TONY CONRAD:

# A Few Remarks Before I Begin

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A year ago I published a statement, which may be most singular in the objectives which it places at the motivational stratum of filmmaking.

This article is called "Non-Linguistic Extensions of Film and Video"[1], and it offers (as an aspiration) the idea that "thoughts", in some sense, may appear, may reach the point of articulation, may be expressed for the first time, at least some thoughts which would be new to consciousness, and that this could occur *within film.*

Well, I have mulled over my commitment to this evidently neo-classical posture ever since.

The greatest embarassment that the article offers me at present is that it suggests *HOW* to extend 'language' in a manner which I now find very ill-appointed.

I had suggested that language might be extended through the ability of film to model an *analytical* or artificial-language system; in particular a system of binary logic.

I have several friends and correspondents who have contributed their interests to the general mulling on the subject of *artificial* and *natural* languages, and the relationships between them.

The impression which now forces itself upon me is that the problem of bonding natural and artificial languages is unsolvable for unexpected reasons, but that it should afford consequential insight along wholly unexplored avenues of review.

The great effort that has been seen in mathematical logic to press the roots of both math and logic beyond the necessity of access through the natural (English) language has of course revealed a basic condition of unsolvability, which I interpret thus: There are in fact *no* artificial nor analytic languages, in *any* real sense of the words.

You cannot start a book on logic without words in English (or whatever natural language). In short, the "artificial language" is a bud sprouted on English, just as company brand names are.

To return to my article for a moment: I might propose to myself (for my own redemption) that *Film* may afford a system that *does* introduce a truly discrete "artificial" language, simply by being independent of the symbology of verbal discourse (or that it could, if used in a cagey way). The problem, of course, is that speech also contains the precursors for an "artificial" language, in the form of DATA which may support some kind of deliberate structure. A very close parallel is offered by SONG.

[Sing]     mmm
          1
        Acquainted as I am   mmm
       ·   3        $\rightarrow$4/3    1
        With the variables of attachment   mmm
        9     4/3$\rightarrow$9 4/3 9$\rightarrow$4/3$\rightarrow$9     1
        To such objects as this one
        9                4/3 9

[Hold up a can of film]

The pattern of thought seems in these circumstances to fall back upon a relational substructure of understanding—to an underpinning of relational modality which we might call

<div align="center">

form     vs.     content

</div>

analysis; which could equally well be prodded out of a concept-structure deriving from

<div align="center">

thought     vs.     thought-about,
word     vs.     object,

</div>

or individual association.
Music is almost always about TASTE, when it is most closely guarded from incursions of poetry, dance, and so forth.

Film, on the other hand, might be more characteristically thought of as having *syntax* as its subject matter. How conjunctions of component materials are used is the stuff which most commonly affects us in a film, whereas the composer more often traps us with the evocation of taste-association which proceeds as a mood or atmosphere directly from the choices which they have made.

What I begin to find important is the shelving of all of this clutter: let's wrap up a few things for the convenience of our discourse:

A. There are no artificial languages.

B. Some relational propensity in our thinking calls into being illusions of such impossible discriminations as

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| form | : | content |
| word | : | object |
| analytic | : | synthetic |
| data | : | association |

C. Information about the problematic character of these false discriminations will derive only with difficulty from within the systematic approach which has served to produce our particular awareness of their inadequacies: in short, *some other thought strategy* is necessary to get further in the discussion.

Here are a few thought strategies:

1. I simulate what I like. If I like how someone speaks, I speak like them. If I like white, I dress in white.

2. I justify my thoughts with care, based upon a system of logic which is (one hopes) not so precise that it reveals that it is corrupted by its tie to my own speech.

3. I repeat and repeat whatever I am interested in.

4. I always consider lying, and being lied to.

Now what, as an activity, seems futile here, may be reviewed from a thoroughly different angle.

The film scholar has never been up to dealing efficaciously with the problem of *anticipation, suspense, temporal composition.* This is nothing out of the ordinary: nobody (film scholars *or* makers, or the corresponding commentators and artists in any of the fields of music, dance, theater, etc.) has been able to do much more than annotate the *decisions of taste* which underlie temporal composition strategies.

BUT:    BUT:    BUT:    BUT:

Always, always, always, people. People respond with their attention in ways which can be *programmed.*

*This* is a program.

The program is perhaps the most difficult chunk for the serious film person to bite off and chew:

*Program* equals *Pap.*

There is gut emotion in the rejection or acceptance of programming schedules.

Why am I informed, as I write these notes, that the Tibetan lamas who

"We went yesterday to hear Tibetans chant—Kagya lamas of Gylwa

Kaiwapa doing Inahakala puja. (They watch TV the rest of the time.)" writes David Hykes.[2]

The patterns of anticipation and resolution which are incipient in the common practice *program* have something going for them. What?

There is a wave of interest presently in a discipline which (similarly) prods before us highly unresolved social *data*. I'm thinking of sociobiology, naturally.

Sociobiology is a curious structure, regarded purely as a thought-framework. Clearly the first question to ask of sociobiology is: Is it self-exemplifying?

I apologize immediately for this tangent, even though it is fitting as an introduction to the two sentences which I have selected to illustrate these comments:

THIS COMMENT IS
SELF-EXEMPLIFIED

THIS SLIDE IS
ALSO AN EXAMPLE
OF ITSELF

NON-SELF-ILLUS-
TRATIVE STATE-
MENTS, LIKE
THIS, ARE LESS
PARADOXICAL.

Typical of the job of the film theorist, in these circumstances, is to evaluate the relative values of the messages (on the one hand) and the fact that they are presented as slides (on the other hand) in shaping an impact upon "an audience". As you watch this slide, perhaps you can separate and evaluate these factors mentally. Surely you are aware of what stimulates your attention, but is there anything systematic to say about what does it, why, and how it works?

We know that *attention* is the key item in linking experience to thought: it stands to reason.

The *types of thought* and the *patterns of attention* must then be interactive, and the terms of this interaction must develop alongside of a new sort of logic or thought-systematization. Can this interaction be described? Maybe it is possible to describe the *description* at least: it would seem that self-observation must play a component role (relative to the data-constituent offered to us internally by our attentiveness variability). It must also seem that the new thought pattern characteristic of self-observation at this level (at the level of generalizing about different types of *thought* and *attentiveness* experiences and interactions) will have to be (metaphorically speaking) cloudlike, holistic; unsystematic to be sure; at any rate, it must pass muster as being *unsystematic, unrepetitive, unimitative, unlying*, and so forth.

Basically, this piece is a romance, with the real and transcendental components bonded in the brain of the sender/receiver: It is another in a series of calls for *thought*.

As a performer, I have come to value the site which is presently being made available for the playing out of these words, for the particular kind of game that occupies my attention today: the game of thinking inside of other people's heads.

It is conspiritorial rather than confessional of me to give you a knight in this way.

There is no objective of art or media clearer than the making of *money*, within the economic reality of our capitalist-socialist world. However, the intellectual community resists this reality to some slight degree thru a vestigial awareness of other valuational schemata. In principle, it is Pure Reason that could be called upon as a ground, as a reality for the cultural institutions which support our communication and inventiveness.

Pure reason, of course, is a notion. The varieties of thought itself are never a *subject matter;* how could they be such, when the invocation of *thought varieties* for discourse—for use as examples, for example—must be such a tenuous matter.

There may be two ways out of this boot-in-the-quagmire. One: to examine the varieties and structure of thoughts or systems of ideas, and to examine the mechanisms by which they may propagate themselves from brain to brain (or by which particular ideas may contrarywise prove ill-suited to such propagation). My contributions to this field shall be composed under the rubric: Ideology Engineering.

The other way to study communication is to study *attention.* I use the word "communication" in a considered way, as *communication* and *thought* have to be seen as bearing the same relationship to one another as *individual organism* bears to *gene.* I mean to say that there is no thought without communication. This is a crucial conceit to Route 2.

How long, actually, does any particular thought take? How often would you have to work on a good one, to get it really going? How long is our attention span?—Perhaps you could get an idea of this by seeing how long it takes not to hear insects chirping outside the window. How long did it take not to notice the page having been turned? We are very aware that we are made very aware by *changes* that occur in the environment.

Consequently, it is safe to say that very probably human thought requires constant renewal and alteration. In fact, the variety of thought available to humans is almost directly a function of the number of scales of attentiveness which are achieved within the individual.

It is possible to have one thought in mind for a certain limited time, so long as it fits into a particular thought-type. If you want to get a thought really going, you have to get attached to it; to prod it into position all the time, and to give it plenty of relief time.

Here's some relief time from that last thought:

Taste, I would hope, could serve as the *subject* of film, as well as of music.

In structuralist discourse the relation between word and thing/idea is privileged: In spite of a hundred years of philosophy spent in tight infighting about this relation, the structuralist ignores the outcome (which *must* be that word and object are in an ontologically unstable relationship), and in effect makes the *word* elemental to their work.

Another sort of understanding altogether must be brought to bear upon the whole nexus of issues which have been associated by the structuralist siege: the tactics which suggest the greatest excitement to me are those accessible through approaches of those such as Harry Jerison and David G. Hays. Jerison [3] makes as his starting point in relating to language the extremely sensible observation that our *use* of language is not at all linked (in terms of causal appearance in an evolutionary context) with interpersonal *communication.*

Notice I didn't say that *thought* and communication are unglued. The fact is, simply, that language contains traps for thought, and that varieties of linguistic thought may not even be *consistent.* For example, Henry Flynt [4] points out that you may *think* you could imagine not having language, but it is impossible to clarify this idea.

Most language traps seem to lie in wait around philosophical problems, rather than around practical problems.

When you dispose of a dead person's effects and papers, and thoughts and communications, you find yourself reduced to this

### What use is it?

What use are ideas? Or communication? Or the intellectual community? Thoughts might best be categorized in these terms:
1. What use are they?
2. What are they worth in money?

What is *A THOUGHT*, exactly, anyway? This is an important ISSUE.

Clearly the cultural community depends upon being able to demonstrate that a body of thoughts or ideas has been communicated to its members. Otherwise, the jig is up. In practice, tho, a *forum* on the subject of education as communication is a rusty turkey to try to flush from academia.

This is a performance. Fortunately, as a practitioner of a discipline which nobody can describe (media study) I am protected from serious engagement with thoughts of any real consequence. What is

this subject, media study, which I profess to elucidate? Is there, seriously, such an intellectual subject as making videotapes? Come on.

How about making it *more* serious by studying *communication* instead, and doing that by studying the *movies?* Are you joking?

Being in this position, it is necessary for me to invent the actual discipline which is requisite to the present performance, and to consecrate that performance to the passage of time.

Naturally, the advantage of being serious by not being serious is that it is impossible to communicate by being serious. That is, there is no thought, as a consequence of seriousness, any more than there could be thought as a consequence of this. How would you describe this?

Perhaps you would discriminate between serious style of presentation and the real serious stuff, which has to have solid thinking to back it up. I would not find such an attitude helpful, if you were in my field. Of course, it does depend also upon individual interests.

Jerison, by splitting apart the evolution of language from the use of language for communication, makes himself liable to suggest *another use or motivating function for language.* He suggests that language, like the senses, gives homo sapiens an ability to represent, record, and relate spatially and temporally to the environment. This environment was originally, of course, the competitive environment shared with the roving predators—the dogs, cats, etc.

Such speculation is not similar to sociobiology, which simply attempts to arm us with new DATA: namely DATA concerning our inbuilt dispositions as physical organisms. Jerison instead gives us the *mapping function* as an (in a sense) irreducible element of our linguistic structure: his contribution suggests that *the code* used to carry a message is non-elemental; associational thought must be derived not from the *code* but from the *conjugation* of codes, as elemental pairings.

| TIME &/OR PLACE MAPPING | ASSOCI- ATION |
|---|---|
| | |
| thought image | lan- guage |
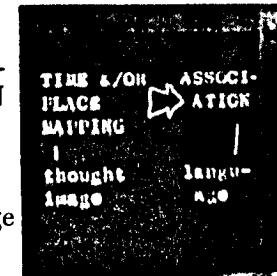


As the ideas here flex in and out of unruliness, it becomes harder to invest the emotive mechanism in them that holds them under intense

# ATTENTION

A conjugation of codes, though, is highly attention-getting.

There are simply more conjugations of codes than you can shake a stick at. The only reason to classify them, à la Rudolf Arnheim,[5] would be to use up the boring ones. Can life be continually thrilling forever?

Many who claim to find life thrilling also meditate.

We will all generally have *learned* thru being offered conjugative material; the offering of DATA is (tho not inimical to, at least) not very supportive of communication or thought as one might wish to find it.

Why is relational structure so troublesome, when it is pandemic to ratiocination? This is simply the wrong question. Failing relational structure is the most attention-directing principle of human thought. This attention-driving mechanism also powers the means by which attention rises to a new level of generality. In the present instance, for example, we can force tiresomeness into our recognition of common attitudinal systems operative within the following relations:
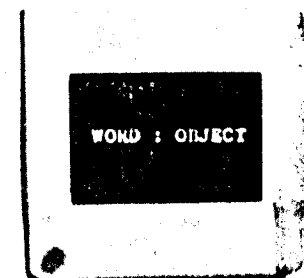
| | |
|---|---|
| FORM | :CONTENT |
| WORD | : OBJECT |
| RELATION: | DATA |
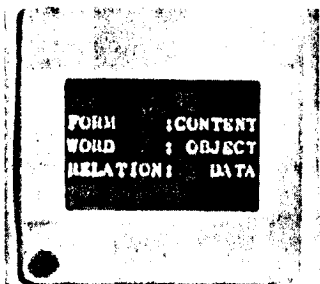
FORM : CONTENT



WORD : OBJECT



RELATION : DATA



Presently, we may discover generality with enough clarity to form a new relation:

| | |
|---|---|
| PROBLE- | AT- |
| MATICAL | : TEN- |
| RELATIONS | TION |
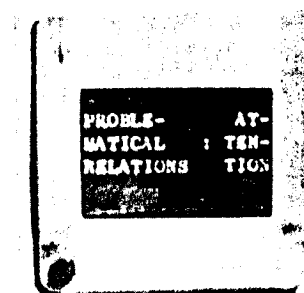


Can the brain easily bridge this gap? The answer that has to be predicted is YES.

Hello out there? Are they still functioning?
Hello

## ADDENDA

If one thing is sure, it is that none of this is consistent with the attitude that *association* is more or less "correct", as a principle for constructing art or literature.

By saying that mental activity is "associational", I would not like to be construed as saying that other thought structuring may be available or accessible to "us".

I write what comes to mind. We all do.

*Attention* needs guideposts for focus. Exploration of alternative attentiveness is a valuable cultural commodity.

<div align="right">(Buffalo, New York, August 27, 1977)</div>

### NOTES

1. Conrad, Tony. "Non-Linguistic Extensions of Film and Video." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 3, August 1976. Pp. 276-282.
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4. Flynt, Henry. *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*. Multhipla Edizioni, Milan, 1975. Pp. 13-15.
5. Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

P. Adams Sitney did his undergraduate and graduate work at Yale University. He is the editor of THE ESSENTIAL CINEMA, published by New York University Press, author of *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* and editor of *Film Culture Reader* and *Film Culture* magazine. Professor Sitney has taught at Trinity College, Yale University, Bard College, New York University and the School of the Chicago Art Institute. He is currently Director of Library and Publications at Anthology Film Archives.

### Authors

P. Adams Sitney
Dziga Vertov
Sergei Eisenstein
Jean Epstein
Germaine Dulac
Hans Richter
Antonin Artaud
Joseph Cornell
Maya Deren
Sidney Peterson
James Broughton
James and John Whitney
Carel Rowe
Stan Brakhage
Peter Kubelka
Stephen Koch
Annette Michelson
Michael Snow
Jonas Mekas
Ernie Gehr
Anthony McCall
Paul Sharits
Tony Conrad
Hollis Frampton

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