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The Space of Narrative

The origins of this argument lie in a consideration of the ontology of cinema as a mode of representation. At least since 1941, when Gregg Toland established the possibility of deep-focus photography in Welles's *Citizen Kane*, cinema has been able with ever-increasing ease to give the illusion of space and depth on its two-dimensional surface. Yet I'll argue here that there has been 'a certain tendency' to evade the possibilities of such space. All cinema, but especially talkie cinema, collapses the ontological space of its figural aspect (its visual field) into the epistemological flatness of its discursive aspect (its linguistic significance). In the collapse of figure into discourse, the 'certain tendency' of which I speak is thus, paradoxically, a 'resistance to cinema' within cinema itself – or, better, a resistance to cinematicity within this ostensibly primarily visual art.

At one level, this is nothing shocking, of course. As David Bordwell has argued, 'In making narrative causality the dominant system in the film's total form, the classical Hollywood cinema chooses to subordinate space'¹. The visual field serves the narrative in fiction film, specifically in the sequentiality of a temporal organisation of cause and effect. Narrative space is subservient to narrative time. But I'll argue here that, just as there is a resistance to cinema within cinema, a resistance which is explained by the pressure of narrative, so also there is a corresponding

1 David Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (BFI, London, 1975), 50.

second-order resistance : a resistance to narrative within narrative. Narrative – as opposed to narratology – has come in recent years to occupy a more central position in theory ; but our thinking on narrative is constrained, unnecessarily limited, by the predominantly phenomenological categories through which we understand narrative.

I shall argue two propositions in this paper. Firstly, I shall indicate how it is that narrative is thought by a modernist culture in terms which prioritise space and thus evacuate any hint of history from narrative structure. In modernist culture, narrative is 'cinematished', its potential for ontological figure reduced to the flatness of an epistemological screen: it becomes a spatial 'representation', and to the extent that it is both representation and representation dehistoricised, it is contaminated inevitably by ideology. Modernist 'epistemology', thus, insofar as it depends upon this kind of comprehension of narrative, is precisely the denial of epistemology : ideology. Secondly, I shall argue, as a counter-proposition, that it is important, if we are to escape such an ideological thinking, to reinscribe history into the figure ; or, to put it another way, that we must find ways of thinking the temporality of space or the historicity of representation.

I. Imploding Space

In his Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, Conrad famously declared that :

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see. That – and no more, and it is everything.

The ostensible object of this 'seeing' is, of course, the visible world ; 'art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe' ; and yet, the writer does not behave like the scientist or the philosopher in this aim. Scientists, philosophers – and, we might add, cinematographers – examine the external world, but, according to Conrad :

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*Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal.*²

In this key declaration of the intents of modernist narrative, we have the articulation of a neo-romantic predicament regarding the proper relations between consciousness and external nature ; but it is formulated in terms of a proto-phenomenological problem of the relation between the visible and the invisible, between what is 'immediately' available to consciousness and what is thus available only in mediated form. In the scopic drive, we also might sense the pressure of a 'cinematic mentality' : Conrad's text was written in 1896-7, coincidentally in the wake of European excitement over the ability of the Lumière brothers precisely to 'make you see' things like workers leaving factories, trains arriving in stations, boats leaving harbours, babies feeding, and so on.

Conrad faced the stark problem of the assignation of meaning to an agnostic, sceptical world of relativised values. He rejected the idea that the visible facts of the world could 'speak for themselves', that they needed no corrective demystifying commentary ; equally, he rejected the subjectivism which suggested that the meaning of the world lay in the consciousness of the Subject of perception. The whole of literary modernism is characterised by a negotiation or oscillation between these two tendencies. Henry James, and perhaps more explicitly T.S. Eliot, seemed to reconcile them in the philosophical notion of the 'point of view'. The world cannot be perceived as such ; it is perceived from a specific point of view, a specific space. All perceptions are thus 'located', and no single space, no single point of view can assume an absolute validity in its perception. There are at least 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' (Stevens) ; at least two ways (European, American) of viewing a social sphere (James) ; at least four places from which a world can be constructed (Eliot's *Four Quartets*) and so on. Levinson describes the situation thus :

2 Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897 ; repr. Penguin, 1987), xlix, xvii.

Meaning is no longer identified with presence to an individual consciousness (as in the various instances of Pater, Conrad and Ford). Nor is meaning considered autonomous and self-sufficient (as in Husserl or Hulme). It is the product of multiple perspectives³.

But if the validation of meaning depends upon such multiplicity, there emerges a specific inflection of the problem of self-consciousness. Eliot, for example, gets rid of one problem and produces another, for 'the self is now fractured and appears as a product of representation. In *Four Quartets*, for instance, there is a self identified as that which is 'located' in each specific place ; but this is complicated by a 'second-degree' self which is not located but is merely hypothesised, a second-order self who is aware of the predicament of location suffered by the first self. The identity of this self is now internally fissured by an ironic critical difference, and, as Moretti argues, 'irony is a fundamental attitude of modern culture and consciousness'.⁴

The trajectory of modernist narrative is one which strives to move from such a fractured 'differential' and problematic self whose point of view is necessarily invalid towards an identity of selfhood in which the self's point of view is validated by a social consensus and thus becomes ideologically normative, uncontentious. Sartre's formulation, that 'man fundamentally is the desire to be God', might thus be modified : 'man, fundamentally, is the desire to be anonymous, unnamable, *socialised*'.

But the modernist self faces the problem of its ironic construction which denies such a possibility. De Man is instructive here. When he considers irony, he turns to Baudelaire's "De l'essence du rire", and alludes to the passage in which Baudelaire describes a man falling in the street. De Man argues that there is in this instance a *dédoublement* of the self, such that there is an absolute rupture between, on the one hand, the empirical self or material body with stumbles and falls, and, on the other, a 'linguistic' self which knows that a fall is taking place, but can do nothing about it. You cannot stop falling just by thinking 'stand up' ;

3 Michael Levinson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), 184.

4 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World* (trans. Albert Sbraglia ; Verso, 1987), 97.

but, argues de Man, you can come to know yourself better. In fact, de Man uses this example to drive a wedge between consciousness (the linguistic self) and history (the stumbling material body), which is the predicament of the modern literary self.⁵

The modernist construction of the self as one predicated upon the problem of difference or deferred identity generates a specific narrative form ; that of the *Künstlerroman*. Blanchot argued that in the struggle to produce art (rather than just a banal exercise in writing), the writer is threatened with precisely this bifurcation of the self, and resorts to the keeping of a diary, 'Le Journal [qui] enracine le mouvement d'écrire dans le temps, dans l'humilité du quotidien daté et préservé par sa date'.⁶ The journal, of course, enters the modernist narrative explicitly on many occasion, with the net result that narrative starts to implode upon the figure of the self – the linguistic self – and fails increasingly to look outwards to the ontological space and depth of the external world, of history.

Moretti argues something similar regarding the *Bildungsroman*, which he thinks as a specifically modernist form. The *Bildungsroman* is, ostensibly, concerned with the narrative of the passage of time. Yet, Moretti argues, the narrative logic of the *Bildungsroman* is conditioned by the drive towards *Zusammenhang*, 'connectedness". The hero of the *Bildungsroman* must use her or his time to find the proper or adequate mode of connection between her or his inner life and the social formation to which and through which her or his life will have significance, through which her or his narrative or point of view will be consensually validated :

*Zusammenhang... tells us that a life is meaningful if the internal interconnections of individual temporality... imply at the same time an opening up to the outside, an ever wider and thicker network of external relationships with 'human things'*⁷

- 5 See Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' in *Blindness and Insight* (2nd edn ; Methuen, 1983).
- 6 Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Gallimard, Paris, 1955), 21.
- 7 Moretti, *op. cit.*, 18.

Plot as time or as the chronological sequence delineating the narrative of a genuinely historical selfhood is always finally superseded by plot as the space of connection, plot as the *Zusammenhang* which locates the self in a normative social order with which the self has learned to conform, whose values the self has learned to internalise such that it feels not only 'free' but also 'validated'.

For present purposes the single most important point here is the triumph of a spatial organisation over a temporal. Moretti describes it as the triumph of the *fabula* over the subject ; and we should recall here that Tomashevski defined the subject as 'the introduction of narrative material into the visual field of the reader'. It is also the triumph of ideological epistemology or self-knowledge over ontological or historical being.

Finally, one must ask about this 'social consensus', this *polis* whose values the modern literary self learns to internalise. It is crucial to realise that it is not a material *polis*, not real social relations, but rather an abstraction, an *image* of the social with which the modern literary self finds itself 'freely' in accord. That image is, precisely, another self – a mere representation of the self ; this is the logic of marriage in the *Bildungsroman* :

It has been observed that from the late eighteenth century on, marriage becomes the model for a new type of social contract ; one no longer sealed by forces outside of the individual (such as status), but founded on a sense of "individual obligation". A very plausible thesis, and one that helps us understand why the classical Bildungsroman "must" always conclude with marriages. It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that "pact" between the individual and the world, that reciprocal "consent" which finds in the double "I do" of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation.⁸

The space of the real material and historical social collapses into the tiny – and flat or abstract – conceptual space between the rhymed couplet of

8 Moretti, *op. cit.*, 22.

'I do'. On is reminded of John Donne's famous linguistic attempts to contract the space of the world into the size of a room, a bed, or into what I think of as the 'scene of recognition' in the mirroring eyes of two lovers : a flat protocinematic screen : 'My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears'.⁹

II. The Ontology of the Visual

'...before all, to make you see' : what do we do in the instance of an art-form which is primarily visual cinema ? I want to indicate the ways in which cinema also encourages the implosion of space, the collapsing of figure into discourse. I'll address three films specifically : Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas*, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation*, and Jean-Jacques Benoit's *Diva* ; in all three, there is an interesting and relevant negotiation between the discursive and figural aspects of the film's structure.

Cinema is, above all, an art of movement. But most cinema cannot bear the simplicity of this ; it prefers to have such movement inserted into an economy governed by narrative significance. But if pure cinema is movement, then what better form of cinema than the road-movie ? Wenders has a particular liking for the road-movie, and almost all of his films can be thus described. *Alice in den Städten* or *Im Lauf der Zeit* are simply two explicit instances of this tendency ; but *Paris, Texas* is another film dominated by the road : its very title implies a road between two places (actually only one place, of course). Wenders overlaps with a specific trend in postmodern cinema not only because Robby Muller's photography enables the *mise-en-scène* to look like a pastiche of Edward Hopper paintings, but also because the road in question is always a 'nostalgic' road homewards in some sense ; his films operate, at one level, in *la mode rétro* or, more properly, as 'nostalgia films' (though not quite in the way Jameson describes that).¹⁰

Paris, Texas opens with the figure of Travis, mute, wandering across a huge expanse of unmarked space : an epic landscape which calls to

9 Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (Methuen, 1986), ch. 1.

10 See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (Verso, 1991), 19.

mind the sublime grandeur of an Ansel Adams photograph. But there is no mythic timelessness here : time itself is present in the figure of a vulture, waiting and promising an end inscribed in this beginning. Travis's brother Walt comes to bring Travis back to California and to his son, Hunter, who has been living for four years with Walt and his wife, Ann. Travis and Hunter go in search of Travis's estranged wife, Jane, whom they discover working in a peep-show in Houston. And here the explicit trajectory of the film becomes apparent. The film marks the entry or re-entry of Travis into language. He gradually shifts from utter silence firstly to a strategic silence (in which he refuses to talk about what happened between himself and Jane), and then into a technological silence (when he makes a crucial tape-recording), and finally to a narrative eloquence (when he narrates the story of himself and Jane, but displaces it onto a fictional couple, and into a technological medium of a phone-link). Travis and Jane never meet directly, and communicate only by the phone-link in the peep-show ; and, crucially for my argument, when Travis narrates his tale to Jane, he refuses to look at her, turning his back to the image such that his discursive flow cannot be hindered by the presence of a figural image.

The plot of the film is based upon a typical kind of deferral structure : an enigma is proposed at the start, and the elaboration of the film, its movement, is the movement towards the resolution of the enigma. In this case, the enigma is twofold : what is the relation between Paris, France and Paris, Texas ? and who is Travis ? The narrative of Travis is one which the character comes to inhabit only slowly ; and the film charts Travis's coming to self-presence, as well as the construction of motherhood (which is the link of Paris, Texas to Paris, France). Wenders himself said, in interview, that 'cinema is in a way an art in which things and persons come to be identical with themselves'. So, the distance between Paris and Texas is, in a way, elided ; and the distance between the name 'Travis' and the character is likewise overcome, as Travis comes to be identical with himself.

This example reiterates the narrative logic of the *Bildungsroman*. In this instance, the consensus constituting the final image is that of a patriarchal view of the family : the image of Jane and Hunter in a familial embrace, while the father goes off alone, 'free'. And, as in the form of the

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Bildungsroman, this image is a "flat" image : it is an image where the ontological substance of the characters, their historical complexities, are reduced to something epistemologically recognisable, assuring, 'valid' and ideologically normative. The crucial space in the ontology of the visual here is precisely not the social, not the grand Ansel Adams-like landscape. It is, simply and most fundamentally, the space of the ear, and the film marks a shift from figural eye to discursive ear, not only in the scene where Travis talks to Jane without looking at her in the peep-show, but also at two structurally central moments in the film.

Two moments are marked by the dislocation of sight and sound. In the first, Travis, Walt and Ann watch a home-movie which depicts an earlier, happier moment prior to Jane's disappearance. This film enables a series of moments of recognition : the characters see each other on screen, and typically turn to look at each other in 'real life' for validation and verification of the image. Further, the film is silent. This silent scene of recognition enables Hunter, the child, to acknowledge Travis as his real father for the first time ; and, immediately after this, Travis sets up a 'mirroring' relation between the two, as if the son were an image of the father – or vice-versa. The second moment occurs when Travis and Hunter have found Jane. Travis makes a tape and leaves it for Hunter to listen to alone. This offers a complementary example of sound without image, for as Hunter looks out of the hotel-window while listening to the tape, he can see nothing because of low-lying cloud : cinematically, the image is accordingly impoverished and attention is drawn firmly to the voice. On the film's soundtrack, we hear this tape as a continuous voice ; but as we listen to it, we see three separate locations : the space in which Travis records it, Travis's car where he is playing it back in his head, and the hands of Hunter as he listens to it alone in the hotel room. Three ostensibly distinct spaces overlap or collapse into each other, courtesy of a narrating voice.

The recursive feature of the silent home-movie operates by setting up a chain of surveillance. The characters watch each other in the film and on the home-movie screen ; we, in turn, watch the characters on our screen. The net result of this is a potentiation of narrative space in the form of an ontological depth, because reflexivity such as this problematises the relations between the ontologically real and its aesthetic repre-

sentation. The 'film-within-a-film' structure is a simple trick which asks us to view something which we had understood to be 'flat' aesthetic representation (Travis, Walt, Ann) as having the status of a fuller ontological reality. 'Characters' thus appear to occupy, and certainly allude to, the real historical space inhabited by the audience. But this ontological potential is threatened and, finally, erased by the sequence which complements the silent movie, the sequence of the image-less talkie. The tape, in explaining the story, reduces the historical space of the characters once more and makes them turn into the merest epistemological signs, available for understanding, available and present to our consciousness immediately. That which threatened to have the sensuous ineffability of the figural in all its ontological space is collapsed into the flatness and immediacy of the discursively semiotic, a mere sign or word available for immediate comprehension. This is the cinematic equivalent of *The Painted Word* so vigorously attacked by Tom Wolfe in another visual field, that of midtwentieth-century painting.

A similar situation obtains in Coppola's *The Conversation*. The opening sequence of this film is prefigurative of the entire film, a little *mise-en-abyme* of its content. We see a plaza in the centre of a busy city : the shot is taken from a great distance and the soundtrack is very faint, these two factors establishing the enormity of this space. The camera approaches very slowly, and the sound becomes more audible ; and, as this happens, the *mise-en-scène* gradually privileges one figure in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen. This is a street clown, whose major act is mimesis : he imitates passers-by, parodying their movements. When he is not doing this, when he is 'between the acts', he imitates Charlie Chaplin. It is this clown figure who guides us into the film, for eventually he imitates the character of Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), and as Caul walks away, the camera follows them both and then stays with Caul, and we are introduced into the film proper. Our initiation into this film is marked by three things : a contraction of space which corresponds to an increase in noise ; a silent movie star ; the question of representation itself.

The film is about surveillance, or hearing. Caul, a surveillance expert, has been given the task of recording a conversation between a man and a woman who walk all around this extremely noisy scene. The film

charts the erasure of interference and the construction of a sound-track. When Caul reconstructs the conversation, however, he begins to imagine a rather cinematic Hitchcockian narrative film to go with it. He becomes convinced that his tape will implicate him in the murder of the woman whose voice he has strained to hear ; and, in an effort to avoid this, he does two things. He cannot live with the 'negative capability' involved in the making of his interiorised film ; so he tries to eavesdrop on the actual murder itself to verify his imaginary cinematic representation. As he does this, near the end of the film, his own social space has contracted drastically. In a hotel room adjoining the room where he fears the murder is taking place, he crouches with his microscopic equipment in a foetal position in a tiny cramped space behind a toilet seat. But prior to this obvious contraction of space, the film has offered once more precisely the image which flattens ontology into epistemology.

Caul is Roman Catholic. Fearing his implication in murder, he goes to confession. The confessional is extremely dark, of course, and the cinematic image is extremely impoverished ; but as the light comes up (as our eyes grow accustomed to the dark), the screen becomes filled with one image : the image of the ear of the priest on the other side of the confessional screen. As we become aware of this, however, the image of the profile of Caul disappears ; and the priest's profiled ear occupies the whole of the visible frame. What could have been the 'other side' of the cinematic screen, and what could have implied narrative space, figural depth, therefore, once more collapses into flatness. We see an ear ; we hear a voice. This is the substance of the film, in which – as in Wenders – there is a curious evasion of the figural precisely whenever it begins to intrude as a narrative possibility.

Jean-Jacques Benoit's *Diva* is a typical B-movie detective story ; but with the simple difference that what is being chased all over the streets of Paris is nothing other than a disembodied voice, the voice of the Diva which has been surreptitiously captured on tape at the start of the film, and which is eventually returned to the body of the Diva at the end. The film, thus, is simply the story of the dangerous travels of a voice between mouth and ear : it illustrates the complexity of Derridean *s'entendre-parler* ; for the crucial thing is that the Diva whose voice has never been recorded before has never heard herself sing. The narrative space of this

film is one which lays bare the epistemological drive in cinematic narrative ; it is the otolaryngological space between throat and ear, hardly a space at all. But Benix's task, of course, has been to take precisely this 'inner space' and to externalise it : the voice of the Diva, before getting to her ear, has to travel all over Paris, over all of that external space. It is here in the discrepancy between two spatial fields (the inner head of the Diva ; the city of Paris) and in the discrepancy between the discourse and its figure (between the vocal enunciation at the level of soundtrack and the travels all over Paris on the image) that *Diva* marks a break with that certain modern tendency in cinema. Here, in this postmodern film, the discourse does not make sense of the image, does not epistemologically flatten it ; on the contrary, the image deepens the soundtrack : who would have thought that a voice could occupy so much space in the brief journey from mouth to ear ? Who could have thought that the inner space of the auditorium could be so expanded and expansive ; who would have thought it possible for all of Paris to be contained within – and more importantly produced from – a cassette recorder ?

III. Postmodernism, the image and history

In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, it became fashionable to speak 'against epistemology', as Adorno had put it ; but Adorno's arguments appeared in a much weaker form in Susan Sontag's arguments for an 'erotics' of art over a hermeneutics, and in the so-called 'philosophy of desire' which enjoyed brief if influential esteem. What these positions had in common, and what Adorno more rigorously pursued, was a desire to re-think the relation between aesthetics and politics. After 1968, this was put in terms of the 'materiality of consciousness' : a form of experience in which consciousness would not be alienated intrinsically from the object of its understanding. the phenomenological rift between Subject of consciousness and material history would be healed, it was hoped. In short, these philosophers wanted their bodies to do their thinking ; uncannily repeating T.S. Eliot, they advocated a healing of the dissociated sensibility ; they wanted their thought to be as immediate and as ontologically full as the smell of a rose.

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It should be stressed that my own argument differs markedly from this, although it shares a desire to counter the incipient Idealism which contaminates modernist thinking on narrative and representation. To return the figural to cinema ; to return ontological space to narrative, does not imply a glamorisation of a libidinal economy (Lyotard) nor an engagement with schizanalysis (Deleuze). It implies simply an acknowledgement of the space of narrative.

What the, finally, is this "space of narrative" ? The *Bildungsroman* offers one example of such space ; it is the space of a consensual *polis* : the city-state to whose norms the hero of the *Bildungsroman* must learn to conform. But this space is, as I indicated earlier, simply an abstract space, the *idea* of a social sphere and not the reality. It is the Paris of *Paris, Texas*, a linguistic and therefore abstract *joke*, and not the voluminous and labyrinthine depths and turns of Paris in *Diva* in all its spatial enormity. It is a map, not a space ; or, in short, an image or idea of the city : an ideology.

Ideology, we may say, occurs whenever history is collapsed into image or form, whenever representation is understood as a spatial category stripped of its temporal aspect. There is a temporality of representation – a temporality or historicity of space – which most modern narrative circumvents. Most criticism of narrative, further, is constrained in the same flat space : it tries to elaborate the formal shape of a text, which it then describes as its ideological formation, ignoring that the critic herself or himself is precisely responsible for the production of this ideology in the first place. Such "cognitive mapping" – the cinematisation of historical space – reduces the ontological field of vision to a discursive sign, by way of a flat screen upon which is projected an image of the self. The self recognises not the world represented by a text, but rather merely recognises and confirms the Subject's own position in that world ; it recognises its own conformity with a consensus, and it recognises others as sharing the same point of view, a point of view which has become a normative, ideological space. At this moment, then, narrative collapses back into the position of de Man's "linguistic self", a self divorced from material history, from ontological space.

The ideological map, thus, might be accorded the status of the modernist epiphany, a moment in a text when the text seems to arrest

the flow of time and to reduce its complexity to an instant of perception, almost as in Pound's definition of the Image : as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". An "instant of time" is, of course, not time at all, but rather only two-dimensional space.

Such an image is only the excuse for the production of a real narrative space. W.J.T. Mitchell considers the Northwest Indian petroglyph of an Eagle, and he sees it as a kind of condensed narrative, a narrative which will be released by the construction of a narrative around it, but a narrative composed by those who know it is correct and permissible to say about "Eagle" :

The meaning of the picture does not declare itself by a simple and direct reference to the object it depicts. It may depict an idea, a person, a "sound image"... or a thing. In order to know how to read it, we must know how it speaks, what is proper to say about it and on its behalf... The "verbal image" of Eagle is a complex of speech, depiction, and writing that not only describes what he does, but predicts and shapes what he can and will do. It is his "character", a signature that is both verbal and pictorial, both a narrative of his actions and a summation of what he is¹¹.

If the engagement with a text such as "Eagle" is not to fall back into the evasions of space which characterise modernist narrative, then we need a figural rather than merely discursive mode of understanding the sign itself.

Nelson Goodman makes a fine distinction between the way we engage with an image and the way we engage with a text. He invites us to compare a graduated with an ungraduated thermometer. In a graduated thermometer, every position of the mercury is given a distinct reading : the spaces between the graduations don't count, and the system of reading the thermometer is one based upon "difference". In an ungraduated thermometer, however, there is no simple system of differences to guide us, and every possible position of the mercury comes to signify. This

11 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 28.

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latter reading is characterised not by difference but by what Goodman calls "density". Images are dense ; texts are differentiated¹².

Written texts, of course, are characterised by difference ; most basically alongside alphabetic difference, there is the visual difference between print and the space of white between the letters. If we restrict ourselves to this space of narrative, however – that is, if we ascribe no meaning to the "blank space" – we fall into a modernist epistemology which ignores history and is contaminated by ideology. If we are to save the space of narrative, we must restore density to the text itself in a specific sense : history – in the form of the ungraduated space – must be restored to the image.

Kant famously argued that while space was an *a priori* condition of our perception of external objects, time was the *a priori* condition of all perception whatsoever. What modernism has taken this to mean, quite simply, is that since time – which in Kant is associated with internal representation – is in a sense primary, the external figural space of the image can be flattened into the idealist category of what de Man called the "linguistic self", a self into whose inner recesses a material history is collapsed and idealised. The postmodern, however, is not so presumptuous as to encapsulate thus prematurely the category of space within that of time in this way. Rather, the postmodern acknowledges that there is a temporality to space as such. The external world as object of our perception is traversed by temporality, historicity, speed. And, as Virilio indicates, we do not all live the world at the same speed, in the same historical moment, at the same rhythm. The image of the world, its representation, is itself dominated by time ; and it is only when we acknowledge the internal historicity of the image itself that we will be able to return a full figural ontological – or simple historical – space to narrative.

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12 See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1976).