I

Bresson’s fundamental discovery, foreshadowed in *Pickpocket* and asserted in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, was of a cinematic articulation irreducible to any other, which we shall call suture.

Suture represents the closure of the cinematic *énoncé* in line with its relationship with its subject (the filmic subject or rather the cinematic subject), which is recognised, and then put in its place as the spectator – thus distinguishing the suture from all other types of cinema, particularly the so-called ‘subjective’ cinema, where the suture did exist, but undefined theoretically. At first film-makers had only experimented quite intuitively with the effects of the profound necessity of suture, but not with its causes which remained hidden given the subjective conception they had of the image and their confusion of the filmic subject with the filmed subject. Having determined the filmic subject, Bresson, no less radically than Godard, has put the filmed subject back in its place as signifying object. However – and this distinguishes his work from the whole of modern cinema – Bresson gives more than he took away; he puts the filmed subject within a structure and in a symbolic place which are those of cinema per se, no longer as a fictive subject located in an illusory existential relationship with its surroundings, but as the actor in a representation whose symbolic dimension is revealed in the process of reading and viewing.

Suture is best understood through a consideration of what is at stake in the process of ‘reading’ film. The properties of the image manifested there and revealed in particular by the ‘subjective’ cinema are currently being not so much challenged as repressed (with the result that they are then often ‘re-revealed’ in the research of young film-makers such as Pollet). These characteristics mean that the cinema itself engenders the cinematic, that the image of its own accord enters the order of the signer, and that by and in this process of reading are determined the properties, the conditions and the limits of its signifying power. Such a recognition should entail once more questioning the theoretical problems of the cinematic and of signification in the cinema. To understand this demands reading the image to its detriment, a reading with which the contemporary cinema has sometimes made us lose our familiarity, since its use of images without depth hides what the depth-of-field cinema revealed all the time: that every filmic field
traced by the camera and all objects revealed through depth of field – even in a static shot – are echoed by another field, the fourth side, and an absence emanating from it.

Quite simply then and prior almost to any semantic consideration, we are given access to the logic of the cinematic by means of this second reading which reveals the functioning of its images. Every filmic field is echoed by an absent field, the place of a character who is put there by the viewer's imaginary, and which we shall call the Absent One. At a certain moment of the reading all the objects of the filmic field combine together to form the signifier of its absence. At this key-moment the image enters the order of the signifier, and the undefined strip of film the realm of the discontinuous, the 'discrete'. It is essential to understand this, since up to now film-makers believed that, by resorting to cinematic units as discrete as possible, they would find their way back to the rules of linguistic discourse, whereas it is cinema itself, when designating itself as cinematography,* which tends to constitute its own énoncé in 'discrete' units.

In a second phase, the signifier of absence, like a frozen letter, is given as a signifying Sum, the whole of the image tending to form an autonomous unit of absolute signification: a fundamentally poor signification, like that of a discourse which is spelt out, more like a signifying diagram than actual speech. At this stage of the reading the signifier, abstracted from the filmic field, is not yet anchored to it. It has become a floating signifying Sum, certain of whose images (those whose symbolic character gives them a real semantic autonomy, as for instance in Lang) demonstrate the tendency to abstract themselves from the chain of the énoncé, or rather not to be integrated within it.

It is therefore easy to see the difficulties of a cinematic discourse which, like that of most film-makers, is a simple articulation of successive shots. For, if two consecutive images do not tend towards articulation together, but instead function initially as autonomous cells (although, being victims of linguistic habits, we believe the opposite to be true), then their articulation can only be produced by an extra-cinematic element (ie a linguistic énoncé) or by the presence of common signifying elements in each image. In both cases, the formation of the syntagm demands a redundancy of the signified (which must not be confused with the duplication of the signifier without which, as we shall see later, the reading of film would be impossible); this inevitably entails a substantial loss of 'information' and a real fissure between the elements forming the chain of the discourse and those unarticulated, excessive elements which end up forming a magma which paralyses the film by its inertia. In La Chinoise Godard poetically exasperates this fissure between what might be called the 'thing' of the image

* See introductory note above
and its fragile and precious signs, between its reified discourse and the background of opaqueness against which it stands out and to which colour gives a quasi-pictorial density.

The opposite of such a form of the cinematic is that which we encounter in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, where the most important principle, made familiar by the 'subjective' cinema, is that the images are not first mutually articulated, but that the filmic field is articulated by the absent field, that is the imaginary field of the film. This then raises the problem of the suture, which (to avoid the ambiguity present in Bresson's subsequent work) will be defined as follows: prior to any semantic 'exchange' between two images (Bresson asserts that images must only have an 'exchange' value), and within the framework of a cinematic *enoncé* constructed on a shot/reverse-shot principle, the appearance of a lack perceived as a Some One (the Absent One) is followed by its abolition by someone (or something) placed within the same field – everything happening within the same shot or rather within the filmic space defined by the same take. This is the fundamental fact from which effects derive. As a result the field of Absence becomes the field of the Imaginary of the filmic space, formed by the two fields, the absent one and the present one; the signifier is echoed in that field and retroactively anchors itself in the filmic field; the 'exchange' Bresson talks of takes place between these two fields, at which point the *signified* truly appears. Therefore the suture (the abolition of the Absent One and its resurrection in someone) has a dual effect. On the one hand it is essentially retroactive on the level of the signified, since it presides over a semantic exchange between a present field and an imaginary field, representing the field now occupied by the former – within the more or less rigid framework of the shot/reverse-shot. On the other hand, it is anticipatory on the level of the signifier; for, just as the present filmic segment was constituted as a signifying unit by the Absent One, that something or someone, replacing it, anticipates on the necessarily 'discrete' nature of the unit whose appearance it announces.

In fact the fundamental cinematic figures of *The Trial of Joan of Arc* should not be called shot/reverse-shot because they no longer have anything in common with those of the 'subjective' cinema, which realised very quickly that it could only use them obliquely, lest they denounce its fiction. In fact one of the only true shot/reverse-shot series in the history of the cinema is the aberrant series in *Kriemhild's Revenge*, where the protagonists seem unreal because of Lang's categorical refusal to allow the camera to move from the position of their viewpoint. In *The Trial of Joan of Arc* the camera's obliqueness, at last openly admitted and established as a system (if only Bresson's curious idea of the unique point of view from which an object demands to be filmed, were simply about the need to search for the right angle, the right margin of obliqueness for the camera) reveals by and for whom
the operation of suture works: the filmic subject, the spectator, from a place which, although remaining empty when he vanishes into the filmic field, must nevertheless be kept for him throughout the film; otherwise the spectator may fail to fulfil the role of imaginary subject of the cinematic discourse, a role which is only possible from a locus displaced in relation to the field of the Imaginary and the place of the Absent One, since the spectator is not the Absent One.

The spectator is doubly decentred in the cinema. First what is enunciated, initially, is not the viewer's own discourse, nor anyone else's: it is thus that he comes to posit the signifying object as the signifier of the absence of anyone. Secondly the unreal space of the enunciation leads to the necessary quasi-disappearance of the subject as it enters its own field and thus submerges, in a sort of hypnotic continuum in which all possibility of discourse is abolished, the relation of alternating eclipse which the subject has to its own discourse; and this relation then demands to be represented within the process of reading the film, which it duplicates.

Nothing can be said about the relationship between the subject and the filmic field itself, since nothing is said in its process, although this syncopated jouissance — nullifying any reading and cut off from what is excluded from the field by perception of the frame — can only be referred to in erotic terms (or at least has constantly inspired the cinema's own erotic commentary on itself). Let us say that it is the phenomenal support which, given the materials at hand (ie, the cinema itself), helps the spectator organise the space and the progression of the representation of his relationship as subject with the chain of his discourse.

The complex process of reading a film, which has always seemed to be a delayed and duplicated reading, is, primarily, only the process of the representation operating between the two fields which form the elementary cell of the Place of Cinema. This explains the use of theatrical metaphors about the cinema as well as the profound relationship linking the cinema to the theatre: the place of a metaphorical representation, at once spatial and dramatic, of the relations of the subject to the signifier. Thus what we are here calling the suture is primarily the representation of that which, under the same heading, is now used to designate 'the relationship of the subject to the chain of its discourse': a representation sliding under the signifying Sum and burdened with a lack — the lack of someone — and with an Absent One which abolishes itself so that someone representing the next link in the chain (and anticipating the next filmic segment) can come forth. Given that the key to the process of any cinematic reading is provided by

* This phrase and all subsequent phrases given in quotation marks are quotations or paraphrases from J-A Miller's paper, given in translation on pp 24-34 above. [Translator]
the subject, which, however, does not know that its own function is at work and is being represented in the reading, then Bresson is probably the first film-maker, not so much to have put into practice, as to have posited the principle of the cinematic which prevents this function from operating out of time or in the void. *The Trial of Joan of Arc* is the first film to subject its syntax to the cinema's necessary representation of the subject's relation to its discourse.

However, it is unfortunate that Bresson has neglected his discovery, and hidden it from his own eyes, by his almost obsessive recourse, in *Au hasard, Balthazar*, to his favourite tricks like 'showing the effect before the cause'. Such tricks are nearly always impoverishing except when used with deliberate terrorist intentions, as they are by Lang. (Indeed it is no accident that all great creators of the cinema have had some recourse to tricks of this kind. By systematically resorting to retroactive effects of signification, they were, unwittingly, experimenting with the play of the signifier.) Unfortunately this shows that Bresson increasingly sees the 'exchange' as operating between two images (hence the irritating abandon in *Au hasard, Balthazar* of all depth of field) whereas, as we have seen, that exchange, as the effect of the suture, takes place first and foremost between the filmic field and its echo, the imaginary field. More seriously, the signified in *Au hasard, Balthazar* – which appears only at the end of the representation – bears the cost, as it were, of a representation which cannot be resolved because suturing is impossible, the imaginary field always remaining one of absence, so that only the (dead) letter and the syntax of the meaning are perceived.

The ideal chain of a sutured discourse would be one which is articulated into figures which it is no longer appropriate to call shot/reverse-shot, but which mark the need – so that the chain can function – for an articulation of the space such that the same portion of space be represented at least twice, in the filmic field and in the imaginary field – with all the variations of angle that the obliqueness of the camera with regard to the place of the subject allows. This ideal chain consists, as it progresses, of a duplicating representation, which demands that each of the elements composing its space and presenting its actors be separated and duplicated, and twice read or evoked in a to-and-fro movement which would need describing more precisely. This is itself punctuated by the perception of the framing which plays an essential role, since any evocation of the imaginary field relies upon it: that is the filmic field and the fourth side; the field of Absence and the field of the Imaginary; the signifier of Absence and the signifying Sum; the Absent One and the character who replaces it.

That the signified can truly appear only at the conclusion of that act – hence not produced by the Sum alone (paralysed so
long as it is the signifier of the Absence that makes it an entity) but of the relation between the elements of the two fields made possible by its disappearance – demonstrates the symbolic signification of this representation. For just as the 'signified to the subject' seems like 'an effect of signification governed by the repetition of the signifier', itself correlative with the disappearance of the subject and its passing as a lack, so the signified, in the cinema, only appears at the end of a play of eclipses, at the end of an oscillation of the signifier, alternately representing the Absence and the artificial signifying Sum, whose subversive effect on the spectator (which Lang mastered so well), correlative with the momentary disappearance of the Absent One, is then annulled when the Absent One is replaced by someone.

Moreover it is easier to understand the role played by the Absent One in this process, since the structure of the subject is articulated in a 'flickering in eclipses, like the movement which opens and closes the number, which delivers up the lack in the form of the 1 in order to abolish it in the successor' – a comparison between the subject and zero, alternately a lack and a number, 'taking the suturing place of the Absence (of the absolute zero) which moves below the chain (of numbers) in an alternating movement of representation and exclusion'. It designates globally the objects of the image as a signifier – thus requiring that the filmic continuum be divided into units as discrete as possible. But it also designates itself as a lack – that is, to return to Jacques-Alain Miller's definition of the subject, as 'the possibility of one signifier more' announcing the next link in the chain, and anticipating the cutting up of the énoncé to follow – and finally vanishes when that link appears. Thus the Absent One, that frozen production of the spectator's imaginary, is the direct demand of the signifier to be represented in an énoncé subjected to its order, and its eclipse ensures the suturing function of the subject of the discourse.

We have here only given a rough sketch of the functioning of an ideal type of cinematic énoncé whose total originality lies in it being spoken from a Place which is also that of a representation of the relations of the subject-spectator to the chain of his discourse, carried out with the very elements of that énoncé, thus illuminating the fundamental ambiguity of the cinematic. This ambiguity stems from the capacity to produce this necessary representation, only possible with its own elements and governing their 'reading'; without it, ultimately, no reading is possible, and it becomes a duplicated speech, in which something is said to punctuate, articulate, and even eclipse what is said in the meantime, and in its process subjects it to its cinematic Place.

Having cast light on the truly scenic play of the cinematic signifier it now remains to examine at greater length its effects of signification.
In *The General* there is a scene, or rather a fragment of a scene inscribed within a single shot, which reveals the characteristics of the image as in slow motion; this is when the two armies meet on the banks of the river near the burnt bridge. A group of soldiers crosses the river, framed by the camera in high-angle long shot (but in fact, at this stage, the spectator does not yet perceive either the framing, or the distance, or the camera's position; the image is still for the spectator only a moving and animated photograph). Suddenly the enemy soldiers rise in the frame at the bottom of the image, inordinately larger than the others. The spectator takes a moment to realise, like the Poe character who sees a butterfly as large as a ship, that the soldiers have occupied a rise above the river, which was hidden by the position of the camera. Then the spectator experiences with vertiginous delight the unreal space separating the two groups; he himself is fluid, elastic, and expanding: he is at the cinema. A moment later, he retreats; he has discovered the framing. Suddenly, he senses the space he cannot see, hidden by the camera, and wonders, in retrospect, why such a framing was used. That question, although unanswered, will radically transform the spectator's mode of participation: this unreal space which a moment ago was the field of his *jouissance* has become the distance separating the camera from the protagonists who are no longer present, who no longer have the innocent 'being-there-ness' of a moment ago, but instead have a 'being-there-for-ness'. Why? In order to represent an Absent One, and to signify the absence of the character which the spectator's imagination puts in place of the camera. At the same time, or rather in the meantime, the filmic field, dilated by the spectator's reverie, has been tightened up. Its objects (the two armies, the slope, and the river) now form a signifying Sum, closed upon itself like the indivisible signification of a kind of absolute event. Yet the haunting presence of the other field and of the Absent One remains.

1. This metamorphosis of the image will now be described more systematically. In the previous example mention was made of a stage, which can be ignored from now on, in which the image was not perceived as a filmic field, but more like an animated photograph. This stage, prior to cinema, reveals nothing of its nature, but does demonstrate how, ultimately, it is only the filmic space, only the depth of its field, that are echoed by the other field, the side of the camera. It is within the trajectory of this reciprocal echo that the transition from the cinema to the cinematic, and vice-versa, takes place. In a hypothetical and purely mythical period, when the cinema alone reigned, enjoyed by the spectator in a dyadic relationship, space was still a pure expanse of *jouissance*, and the spectator was offered objects literally without anything
coming between them as a screen and thus prohibiting the capture of the objects. Suddenly however, prohibition is there in the guise of the screen; its presence first puts an end to the spectator’s fascination, to his capture by the unreal. Its perception represents the threshold at which the image is abolished and denounced as unreal, before then being reborn, metamorphosed by the perception of its boundaries. (It is of course a simplification to say that the spectator perceives an image, framed and delimited, since he does not perceive simultaneously the framing, the space, and the filmed object. Perception of the framing always eclipses vision of the object at the same time as it puts an end to the spectator’s jouissance in the space.)

Instead, a vacillating image re-appears, its elements (framing, space, and object) mutually eclipsing one another in a chaos out of which rise the fourth side and the phantom which the spectator’s imagination casts in its place: the Absent One. The revelation of this absence is the key moment in the fate of the image, since it introduces the image into the order of the signifier, and the cinema into the order of discourse. In this metamorphosis, the filmic field, an expanse of jouissance, becomes the space separating the camera from the filmed objects – a space echoed by the imaginary space of the fourth side – and, similarly, the objects of the image become the representation of the Absent One, the signifier of its absence. What then remains of the undefined body of the image is literally only a signifier of insignificance. Yet out of this reduction the image is reborn as a signifying Sum, the uniting of its semantic traits which are in a way summoned to signify something together, a signifying Sum always echoed by a lack (absence) which threatens to annul it by reducing it to being nothing but its signifier.

2. From these stages – which we have described only sketchily, without giving more than an approximate account of the logic of their process – can be deduced the tragic and unstable nature of the image, a totality synchronically elusive, made of structurally opposite and mutually eclipsing elements. The cinema is characterised by an antinomy of reading and jouissance, because the space in fact always abolishes the object, and the depth of field makes the bodies inscribed within it vanish (in Preminger and Mizoguchi); but this is only possible with an eclipse of signifiance* (and vice-versa) which enables the spectator, in his daydreaming, to capture

* ‘Signifiance’ is a term used by Barthes and Kristeva to describe the work or process of the signifier as production for the subject – as opposed to ‘signification’, which is concerned with the place of signifieds as product within a system. For a fuller definition see the introduction to R Barthes. Image-Music-Text, London, Fontana 1977, and J Kristeva, ‘Signifying Practice and Mode of Production’, Edinburgh ’76 Magazine. [Translator]
the expressive traits of the image, the unexpected movement of a body or of the camera, and the sudden dilation of space. . . . Through the oscillation of the filmic space, alternately field and sign, the image enters the order of the signifier, but only at the cost of its own reduction. The object is also in oscillation, being in fact the most volatile element of the image: it is always under threat of dissolution in the space, a shadow of itself at the moment at which the image is literally being reduced, and hidden behind its signification during the image's rebirth as signifying Sum. The oscillation of the signifier itself, alternately sign and letter frozen in its literalness only to evoke the absence of anyone, makes the cinema a unique form of speech, one which speaks itself, and sometimes speaks only of itself, whose fate rests with the Absent One; for the Absent One, whose nature is to vanish upon being named, disappears when someone, or indeed something, is introduced into its field.

This introduction alone fills the gap, erases the absence of the empty field, and sutures the cinematic discourse by enveloping it in a new dimension, the Imaginary: the fourth side, a pure field of absence, becomes the imaginary field of the film and the field of its imaginary. The cinema which seemingly is without horizon, does in fact possess one, an imaginary horizon, on the other side. Thus the ambiguity of the field, at once present and absent, unreal and imaginary, can be called cinematic since it is through this duality that the cinema engenders itself. The suturing effect of any presence in the imaginary field shows how, in the cinema, the space and the signifier join their effects even while vanishing; indeed, as in *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, only the articulation of space supports the semantic exchange between shots, and only the relationship between the objects of the image and an imaginary field where those objects are echoed by other objects, prevents the fixing of the signifying Sum, the freezing of meaning which threatens the speech of the film with having to manifest itself for ever — and this at a time when the spectator has been subverted by it — outside the filmic field producing the Sum, and before it is reflected in the imaginary field and meets its own echo.

To make a film always means outlining a field which evokes another field, in which a finger rises to designate — by hiding them — its objects as the signifier of its insignificance, before having them reappear — and die — as a signifying Sum. This signifying Sum, echoed by the absence producing it, does not suggest a plenitude of meaning — which the camera cannot attain immediately, since it is burdened with a lack which must always be satisfied. Instead it represents a particular effect of the cinematic signifier — a real terrorism of the sign — which corresponds to the moment, opposed to the moment of literal reduction, when signification actually penetrates the spectator as a sovereign speech, solitary and without echo. Therefore, the fate of cinematic speech,
abstracted from the objects conveying it, is to manifest itself alternately as a frozen letter, which signifies an absence during its advent, and as a terroristic and subversive speech. Between these two extreme phases, cinematic speech encounters an echo in the field of the imaginary which enables it to anchor itself in the field it comes from. But if the imaginary field remains the field of absence, its only echo is its futility and the anchoring cannot take place; the objects no longer carry it, the speech floats, spelt out, and it breaks as a result of being unsupported by the imaginary.

3. Up to now (except among a handful of great film-makers who understand that the absent field is as important as the present field and that the fate of the signifier is governed by their mutual articulation) the problem of the cinematic has only been raised by modern film-makers. In rejecting a space which today is still largely only one of fiction, they have put cinematic language under exemplary pressure, but at the risk of leading it to the threshold of reification. Surprisingly, in the light of *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, a similar reification affects *Au hasard, Balthazar*, a film whose failure, in our opinion, symbolises that of any cinema which refuses to come to terms with the duality of its space and to articulate it into cinematic fields. This makes Bresson without doubt the most ambiguous figure in modern cinema. In *Au hasard, Balthazar*, a strictly linear film, in which the camera only functions as a finger pointing out the signifying objects, whether those which it follows or those which it finds in its path, Bresson seems to have wanted to question all his syntactic procedures and, at the same time, as it were, suture through movement the discourse, which as a result is inevitably strewn with blanks and gaps. The camera movements themselves prevent the spectator's imaginary from functioning and from suturing the discourse, through the absence they continually produce, an absence which is only filled in rare scenes recalling *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, such as the meeting between Gérard and Marie; as a result the discourse endlessly signifies itself as a dead letter, and its syntax emerges at every instant as the only signified of the film. There is a continually noticeable decomposition of syntagms, for instance, in the scene in which Gérard and his acolyte load the donkey at the end of the film: after they have loaded 'the perfume, the stockings, and the gold', the camera halts on a sordid mess just as the characters leave the frame; the intention of meaning designates itself. . . .

Nevertheless, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* remains the model of the cinematic which takes on the specifically tragic nature of its language, even accentuates it, and allows the suture of a deliberately syncopated discourse. To begin with, Bresson very consciously worked on the times of the image, sometimes in order to create – as did Lang – a *fantastique* of the sign (shots of the registrar's hands and of the priest who makes a sign to Joan, so brief that
ultimately they can only be perceived as insignificant signifiers, illegible messages), and sometimes in order to preserve the signs of the alteration they undergo during the literal reduction of the image: in the confrontations between Joan and her judge, the slight time lapse separating the moment of succession of the shots from the appearance – otherwise imperceptible without that delay – on Joan’s face of the effects of the judge’s words, the tightening of the throat, the movement of the lips, like the results of an invisible whip lash. After the syncope produced by the change of shot, after the erasing of the absence by the presence of the other character on the other side of the camera, and the reconstruction as a cinematic field, through camera position, of the scene of the confrontation between the characters, this moment allows the sign to burst at its point of greatest efficiency, following the operation of the suture.

With infinite subtlety, Bresson has outlined and almost re-invented cinematic fields. Dispelling the illusions and ambiguities of a 'subjective' cinema, he has wilfully accentuated the divergence between the camera’s position and that of the character placed on the same side, thereby introducing infinite modulations of shooting angles: the characters may either be almost face-on (the judge) or in three-quarter view (Joan). The variation of this angle of attack, which results in the executioner seeming strangely more vulnerable than his victim, would, if necessary, prove the importance of the field outlined by the camera, whose obliqueness indicates the spectator’s own position. That the only possible position for the camera should be that oblique angle, shows that the spectator does not identify with any other character in the invisible field of the film, but occupies a position out of alignment both with the character and with the position of the Absent One which is only present in the imaginary when the character, who takes its place, is not there itself.

4. Thus the Absent One, this frozen production of the spectator’s imaginary, manifests itself between two moments: one, when the cinema’s speech is abolished in the spectator’s cosmomorphic jouissance, and the other, when that speech traverses the spectator. In between these two moments the spectator recuperates his difference, an operation by which he is himself placed outside the frame, by positioning the Absent One as the subject of a vision which is not his own, and the image as the signifier of absence. Only during the intervals of such borderline moments is the spectator’s imaginary able to function freely, and hence to occupy the place – evidenced by its spatial obliqueness – of a vanishing subject, decentred from a discourse which is closing itself, and suturing itself in it, and which the subject can only assume in the Imaginary, that is at once during the interval when he disappears as subject, and when he recuperates his difference, and from a
place which is neither the place where the character is positioned by the spectator's imagination — a character who is no more the spectator than he is the subject of the image as fictive image — (hence the unease produced by a shot/reverse-shot such as in Kriemhild's Revenge, and nearly all Lang's shots, where the camera often actually occupies the place of the character in that position); nor is it an arbitrary position forcing the spectator to posit perpetually the Absent One as the fictitious subject of a vision which is not his own and on which his imagination would stop short.

In a cinema free of subjective illusion, one can imagine what scope there would be, once again, for a linking of shots by the look determined by the unique angle which would allow the suture to take place — a suture which alone would allow one to reach, beyond fiction, the point dreamed of by Bresson where each image would only have an 'exchange' value. The field of such a cinematic, not yet born, would be less the space of an event than the field of emergence of the symbolic; its symbol could be the admirable shot/reverse-shot in La Chasse au lion à l'arc within which Rouch frames the dying lioness and the group of hunters praying before her. In The Trial of Joan of Arc Bresson only allows himself to show the signs of communication, unlike Flaherty who complacently purported to recreate the event of communication itself. Bresson does so within a cinematic field which, because he does not attempt to produce the illusion of its immediacy, gives back to the cinema a symbolic dimension, revealed in the very process of reading.

5. After experimenting with its characteristics, naively at first, then more and more deliberately (as with Lang and Hitchcock), the cinema today speaks of nothing else. Yet now that these properties are recognised, we look to that speech to recreate not an object but a site — a cinematic field which will be no longer the privileged means of embodying a fiction, but that for cinema's speech to unfold itself according to its properties, since it is through space that the cinema is born into the order of discourse, and it is from the place whose absence it evokes that it is designated as a speech and that its imaginary is displayed. It would be absurdly academic, however, to deduce from 'how to articulate that speech' only a more efficient way of distributing the cinema's signifier, and simply to expose a misunderstanding of its characteristics, as with Au hasard, Balthazar. For it is nevertheless essential to recognise that, in articulating the conditions and the limits of its signifying power, the cinema is also speaking of eroticism.

That in Bresson's masterpiece, which is about communication, and even more about eroticism (around which its tragedy explodes), he could only talk about it by creating a cinematic field which, at the same time, is the space of his own discourse recreated, and
the field of speech of the cinematic, indicates clearly enough the symbolic specificity of even the most simple cinematic space, reduced to its minimal unit — an absence and a presence; that is, the staging of a 'passion' of signifiers, a mise-en-scène of bodies and of the spectator himself who is privileged to represent the passion operating in communication, and in eroticism especially. For too long eroticism in the cinema has only been exploited or located on the filmic level; people talked about the eroticism of a camera-movement as improperly as they did about the camera-eye and possession of the world by the film-maker, etc. A substantial shift in point of view has in fact taken place; today the phenomenon of quasi-vision, peculiar to the cinema, only appears as the condition of an eroticism recognisable in the articulation of the filmic and the cinematic, and affecting the signifiers and the figures conveying them, thereby demonstrating that the very nature of the cinematic discourse is in question. The discovery that the cinema, in speaking itself, speaks of eroticism, and is the privileged space where eroticism can always be signified, should probably be credited to Lang; and although all the consequences are far from being drawn yet, this discovery engages the whole cinema.

POSTSCRIPT The following remarks sum up and attenuate somewhat the extremism of the article.

1. In the very process which is at the same time *jouissance* and 'reading' of the film — a 'reading' which in turn is signified and annulled, and by which the spectator is subverted — something is said which can only be discussed in erotic terms, and which is itself given as the closest representation of the actual process of eroticism.

2. Subjection of what is said in the meantime in the film is unavoidable for two reasons and in two ways: first the fate of the cinematic signifier is given by the articulations of the process; second, and more importantly, the process itself and all that is said in it, which takes place in a cinematic space making the film a *symbolic space*, always designates the seal of the symbolic, modified by its echo and modelled by its grid.

3. Thus, to say that the cinema, in speaking itself, in its place and from its specific place, speaks of eroticism, leads to questioning its symbols and figures, beyond eroticism. Indeed beyond that eroticism, the essentially *figurative* reality of the cinema is revealed in such films as *The Tiger of Bengal*, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, or *The Immortal Story*. 