

# The Ethopoetic Moment

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Near the beginning of Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) an old professor, Isak Borg, and his daughter-in-law, Marianne, travel by automobile to an academic ceremony where Borg will receive an honorary degree. Their conversation reveals increasing tensions between the venerable old man and the young woman. Borg has lent money to his son-in-law for his academic studies and demands repayment, even though it imposes hardship on the troubled couple. "Evald and I are very much alike," Borg notes with satisfaction, "We have our principles." "You don't need to tell me that," she replies. "It's a matter of honor for him to pay back 5,000 a year." The professor then reminds his daughter-in-law of an ethical imperative: "A promise is a promise." Marianne responds with wounding candor: "Perhaps. But he also hates you." Borg's silent countenance registers the devastating affect. The exchange and Borg's reaction proves to be one of many revelatory moments within a complex narrative of self-discovery.

In *High Noon* (1952), Will Kane seeks help from the congregation of the local church on a Sunday morning. Frank Miller will return on the noon train to seek revenge on the marshal for putting him in prison. In a scene that brilliantly unveils the complex dialectic of a small democracy during a crisis, the respectable citizens of a frontier town debate the wisdom of assisting the marshal. Initial enthusiasm gradually becomes supplanted by prudent skepticism. Finally, with exquisite timing, the Mayor stands to address the crowd. As Kane stands humbly next to him, he first expresses support for the marshal: everyone knows what the town owes this man. But then the rationale begins to change. The politicians up North would frown upon renewed violence: it would be best for business and for Kane if he left town before Miller arrived. With each shift in the Mayor's rhetoric, Kane's face quietly registers the personal implications of such political expediency. "Thanks," Kane says flatly after the Mayor finishes and leaves the church.

These two scenes illustrate what might be called the "ethopoetic moment," that is, *the non-verbal disclosure of sudden personal isolation or social abandonment*. Although the archaic word "ethopoetic," originally used during the Renaissance, encompassed any artistic representation of character or manners, here the term becomes more narrowly defined. Ethopoetic moments are important in part because they encapsulate dramatically and often silently a moment of profound significance for human experience. Sudden isolation or abandonment ruptures bonds of social connection that not only shape individual identity but also provide it with existential meaning. The loss of such meaning not only creates intense drama within a narrative, it also affects the evolving affiliation between spectators and characters on screen. Empathy reinforces identification: isolation on screen encourages an aesthetic of inclusiveness.

This essay draws attention to the ethopoetic moment and provides an alternative method for comprehending them. It adumbrates both the semiotic and Deleuzian approach to such moments and examines how each, by asking a different question, contextualizes a defensible aesthetic response. It then argues that by shifting the fundamental metaphor of

understanding, the ethopoetic moment assumes an importance outside the customary boundaries of interpretive dispute. Yet the claims here remain modest. While asking a different question than Deleuze, this essay still draws inspiration from his works, those of his disciples, and others who have contemplated the affective complexities of the film experience.

Ethopoetic moments assume many forms in many media. They appear in traditional cinema both fiction and non-fiction, as well as on television including the news, sports and advertisements. Typologies could easily be constructed to organize these events into a manageable schema: for example, some operate in the public sphere, others more in private, though the ubiquity of recording technologies erodes this traditional distinction. Depending upon how elastic the notion of "personal isolation" or "social abandonment" becomes for an interpreter, the ethopoetic moment proves to be astonishingly pervasive.

Each ethopoetic moment embodies complex phenomena about individuals, settings, and relationships that repeated viewing often renders more, not less, ambiguous. The study of such mysteries draws upon a long, not always distinguished history going back to the Greeks. More recently, the analysis of human facial expression in psychology and of non-verbal messages in communication studies experienced a renaissance in the mid-twentieth century with seminal works on the study of emotions. By the 1980s, the field became dominated by the Facial Expression Program of Paul Ekman who, positing a limited number of basic emotions, argued for the universality of certain non-verbal forms of communication (Ekman and Rosenberg, 1997). Yet, Ekman and others who devised highly precise systems of evaluation found themselves under increasing attack from psychologists who challenged their assumptions, disputed their findings, and sought to expand the discourse to include moving images. (Russell and Dols, 1997)

Although with notable exceptions film theorists devoted limited attention to the specifics of non-verbal communication within individual scenes, their theories proved capacious enough to attribute meaning to such expressive acts. As David Bordwell argued in his influential book *Making Meaning*, theorists of the late twentieth century established "semantic fields" of impressive explanatory power onto which disciples mapped various cues from specific scenes. Bordwell drew special attention to critics who discovered "*repressed or symptomatic meanings*" in their explications in part because such interpretations claimed to unmask deeply ingrained structures of power customarily ignored by most viewers. Like others before him, Bordwell claimed that such theories about the cinema lacked a falsifying principle: "the heuristic is impervious to counterexamples." And he noted that the nuances of many films go unnoticed "because the interpretive optic in force has virtually no way to register them" (Bordwell, 1989: 251, 260).

Both psychologists and film theorists of the late twentieth century shared a preoccupation with interpretative understanding: Ekman measured and classified facial expressions to determine the emotions that they reflect; film theorists discovered the broader significance behind signs of distress. Despite their many differences such methodologies asked the central and obvious question of any hermeneutic: *what does this expression mean?* For the disciples of Ekman, for example, Borg's response clearly represents a form of surprise, one of the six "universal" expressions posited by the system. For film theorists, Borg's look could mean any number of things, including a challenge to patriarchy that operates on multiple levels of signification.

Deleuze asked a different question than either psychologists or film theorists. Rather than determine what a facial gesture meant, he probed how the expression affected social dynamics; that is, the new possibilities and potentials that the response created among those around the character, including even the spectator of the film. To borrow from the abstract philosophical language of embodiment, the question shifted from "*what does a body mean?*" to "*what can a body do?*" Deleuze rejected the quantitative, linear, and spatially informed conception of time in favor of a more qualitative, dynamic, and emergent notion of temporality that always remains sensitive to the "bounded becoming" of a potential future, a difficult concept that Deleuze called the "virtual." "The other is a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it and takes shape in a language that gives it reality," Deleuze and Guattari wrote in *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 17). In his two books of film theory, Deleuze created an intricate typology that applied this Bergsonian view to cinema. As Richard Rushton explained in an illuminating article, Deleuze transformed the face on screen from an object that indicated something -- a semiotic signal -- to a dynamic creator of new possibilities, feelings, and experiences. Non-verbal communication unleashes ever changing social potentials. It shifts the register of human interaction (Rushton, 2002).

Thus, for example, in *High Noon* the question changes from the meaning of Kane's facial expressions as the Mayor advises the congregation not to support him, to how the dynamic of both the Mayor and Kane affects those around them. Here the film provides an important clue: as Kane leaves the church, the camera provides a shot of the congregation, many of whom look downward or away. Although the tendency might be to interpret this shot semiotically -- the congregation indexes their discomfort and shame -- Deleuze would insist that this response, in turn, creates the potential for a range of possibilities. Their expediency forces Kane to confront his own personal fear that acts in uneasy tension with his allegiance towards a code of honor. Once again the question becomes not what the non-verbal response means, but how it creates new social expectations and potentials.

It is also possible to ask another question of the ethopoetic moment that borrows from Deleuze but relies on a radically different metaphor of comprehension: how do these characters sustain themselves? Here the inter-subjective encounter becomes fundamentally *alimentative*, a form of existential sustenance analogous to the biological relationship between food and the body. If within modern, affluent communities of comfort the satisfaction of such demands becomes routine, even transformed into connoisseurship, its brutal necessity never eludes the poor and the neglected. Social affiliation might seem an odd, even comic analogue to such a basic need. Yet just as a biological demand that rarely goes unfulfilled becomes repressed and forgotten, so also the profoundly social foundation of personal identity become submerged, especially within capitalist societies that constantly reinforce the notion of individual autonomy.

The alimentative metaphor might be deployed for comprehending the ethopoetic moment in three, closely interrelated ways. First, it stresses *persistent need*, an ongoing desire not unlike Spinoza's *conatus*, defined in his *Ethics* as the endeavor of all things to persist in their being. Spinoza asserted that *conatus* assumed two forms linked by *appetitus*, his invocation of the alimentative metaphor and one that, according to Judith Butler, prefigured Hegel's notion of desire (Butler, 1987: 11). In their most elementary form, human relationships could be classified as either sustaining or non-sustaining, the latter deemed by Spinoza to be a form of poison. The quality of such affiliations shapes the development of every individual, some more successfully than others and particularly in early childhood. Biological sustenance in infancy depends upon a fundamental social allegiance between caregiver and child. To

survive and thrive, the infant requires both physical and affective sustenance. This entanglement between biological and social aliments contours a developing ethos and contributes to the distinctive singularity of the mature individual, as John Bowlby's seminal work on attachment theory helped prove (Bowlby, 1980).

Abandonment or isolation becomes a form of starvation, even social death. In *Wild Strawberries* Borg's sudden discovery that his son hates him becomes part of a complex narrative pattern in which his isolation from those who should love him embodies a death-in-life more troubling than the physical death that his dream early in the film has foretold. In *High Noon* Kane suffers a social death first from his young wife, who abandons him less than an hour after their marriage, and then the respectable community of the church, who choose to do nothing for him. In both films, the ethopoetic moment mirrors a much larger theme about social connectedness that resonates in an extraordinary range of cultural texts from Schubert's *Winterreise* to the Charlie Brown of *Peanuts*.

Second, the alimentative metaphor invokes *taste*, a sensory fundament that particularly informed aesthetics during the eighteenth century. For purposes here, the notion of taste is not about artistic choice or the intricacies of connoisseurship. Rather, taste registers a style of social affiliation that can assume a number of forms. Instrumental affiliations entail relationships of power and functionality. A term intended to be regarded with moral neutrality, instrumentality infuses every social affiliation to some degree. Profoundly hierarchical and yet often dependent upon consent, it lies at the core of all economic transactions, but also permeates a parent's guidance of a child. Agapic affiliations, on the other hand, offer friendship and love, as the Greeks knew when they created a word for love - *agape* -- that distinguished it from sexual desire. Unlike restless, forward-looking instrumental relationships, the agapic ideal remains curiously static, a state of grace difficult to sustain within the quotidian life-world. The agapic often overlaps the third modality, *erotic* affiliations which fulfill biological imperatives. Cyclical and powerfully repetitious, erotic desire flavors an extraordinary array of social encounters, as Freud long maintained. Unruly and unpredictable, erotic affiliations sometimes challenge ethical norms, undermine social hierarchies, and revolt against mortality.

Although for heuristic purposes the instrumental, agapic, and erotic can be categorically apportioned, they remain inextricably fused in actual social relationships. Although this entanglement could also be described with a visual simile (the instrumental, agapic, and erotic resemble primary colors that blend imperceptibly into innumerable shades), the comparison to taste and smell maintains rhetorically the controlling alimentative metaphor. More important, this complexity helps provide the social context of each particular encounter. Here once again language makes abstract what is existentially specific. In *Wild Strawberries* Borg's respectable appearance and courtly manners mask a style of social affiliation that remains highly instrumental. Only near the end of the film does he begin to understand how the agapic might redeem him. In *High Noon*, Kane's sense of honor sets him apart from those who surround him, though it might be said that his inarticulate allegiance to a code of duty may itself be a form of instrumentality at once admirable and manipulative.

The notion of *absorption* constitutes a third and crucial trait of the alimentative metaphor. The I/Other dichotomy, visual and spatial at root, becomes bracketed when the assimilative properties of the alimentative metaphor become substituted in its place. Interpersonal relations between two people separated in space involve the absorption

of social norms in a cognitive manner inaccessible to precise linguistic recapture. Within each modal affiliation and dialogic encounter, its participants enact both *situational* and *embedded valences*. As in physics, where a valency indicates an active force, here the term applies to embedded and often cognitively inaccessible human predispositions shaped by experience, history and culture. Embedded valences, in particular, reflect social determinations. Not unlike Husserl's notion of "habitualities" and Gadamer's more controversial invocation of "prejudice," dispositional biases of attraction or repulsion become reinforced through complex historical routines of transmission. Such predetermined judgments of social collectivities are deeply corporeal and astonishingly difficult to eradicate. Selective body features -- skin color, facial configuration, and physical strength -- become categories that congeal historically into stereotypes. Kane was played by Gary Cooper, a tall, thin, laconic white male, which during a certain Hollywood era embodied the Western hero. Though *High Noon* subverted many conventions of the genre, it also reinforced others, particularly in its choice of actors to play villains. Eventually these embedded valences would themselves be undermined as the Western evolved into the science fiction films of the later twentieth century.

Situational valences are more idiosyncratic. Though profoundly influenced by cultural norms, they also reflect a repressed personal history that eludes specific genealogical recovery. Reaction to one person reflects an individual past encompassing many people. A certain gesture might conjure a positive or negative response fermented in hidden antecedents. Dim recollections of previously contested instrumental affiliations might erode conventional agapic formalities in a current encounter. Erotic and agapic affiliations, in particular, retain ingredients from aliments in the past reinforced by biological imperatives. Still, the past is not always prologue. The immediate personal context also creates situational valences. A momentary gesture that in one social context helps sustain affiliation, in another situation deprives it of nourishment. An ethos that in one circumstance might easily be alimentative, in another becomes distasteful. Each person brings his or her own situational valences to the ethopoetic moment.

The various categories of the alimentative metaphor make no special claim to uniqueness. Distinguishing between embedded and situational valences, for example, draws upon the rich traditions of hermeneutics dating back to the Romantics. The metaphor provides something more difficult to explain. Notions of "meaning" in all its semiotic variations offer a way of understanding the ethopoetic moment. At its most ambitious, the alimentative metaphor seeks to *absorb* the event affectively into the living experience of its "participants," a word that unlike "viewer" stresses the active engagement and assimilation of the human realities that the ethopoetic moment discloses. Traditional interpretive strategies provide a form of understanding necessarily detached from the cinematic experience that it illuminates. The scopic metaphor reinforces spatial distance between the spectator and the scene: notions of "gaze" and "voyeurism" correctly capture this aloofness. While not eschewing the value of rational interpretation, the alimentative approach collapses such distance by changing the modality of comprehension. The moment becomes internalized and transformed in a manner not unlike the digestion of food. This notion of comprehension draws upon various German traditions, including the concept of *Bildung*, though to my knowledge no German invokes the specific metaphor to explain its affective ontology.

Without invoking the alimentative metaphor, film theory has never been inattentive to the emotional and the affective. Early in the twentieth century, Eisenstein wrote in depth about "this esthetic growth from the *cinematographic eye* to the *image of an embodied viewpoint on*

*phenomena*" (Eisenstein, 1949: 233). More recently, Charles Affron explored the affective categories of film in his underappreciated *Cinema and Sentiment*, published a generation ago (Affron, 1982). Then too, the emergence of cognitive film criticism engaged such issues with fresh insight. In an important article, Carl Plantinga noted how the human face not only registered various emotions, but how such expression provoked what he called "character engagement" as opposed to the more vague and misused notion of "identification" (Plantinga, 1999: 244-5). For many contemporary theorists Deleuze casts a long shadow. Many recent scholars have detached themselves from the often static categories of psychoanalytic and semiotic criticism to embrace the thinking which Deleuze resurrected from Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, and Bergson. In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro celebrated the "corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame." (Shaviro, 1993: viii). In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks explored imaginatively how intercultural cinema evoked for the culturally displaced embodied sense memory, including the taste of food. (Marks, 2000: 234-38) Patricia Pisters demonstrated in *The Matrix of Visual Culture* how the concepts of time and motion in Deleuze result in complex and evolving subjectivities within the affective experience of film (Pisters, 2003). In two insightful books, Anna Powell shows how "Deleuze's spectator does not exist as a separate entity, but is subsumed in the film event *as part of it*" (Powell, 2005: 4 and Powell, 2007). Each of these works shows the limitations of the scopic metaphor and theorizes how film becomes most effective when, in the words of John Keats, it is "proved upon the pulses." The alimentative becomes evoked conceptually if not explicitly. The discourse on embodiment in a number of disciplines unites what Descartes separated.

Yet, traditional forms of interpretation often lead to alimentative comprehension without formally intending it. No matter the interpretive lens, intense scrutiny of film creates differences of comprehension though repetition. During the first or naïve viewing of a film, most viewers remain captivated by what happens next. Released from this narrative mystery, the spectator achieves new levels of comprehension with each additional viewing. Repetition deepens the affiliation between the spectator and the embodied representation. Spectators understand these increasingly familiar images in ways that transitory encounters never possess; the scenes acquire *invested meaning*. This assimilation of the ephemeral carries with it an important potential. The first viewing of other films may become less naïve, as spectators assimilate the hidden density of what they experience.

The categories of the alimentative metaphor might best be illustrated by extended analysis of a complex example of an ethopoetic moment. Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, released in 1954, concerns a small village in sixteenth century Japan that constantly suffers devastating raids from roving brigands. To protect themselves, the villagers recruit masterless samurai, who agree to defend the village for little compensation. The samurai include Kambei, a stoic leader; Kyuzo, an expert swordsman; Heihachi, an affable companion; and Kikuchiyo, a farmer's son whose claim to be a samurai needs to be demonstrated during the narrative. Kambei establishes a defensive perimeter around the village, but near the middle of the film decides that a preemptive strike on the brigand's camp would be a useful tactic. One of the more aggressive villagers, Rikichi, agrees to guide three samurai to the hostile encampment. The scene that follows, which lasts a little over five minutes in viewing time, includes a brief unexpected inner narrative of cinematic brilliance.

To the non-diegetic sound of drums, the raiders approach the brigand's camp. Kikuchiyo gives instructions to set the hut on fire and kill the enemy as they attempt to flee. Through gaps in the walls, the three samurai observe the sleeping robbers and their women. To the

non-diegetic sound of a Noh flute, a young woman in the hut gradually rises from sleep and looks around. When she sees the fire she initially recoils in horror, then observes the flames in silence, a curious smile upon her face. As the fire spreads and everyone tries to escape, the samurai shove aside the fleeing women and slay the brigands. They regroup near a pond, when suddenly Rikichi stands and observes the young woman emerge from the hut. He runs toward her; confronts her silently for a brief moment. She recognizes him, reacts in horror, and runs back into the burning hut. Heihachi drags Rikichi away from the hut, but an off-screen gun shoots him. The raiders take Heihachi away as the camp burns. Kikuchiyo slaps Rikichi and blames Heihachi's death on him. "Who was she?" he demands. "My wife!" Rikichi exclaims slumping to the ground. Heihachi dies.

The brief, tragic, and virtually wordless captivity narrative of Rikichi's embedded within this scene encompasses ambiguities of personal ethos and of spectatorship ignored by more general thematic interpretations of the film (Desser, 1983; Richie, 1984; Prince, 1991; Stafford, 2001; Mellen, 2002). To the first-time viewer, the young woman who gradually emerges into the cinematic frame, accompanied by the haunting, non-diegetic sound of a Noh flute, introduces a mysterious diversion. The screenplay in English translation, describes her appearance in the following language: "A single candle burns, its flame flickering in a slight draught. The figure sits up slowly. It is a beautiful young woman. A Noh flute begins to play over. The curtains stir in a slight breeze."

The script describes her as "staring sadly into space," an appropriate caption to the frame, but one that also vivifies *ekphrasis*, the problem of expressing "non-verbal communication" in linguistic form (Kurosawa, 1992: 162-63). Without the images, the screenplay would evoke a more vague, subjective image for the reader unacquainted with the film. Conversely, the spectator innocent of the script might describe her expression differently, as "blank" or "empty" or perhaps "despondent." Psychologists of facial expression might eschew subjective characterizations and substitute a system of precise, anatomical descriptions that differentiate subtle distinctions in facial movement.

The alimentative approach, borrowing in part from Deleuze, would concentrate on the woman's evolving social relationships within the scene, how her facial expressions reveal what sustains her. To the brigands, as many shots indicate circumstantially, her alimentative value remains overwhelmingly instrumental and erotic. They use her for their own purposes. To the samurai, their voyeurism may also involve erotic affiliation, intensified because of the impending violence. But their main concern remains instrumental: unlike the other anonymous, semi-naked females, the young woman has awakened and may prematurely warn the brigands. She represents a danger to the raid. From the viewer's perspective, however, who identify with the samurai and observe them watching the woman, the close-ups and the Noh flute helps alter their affiliation with the character. Her pathos provokes sympathy, a situational valence that creates an ambiguity of affiliation. Unlike most war films, an "enemy" becomes humanized while still representing a danger. The agapic remains in tension with the instrumental.

Her reaction to the fire further complicates these affiliations. Initially she reacts in horror but then gradually alters her response to the danger and her affiliation with the brigands. The screenplay describes this transition: "then she turns back and looks through the curtain, camera reframing again to keep her in close-up. She lowers her head, then raises her eyes again with a bitter little smile" (Kurosawa, 1992: 163). Subtle and ephemeral, this expression eludes many first-time viewers. Others might not characterize it as a "bitter little

smile." Once again, however, the contestable semiotics of this frame may be redirected towards the ethopoetic affiliations that it alters. The expression provokes a response first from Kikuchiyo then Kyuzo, who realize that she will not call out to warn the others. She serves their instrumental purposes by her silence. But her "bitter little smile" also embodies an ethical position of some importance. But not reacting, she will kill the brigands, as well as herself. Unaware of the impending raid, she becomes an accidental warrior, an agent of destruction whose motive remains obscure. Her passive aggressiveness deepens the mystery of her identity, and strengthens the audience's increasingly complex affiliation with her.

Her reaction also hints at something else. When she first recoiled from the flame, she indicated an instinctive desire to live and flee from danger. By gradually returning toward the flame and remaining to die along with her captors, she embodies an attitude with a familiar parallel in language. In his *New Science* published in 1724, Vico argued that metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony originated in the human body. Metaphor helped describe inanimate objects. Metonymy and synecdoche emerged when early poets struggled to elevate specifics into more abstract universals. Irony became possible as language gradually detached itself from its embodied origins (Vico, 1968: 129-31). Though Vico's genealogy rests on epistemological assumptions contested by modern phenomenology, his notion of primordial corporeal tropes might be invoked by this scene. Long ago, a circumstance not unlike one depicted in this brief narrative evolved into "irony" as a category of thought.

Her second appearance bears a curious similarity to her first. Once again she emerges to the non-diegetic sound of the Noh flute, sees something that frightens her and this time actively chooses death by returning to the burning building. Commentators stress the actions of Rikichi in this sequence. A villager and a subordinate, he abandons group discipline and proves the cause of Heihachi's death by gunfire. As Roy Stafford put it, Rikichi acts from "individual motivation" and a "selfish desire for revenge" against the brigands (Stafford, 2001: 25). Yet, as Kurosawa has constructed the scene, the audience's agapic affiliation with the woman moments earlier complicates any condemnation of him for breaking ranks. The agapic bonds of marriage overwhelm the instrumental demands of battle. But these agapic affiliations also involve complications. The screenplay indicates that the flames drive Rikichi back from entering the burning building: "He reaches the threshold but staggers back from the leaping, roaring flames. Medium close-up of Rikichi in back view, silhouetted against the flames holding his sword" (Kurosawa, 1992: 165).

Does Rikichi's raised sword, a momentary gesture easily overlooked during an initial viewing of the film, reflect an intended act of punishment for his wife's shame? Or does it embody an instinctive response to the intense heat and the stress of his wife's unexpected appearance? The notion of shame, an embedded valence within traditional Japanese society, resonates less with contemporary Western audiences, particularly after the sexual revolutions of the twentieth century. For both Rikichi and his wife, however, the absorption of such socially determined behavior creates profound ambivalences of affiliation. Rikichi's wife twice becomes suicidal within this short narrative: once as an act of revenge; a second time as shame. Rikichi loves his wife sufficiently to endanger himself and his companions, but may also feel compelled to slay the woman who shamed them both. In both cases, it is not simply the samurai who within the film enact a code of honor. Villagers such as Rikichi and his wife also disclose an allegiance to a rigorous standard of conduct that sacrifices personal survival and agapic affiliations to a more transcendent, instrumental duty. By sacrificing her life, Rikichi's wife redeems the unsustainable isolation and social death of her captivity.



The ethopoetic moment and the alimentative metaphor that might be deployed to comprehend it might be viewed as yet another form of interpretation or criticism in a field crowded with more worthy competitors. But the approach outlined here seeks something more elusive and perhaps ultimately unattainable: a notion of *film appreciation* that separates itself from the banalities which that phrase customarily invokes. The goal becomes for the spectator to appreciate fully the human experience depicted on screen. Here the process of internalization necessarily involves more conventional forms of understanding, including interpretative categories applied to repeat viewings of a scene. By drawing attention to a brief narrative, virtually any critic espousing a coherent point of view deepens understanding. When appreciation becomes the goal, however, the focus shifts away from interpretation and towards the existential predicaments enacted on screen. This traditional humanist approach comes with many attendant dangers, none of which need be rehearsed here. However, it also offers a comprehension of film that returns it to a place that for many viewers it never entirely vacated. Art once again becomes ordinary, as John Dewey argued. Disclosing abandonment and isolation, the ethopoetic moment forges social connection.

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