Framing, Screening, Screening-Off:

The Status of Fantasy in Dino De Laurentiis' *King Kong*

by

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One arrives at the theater lured by the promise of a new Kong. The Dino De Laurentiis' production of King Kong will be "based on" the text and viewing experience of the Schoedsack and Cooper film, rooted collective and private memories of Fay Wray's indelible screams, and the climb and fall from the Empire State Building. But it will not be an exact remake. The poster reproduced in countless newspaper ads promises to stage the climactic battle on top of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Kong is viewed from above, drawn in foreshortened perspective so that he dwarfs not only the planes that assault him, but the Trade Center and the whole city of New York. He is here frozen at the moment of his greatest fury, caught in mid-roar as we look down from a position suspended in the sky in anticipation of the terrible deathfall. The poster signals that this will be a contemporary Kong, bigger and more savage than the original.

The poster is viewed in the context of a publicity campaign which promises a Kong improved by all the technical resources that an international producer can possibly assemble in Hollywood, 1976. Spurning the animated miniatures of the original film, De Laurentiis has constructed a "life-sized" Kong, forty feet tall. It is cinema as an engineering project--a Faustian battle to master not nature, but machinery. Hydraulics are a major concern: the beast's movements must be fluid, natural. The face

will be ferocious, but sensitive.[1] Three decisions have built the machine and the film which contains it:

1. King Kong will be produced as a "fantasy," in the words of the scriptwriter;
2. it will maximize spectacle (fantasy enlarged to gigantic proportions);
3. every frame will be charged with "reality," in order to gain the belief of the audience.

The scriptwriter, Lorenzo Semple, Jr., is well aware of a contradiction between the demand for epic fantasy and the requirements of "realism." The story simply does not make sense in terms of accepted standards of film narrative. He tells De Laurentiis, "nobody would ever 'really believe' in a forty-foot ape who flipped out over a 5'4" blond bride." Semple confesses that although Jaws was a "picture filled with ludicrous absurdities" it was nevertheless "accepted as totally real and because of that coining zillions." Dino replies that "we will make our ape as believable as their shark."[2]

De Laurentiis and Semple assume that their film will be successful insofar as it deceives the spectator into accepting it as reality. One believes or one does not believe. There is no middle ground.

It follows that the film which can coin "zillions" will concern itself with the production of "reality effects."

It is tempting to regard King Kong II as the very model of the 1970's project of Hollywood cinema. A conception of the movie as a spectacular fantasy construct is uneasily wedded to a passion for realism, literally achieved "at all costs." Serge Toubiana writes in Cahiers du Cinema that De Laurentiis' Kong is the "self-exhibition" of Hollywood: through a huge investment of capital the industry builds a collosal machine which climbs to the top of the financial capital of the world only to smash itself on the public streets below.[3] A narcissistic, meglomaniacal Hollywood cannibalizes one of its past successes to build a suicidal automation. King Kong is cinema founded on the threat of rape, yet the machine is ultimately impotent. Kong seizes the girl, but can never possess her.[4]

King Kong is the producer's film par excellence. In the first story conference with Semple, De Laurentiis explains his Kong by assuming the role of the ape. According to Semple,

> Dino capered around his office, pantomiming an enormous monkey plucking off a girl's vestments, delicately, as one would pluck the petals of a flower. . . . That was the entire content of our conference on how to remake King Kong.[5]

Inspired by the image of the producer as Kong, Semple writes a forty-page outline in which the beast is exhibited by an international oil company as the symbol of pure "Power." Like Exxon's "Tiger in your tank," Kong is a totem animal representing not only energy as such but the economic power of the company which, through mysterious

feats of engineering, transforms primeval goo into profits. Kong's seduction of the girl is paralleled by--encased in --a story in which the oil company intends to "rape the environment," according to the cliché, but extracts Kong in place of petroleum. The beast is then displayed as a metaphor for the company's own aggressiveness, associated with the phallic acts of drilling, appropriating. In Semple's revisionist script for the seventies, Kong is an image invested with the contradictory traits. On the one hand he is the symbol of the capitalist project out of control--an apparatus which devours, rapes. In other scenes the beast takes the classical "feminine" position of nature victimized, exploited, perverted by a civilization in search of immediate profit, the "instant fix." The film is a rather transparent allegory in which the "interpretation" is readily available on the manifest level of the text. De Laurentiis' concept of Kong as essentially the act of stripping a woman of her clothes is united to an orthodox "liberal" appeal for the defense and protection of Mother Nature from rapacious and cynical industrial power.

The figure of Kong intersects and condenses two distinct chains of ideas: the sexual and the political/economic; Semple apparently regards the producer's strip scene as a metaphor of the activity of any "big business" including, of course, the film business. In any case, the Kong project originates as a strip scene in which the

producer consciously fantasizes himself in the role of King Kong. It is an erotic fantasy elaborated from the memory of an earlier film, inflamed by the wish to see more, to take the scene further. Yet even the revised fantasy never moves beyond the stage of foreplay. The whole of the De Laurentiis production can be considered as a chain of images deployed first, for the purpose of inducting one (characters and the spectator "identified" with them) into the strip scene and, second, to link this scene of arrested, "frustrated" eros to the terminal scene in which Kong falls to his death after trying once more to achieve coitus with the girl. This death scene, evoked by the advertising posters, displaces the strip scene from the South Pacific to New York, from the center to the end of the narrative. On top of the World Trade Center Kong continues the rape/seduction as though none of the plot had intervened, only to be blocked decisively by the attack of the helicopters. The film erects a final defense against the extension of a scene it has resurrected. The strip scene is the navel of King Kong: the scene to which the film leads, the scene it spirals back to retrieve, knotting and breaking the narrative thread at the site of Kong's love nest; it is the scene for which and from which the film was produced, the scene De Laurentiis enacted in his office--the origin, the primal fantasy.

In adapting Freud's celebrated term "the dream's navel" from The Interpretation of Dreams I wish to invoke

the sense of a "tangle" or "meshwork" from which "the dream-work grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium," without necessarily proposing that this navel must, by its very nature, remain uninterpreted. The dream-thoughts, in Freud's words, extend themselves without limit "into the unknown," they "cannot . . . have any definite ending. . . ."[6] In contrast, the movie is a closed text. Not only does commercial cinema seek narrative closure--resolution--in order to preserve its status as a fiction framed off from the "real" world of public and private experience, but its discourse is limited spatially by the screen and bounded temporally by economic and cultural constraints on the "acceptable" length for a movie experience.[7] Unlike the dream, a film can be re-screened, and though individual responses vary, the material to which one responds remains essentially the same yesterday and tomorrow for all spectators. But despite the presence of more or less universal (primal) situations in dreams (which led Freud to posit phylogenetically transmitted inheritance) the dream text is an essentially private construction, inaccessible to all except the dreamer and the analyst familiar with the personal history of the patient. In distinction to the dream, the movie is constructed for a public, not an individual. It is also produced by a public in the sense that the industry adapts its product in response to the reception of previous films. Thus every commercial film is, loosely, a remake: it revives

the corpus of past cinema; it is advertised as a repetition and variation of previous pleasures. The spectator is lured to the theatre (or the television screen) by the promise of a "new" experience which is nevertheless drawn from a limited repertoire of conventions. One goes to the Hollywood film in expectation of a new combination of events and characters, sounds and images placed within--and organized by--the received system of Hollywood discourse. All this is to say that because the feature film spectator expects the movie to "make sense" in terms of previous film experience he/she demands a highly organized, "logically" plotted narrative, not the chaotic rebus of a dream. In contrast to Christian Metz' claim in his "Note on two voyeurisms" that the film experience is typically a "lawless seeing, seeing of the Id ungoverned by an Ego," I am stressing that the spectator's viewing contract with Hollywood cinema presumes a highly structured experience with strict limits on what and how one sees.[8] King Kong may begin to strip the woman, but he will never rape her on screen. Within the Hollywood experience, Metz' "lawless seeing" must remain virtual. Its object is ever off-screen; its gaze is always tamed, re-directed to substitutes by the prohibitive law of the public institution of cinema.

More than a decade ago V. F. Perkins wrote that the film spectator is never completely "submerged" in the on-screen experience:

> Part of our mind remains unengaged in the fantasy. . . . Consequently we can trace our reactions with a detachment which is unattainable in dreams and very difficult in any real situation of like intensity. . . . In the cinema we can observe our involvement while it is taking place. We enter the film situation but it remains separate from ourselves as our own dreams and experiences do not.[9]

Metz and Baudry have stressed the unconscious and or "lawless" dimension of the viewing experience in connection with the thesis of primary identification. In theory, the spectator identifies first with the "raw fact of seeing," and only secondarily with the traits and positions of character-images.[10] My analysis of the apparently "raw" texts of pornographic film have led me, in contrast, to underline the ways in which a film is "defensed" to render potentially traumatic material pleasurable rather than threatening when experienced by the spectator in the controlled conditions of a public theatre.[11] Adapting M. Masud Khan's hypothesis of the "good dream" to the viewing experience I would argue that viewers are lulled into relaxing their usual "waking" defenses vis-a-vis the screened narrative so that, in public, they can watch "private" or otherwise forbidden images of eros and violence from which they would "normally" avert their eyes. According to Khan, the subject of the "good dream" is able to face "disturbing impulses" because the very structure of the dream enables the dreamer to achieve a "benign distancing" from these ideas/images.[12] I suggest that a condition of one's ability to relax, permit and accept the

semi-prohibited material on the theatre screen is the knowledge--contained in the viewing contract--that the movie itself will defend the passive, unprotected viewer against the implications of its most disturbing scenes through the forms of self-censorship assumed by the cinematographic language (the cut, the dissolve, the dolly-out, framing, etc.) as well as by the promise of classical narrative that any wound opened by the story will also be closed by it.

The notion that Hollywood cinema arouses yet protects the viewer from traumatic vision tempted me to think of so-called "normal" cinema as an extension of the scene in De Laurentiis' office in which the producer, as Kong, delicately plucks the clothes from the bride. The scene convinces me that the Hollywood film more resembles a well-defensed conscious fantasy than the relatively "lawless" vision of the night-dream.

The pantomime in the office which originates and centers <u>King Kong</u> is not the usual strip-tease. De Laurentiis does not pretend to strip his own clothing, but undresses an <u>other</u>. Cinema is not self-exhibition (if you will permit me to follow the implications of the image). In distinction to the dream, says Perkins, the film "remains separate from ourselves." As a spectator I may lose or find myself <u>in</u> the movie but at the same time I know this vision is produced, not by myself, but by an <u>other</u>--an industry. Although I provisionally accept the on-screen

experience as if it were my own, I am always conscious of the "as if." It is the discourse of a stranger which seduces me into accepting his speech as mine. It is mine and not mine. But I have no such knowledge of another person producing my dream. Even though the dream "happens" to me regardless of my will, "it" who dreams is yet myself. I may realize it was I who dreamed only after the fact, but from the beginning of the movie to long after the experience I never claim that I created the visions which, for two hours, I seemed to live. I am always aware of the "seeming" of the movie experience. As in my fantasies, I know the experience is fictional, unreal. Likewise, my conscious fantasies are imagined/image according to the visual laws of the world I accept as real. At night, I could perhaps dream a Betty Boop cartoon, but such alarming transformations are not reproduced in the relatively stable and "realistic" images of day-dreams and feature films. Even the "impossible" fantasy of King Kong will be played according to the conventions of realism.

Freud's most celebrated passage on fantasy characterizes it as a means of escape from the harsh demands of the reality principle. The passage places the activity in its proper scene--a place within and yet beyond the civilized order:

> The creation of the mental domain of fantasy finds a perfect parallel in the establishment of "reservations" or "nature reserves" in places where the requirements of agriculture, communication and industry threaten to bring about changes in the original face of the earth

> which will quickly make it unrecognizable. A nature reserve preserves its original state which everywhere else has to our regret been sacrificed to necessity. Everything, including what is useless and even what is noxious, can grow and proliferate there as it pleases. The mental realm of fantasy is just such a reservation withdrawn from the reality principle.[13]

Freud adds that fantasy par excellence is the day-dream, whereas "a night dream is at bottom nothing other than a day-dream" used and distorted by the instinctual impulses released by sleep. "The essense of the happiness of fantasy--making the obtaining of pleasure free once more from the assent of reality--is shown in [day-dreams] unmistakably."[14]

The emphasis is on the freedom of fantasy construction. In the nature preserve, conceived as a kind of primeval jungle, the fantasy proliferates "as it pleases," like a "useless" or "noxious" wild plant. In this region, Freud writes, the human being can remain "an animal of pleasure." There, "every desire takes before long the form of picturing its own fulfillment."[15] Note that Freud does not say immediate fulfillment, but fulfillment "before long," presumably by the end of the scenario. Desire, unleashed in this wilderness, not only pursues, but captures its object.

Freud's stress on the liberty of desire in fantasy and its immunity from the law of the lived-world finds its parallel in Hollywood's characterization of its activity and product as "just entertainment," "just a movie," exempting the spectator from attempting to transfer what was

learned in the film into "real" life outside the theatre. Thus cinema which does not bind its wounds--close itself--in the theatre but asks the spectator to complete the narrative through political action finds itself at a great disadvantage vis-a-vis the cultural definition of a movie as "useless" pleasure. One is usually lured to the movies as a "pleasure ego" (Lust-Ich), which "wants to introject into itself everything that is good and eject from itself everything which is bad."[16] There one forms identifications by projecting qualities one does not wish to recognize in oneself onto the "bad" characters while claiming the good characters as if they were oneself. Simultaneously, one physically incorporates popcorn and soft-drinks as if to reinforce the primary "inward" movement of introjection. The "art-film" spectator identifies less with the puppets than with the god who pulls the strings. It is a step "up" to the source, but also a step inward; art is an even more privileged realm than entertainment. If the artist is not a rebel against the social order, according to the romantic conception, he is at least exempt from the demands of the social/political order and should not reflect its ideology if he is to be considered a "serious" artist. According to Freud's "Two Principles of Mental Functioning" the artist is he who has renounced reality to live in the realm of fantasies which ordinary men regard as "valuable" because "they feel the same dissatisfaction as he." Freud adds that "this dissatisfaction,

resulting from the displacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality."[17] Thus art, and the entertainment of popular film, are conceived as escape, fulfilling the wish which reality has displaced or denied. The image of fantasy as both a place --a primeval reservation--and as the wild plant which grows where it pleases within this interior realm sets the stage for the thesis that film as dream or fantasy is indeed a lawless enterprise of seeing/imaging/imagining withdrawn from the culture--the ideology--which otherwise governs human behavior. It is a seductive image, because it asserts cinema as liberation--freedom of vision and thought--cinema as a regression to that pre-Oedipal era in which the child was yet omnipotent, ignorant of the prohibitions of the Law. It is the vision of Kong as "natural" cinema--the force of cinema as a scopic and erotic drive--prior to the Social Contract.

Unfortunately for those who would unleash the power of raw cinema, Kong is impotent. He sees, he seizes, but he does not possess the phallus. Hollywood cinema is precisely a social contract, or as Comolli calls it, the "viewing contract." It is cinema that defends against cinema conceived on the "natural" model. Hollywood cinema is fantasy. But it films against the primal fantasy of cinema as a free drive (Trieb) towards "the raw fact of seeing."

In contrast to the texts I have quoted above, Laplanche and Potalis stress the defensive aspect of fantasy construction:

> . . . to the extent that desire is not purely an upsurge of the drives, but is articulated into the fantasy, the latter is a favored spot for the most primitive defensive reactions, such as turning against oneself, or into an opposite, projection, negation: these defenses are even indissolubly linked with the primary function of fantasy, to be a setting for desire, insofar as desire itself originates as prohibition, and the conflict may be an original conflict.[13]

These words set the scene for a brief analysis of what I consider to be the central fantasy of King Kong--the scene in which Kong begins to strip his bride in preparation for an infinitely delayed act of coitus. I have called this scene a "primal fantasy" (Urphantasien) not only because it displays the "essential" role of Kong in the film, but also because De Laurentiis' parody of the scene seems to have served as the originating point of a script which was written to justify and repeat exactly this interrupted act. According to the definition of primal fantasy in The Language of Psychoanalysis,

> . . . these fantasies dramatise into the primal moment or original point of departure of a history. In the "primal scene," it is the origin of the subject that is represented; in seduction fantasies it is the origin or emergence of sexuality; in castration fantasies, the origin of the distinction between the sexes.[14]

As depicted on-screen, De Laurentiis' strip-scene alternates and, through temporal succession, surpresses, the

three scenes categorized under primal fantasy: primal scene, scene of seduction, castration.

The advertising poster defines King Kong as essentially a mortal combat in the heavens above New York. The paperback version of Semple's script (published three months after the film's release) pictures a second fight to the death on its cover. The location is that other focal point of this double-centered narrative, the obverse of the sky scene. We are underground, in a back-lit cave, surrounded by rock walls, dripping stalactites. Kong struggles against a monstrous python which threatens to strangle him. Holding the head at arm's length, Kong tries to claw the coils from his throat. As on the poster, he is roaring in rage or frustration. The scene is again foreshortened, but drawn from an eye-level perspective. The foreshortening no longer emphasizes the size of Kong, framed and contained by the rock, but the buttocks of a naked blonde who sprawls on her belly in the lower right foreground. This scene loosely reproduces the moment of the film at which Jack, the human hero, has penetrated Kong's home on a rescue mission. The cave is Kong's love-nest; there the girl will soon be eaten or raped by a beast eight times her size. Jack's arrival coincides with the attack of the python. As Kong wrestles the snake, Jack stealthily leads the girl out of the cave to the edge of a precipice. Kong snaps the snake's jaws, turns to pursue the runaway pair. They leap toward a river below,

leaving Kong at the top of the cliff.

Taken as a whole, the scene is the first turning-point (crisis) of the De Laurentiis film, marking the end of Kong's power to control the plot. From this point on, the former aggressor is cast as the victim. The battle with the snake begins the progressive emasculation of Kong --the process of dethronement, if you will--which proceeds through imprisonment to a mocking coronation of the King in New York. At which point the plot again turns: the ostensibly impotent King breaks his shackles to become once more the wild beast on his "wedding night." The ape again seizes the girl, ascends the heights, and prepares to possess her. Followed, of course, by a final reversal: the combat, the fall and the death of King Kong. To use Vladimir Propp's terminology, the first "move" of the narrative presents an amorous, rampant and climbing Kong, the second a fallen King, stripped of his power, the third reconstitutes the original, terrible Kong, displaced to a concrete jungle, while the denouement (in a replay of the second, tragic, move) stresses the fall from the skies.

Yet this analysis of the moves of the plot is limited by its singular focus on Kong as the protagonist-victim. As constituted by Semple, the narrative progresses by the exchange of the girl between two heroes. By turns, both Kong and Jack romance the woman with a questionable past. Each can momentarily retain her in his own sphere of action, but neither can close with her in the sexual

act. The whore remains a virgin for the duration of this plot. Whenever foreplay begins to veer sharply towards coitus, the rival lover intervenes, abducting the girl. Like a baton in the circuit of a race that never crosses the finish line, Dwan is passed between man and beast.

Neither the animated Kong of Shoedsack and Cooper nor De Laurentiis' mechanical beast are anatomically complete. Although each beast is unquestionably male, neither possesses a penis. On the cover of Semple's "Complete Script," the naked blonde's body thrusts diagonally from the perimeter on a line that meets an empty space between Kong's thighs. The girl is precisely aligned with an absence. In both the frozen drawing and the "live" film on-screen, the phallus is supplied in the image of the snake which threatens to strangle Kong.

The issue at hand is the missing phallus. In each representation of the beast who would be man, Kong is constituted <u>as</u> the phallus, alternately rising or falling, rampant or limp. To the villain of King Kong II, Kong is the image of "power"--the symbol of energy, oil, the primeval force that fuels civilization and capital gains. Kong is a value which <u>grows</u> in contrast to shrinkage of American resources. To the hero who rivals the ape, Kong is purely and simply "a god." To the woman in question, Kong is the threat and the promise of "the impossible fuck." She will ride to star status as "the bride of Kong," reinforcing the public image of the star as whore,

elevated by the figure of power she seduces and then disclaims. To the spectator, Kong is the promise of an amorous, fierce, yet tragic beast pursuing the receding image of a woman--an uprooted phallus on the rampage, yet curiously impotent. He is capable of destroying cities, but in the sexual sense this beast is all bark, no bite.

What is the fate of the phallus? Where does it go? What does it become? Even though the phallus never appears on the screen as such, whenever the scene of seduction approaches each of the characters reacts as though a representation of the gorilla's organ were clearly visible. Throughout both the Shoedsack/Cooper and De Laurentiis versions of the text, rape is equated with being eaten. The projecting and penetrating phallus is spoken and displayed in terms of incorporation by the mouth. Not only is the location of the threat displaced from the loins to the head, but the act is reversed in direction, though the end is death in either event. Yet the fear is removed that Kong will attempt to force himself into a vagina that is much too tight. At the turning point, the phallus is detached as a snake so that Kong seems to be wrestling with the force of his own sexuality. Yet the snake is also Jack's phallus, injecting itself into a scene he is otherwise powerless to control. At times in the narrative, Kong's monstrous body <u>as a whole</u>--both hairy and naked--comes to represent the phallus rampant or fallen in line with Kong's "political" position <u>vis-a-vis</u> the other

characters at any given moment in the plot. At times, the phallic role is played by the breath, again by the forefinger that pokes, prods and disrobes the girl, still again by the very gaze of the beast as he crashes through the forest to seize his bride from the sacrificial altar. From this partial catalog of its multiple appearances, one can define the phallus as less a "thing" than a center of value--the temporary depository for emotional investment. The spectator plays a limited market of possible objects, investing or retracting libidinal energy, scene by scene, according to the changing recommendations of those who control the visual apparatus. In this sense the phallus is a detachable and transformable part-object which can be cut, dissolved, transported and reconstituted into whatever image can serve as a site for the investment of a strongly ambivalent charge of fear and desire.

Like the advertising poster, the drawing on the cover of the script suspends the combat in a frozen tableau. Both images are selected from a point prior to the decision of the two crisis scenes; the antagonists appear equally matched. As Kong fights for his life and his "bride," the woman watches from a position inside the battle arena. She seems in danger of being shot or trampled, yet in her role of the prize--the treasure--she has been placed slightly to one side of the death-struggle. Her position in and yet apart from the scene ties the woman's destiny to that of her "husband"--the ape--while

asserting her powerlessness to intervene in a "male" conflict which will determine the direction of her life. Each tableau represents a form of the classical sexual triangle. Yet in each case, there is a fourth party to the scene--one who watches from a position outside the frame. It is Jack, Kong's rival and, at times, his defender.

The scene in each love-nest--New York and the island--first presents an amorous Kong engaged in foreplay with his bride. In each case, an attack from the outside breaks off the love-making, preventing Jack's rival from possessing the bride. Identification of oneself with one's rival, as in the sky-battle, does not negate his role as rival. The attacks which interrupt Kong's preparations for coitus clearly serve Jack's erotic interest. Although the script denies that the assaulting snake and helicopters are in any way Jack's agents, their timely entry on the field of love approximately coincides with his own arrival on the edge of a threatened primal scene (urszene).

The marks that identify a scene as primal are far more visible in the cave battle than on the roof of the World Trade Center. Not only has Kong's foreplay proceeded to the point of beginning to strip the bride's clothes, but the scene is enclosed and relatively dark. It is the bride, not Kong, who first sees the snake. It had waited, according to the script, hidden in moss, but its head now

The voyeur scene is conventially used in narrative feature film and television fiction to cue the spectator that one should pay special attention to the display of the "inner" scene. In thrillers, the classical and hard-boiled detective genres and romantic comedies, for example, the scene which the hero takes an "outside" position to overlook/overhear an interior drama supplies information which changes the direction of the plot. I have argued above that the snake-battle is crucial in the pattern of the King Kong narrative because it initiates the movement towards the imprisonment and metaphorical castration of the "King." Such scenes are intersections, reversal points, turns. Some pornographic texts utilize the voyeur scene as a means to inflame the desire of the exterior male for the woman enclosed or imprisoned in a special house of pleasure, spurring him to eventually "break into" this eroticized place. The presence of the watcher outside the scene of emotional and visual interest effectively frames this scene both spatially and temporally from the rest of the film.

One frames a painting to signal that one considers it sufficiently "special" or valuable to clearly separate it out from a context. Framing is a dual activity: it frames-in and frames-off; it attracts the attention to the interior while removing it from the surrounding world. Framing decathects and devalues the exterior. By virtue of being outside the frame, the exterior scene is relegated

to the status of the ordinary. Until one withdraws attention from the framed scene, the outside is mere background --a set. The frame not only establishes two levels of value, but constitutes two separate orders of "reality." Thus separate modes of viewing/comprehending must be set in gear to appropriately relate oneself to these distinct realities. Framing devices such as the voyeur schema can be used by the producers and consumers of cinema to distinguish registers or levels of fantasy within the film.

Psychoanalytic literature occasionally invokes a fantasmatic screen which serves alternately as a surface of projection or as a means of defense and protection. The term "dream screen" was coined by Bertram Lewin to define "the blank background upon which the dream picture appears to be projected." Lewin developed the concept on the model of the experience of film-viewing,

> . . . because, like its analogue in the cinema, the dream screen is either not noted by the dreaming spectator, or it is ignored due to the interest in the pictures and action that appear on it. However, under certain circumstances, the screen plays a role of its own and becomes perceptible.[19]

The dream screen first came to Lewin's attention when one of his patients could not "produce" her dream for the analytic session. She claimed that she could not remember the dream, that at the critical moment that she wanted to retrieve it to consciousness it "bent . . . away from her and then like a carpet or canvas rolled up and off into the distance. . . ."[20] In this and similar

instances the appearance of a screen at the end of a dream is interpreted as representing the process of repression. The dreamer does not "want" to remember the dream, much less display the dream text to the analyst. Instead of holding the dream, converting it into a text, the dreamer simply watches it blank out, recede or roll up, disappear into an inaccessible region of the psyche. The dream is lost.

In other cases the dream image fades out to reveal a blank screen--a wall, blackboard or television screen. Such blank-outs of the dream image occur, according to Lewin, when the dream threatens to represent the highly disturbing image of the primal scene. The blank screen exhibits the wish to return to "dreamless, textless sleep."[22] In other words, the screen which supports the image appears as such--suppressing "its" image at moments when the subject attempts to abolish the dream, when the unhappy dreamer desires to experience the sheer nothing of sleep. The blank screen is the attempt to kill the dream and oneself as dreamer.

Dreams in which the image does not fade away but reveals itself to be contained on and by a screen, framed-off, as it were, from the rest of the dream, have been linked by Abse to the dreamer's attempt to protect himself/herself against the force of potentially traumatic representations, especially when the dream threatens to present the primal scene. The screen acts both as a "projective

backdrop" and as a "protective foreground" which prevents "anxiety-laden material from clear emergence as an element in the manifest dream."[23] Abse argues that "the dream screen puts psychic distance between the observing ego and the dream."[24] Material which otherwise might be censored out of the dream can be presented in a relatively raw form as long as it is thus framed-off, dreamed _via_ a kind of aesthetic distance.

I suggested earlier that when De Laurentiis' _King Kong_ approaches its primal fantasy, it frames the scene in such a way as to simultaneously draw attention to the "special" nature of the experience and to hide, displace, interrupt the scene so that it cannot exhibit its promise. Yet framing is still an imaging, even when it cestrates. Although the narrative demonstrates twice--in the crises--the impotence of Kong, the first image of the beast must hide his deficiency in order to found the story on the threat and promise of sheer power. Only in his first appearance, on a screen effectively blank, is Kong truly himself. Since the image of the phallus can never be revealed as such without destroying the very concept of Hollywood cinema as a pointer to a vision which must remain always inferred, Kong is first imaged on a dream-screen as sheer possibility.

and the fragments of legend can only point to Kong, for such is the very title of the film. But this show of Kong is a non-appearance. His presence beyond the image must be inferred from the signs--the symptoms--displayed on the screen within the screen. Like Heidegger's aletheia--the event of truth which presumes a prior concealment--the revelation of Kong is a veiled presence which is yet an absence. Kong has produced the cloud of vapor--the barrier-image; he is visible by his effects. Yet Kong's first appearance on this double screen is simultaneously a screening off of his "real" image.

The tantalizing bank of motionless fog is projected twice on the mess-room screen--the only image given such insistence in this show of symptoms, promises and threats. As interpreted by Jack, who knows the "truth," the cloud speaks the danger of a monstrous, probably murderous "creature" which mysteriously mixes the normally separate categories of man and beast into a "huge, slouchy . . . thing." The fog screen produces anxiety (Angst) because it conceals an anticipated danger whose precise form remains unknown. Yet for Wilson, the entrepreneur who interprets each image in terms of his economic project, the cloud-bank screens the known Hollywood ending rather than the scene of another narrative; insofar as the fog contains "free hydrocarbon radicals" it is the very image of accessible oil. The fog is to Wilson the very opposite of a barrier--a defensive screen. It announces that the