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Chapter 3: Desire (I)

. . . my desires have invented new desires . . . (Helene Cixous, 1976, “The Laugh of the Medusa”)

Like a moving film the flow of thought seems to be continuous while actually the thoughts flow stop change and flow again. At the point where one flow stops there is a split second hiatus [a cut]. The new way of thinking grows in this hiatus between thoughts. (William Burroughs, 1969, *The Job*)

Though my desire to make films had been embraced in certain venues by a handful of respected scholars, I continued to worry the matter. The worry was not unproductive. I was emboldened by my reading in the archives and in film histories, both of which illuminated challenges overcome by many fine artist-composers, and I have been nothing if not aspirational. At the same time and in spite of my fears regarding career identity and what began to feel like living in the academic interstices to an even greater extent than ever before, I continued making films. It felt essential. *Malkovich*. I’d found a portal to a sacred space for me to be in, to dwell in, to make in, a space where I could test out and refine a voice that might be heard in the midst of the vast range of academic voices that wanted to do what they wanted to do (help students, clear the way for new forms of writing, support existing forms, mark and re-mark/make identities—all attempts to move audiences).

I continued proposing conference presentations, as live performance seemed the optimal scenario for sharing my work. The responses articulated what I had been sensing in the archives, that many of us working in the field of Composition wanted more film. As had been the case with *i’m like . . . professional*, my 2007 CCCC presentation became an invited submission, this time not to a renowned digital publication, but to the esteemed and inviting print journal, *Composition Studies*.

The performance took place in the biggest conference ballroom situation I’d ever encountered, and I was presenting with two of my/our inspirational superheroes, Geoffrey Sirc, and Anne Frances Wysocki. As if that weren’t enough to compel my intense gratitude, I recall a stillness in the hotel room, shortly before slipping silently down to the Grand Ballroom. I stood in the center of the room, the hum of the minifridge an ambient buzz profoundly silenced by the goth-symphonic vibe of my quiet joy. I said out loud and to no one in particular, “I am in New York City, presenting a cinematic tribute to Jean Luc Godard.” The

ground shifted beneath me. . . . I had hacked the sound system with the help of my filmmaking co-conspirator, Todd Taylor. We had earlier bypassed the AV team and cabled up so that the room would fill with the audio track that scored the film—The Art of Noise’s “James Bond Theme.” *Ready*.

The presentation offered both a tribute to Jean Luc Godard and a historical consideration of the revolutionary status of 1963 *Composition*. I would reproduce it for you, here, as a point on the timeline of our disciplinary desire. You might loop the video I looped at the NYC presentation, if only I’d saved the micro-cassettes upon which the short film had been saved (alas, my moves to digital have meant some regrettable decisions to toss certain materials). Standing in is the text from that presentation, which was eventually published in *Composition Studies* as an invited submission. The piece intends to both articulate my/our desire to work in film—toward film-composition and it aligns that desire with early desires that shaped our field. This is, “‘Totally, Tenderly, Tragically’: Godard’s *Contempt* and the *Composition Qu’il y Aurait* (That Might Have Been).”

A retiring adolescent, I started watching black and white movies on Saturday afternoon TV. I got hooked fast—the sharp contrasts, the slightly unreal look of black and white film, the busy and contemplative smoking. Nothing was exactly clear . . . but in that confusion I sensed something I could hold on to . . . I felt a part of something capital-*M*³⁵ Meaningful. A powerful sense of pleasure and belonging emerged from what felt like my shadowy find. Perhaps it’s not surprising that these films, this art, should have taken hold of me, given my clinical outsiderism and attending vulnerability. I consider my desire to participate in film as fully as possible as a desire for belonging, for communion with something just slightly unknowable and possibly dangerous. This desire makes sense to me as I think through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s (1936) contention that “artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult” (p. 224).

Benjamin’s focus on “artistic production” gives way organically to contemplation on consumption; are film people cult members? There’s something right-feeling about this notion, especially as I think about the cultural and intellectual importance of the films of Jean-Luc Godard, considered the most “intellectual” of filmmakers comprising the French New Wave of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Of course, this “cult” conceptualization of the films and filmmakers of the French New Wave is problematic, given what we understand of cults. But what I want to get at is the seductive nature of participating in a “movement” even as I experience a vibrant but hopeful internal melee that pits my awareness of the collaborative nature of text making with my

35 I intend here to hint at the masterful film noir work of Fritz Lang in his captivating film, *M*.

infatuation for the auteur (who would resist the cult but perhaps unwittingly participate in the production and consumption of its sacred artifacts).

I am trying to articulate a desire. I am thinking through my desire to produce “magic” objects that secure my belonging to a community, but at the same time, aware of this desire, I resist, mindful of the creative limitations of group membership. Take, for example, the ways in which working in Composition is so often about generic conventions and text-bound assignments. Writing on changes in English curricula (of which Composition continues to remain a part, if not a humble but evolvingly rebellious servant), Gunther Kress worries that generic thinking about curriculum is unlikely to assist learners as we experience literacies shifting and as we are increasingly learning to move among and between differing literacy contexts, arguing succinctly that, “[a] curriculum based upon theories of semiosis of convention and use cannot hope to produce human dispositions deeply at ease with change, difference, and constantly transformative action (1999, p. 67). Thinking with roomy wisdom about the coming convergences and the attendant rhetorical demands and affordances, Kress explained that

There is . . . a coming together of developments—economic, technological, social, political—which requires a rethinking of the processes and the means for representing ourselves and our values and meanings, broadly . . . “literacy.” (1999, p. 67)

Since the early 1990s, Kress had been encouraging us to think about literacy beyond our limited academic range, in many ways consonant with the converges of design and rhetoric initiated by scholars like Wysocki. For Kress, “the possibilities offered by electronic technologies of communication raise this question of the constant metaphoric extension of the term literacy sharply” (1999, p. 68). By now, this claim seems obvious, but I want to emphasize the dynamic and ongoing nature of this desire to move beyond constrained convention toward the increasingly rhetorical vastness of meanings inherent in digital media making. As Sirc (1999) had it, “Composition remains entrenched” (“After Duchamp,” p. 190).³⁶ So too did Kress attempt to activate new curricular thinking; Composition had/has work to do:

[c]urriculum now needs to be focused on the future; its task is to provide young people [students] with dispositions, knowledges, and skills which they will need in their future social lives . . . [and] ‘conventionality’ does not provide a means of understanding or using . . . new media. (1999, pp. 66-67)

³⁶ Anis Bawarshi argues effectively for Composition as genre in his book *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*.

In increasingly new media-saturated literacy scenes, it seems obvious, now, that we have taken Kress' claims seriously in order to consider the ways in which our servitude to clear written discourse has sometimes, if not often, shaped and constrained Composition's identity. We miss a range of pedagogical and cultural opportunities when we—as individual teachers or as collective programs, as a discipline—are unwilling to stray from these conventions and postures, especially because it is now rhetorically purposeful, possible, appropriate and timely to do so. It is my hope that works like this, which hope to generate reflection by recursing in ways that move us, gesture toward fuller investment in the thrilling range of creative energies that manifest within the context of work in new media and film-composition.

As I attempt to honor early Composition by tracing my interdisciplinary investment in new media work (especially production), I hope you'll indulge me as I explore my particular filmic disposition. Explored through the lens of the year 1963, an iconic year for Composition, I look at the work of an iconic filmmaker—Jean Luc Godard—whose work first found widespread critical acclaim in the early 1960s, and especially in 1963. I hope to generate associations that aid you in discovering criticisms that may manifest absent my overt articulation. Call it an experiment. Or subversive. Or self-indulgent. It seems to me a matter of form and content. A compositionist who now fancies herself a filmmaker has some serious investment in “self,” and this seems appropriate, for by all accounts, Godard was an egomaniac. As well, early Composition struggled with self-assured nobility and conviction against Terrific Academic Odds.

More to the point, considering the variety of informed yet inventive pedagogical moves of early Composition³⁷ alongside my predilection for ambiguity and moves that gesture toward “the new,” I am drawn to the work of French New Wave filmmakers because of their (past) attempts to generate the new even as they clearly paid homage to the classic, in this case, to classic film, to the established and beloved works that shaped their discourse community and redefined how they, and we, think about (film) texts. Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, and other filmmakers of the French New Wave worked together for years as writers for *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* (Cinema Notebooks, or Notebooks on the Cinema), the cinema journal of the day, so it seems inevitable that their work derives much from their longtime collaborations as they reflected together on the nature of film.³⁸ Yet many of these

37 See Stephen M. North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* for a neatly compartmentalized review.

38 Similarly, the teacher-scholars of early Composition had worked for years to teach writing without the benefit of a rich historical sense of itself, without a range of theories from which to draw. In part, my point is that this unknowing disposition compelled creative indi-

visionary filmmakers worked within the romantic milieu of the auteur-driven by a “unique” vision. I want to participate in this romantic sense of my work, within the interstitial work that emerges from a knowable place along with desires to move beyond; I seek always to maintain this indeterminate posture, despite the vast disciplinary odds, and practices of expressivism.³⁹ (Composition has been there—romanticism via expressionism—and few want to claim a desire for Return, despite laudable contemporary moves to retrieve the value, meaning.) To explain/apologize: I like to think that I invest myself in work that must be done, however seemingly unstable in its wandering, work that is compelled by both internal and external forces (personal desire and memory; identification with people, places, and cultural particularities; worry over “the state of the world”; longing to create “art”). Perhaps speaking to my various desires to participate in the “cult-y” French New Wave (via spectation, reflection, imitation, and, more hopefully, invention-in-production), Phillip Williams, in “The French New Wave Revisited,” explains that

What the [French] New Wave moviemakers improvised was a much more spontaneous, independent cinema, a cinema that lived in their world and spoke to their generation. It was often rough and unpolished, but seldom uncommitted. There was usually a strong voice behind the camera; a voice that spoke to aspiring artists around the world. (Williams, 2002, para. 13)

Based upon these identifications, it should be obvious that I value a Composition that is interested in more than clear, expository prose; I want (however idealistic) a Composition invested in composing (as) art, and this must surely mean that I am romantically seeking to work beyond the bounds of our discursive conventions. It has always been true. My first report home from first grade was a note informing my parents that I was doing “fine” but that I refused to color within the lines; this disposition continues to obtain in my work today, so that whereas I want to make art, I want to make it on my own terms, however culturally shaped and re-imagined, however resistant and unruly (and even if it means making “mistakes”). Here, my identification with Geoffrey Sirc’s similar desire—articulated so beautifully in his book *English Composition as a Happening*—is clear. But it’s not enough to cite Geoff and hope that you get my meaning. That is, I suppose that readers may be wondering exactly what I’m after. Essentially, I want to share my take on various scenes within both film and

viduals to discover the available means of getting the job done—humanely, creatively, compassionately, and in ways that privileged personal freedom from constraint.

39 See Sherrie Gradin’s *Romancing Rhetorics* or Bruce McComisky’s *Teaching Writing as a Social Process*.

Composition because there is value in this reflection. I will focus particularly on Jean Luc Godard because I find value in seeing the ways in which early Godard operated—with little funding, with found moments, with something close to an egomaniacal bravado and certainty in his novice moves. This sort of novice confidence seems key to recalling early Composition and its motives and, most importantly, for the motivational value it offered/offers young writers.

In his *Senses of Cinema* essay on Godard, Craig Keller explains that Godard has been fairly vilified because of his bravado. Yet it seems reasonable to agree with Keller as he intimates (via reference to artists considered “masters”) that it is necessary for an artist to maintain such bold confidence, especially in the creation of some outstanding new thing: “Godard is an artist of tremendous agency and authority within his medium, and through the uncompromised expression of his aesthetic and, therefore, moral convictions, demonstrates as little concern for the satiety of the ‘audience that might have been’ as Beethoven, Joyce, or Renoir before him” (Keller, 2007). Joining, then, in the esoteric stance (any self-respecting auteur is drawn to the esoteric), I want my writing to serve as a kind of image (the notion of text-as-image,⁴⁰ by now more than passé), one that comes into focus over time. Similarly, Keller says of Godard’s longing for a more fully engaged cinema, “qu’il y aurait’ [‘what might have been’] is a conception couched primarily in the language of ‘hindsight’ (projecting backwards into a memory of cinema/art/world to underscore and poeticize the associations between the films), and we might do best to make that leap into the future” (Keller, 2007, para. 6).

Reflection and becoming. Of course, I realize that I romanticize this very work by considering it as a kind of becoming that you should indulge. I find even greater clarification for my method in a W. J. T. Mitchell (1995) interview with Homi Bhabha (1995). I want to identify with Bhabha’s response to Mitchell’s question regarding the “difficulty” of his prose. Bhabha explains:

I feel that the more difficult bits of my work are in many cases the places where I am trying to think hardest, and in a futuristic kind of way—not always, I’m afraid, there may be many examples of simple stylistic failure, but generally I find that the passages pointed out to me as difficult are places where I am trying to fight a battle with myself. That moment of obscurity contains, in some enigmatic way, the limit of what I have thought, the horizon that has not as yet been reached, yet it brings with it an emergent move in the development of a concept that must be marked, even if it can’t be elegantly or adequately realized. (as quoted in Mitchell, 1995, p. 91–92)

40 See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*.

Apparently, in Godard's writings on film, he worked in a similarly "rebellious" (or, from my perspective, "organic") manner. Craig Keller explains that, "Godard's method of writing about films involves elliptical, round about argument, the concatenation of seemingly unrelated disparities, and frequently coming down on the side of films deemed by critical establishmentarians as too vulgar or unpolished" (Keller). Godard's writings were considered the most deeply theoretical of those published within the pages of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* (the cinema journal, you must keep in mind). Keller insists that "the cinema as put forth by Godard was therefore a 'cinema that might have been,' a canon (or anti-canon) that existed only as an ideal . . ." (Keller, 2007, para. 5). Sounds good to me, but I recognize its sentimental disposition as one that may make my comments unavailable for serious consideration in today's Composition programs, which are beholden to assessments both internal and external (and this means clarity, uniformity, not complexity or idealism). Nevertheless, what I'm after in this, my apologia, is an account of my desire, my longing to think about film and Composition as a scene, complex and overfull, idealistic and unavailable for easy analysis. In other words, this writing wants "to put our relation to the work into question, to make the relationality of the image and the beholder the field of investigation" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 49). For my purposes, "the work" is about both film (spectation, appreciation, and, importantly, production) and Composition, and I hope to think through the "relationality" I experience as both a filmmaker and a compositionist—a composer. The French New Wave represents the scene of my early and more recent identifications, associations that seem useful for thinking about film as rhetoric, filmwriting as appropriate work for Composition, as (a) composition.

So I will proceed. No more apologies for indulging my francocinephilia and the clichés that attend imitating "The French" as I admit that while drafting this paper, I wanted to do Serious Academic Work by seeking a more theoretically deep and confounding lens through which to make my arguments. I have been contemplating Mitchell's consideration, *What Do Pictures Want?*, his concern for what images seem to desire as a way of thinking about images, a concern reflected in Godard's approaches to filmmaking, particularly in his trademark jump cutting techniques, which display motion-in-time but only imperfectly, as though the image wants to avoid capture and maintain a sort of freedom or integrity.

Again, desire. Godard's jump cutting moves as revolutionary rhetorical gestures that sought to destabilize conventional filmmaking. The jump cut. Craig Phillips defines a jump cut as "a non-naturalistic edit, usually a section of a continuous shot that is removed unexpectedly, illogically . . ." (2007, para. 7) and sort of re-imaged to create a version of the real that reflects our imper-

fect perception (think of how a blink intervenes to create a nano-temporal lapse in the fluid, linear progression of image-narrative). Working against the theory that regards Godard's decision to employ jump cuts in his films as rhetorically brilliant filmmaking (which I want to insist that it is), Keller explains the use of jump cuts as a convention that is

commonplace today, but back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this was all very groundbreaking. Jump cuts were used as much to cover mistakes as they were an artistic convention. Jean-Luc Godard certainly appreciated the dislocating feel a jump cut conveyed, but let's remember—here was a film critic-turned-first-time director who was also using inexperienced actors and crew, and shooting, at least at first, on a shoestring budget. (Keller, 2007)

Keller argues that Godard's jump cuts were, in essence, the product of novice skill and working conditions—more simply, mistakes. Phillips adds, "Today when jump cuts are used they even feel more like a pretentious artifice" (2007, para. 7) I am not sure that I can agree with Keller because of the over generalization he creates. But more to the point, his identification of Godard's (then) revolutionary move as a mistake, while not implausible, seems to emerge from ignorance about the nature of writing, the nature of filmmaking, the nature of reflection, and the nature of textual convergences that generate "ideas" about an expression-event (text, film, art work, etc.).⁴¹ Filmmaker Tom Twyker (*Lola Rennt* or *Run Lola Run*; *Paris, J'Taime*) agrees as he describes the influence of the French New Wave filmmakers and their methods: "they looked for the moment," he argues, extending that visual inquiry to imagine the value of the jump cut along with Godard. Twyker recalls, "If you look at what Godard has said about his films—the jump cutting, for example—it was often there because they didn't have another take, so they cut inside a take just to move the shit forward. It's less conceptual, but it's still artistic" (as quoted in Williams, 2002, para. 16). Keller, as critic, wants to point out Godard's methods as mistake, whereas Twyker, as filmmaker, sees the jump cut/mistake as method that is nevertheless "conceptual" and "artistic" (as quoted in Williams, 2002, para. 16). From the perspective of the rhetorician and compositionist, pointing merely to Godard's inexperience and limited working conditions seems far beside the point; Godard invented an available means of persuasion in his given situation, and it worked, magically, ambiguously so (and in this way, perhaps we find the trace back from

41 I borrow the term "expression-event" from Brian Massumi, who describes our existing and emergent affective relationships to expression or external stimuli, be it image, image and words, text, etc.

the French New Wave to Italian Neorealism, a desire to create something that did not so much resemble a “film” in terms of Hollywood spectacle but more in terms of a story about “real” life, full of real human beings who remember only in pieces and imperfectly jump cut—rather than as fluid movement through clear, linear space-time).

Jaime N. Christley writes about another filmmaker who works in a similar rhetorical mood, Chris Marker, who famously wonders about “the nature of truth, how it is perceived, understood, and most importantly, how it is created, for ourselves as individuals and as members of this or that community” (Christley, 2007, para. 1). Marker’s most famous work, *La Jetée*, which is comprised of a continuous series of discontinuous jump cuts,

Clock[s] in at 28 minutes, [and] is one of the strangest movies ever conceived, and also one of the most beautiful and sad. It’s made up almost entirely of black and white still photographs, depicting the events of the narrative. (There is one single, haunting exception—the woman, in repose, fluttering her eyelids open.) These stills are governed by a third party narration—the only voice we hear—as well as music, and sound effects. (Christley, 2007, para. 6)

In her *Senses of Cinema* entry on Marker, Christley explains that, “[t]aking an image, a simple image, . . . and ‘scrubbing’ it—closely examining its nature, its context, its subject, or any other aspect, in order to develop a relevant discourse—is what Marker does best. Scrubbing the image is Marker’s bread and butter” (Christley, 2007, para. 8). For Composition, we find here an easy analogy to an emphasis on creativity and invention that leads to new methods, but perhaps more clearly, we see revision practices in writing processes (writing as “scrubbing” via revision). But we might/must also consider that while Composition has devoted itself more recently to studies of the image that aid in the teaching of elemental rhetorical knowledge and skill—rendering Marker’s “scrubbing” valuable for our current theory and practice—I have to think about present-day Composition beyond the elemental/textual in order to conceive of it as more expansive and hopeful cultural work. Here, however, I think ambivalently with Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, who bluntly explains his take on what such critical work can accomplish as cultural work:

It is obvious that art cannot teach anyone anything, since in four thousand years humanity has learnt nothing at all. We should long ago have become angels had we been capable of paying attention to the experience of art, and allowing ourselves to be changed in accordance with the ideals it express-

es. Art only has the capacity, through shock and catharsis, to make the human soul receptive to good. It's ridiculous to imagine that people can be taught to be good . . . Art can only give food—a jolt—the occasion—for psychical experience. (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 50)

It seems that we both comprehend and insist upon working against this ambivalence, and so, again, desire. Resisting Tarkovsky's seemingly self-evident claims regarding the failure of art to elevate us to the realms of the angels, it seems crucially important that we "become angels . . . capable of paying attention to the experience of art" (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 50). Naïvely idealistic, the desire for it is essential; it is Composition's desire for reflection, our mobilization of reflection as the compulsion to effectively communicate desire and resistance, expression and argument, ambivalence and meaning. In the context of reflection on film and image texts, it is this desire that I imagine informing Deleuzian speculation on the "plane of immanence" where we find interplay between the virtual and the actual so that they "thus become interchangeable," where "[a]ccording to Deleuze, the actual is defined by the present that passes, the virtual by the past that is preserved" (Pisters, 2003, p. 4). Conversely, speaking primarily of representation via words-in-print-texts, and perhaps articulating the sense of permanence and status sought by Albert Kitzhaber in and around 1963, by 1965, in a report sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board, we read that "we must distinguish between the passing and the permanent" (as quoted in Harris, 1996, p. 7). The reality and experience of immanent change had been associated with ostensibly harmful "progressive attempts to turn the [English] classroom into a 'catch-all' space for discussing what ever happened to be on the minds of teachers or students" (Harris, 1996, p. 5) . . . and this wouldn't do. But if we find value in Deleuze's take—"the actual is defined by the present that passes, the virtual by the past that is preserved" (Pisters, 2003, p. 4), in becoming rather than in establishing *What Has Been*, then we will want to explore Godard's jump cutting, montage, and other added effects in order to appropriately consider, along with Michael Temple and James Williams,

autobiography and memory in film; age and melancholia; twentieth-century history and historiography; the fate of European art and culture; the relation between aesthetics and identity; ethics and philosophy; the nature and status of authorship and literature; the evolution of the visual image from painting to film and video; speed and technology; and videographic montage as a new poetics. (2004, p. 9)

It is true that here I want to "discuss what happen[s] to be on my mind,"

and I will do so by paying homage to Godard's "new poetics." Thinking alongside my concern for a kairotic, responsive, and responsible Composition, I want to applaud Godard's efforts to both capture and liberate an image at the same time.

Less idealistically, as "a film person" (and as someone who is not actually French), it's humbling for me to return to Benjamin's comments upon the apparent charlatanism of the film spectator; he argues that "[i]t is inherent in the technique of film . . . that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is something of an expert" (1936, p. 231). Humbling today, but back then, as a cranky teen with my Saturday afternoon movies, it seems plausible that I enjoyed certain films—even with my limited understanding—because of how they made me feel, like *one of us*. Rhetorical engagement as social process. Simple. Still, recognizing the weight of my tone and the nature of current Composition, it seems necessary to read against my somewhat dreamy and nostalgic sentiment and make clear that I find the "anything goes" disposition to composing and Composition somewhat problematic. But I will resist explicating this awareness as a form of Burkean identification with and in the spirit of Godard, who, speaking in terms of production on his work as critic, writer, and filmmaker, identifies "a clear continuity between all forms of expression" arguing, "[i]t's all one. The important thing is to approach it from the side which suits you best" (as quoted in Milne & Narboni, 1972, p. 171). So I will follow my sentiment as I shape my approach-identifying with Godard who has divulged that "[i]f I analyse [sic] myself today, I see that I have always wanted, basically, to do research in the form of a spectacle" (1972, p. 181).⁴²

I realize that by identifying so closely with Godard's self-assured performative disposition, I may simply be exposing my narcissism. Possibly confirming this diagnosis is *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis' review of a film recently screened at the Berlin Film Festival, a film scrumptiously entitled *Exterminating Angels*. Setting up her review, Dargis (2007) writes, "Film criticism . . . is the rationalization of taste into theory. No matter how involved the argument, writing about the movies almost always comes down to a question of personal taste, [to] that web of influence through which we filter each new film" (Dargis, 2007, B3). I love the candor with which Dargis explains her take on film criticism. Aspiring to a similar effect and gesturing toward a kind of nostalgia that may be productively (re)motivational for contemporary Composition, I call upon my personal taste and experience, along with various historical accounts, in order to project a sense of "crisis" in

42 This approach was multimodal as this paper was originally presented at the 2007 CCCC conference. During the presentation, I read the paper as I screened a short film, an homage to Godard that wanted to articulate my desire visually and aurally, in cinematic rather than in pure "conference-paper mode."

1963 film culture and argue that a similar disposition attempted to move 1963 Composition.

So, Godard (1963): in his “first and last” big budget, studio-financed film, *Le Mepris* or *Contempt*, made a move to “go big” in ways that diminished many of his most inventive and effective filmmaking moves. But in “going big,” Godard failed to create a very good film. A few complaints: a shift from black and white into lurid color; loss of subtle montage and other added effects for linear narrative; big name Hollywood stars; hit-you-over-the-head references to Greek Literature—when, we get it. Contemporary analogues to the shift I’m lamenting can be found in films (famously, all iterations of latter-day Star Wars) that evidence the CGI effect, films that, because they can, create digitally crafted armies of millions—locusts, clones, aliens, what have you—but that lack a certain small scale intimacy and suffer the loss of the ambiguous charm, delight, curiosity, and terror that comes from not seeing, from not overwhelming the sensorium—absence is presence, or, as Baudrillard famously comments, “to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has,” (1983, p. 5) which is a pretty magical formula for the artifice of (film) composing. This is relevant to Godard and his early methods—hand held cameras, little financial and technical support, and a revolutionarily independent spirit. I’m inspired by Godard’s charming ambiguity—how his work is both pleasurable and intellectually engaging without clubbing me with its studio-supported, effects-driven force (its obvious-to-the-point-of condescension rhetorical effects). I want to think about Composition through the lens of film culture and its various crises of aspiration. Specifically, as I contemplate early, present-day, and future Composition performances, I want to imagine with Jean-Luc Godard a “cinema that might have been” (Keller, 2007, para. 5). That is to say, I want to think with Godard about a phenomenon that often amounts to “the disconnect between audience spectatorship (ecstasy before the projected spectacle) and the ex post facto indifference and callousness of that same audience/world that once watched” (Keller, 2007, para. 7). In other words, I want us to think with Godard as he laments the rhetorical and affective intensity that occurs at the moment of spectation/experience but fades once the lights come up. Godard seemed to be after both affective intensity as well as rhetorical and cultural engagement. As Keller interprets Godard’s desire, “The cinema, which disengages us from worldly considerations while engaging us in its world, that is, our world, ontologically resides in a zone of paradox. Between action (engagement) and inaction (disengagement), Godard was to set out on the path of the former” (2007, para. 8).

It seems, then, that Godard shares a sentiment famously articulated by Brian Massumi in “The Autonomy of Affect,” which caught the attention of scholars in Composition. Wondering about affect is not a new practice within

our field; Ann Berthoff and Sondra Perl famously explored affect in Composition's early days. More recently, Composition scholars Kristie Fleckenstein, Jenny Edbauer Rice, Lynn Worsham, and others have been exploring the affective as a way of theorizing writing and the teaching of writing. While not speaking within the context of Composition but nevertheless exploring issues of pressing concern for many teachers of writing, as Massumi theorizes responses to film and televisual texts (including print text-as-image), he seems to share Godard's concern for audience-experience as desire that engages a "free-flowing affect."⁴³ This phantom but, as I see it, necessarily desirable affect circulates, for Massumi, somehow beyond discourse, within and throughout what he calls "expression-event[s]" (2002, p. 27).

While Massumi's free-flowing affect provides us with a language for thinking through our seemingly non-conscious, visceral and heightened sensorial responses to certain expression-events, such as a film, the concept is clearly problematic for those compositionists who have gener(ic)ally accepted Foucault's various articulations of the ways in which nothing exists outside of or beyond discourse. My experience as a filmmaker who screens her films at academic conventions has shown me that some, if not many, compositionists believe that teaching, using, or producing film-as-rhetoric is problematic to impossible; film as composing (filmwriting, film-composition) moves us beyond convention and genre and traditional notions of "engagement" via affect, gesturing toward an "anything goes," extra-discursive play that may be counterproductive, even dangerous. Eager to argue for a more beautiful use of digital play in her 2007 plenary, "Fitting Beauties of Transducing Bodies," at the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric & Composition, Anne Frances Wysocki argued that some visceral forms of engagement may unwittingly contribute to a culture of violence that seems easily to tolerate violent representational texts and encourages audiences to participate with/in them (in the form of violent video games, new digital artforms that foreground the body's response to its status as "art object," and, we might imagine, film).⁴⁴ In my eagerness to embrace or simply to be after Massumi's "free-flowing affect" as I participate in film work as a spectator and film-compositionist, I initially resisted Wysocki's reading; however, working more carefully through some of my initial reservations (which I tried eagerly to deny), I see now that there is something quite important about what she is worrying. Still, I want to bypass this concern, for now, especially because of the ways in which it occludes my immediate desire.

43 I am indebted to Dennis Lynch for the term "free-flowing affect," and am grateful to him for talking through his reading of Massumi with me in a post conference extension of a paper I presented at the Penn State University's Conference on Composition (2007).

44 See *Saturday, 2002* by Sabrina Raaf or *Osmose* by Char Davies.

Thinking about desire is to think in terms of affect. Filmmaking engages desire, invoking its creativity and imagining (the experience of) its fulfillment; writing or talking about a film I've made is a far less complicated rhetorical activity. That is, the writing that attends film work seems to come with comparative ease. Because, while there's more to it than this, essentially, in generating words, I work with one track, whereas in generating a film I work with several visual tracks and possibly one or more sound tracks, as well. I work to integrate them into an audio-visual whole that resonates something I want, something I want to project, something I want an audience to imagine as new, something that moves, something an audience reanimates and in that way sort of helps to complete. Though somewhat problematically received, Marc Prensky (2001) popularly intimated that our "digital native" students were all about this complex, integrative, pleasurable rhetorical work (p. 1), and his terms resonated in a variety of compelling ways. Nevertheless, film work in our classrooms often defaults to analytic and cultural studies oriented work regarding existing films (Bishop, 1999, p. vii), and this is fine for purposes related to the production of standard written English and for critical academic discourse, but literacies shift, and we seem stuck. So this analytical textual work about film is fine, except that it's not. In many ways, we are not so much producing but still looking at film texts as bound by conventions and thereby throwing back to earlier versions of Composition that privileged literary texts that primarily served to polish up students for work in literary studies (Connors, 1997); we had been limited in terms of invention potential, discovery, creativity . . . we had diminished rhetoric's expansive range. In our recent film work, we are similarly delimiting our potential by clutching at what is, at what has been, and especially at what has been commercially successful; what I'm after is the "naive object," a term Geoffrey Sirc (2007) recently shared with me in an email discussion of this project, explaining that

by "naive," I mean the stuff students do, which may not be naive at all . . . naive = must be as underdetermined as possible, which in a sense obviates a certain kind of over-determined criticism. So the rhetorical apparatus you bring to a textual/filmic/whatever object must be a kind of fresh encounter. You can't bring the received discourse in as an analytic for new objects. (G. Sirc, personal communication)

Agreed. And I want to compel us to do more interesting and inventive things in our film work alone, but I realize that we are still largely about orderly academic written discourse. Even so, it seems to me that film work may productively move (student) writers to greater rhetorical efficacy. So, what of the

writing that emerges from or attends film? Here again, desire, desire for affective intensity, desire for a vital (and pedagogically valuable) engagement.

Engagement. I remember reading about early Composition and its groovy moves—“the sounds, the candlelight, the students on the floor, the dark” (Sirc, 2001, p. 1)—an inviting disposition that privileged and inspired spontaneity and creativity and desires to teach and learn with far less support than we were then receiving (by comparison, Godard’s 1963 film *Le Mepris* is in many ways all about the horrors of what happens to one’s creativity and integrity once massive support is secured: the breakdown of communication, trust, and tenderness; the loss of frivolity and joy; the absence of wonder). Briefly summarizing the film,

Contempt deal[s] with a conflict between a European director (Fritz Lang playing himself) and a crude American producer, Jerry Prokosch (performed with animal energy by [Jack] Palance) over a remake of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Prokosch hires a French screenwriter, Paul (Michel Piccoli), to rewrite Lang’s script [in other words, seeking commercial gain over art, he hires a lesser-known writer to revise the work of an established “master”]. Paul takes the job partly to buy an apartment for his wife, the lovely Camille ([Brigitte] Bardot); but in selling his talents, he loses stature in her eyes [in early discussions of this paper, Geoff Sirc imagines Brigitte Bardot as Composition student, and this makes sense to me, especially as . . . through] a series of partial misunderstandings, Camille also thinks her husband is allowing the powerful, predatory Prokosch to flirt with her—or at least has not sufficiently shielded her from that danger. (Lopate, 2007, p. 1)

Maybe I was drawn to Composition in the same way that Camille fell in love with Paul. In the film, lamenting the changes she experiences ever since Paul (the hack writer) pockets the check from Prokosch (the producer), she comments upon their earlier days, their carefree courtship, their spontaneity, the joy they knew despite their unknown status and modest financial circumstances. Maybe I was drawn to Composition because of its hopeful yet undecided nature. But I can’t spend too much time on a literal comparison; casting myself is one thing, but it’s too presumptuous to imagine our entire discipline as characters in a French film (although it is deliciously tempting).

We have been talking about film in Composition since at least 1939, when, as noted earlier, Hooper J. Wise noted the use of film as a tool that aids in the teaching of listening (*silenzio!*) skills as he discusses common practices in the University of Florida’s First Year Writing classroom. Ever since then, we

find references to film use in Composition's scholarly record. Apparently, we put film to the following uses: to engage students, discuss content, practice analytical skills, explore narrative conventions, discover and analyze cultural trends, and much more. More recently (obviously), we find ourselves thinking about film composition not merely as an artifact for consumption and analysis but also as end-text, as something to be produced in a Composition classroom (in fact, to avoid engaging with similarly popular "new" forms, Sirc has recently commented, seems "cranky and wrongheaded" ["Writing"]). Lacking production possibilities, we have in the past passed on film and other multimodal text-work. Or, the more likely cause of our inability to see film production as worthy (rhetorical) activity involves the continued privileging of the (correctly) printed word, (clear) written discourse as the primary vehicle of rhetorical power. We know that film, especially "intellectual," "foreign," or "independent" film can be provocative and engaging and rhetorically effective, but we seem to be conflicted about how and why we should be working with it. (As for the massive *Rambos* and *Pretty Women*, "no problem," we've been saying, for quite some time).

And "reading" these films is far too easy. Working in film production is vastly more interesting, challenging, and capable of engaging existing and shaping emerging rhetorical knowledge and skill. The ambiguity inherent in film work enables a kind of fluid possibility, a charming sense that what one says or does regarding film (as Benjamin earlier predicted and as Dargis intimates) can be said and/or done (e.g., YouTube, Slamdance, or the Free Form and Cell Phone Film Festivals). In other words, the current moment asks us to think about the ways in which the ambiguous and potential-laden multimodal disposition one must possess or develop in film work may productively reactivate and reimagine the "fearful" postmodern promise, "anything goes" (the sort of promise upon which early Composition perhaps relied, the promise we were persuaded to no longer trust post 1963). For "anything goes" is a threat to discursive power, a threat to the dominance of certain discourses that delimit what can be said and done in the context of thinking about and performing Composition—this issue of *Composition Studies* is, after all, devoted to thinking about shifts in culture that resonate within and throughout the emergence of our field. Film's inherent "anything goes" posture seemed/seems likely to jeopardize traditional acts of composing by suggesting that it is free (not without consequence but that it is unconstrained by generic conventions). But somehow, desire for this posture seems necessary in the present moment, as forces-internal and external-continue to attempt to define the nature of our rhetorico-compositional work and the nature of what constitutes an appropriate "composition." It is this desire that turns me back to Godard.

For Godard, anything could and did “go.” He is known for totally controlling his unorthodox methods of production. He worked fast, cheap, and, for the most part, without studio intervention. The parallels to early Composition are striking, it seems to me. And, just as early Composition pedagogy was in many ways born of—but could not break from—Literary tradition, in a parallel universe Godard has famously said of film work and its intertextual relationship to nearly 10 years of film theory (in the form of the *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, for which Godard had been a chief writer) “we’re born in the museum, it’s our homeland after all” (as quoted in Howe, 2005, p. vii).

In addition to his thrift and cleverness, Godard likely appeals to the contemplative compositionist; introducing *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, John Howe notes Godard’s “explicit references to the physical process of filmmaking, [and] a reflective and reflexive element that has become central to his work” (2005, pp. ix-x). Leaving the measure of analogy (to Composition) to the reader, I will simply point out that when I consider the ways in which this reflexivity is in part responsible for Godard’s early success, I have to laugh reading an anecdote from Philip Lopate’s 2007 review essay of *Le Mepris* for the *Criterion Collection’s* DVD release. Lopate, a cinephile who has himself borrowed dialogue from Godard’s film for his own book on film entitled *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically* recalls that in “1963, film buffs were drooling over the improbable news that Godard—renowned for his hit-and-run, art house bricolages such as *Breathless* and *My Life to Live*—was shooting a big CinemaScope color movie with Brigitte Bardot and Jack Palance” (2007); so, even the counterhegemonic, revolution-minded art-house regulars were excited to see what might happen if Godard were funded and loaded up with stars. It gets better: Angry over Godard’s refusal to trade on Bardot’s sexuality, the studios forced a compromise. The film opens on a scene of a nude Brigitte Bardot unwittingly offering a critique of the ways in which women are victims of the gaze as she asks her lover if he enjoys—one by one—each of her “parts” (“Do you like my feet? . . . Do you like my knees? . . .”). Following this “compromise,” which one might be tempted to view as successful given the reflexive critique it actualizes even as it self-referentially exploits Bardot’s appeal, Godard famously wondered, perhaps even then considering the horror of having sold out, “Hadn’t they ever bothered to see a Godard film?” (as quoted in Lopate, 2007).

In many ways, I am thinking about selling out, selling out to correctness and clarity at the expense of engagement, creativity, and a counterhegemonic spirit enacted through early pedagogies. I’m nostalgically thinking about how, just as early 1960s Composition wanted to move away from the strange and stultifying posturing of Compositions A and B, we find, according to Youssef Ishaghpour, “Godard’s . . . insistence on a sort of legal equality between image

and text” (as quoted in Howe, 2005, p. xii). I’m seeing here an early form of Composition-as-Cultural Studies that had begun to deconstruct traditional distinctions within the arts. Godard wanted to see film-as-rhetoric-as-art-as action, not through the narrow lens of disciplinary or mercantile divisions that often diminish creative potential; to do so, he could not work effectively or with real satisfaction within traditional studio engines. Famously commenting upon the “unpleasant difficulties” he encountered with his producers on *Le Mepriis*, Godard commented that “the imaginary has completely flowed over into life” (as quoted in Brown, 1972, p. 37) which is to say that, like Paul in the film, Godard had found that selling out isn’t worth it. It’s a somewhat obvious critique, but it materializes my concern for Composition’s continuing identification with what has been. My nostalgic turn both asks that I remember and compels me to imagine “the Composition that might have been.”