

Dear Miriam,

In being tasked to pen some thoughts on your filmic triptych, from my particular position on the “inside” of the films, my thoughts have been focused on what’s fixed in plain view; namely, against the framed sites, the desert, the postal office, and the jungle road, is always a singular action that unfolds, per the circular spin of the Xerox-musical chairs, the to-and-fro of the postal walk, and the forward drive of the motorcycle, which then allows a particular form of thought to solve from the process. Without delving too deeply into *what* those thoughts are, per whatever meaning is embedded in each framed action, my efforts have concentrated on a question on cinematic limits, certain paradoxes of place-making, and convolutions of perspective. To be clear, these notes unfold from the strangeness of my place from *within*, and from *without*, the films. That I have yet to see the final product permits a certain drift—in and out of your frames, as it were. Since Gaston Bachelard always lingers on my mind, per his masterful *Poetics of Space*, perhaps I can situate my thought process in the simple observation that these physical spaces, in your films, open viewers to imagined distances. Place matters, but perhaps mainly as backdrop to our ontological diversions.

What is it he writes? “In French, one should think twice before speaking of *l’être-là*. Entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a cheap chaplet of sojourning, a refrain with endless verses.”

Just think to all the hours we’d spent lingering outside of the postal office, while waiting for the sun to shift, for shadows to find their rightful place behind the building, or for people to pass, while pausing to ask questions—all the time spent waiting, in short, for the right conditions to present themselves on site, in order for you to find your proper shot. To make this work, in the end, it seemed “preferable to follow the deviations of the various experiences of being,” per Bachelard. That is: of being *there*, which is a concept that clearly benefits from being read in relation to the mobility of language. “Sight says too many things at once,” Bachelard writes: “Being does not see itself.”

That sight speaks, albeit too profusely, seems important to your work. Each of your framed actions motion an imagined language, which moves us to think about destinations, and end-goals. Still, the films’ chosen locations, in their specific lack of specificity, work against the very possibility of an arrival. Situation, location, and faciality are presented as “sites,” equal in their expression, and so equally prone to influence, elision, errancy. Whatever sense of placement exists inside the frame can only ever slip with the profusion of possibility to a place outside of its own bounds.

Everything risks getting lost in the semantic run.

Bresson writes in his *Notes on Cinematography*, “The power your (flattened) images have of being other than they are. The same image brought in by ten different routes will be a different image ten times.” The term “route” feels significant to your films. Most obviously, perhaps, as they read as travelogues of sorts, charting action’s disorientation of sense, the senses, sensibility, as a potentially site-specific effect (and this, per the brain-machine’s special f/x, &c., but more anon.) Route, though, also tracks with how notions, like, the circuit, the line, the course come to shape the imaginary relations we hold with the world. In each sequence, a designated action draws a kind of cartography in space, but one that plays on what’s contained within the word “route”; namely, as hailing from the Latin *rupta*: ‘broken way.’ The condition of film-making is then about choosing routes—as a process of breaking open pathways in the fixity of place, or frame. It isn’t intellectual, Bresson admonishes: “Simply a mechanism.” The point is to forget you are making a film. (This is good advice for writers, as well; we’re often too self-aware to forget about the form, and too caught up in the cerebral mechanism, to notice that text, too, is most simply a motion. It flows, as it were.) On the actor, Bresson adds: “The “to-and-fro of the character in front of his nature” forces the public to look for talent on his face, instead of the enigma peculiar to each living creature.”

Bresson may say that the mechanism isn’t cerebral—as a *process*; still, in this “to-and-fro” of characters, some kind of discourse is intimated as presenting itself. “Discourse,” namely, comes from the Latin *discursus*: “running to and fro.” In this, I keep thinking about the strangeness of Bresson’s statement—what it means to be in constant movement as a character in front of one’s nature. Nothing to do with talent, but the influence of motion on the subject, or on the subject of persona, in relation to place, frame, milieu. (It occurs to me that perhaps “talent” is the ability to surrender to being moved, quite simply.) Of course, Bresson means to elide physical nature into its other meaning, as the essence, unseen: the acting backdrop to our existence. Like, per Wittgenstein: “Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which what I could express has its meaning.” Discourse, in this line of

thought, then emerges as the vital movement of a comprehensive action, our running to-and-fro our own nature, shifting with the specificity a chosen frame.

To conflate Bresson and Wittgenstein is maybe a stretch—or, maybe *not*: After all, cinematography, understood as a writing with motion, is a process of capturing not only physical motions but those “in-apprehensible by pencil, brush or pen ... certain states of soul recognizable by indices which [the camera] alone can reveal.” Indulge the digression upon digression: it seems important to note that both Wittgenstein and Bresson were concerned with forms of language, and their limitations, and with looking, with sights, and place-making. View and limits go hand in hand in the *Tractatus*, clearly; Wittgenstein even calls his treatise a “picture theory.” It was about understanding the ability to capture language’s limits in sights, and in the particular perspectives, or routes, that draw us towards them. Cinematography, I guess, is a concentrated effort to do the same. Bresson often fills his frames with obstructions, articulating something of our inaccessibility into what the image means to convey.

I hear Wittgenstein went to the movies a lot. He wrote one book from the view from *within*, and another, thinking about the view from *without*.

Volte-Face.

In a short introduction prefacing a collection of Maurice Blanchot’s writings after his so-called “Turning-Point,” Michael Holland notes on how all of the author’s criticism, up until the early 1950s, had “amount to a *stricture* upon the unacknowledged limits of what a given writer had said, a designation and a denunciation of those limits for the closure they impose, through language, upon an experience that takes place entirely in language.” This came to mind for a couple reasons, but first, in writing this text from the strange perspective of literally being “in” the work, as opposed to writing “into” the work, it occurred to me that I have somehow crossed those ‘unacknowledged limits,’ and whatever they threaten to foreclose of the ‘experience’ of a work. That is, the limits of language are always being hit in the attempt to inscribe the experience an artwork is meant to designate. As a writer, one is always on the outside of a work, searching for openings, attractive entry points, or something in the essence, or experience, that’ll grant access into the work’s core ideas, or inner logic, knowing, all the same, that there’s only so much that can be expressed in plain English. As Wittgenstein would have it, “the limits of my language are the limits of my world.”

It seems worth mentioning that, Blanchot, while working on *The Space of Literature*, in seeking an exit from this impasse of critical language, would eventually stumble across an enticing opening in what Hölderlein had called a ‘categoric reversal;’ namely, in the overturning of one language to another, he opened his writing to the possibility of *being* “an instance of the literary space it refers to.” My current situation is not dissimilar, at least in theory, as I have found myself overturned into your work—as a character. Here, in my speculative place outside of language, inside your world-build, which is to say, inside the experience of your films, or as a part of the experience, it seems I have hacked the limit issue—quite simply, in having been tasked to literally walk into the work. And, as it were, out of it. The question has become, what would it mean for this text to “be” an instance of this experience it seeks to refer to?

“Images and sounds are fortified by being transplanted,” writes Bresson. Some relationship to the “real” reveals itself as an instance of mimesis. What moves is the self: re-situated in the spiral of relations. (I keep thinking about this as a call to action, with due admonition.) Everything as image is set in motion, like, circling around each other in confused formation, then stopping to sit on the Xerox machines as if pausing to contemplate reproduction in action; carrying letters to, and fro, the post office, with the main event de-centered by the background action of drifting clouds, for all the elusive indifference of their romantic momentum. Or, then, the the epistemological uncertainty of the motorcycle ride, the fixed view of swerves and forward motion, which, as you wrote, seems to be ‘persecuting the viewer,’ per the chase. The astonishing draw of these sequences lay in their capacity to hold us in the allusive motion—as a negligent semantic track. That is, I have started to think that its about visual disorientation as emotionally impactful. “We are never sure of being closer to ourselves if we “withdraw” into ourselves,” Bachelard also writes: “if we move toward the center of the spiral; for often it is in the heart of being that being is errancy.”

Distances come to relay narrative. From the inside, the narrative logic of your films resembles the paratactic morphing of fairy tales, in which narrative only ever unfolds in the partial or complete absence of the conjunctive clause. Like fairy tales, which in this sense, “do not speak” in linear fashion, but generate narrative in sequential language—in passing elements, places. Events simply follow, one after the other. In the magic of isolation, elements in these tales, as in your films, things are permitted to simply metamorphose. In this absurdism, a certain logic: as things, people, and places strung together come to form “internal relations,” as noted by Wittgenstein in a side note to the 1918 draft of the *Tractatus*: “Like the two youths in the fairy tale, their two horses, and their lilies. They are all in a certain sense one.” Noticeable in Wittgenstein’s bracket is an early intuition about what happens when, as he later writes, language “goes on holiday.” That is, even in the absence of causal logic, even within a sequence of disjointed elements, words, like

people and places in your frames, still exert influence on one another. As such, semantic displacements, and elisions of place, in their very lack of causal logic, intimate some kind of meaning in the errancy of motion. On location, time slips into scenario. This idea of place overturns to inform personae. The self is doubled in action. One slips out of a frame, into another. Endless drifting stands substitute for narrative. That is, in all these gestures, seen as a series of turns and counter-turns, toppling figures and places, an allegorical landscape is intimated in the continuous transformations. To be clear, movement feeds your system.

Michael Sorkin writes in his seminal essay, *See You in Disneyland*: “Getting there, then, is not half the fun: it’s all the fun. At Disneyland one is constantly poised in a condition of becoming, always someplace that is “like” someplace else. The simulation’s referent is ever elsewhere; the “authenticity” of the substitution always depends on the knowledge, however faded, of some absent genuine.”

Sorkin goes on: “The empire of Disney transcends these physical sites.” He’s suggesting that what makes possible the conversion is a paradox in the literal placemaking. Like Sorkin, your films situate us in the definite experience of going “there:” (somewhere, which is nowhere, or perhaps anywhere): yet in placing an emphasis on the continuous stream of arrivals, becomings, and substitutions, you intimate the film’s true place as elsewhere—what Blanchot would have called, the ‘here coinciding with nowhere.’ In this strange place, which is clearly somewhere, but also could be nowhere, we are tasked to consider everything in the frame that is “elsewhere”—as per Disneyland. *The substitution depends on the knowledge of an absent genuine.* That is, your framed actions transcend their sites, thus permitting the drift from one location to another, as places perhaps equal in the imagination. I keep thinking, rather unclearly, that this draws into perspective the notion of “everything,” as a term courting world-building. Everything, as in: “the appearance of what has disappeared—the imagined, the incessant, the interminable,” per Blanchot.

To peer into the void of everything that appears and disappears inside your framed sequences—faces and letters, time and place—is admittedly somewhat of a trap. From my view from within, Still, insofar as the word “everything” signifies nothing but itself, as a self-reflexive limit implicating whatever is drawn into its proposed totality, it emerges as a useful frame for the filmed actions. As a word courting a totality of elements, “everything” can notably only ever recede into its respective sign: “to draw one toward it (as though it were possible to reach it.)” In other words, you can never grasp the whole; something always withdraws into it.

In the fixed frame, there is always something obstructed. Partial views. Walking into, past, beyond the frame. I am fascinated by what we are not permitted to see. Still, the gap isn’t what makes the image work, but what it permits us to gleam in passing. This dislocation feels crucial, here, too; namely, as everything in the films somehow turns into something else—as copy, or double—in a sense, intimated is the expansion of some invisible limits.

Of course, a relationship is also intimated to the cartoon, the animated line. It always occurs to me to draw in Aquinas, who said something along the lines of, God is what does not move behind the animated object. But, perhaps that’s a line of thought best saved for later.

Finally, thinking back to the route, to being *there*: it seems the self is also broken open in the frame. It makes one think about the boundaries of self against other, and the limits that spin us into being. Perhaps it is impossible to keep track of the self, of proper place, singular meaning. In this stretching out, language and persona slip through limits, like, the borders of social actions and scenes: as game, ritual, play. Ordinary actions are turned into strange ones in substitution. In sequence, it looks like a normal life. But slow it down, and watch it frame by frame, and the action unravels in total errancy.

Endless avenues to traipse in this business; this is just one route.

Yours,
Sabrina