? Poor tuna! Wow." [Laughter] He's clueless.

The frightened woman—the frightened woman sees the tuna being caught, looks at the tuna, and is put in a purely optical and audio situation with a language she doesn't understand—a patois—with gestures she doesn't understand—the violence of the sailors—and a grinning sailor is trying to make her touch it. She reaches out her hand—deeply, deeply shaken. The cliché was the image caught up in a sensorimotor perception, and notice that both are intertwined both for the actors in the film as well as for the audience. The purely optical situation breaks with sensorimotor perception, for the characters in the film and for the film's audience. The moment I perceive that I'm in a purely optical situation, I step out of the cliché-image and latch onto something intolerable. Why? An excess, something in life that's too powerful, but what is it? Or maybe it's something too miserable, something too terrible.

Well, so, we're making a little progress. The purely optical situation, rather than being through the eyes of a traveler or tourist, is one seen by someone overwhelmed by something intolerable. [Pause] In this sense, you could say, it's what a child sees, yeah, a child's perspective, but a particular sort of child, or that it's through the eyes of an immigrant, right, a poor migrant, a purely optical, audio situation. You'll notice that I'm using "audio situation" strictly in the sense of language, of sounds. It's a wonderful scene, with the sailors shouting while they fish.

And when the volcano erupts and she runs away, terrified, the whole village comes together. They're used to it—for them it's sensorimotor—and then the protagonist, the woman, starts running, she starts running because of her own sensorimotor circumstances. Her situation is also sensorimotor; she has her own sensorimotor perception. She runs, right, but that's beside the point; [the sensorimotor] inevitably comes up now and then, but that's not what's at issue here. She runs and runs until she gets to a cliff side; she's all alone, and she delivers her famous line, which goes something like, "Enough! I'm afraid. Oh God, how beautiful. How horrible." I can't go back, I'm afraid... She comes up against the cliff face — "Enough! I'm afraid"—it's a purely optical situation. It only appeared to be sensorimotor. For the islanders, it *is* sensorimotor—they aren't bothered at all; they've been living there for generations. But it's too much for her. She'll

never be the same, as they say. Just being there, put in purely optical and audio situation, was enough to leave her so deeply shaken.

It's even clearer when it comes to our third example, *Europe 51*. The heroine has just lost her child. Now, dead children are such a common trope, so what does she do? She goes around with her husband, and she's looking—well, she's coming from a bourgeois perspective. In other words, she doesn't really have enough perspective to understand what she's looking at—so what does she see? For one, she visits a factory; she visits a factory and sees the poor folks working at the factory—immigrants, or what have you. She says, “But it's not possible, it's not possible, who are these people? Who's been trapped inside? Who are these people? It's impossible.”¹⁶ Meanwhile her husband, a sensorimotor tourist, pats her on the back and says, “How long do you intend to keep this up?” She says, “But you don't understand, you don't get it,” and she takes this optical situation all the way and her husband has her committed. Alright, what is it that she saw? She could have seen a cliché, right, but she saw something else. At what point did she see through clichés? She went beyond cliché when she fell out of touch with sensorimotor perception and came upon a purely optical audio perception. At that point, something came over her, like an overwhelming noise, an overpowering vantage point—and she glimpsed was the intolerable, the insufferable. In other words, in the four films critics flagged as Rossellini's departure from neorealism, I think you get nothing *but* a pure example of the very core of neorealism, i.e., highlighting optical and audio situations in their purest form.¹⁷

And if Rossellini is our standard bearer here, in other words, if this is present throughout Italian neorealism but has been obscured—that's precisely why I needed to take so many precautions. And it turns out, this concept of a purely optical audio situation effectively covers all of the characteristics from before. Without sensorimotor sensation, there's no longer as much of an emphasis on action. What's witnessed are events that aren't fully attached to those to whom they befall—like I was saying last time, when you get into an accident: you're in the car, you get into an accident, you can see it coming—you're in a purely optical audio situation. Death happens; it's not your doing, and yet it's happening to you. Somehow, you get out of it—if you do, you'll never be the quite the same, for two, three hours at least, cut the bullshit, you... something happened. It's the opposite of the audience's situation, [which is a] purely optical audio situation.

Comtesse: How can it be—speaking of Rossellini—recalling what you said at the start, how can there be a difference, or even an opposition, between a concept's creation and an indifference to truth (which is irrelevant, allegedly), but in this same atmosphere, Rossellini did nothing but use cinematographic and artistic methods to underscore what's at stake in the truth.

Deleuze: Yes, yes, yes, I take back what I said about truth, when it doesn't happen to be part of my subject, alright. I was speaking for myself; I wasn't talking about Rossellini. As far as Rossellini is concerned, you're totally right.

I mean, in the New Wave, you see all the characteristics I covered before, including the idea of the international conspiracy, of everything that exceeds us, of the event that exceeds us, the cliché, the cliché's presence inside and outside of us, as well as the problem that, sure, you could always call the problem of truth—call it whatever you like—can one get beyond cliché? Can one create images that aren't cliché? The answer: yes. Purely optical and audio images, in the sense we're trying to... I mean, what was happening with the New Wave? And to what extent are the main contenders in the French New Wave really picking up what Rossellini had left off?¹⁸

It's obvious—I'm rushing through this because there's so much left to cover—It goes without saying that... coming back to my two main examples, Godard and Rivette, what do they do? Personally, I think they made no secret of their admiration for Rossellini; this is what they got from him, it's what they pick up from him, an approach to film that tried to achieve, that defined itself as a battle against cliché, as a new sort of meditation on images, a battle against clichés—carried out by who? How does one pull a completely different type of image out from under cliché, the cliché always being sensorimotor—how do you uncover purely optical situations and purely audio situations? Well, for one example, I'd refer us to the “I don't know what to do,” once it's taken on a starkly symbolic value. “I don't know what to do,” which signals the end of the sensorimotor, the end of sensorimotor perception. Among other things, I could add a film like *Made in USA* (1966). *Made in USA* is almost the archetype here. Anna Karina literally *does* nothing; she displays images, she displays images in bright blocks of color, red or blues—sometimes unbearable images that come back to the idea of an international conspiracy. So, we're put in a purely optical and audio situation, which culminates in seeing something intolerable. [Pause]

This is what Rivette is all about. It's no longer a sensorimotor situation, it's no longer a sensorimotor situation, all you have are purely optical situations, and these purely optical situations—see, it's rather strange, but there's still more left to explain—these will correspond with abandoned places, whatever-spaces, indeterminate places. As a result, time and time again, there are two main problems: how are optical audio situations supposed to help us get beyond clichés? On the other hand, why do they manifest in whatever-places, in whatever-spaces, incomplete spaces, spaces of construction and destruction, peripheral spaces, bare steel beams, wastelands. Why is that?

And another thing: where does Tati fit into all this, in this whole movement? We don't have time to get into it, but I found it so obvious, Tati is the first director to have made a comedy consisting entirely, that did not have the slightest sensorimotor, save for his first film, *The Postman's Stroll*¹⁹ and that's a “stroll” [*balade*], which is our running theme. What's tricky about such a stroll is that it's right there, already at the service of purely optical situations; take for example Rivette's *The North Bridge* (1982). How does *The North Bridge* begin? With the mutant's trip [*balade*], the young woman making her way around the lion statues, in the periphery: the situation is purely optical. She's on, like, a moped, she's riding, and while she's still moving

forward, she looks [back at the lion statue] and because of her optical situation, she crashes the moped. What happens then? What takes over, what happens next? A sequence, reflecting an international conspiracy, a sequence of purely optical situations, the transition consisting only in the double wandering of both the girl and of Bulle Ogier. *The North Bridge* offers a quintessential example; we ought to pick it apart, one scene at a time. It's an optical audio film at its purest. And when I say Tati, besides *The Postman's Stroll*, besides *The Big Day* (1949), you get comedy that relies exclusively on optical situations and audio situations at their purest.

That's what I meant at the beginning, only if, again—note that this is all only somewhat coherent, since I did say that I had only begun—again, to recap, I started by delineating action-images using four characteristics, and I felt like these four characteristics all pointed toward something beyond the action-image, perhaps beyond movement-images as such. Now I can name it: the pure form of the optical audio image, the pure optical audio image insofar as this makes us see something—yeah, I'm circling back—something too violent or too terrible, and insofar as this occurs in whatever-place, in whatever-space.

As a result, all the themes we hoped to analyze this year start to come into focus. Because now we find ourselves in a place where we can't go any further; it's time to bring in concepts. Ultimately, all I've done is give a variety of justifications for saying, well, optical audio situations *aren't* something that exists only in cinema but deserve their own concept. What does this concept consist in? We don't know yet.

All that's left to do now is flesh it out. Okay, so I'll work out its characteristics one at a time, and all I'll cover today, to wrap things up—well, it's pretty straightforward; we ought to take this first characteristic at face value: there are no more sensorimotor perceptions. Of course, there will still be some in the film. Then what do I mean by, “There are no more sensorimotor perceptions”? I mean that auditory visual perception is no longer naturally prolonged into movement. Under normal circumstances, in life, it doesn't cut off; our perceptions are naturally prolonged into movement. The first chapter of *Matter and Memory*, as mentioned previously, explained how, through the brain, perception was sensorimotor, i.e., that our perceptions are naturally prolonged into movement.²⁰ So, let's see: suppose that after a serious illness this is no longer the case; suppose that after a serious illness, something comes loose—our perceptions no longer extend into movement. Is there such an illness? Well, yes, there is. Such as with what we'd call either aphasia or apraxia. Bergson talks about these a lot; he describes these sorts of cases. It doesn't need to be an extreme case: either way... perception is purely optical-audio; it's no longer prolonged into movement.

Let's lower the stakes: it extends into movement, but the movement doesn't match our perception—it's clumsy, it's sort of awkward, as if there were some hesitation and things didn't click. Optical audio perception is only prolonged into misfit movements, struck with a strange clumsiness, a warping. It's off—gestures are always off; the guy bumps into things, collides into

things, trips, bumps into things, it doesn't work. It's as if the natural coupling of perception and movement were compromised. What do we call these? Wrong moves. Wrong moves start to multiply; "off" details start to pile up.

In realism what's important are the details that ring true. In neorealism, it's the details that ring *false* that count. What exactly is that supposed to mean? But this isn't coming from me. Looking to details that ring false for evidence of veritable reality, as opposed to the pseudo-reality of realism, was something Robbe-Grillet constantly focused on.²¹ Now if it's true that Dos Passos had [*Pause*] a decisive influence on Italian cinema, the so-called New Novel is what had a decisive influence on the New Wave. I don't mean Robbe-Grillet in particular—although Robbe-Grillet talked about it since he made an important foray into cinema, and for good reason—because the New Novel and cinema are linked in many different ways. In what ways are they connected? If I'm stuck on this first characteristic—to put a pin in all this—it's that it becomes relatively important that, in a way, the actor plays false.

I'll refer to an instructive passage from Robbe-Grillet. "In this new realism"—he's talking about himself, about his novel, and what was being characterized as the New Novel, the so-called "school of the gaze," and, when it comes to Robbe-Grillet's early novels, the purest form of optical audio situations. He accomplished in literature what we've seen play out in film. And he insisted, "don't believe it"—if he rejected, if he spurned the "school of the gaze" from the very beginning, an ostensibly apt characterization of the New Novel, he did so for a very specific reason. He said: "Don't think for one second that it's about the spectator's point of view." The purely optical audio image—call it whatever you like, but it's not the audience's perspective. Neither is it an actor's point of view. Who are these new kinds of people? Who exactly were these strange people on these "trips" [*balade*], these people who didn't identify with the events that happened to them? What's happening with both the New Novel and the New Wave?

Robbe-Grillet goes on: "In this new realism, it is therefore no longer *verisimilitude* that is at issue. The little detail which 'rings true' no longer holds the attention of the novelist, in the spectacle of the world or in literature; what strikes him—and what we recognize after many avatars in his writings—is more likely, on the contrary, the little detail that rings *false*. Thus, even in Kafka's diaries, when the writer notes down what he has noticed during the day in the course of a walk"—our theme of the stroll, the long walk—"he retains merely fragments which are not only without importance"—this could well describe neorealism—"but further, which seem to him cut off from their signification, hence from their *verisimilitude*: the stone abandoned for no good reason in the middle of a street, the bizarre gesture of a passer-by, incomplete, clumsy, not seeming to correspond to any function or precise intention. Partial objects, detached from their use, moments immobilized, words separated from their context, whatever rings a little false..."²² [*Interruption of the recording*]

... they act as though their movements were tangled up in cloth. They chase each other, they fire their revolvers, all their movements are off, so they shoot awkwardly; you've never seen such clumsy gangsters. Isn't that how it is in real life? Then you see what sets American realism apart.

And we eventually—thanks to New Wave and thanks to Italian neorealism—got used to a new type of scene in film: in a fight, people's extraordinary awkwardness—these aren't Hollywood fights that aren't drawn out, where the shots are fantastic, with real stunts, as they say—instead, we get guys slowly, clumsily grappling each other, landing a blow here and there but never where it counts—Bang!—a real fight, in other words, like what you'd see in the street. [Laughter] People don't fight like in Hollywood; if I try to hit someone, right away my punch comes too late, I hit him in the eye, he's going to come at me, you don't know how it'll go down. [Laughter] Anyway, these kinds of fights, just go around in circles, you know? [Laughter]

Well, this way of playing false, which you find prominently featured in Truffaut, in Godard, in all of them, ultimately—there's one who... I can't remember—oh, in Tati; what Robbe-Grillet said about details that “ring false” applies to Tati word for word. [Pause] Ah, there's one American who did it, whose use of sound was incredible: Cassavetes. The dialogue in Cassavetes—now *there's* a major detail that rings false. There are constantly guys who are... It's like in everyday conversations: listen to two people talk. If you put yourself in a position to really listen to them, it just sounds awful. A conversation in the café, the guys are half drunk, “Then I'll say a little bit... you..” and then... At every turn, something sounds wrong. Someone else who really emphasized this—the power of the false—was [Jean] Eustache. *The Mother and the Whore* (1973) is a deep, cinematographic reflection on “What is the power of the false?” and on the question, “How do we get out from under the most awful clichés?” Which will be purely optical-audio.²³

Well, all of that is only the first of the characteristics we're going to cover in order to develop the concept of an optical audio situation: it's as though perception's natural prolongment into movement has been severed.

This is where I'll pick up next time—it's all well and good, but it's still negative—if perception no longer extends into movement, what happens to perception? It can no longer be the same perception as when it was prolonged into movement. What will happen to it as a result? [End of recording] [1:24:34]

Notes

¹ Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta cleverly translate *balade* as “trip/ballad” to convey the multiple senses of Deleuze's use of the term. There are several points in this translation where this choice is less effective. I use a

couple different terms—wandering, strolling, going on a walk, a trip—but I indicate where this term appears wherever it may not be clear, for those reading *Cinema 2* alongside.

² I've kept *burlesque* as “burlesque,” following the example of Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta in their translation of *Cinema 2*. “Burlesque” may be misleading for parts of the English-speaking world; the reader might also consider “slapstick” as a good alternative (although “slapstick” isn't as precise, since what Deleuze is describing doesn't apply to most of what we might consider slapstick comedy).

³ Note from transcript: See Session 15, from April 20, 1982, where Deleuze touches on burlesque as small form; however, he doesn't bring up Buster Keaton. This reference might be in the missing half of the following session, from April 27, 1982. Deleuze devotes a lengthy analysis to Keaton at the end of Chapter 10 in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*.

⁴ See Deleuze's discussion of Chaplin in *Cinema 1*, starting on p. 170.

⁵ Note from transcript: *Safety Last* (1923) Deleuze goes over these two examples from Lloyd in *Cinema 1*, p. 170

⁶ From the film: “Now the feud must go on and on. My two sons must be taught to avenge this deed!”

⁷ *On a l'impression d'un hors d'oeuvre, que ce “hors de,” qu'est-ce que c'est?*

⁸ Note from transcript: In France, a collection of Keaton's short films were named after the character he plays, “Malec.”

⁹ Deleuze might be conflating the plot of Keaton's *High Sign* with another film. Our Hero (Keaton) is looking for work and manages to get hired at the shooting gallery by using the dog-bone-machine described above.

¹⁰ Note from transcript: For Keaton's machines, see *Cinema 1*, pp. 174-6.

¹¹ Note from transcript: In what follows Part 1, Deleuze has ended the discussion on burlesque and suddenly returns to a topic he had brought up during the previous session. There's no clear explanation for this shift. Even though there's no indication that a tape is missing, the brevity of this session, as well as Deleuze having suddenly changed subjects, suggests that it's at least possible that a section is missing.

¹² Deleuze is somewhat off with the order of events in the scene, but that's neither here nor there.

¹³ As clumsy as it is, I've translated *situation motrice* as “motor situation” for the sake of helping the reader keep tabs on how Deleuze develops the transition from a sensorimotor schema to one of sight-and-sound. See note 14, below.

¹⁴ I have yet to find a translation for *image* or *situation optique sonore pure* that isn't awkward. A “purely optical audio image,” etc. gets the job done. Deleuze is moving beyond talking about sensorimotor images (“action” and “perception” images) and starts to discuss optical/audio images (ones of “sight and sound”).

¹⁵ While most of Rossellini's comments here are paraphrased (for which the translation is mine), I've included a more direct quote: the last line is from the interview translated by Liz Heron. “Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut, Ferydoun Hoveyda and Jacques Rivette: Interviews with Roberto Rossellini (July 1954 and April 1959)” in *Cahiers du Cinéma: 1950s New Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard, 1985), pp. 209-17

¹⁶ I can't find this exact line in the film, so I've translated Deleuze's paraphrase as is.

¹⁷ Note from transcript: For a succinct overview of these parts of Rossellini's work, see the first chapter of *Cinema 2*, pp. 7-9.

¹⁸ Note from transcript: Deleuze develops this take on the French New Wave in *Cinema 2*, pp 18-20.

¹⁹ Note from transcript: The film is actually “L’École des facteurs,” *The School for Postmen* (1947).

²⁰ While certainly applicable to the first chapter, Chapter 2 of *Matter and Memory* might be more helpful in summarizing these points. See p. 111. “At the basis of [recognized perception] would thus be a phenomenon of a motor order. (...) There is no perception which is not prolonged into movement.”

²¹ I’m following Richard Howard’s translation Robbe-Grillet. Accordingly, *faire faux* is here translated as “ringing false,” as opposed to ringing true. Alain Robbe-Grillet, “From Realism to Reality,” in *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1965), pp. 157-68. Note from transcript: Deleuze only cites Robbe-Grillet once in the first volume (*Cinema 1*, p. 242 n.21), on the subject of “ringing false” in particular. However, Robbe-Grillet comes up frequently in *Cinema 2*. See p. 137. [Translator: Tomlinson and Galeta often translate *faire faux* as “making false” or “falsifying.”]

²² This long passage begins on Robbe-Grillet, p. 163

²³ See *Cinema 1*, p. 241.