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Free Indirect Affect in Cassavetes' *Opening Night* and *Faces*

Homay King

How to make the affect echo?

— Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*¹

1. In the Middle of Things: *Opening Night*

John Cassavetes' *Opening Night* (1977) begins not with the curtain going up, but backstage. In the first image we see, Myrtle Gordon (Gena Rowlands) has just exited stage left into the wings during a performance of the play *The Second Woman*. In this play, Myrtle acts the starring role of Virginia, a woman in her early sixties who is trapped in a stagnant second marriage to a photographer. Both Myrtle and Virginia are grappling with age and attempting to come to terms with the choices they have made throughout their lives. In the wings, Myrtle bustles about discontentedly, whispering to a stagehand that there has been a problem with the props. She quickly takes a drink from a bottle of liquor before returning to the wings and readying herself for her next entrance. The film cuts to a shot of knobs on a lighting control board, then to a mobile, low-angle image of a red curtain rising above the stage. In this unusual shot, the camera follows the edge of the curtain up to the rafters, then pans rapidly down to the edge of the orchestra pit. The image is momentarily washed out with illumination as the camera swings past the row of bright foot lights. From here, the film cuts to a long shot taken from the stage of a crowded audience. The point of view this shot provides is ambiguous: we do not yet know what kind of play we are watching, who exactly is playing the scene, or where they stand, and Myrtle has not yet entered the stage.

The three shots described above cannot be associated with any particular figure's point of view. The next one, however, situates us in a highly specific location. The film now cuts to a poor view of the stage taken from a seat in the middle of the audience towards the back of the theater. The silhouetted head of a theater-goer seated in the next row blocks the camera's line of vision, taking up almost half the film frame. As the camera cranes its neck, we are able to discern a set on stage representing the interior of a commodious apartment. The set is sparsely decorated in a modernist style; the most conspicuous design elements are several large black and white photographs, including a greatly enlarged portrait of an older woman wearing a black hood and work apron. On stage, we see Maurice (John Cassavetes) in character as Virginia's husband, Marty, seated at the top of a staircase. Myrtle now enters as Virginia, and the two actors begin to play a scene in which they argue after she has returned home late from shopping and drinking alone at a bar. After this brief scene, the film's opening credits begin.

This introductory sequence is an unusual prelude to the rest of *Opening Night*, one which establishes a wholly unconventional relationship of the spectator to the action both of the film and of the play within it. The film's first shot places us in the wings: we do not yet know what kind of play is being performed, nor that the play has not yet opened officially (at this point, *The Second Woman* is in a trial run at a small theater in New Haven before debuting on Broadway). The shots of the lighting controls and rising curtain are similarly disorienting. Cassavetes shows the curtain rising not in a fixed long shot from the audience, but in close-up with a mobile camera which is positioned at the very edge of the stage. Where we might expect the film camera to reduplicate the proscenium arch, we are instead placed on the border between dais and audience, watching the curtain rise dizzyingly above. We begin in the middle of things both spatially and temporally: at the center of the action in the middle of a trial-run performance. The

shot of the stage from the perspective of the theater seat which follows does not so much clarify as further obscure the relationship between the spectacle and what surrounds it. From this place in the back of the theater, the spectator is denied a transcendental perspective upon the stage and the illusion of mastery which accompanies it.² From behind the wings to the edge of the orchestra pit, from on stage to the rear of the audience, the look of the camera remains mobile and in the middle of things, declining to fix itself to a privileged eyeline, declining to state where one look ends and another begins, avoiding easy paths of identification. The camera's look, this sequence seems to indicate, is to remain at all times oblique and indirect.³

I will soon be arguing that such decentered structures of enunciation place many of John Cassavetes' films in the tradition of what Pier Paolo Pasolini has called "the cinema of poetry,"⁴ and that Cassavetes' cinema explores the related parameters of "free indirect subjectivity." Pasolini defines the free indirect style as a mode of cinematic perception and enunciation which complicates distinctions not only between subject and object, but also between enunciator and énoncé, and ultimately between author and character. He describes this discursive structure as it manifests itself in films by Antonioni, Bertolucci, and Godard. In this essay, I interpret Cassavetes' work in the context of Pasolini's article and suggest that Cassavetes is, at least in this respect, these directors' American counterpart. Characterizations of Cassavetes' work as improvisational, documentary-like, and technically raw have tended to obscure the elements of his films that are formally innovative. Those adjectives themselves have been insufficiently scrutinized and defined, resulting in misconceptions about precisely what "improvisation" involves as a practice and what it suggests as a theory of cinematic production.⁵

I suggest that, in fact, nothing could be further from our received notions of documentary realism than a Cassavetes film. Unlike documentary, which typically relies upon a clearly

delineated and hierarchically ordered structure of enunciation, Cassavetes' films are enunciated in a highly decentered manner, both at the level of the spoken word and at the level of the look. When Myrtle delivers her lines as Virginia in *Opening Night*, we are never entirely certain who speaks, finally: the character Virginia, the actress Myrtle, the playwright Sarah, or ultimately, the actress Gena Rowlands or the writer/director Cassavetes. In turn, the use of close-ups, extreme long shots, and mobile camera shots, often in close proximity within a single sequence, complicates efforts to attribute point of view and to separate out those looks that belong to the enunciation from those assigned to characters within the diegesis. The thick layering of personae and masks and the resulting enunciatory ambiguity are particularly visible in a back-stage film like *Opening Night*. But, as I hope to demonstrate, this layering is equally present in an earlier film such as *Faces* (1968), where the characters are also in some sense already acting roles.⁶

Later in this essay, I hope to show that in these films, it is not only speech and vision that participate in the mode of the free indirect. Affect is also subjected to a crisis of attribution. It is as if Cassavetes' films attempted to exteriorize affect; that is, to dispossess the actors of their emotions and to locate their source in a diffuse visual situation. Just as we are never quite sure who is speaking when Myrtle delivers Virginia's lines, our attempts to localize affects and to confine them to a particular character are frustrated. This notion of what I will call "free indirect affect" has its sharpest consequences for characters such as Myrtle or Mabel Longhetti of *Woman Under the Influence* (1974), particularly in those moments where the affects they display are seen as deviant or disruptive. For, if affects cannot be localized, then the characters to whom they ostensibly belong cannot be pathologized in a clear-cut manner. In his words, Cassavetes refuses to "film inside the characters" (Cassavetes, 159). Such an approach to filmmaking suggests a new way to think about the origin of deviant affects: they have a source somewhere

other than “inside” an individual psyche, and a cause that may not be explicable solely in terms of psychical repression. In stead, emotional states are linked to a group situation or dynamic, and the responsibility for them is likewise collectivized.

This feature of Cassavetes’ films has crucial ramifications for a feminist interpretation of his oeuvre. When the sources of affects normally considered neurotic or hysterical are rendered indeterminate, such affects are unhinged from their traditional association with female subjectivity. Certainly, to embrace Cassavetes uncritically as a proto-feminist director would be impulsive. His depictions of female characters in distress are often broad-stroked and far from flattering, and his husbands and wives frequently enact hyperbolically stereotypical gender roles and patterns of behavior. In this essay, however, I will be arguing that *Opening Night* and *Faces* not only critique such roles and patterns, but also offer a way out of them. This unexpected development occurs first and foremost through what I call free indirect affect.

2. *The Second Woman*

Throughout *Opening Night*, Myrtle complains that she is no longer affectively “open.” The emotions that she wishes to draw upon for her performance in the play are no longer accessible to her. In her ostensible attempts to re-engage with the play’s material, Myrtle exhibits every manner of unprofessional behavior imaginable: showing up intoxicated and unprepared for rehearsals, calling up the play’s director in the middle of the night insisting that he discuss her role with her, and changing her lines in the middle of performances. Initially, we are given to understand that Myrtle’s difficulties acting her role have primarily to do with her reluctance to play the part of an aging woman. As she remarks to Sarah, “If I’m good at this part, my career is severely limited. Once you’re convincing in a part, the audience accepts you as that — as old.”

The moments of discursive indeterminacy which occur throughout the film, however, help us to understand that Myrtle's fears about being type-cast as "old" reflect a much larger dilemma. Myrtle is less afraid of aging per se than of closing down affectively: of delivering lines in a mechanical fashion, of ceasing to be moved by her material and settling into a static, unchanging role. Aging must be interpreted as a metaphor for a shutting-down or affective mortality.

Myrtle fears that she is losing her power as an actress: as she admits to the play's director at one point, "Manny, I'm in trouble. I'm not acting." Her comment betrays that at the moment Myrtle acts the role of Virginia as the stereotype of the embittered woman to a tee, she paradoxically ceases to act — not so much in the sense of failing to play the part, but in the larger sense of human agency. That is, she is no longer to initiate an action that solicits a response or reaction from others, or that opens a chain of new possibilities in the world around her.⁷ In *Opening Night*, to act well means precisely to participate in this latter type of action. The filmic enunciation responds to this dilemma, insisting that Myrtle does indeed retain the capacity to act — both in the theatrical sense and in the larger sense of inducing responses in others which reverberate through the external world. It does so by its own persistent and palpable reactions to her, in the form of camera movement, non-continuity cuts, and abrupt changes of angle.

Myrtle's refusal to act the part of Virginia duplicates the film's enunciatory responsiveness. Just as the film reacts to its character, Myrtle, so Myrtle reacts to her character Virginia: playing her "badly" becomes a way of letting Virginia remain discursively open. According to Myrtle, there must be a way to play the character such that "age doesn't matter;" that is, such that she remains open to futural possibility. The way to act the part with dignity for Myrtle is thus paradoxically to act it in a disorderly fashion: to change the lines, to surprise the other actors and force them to play scenes differently than they had been rehearsed, to refuse to

fix the role into a predictable pattern. For Myrtle, to act this part with reserve or resignation would be to condemn the character to a static state of “being.” Thus, Myrtle’s bad behavior in the play constitutes a protest not simply against the stereotype of the older woman, but also a protest against “being” in a larger sense, which — at least in this film — is opposed to “acting.” For Myrtle, to become this character fully and to play her in the manner in which she is directed would effectively put an end to acting: it would close Virginia down and constitute her for eternity as already having been what she might become.

In general, Cassavetes’ method of direction is opposed to techniques that work to consolidate character identity into stagnant roles and forms. His critique of Stanislavskian Method Acting, as taught in Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio in particular, derives in part from its tendency to isolate characters into solipsistic poses: in an interview, he disdainfully refers to the Method as “organized introversion” (Cassavetes, 52). Burton Lane, who co-founded the Cassavetes-Lane Drama Workshop in 1956, describes their approach’s differences from that of the Actors Studio in the following statement:

Feeling is simply the first link in a chain. It is followed by an adjustment of the individual to the situation and to the other people involved in it, and this in turn leads to the projection of an attitude which initiates the involvement with other persons...Actors who are preoccupied with themselves — with examining and recalling their own innermost experiences — cannot properly interact with others on stage, much less approximate the interactions of others with themselves.
(Cassavetes, 53)

Cassavetes’ and Lane’s style of direction emphasizes interactions among actors over and against the establishment of a consistent and “authentic” character identity. Their methodology accordingly privileges the moments of “adjustment” and “involvement” that are catalyzed in others by “feelings,” rather than the one-sided expression of those feelings. Cassavetes describes this process in the above-quoted metaphor of “never trying to film inside” his characters.

According to such a method, sets must be lit and scenes blocked to allow for maximum actor mobility, leaving room for unpredictable acts to be registered on film. As Cassavetes notes, “I cannot require that actors obey pre-determined camera movements...we generally lit the room so we could shoot 360 degrees” (*Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 152-3). While he may slightly exaggerate the degree of improvisation and mobility on his set (particularly in later films), it is clear that Cassavetes’ style of direction is designed to subvert an interiorized or unidirectional model of performance, in favor of a more diffuse definition of affective expression.

At this point, it may be useful to return to where we left off with *Opening Night*’s beginning, and to analyze more concrete instances of the free indirect style in this film. After the set of images described at the beginning of this essay, the film’s opening credits sequence begins. We see grainy black and white still images of various actors in the film with credit text written over them, accompanied by the sound of applause, whistles, and occasional laughter. This fairly conventional set of images is followed by a cut to a large black and white still of Myrtle in a white gown with outstretched arms, superimposed over a still of the audience taken from the stage. As Myrtle’s still image appears to ascend over the crowd, the applause fades into a piano solo, and she begins to speak in voice-over:

They want to be loved. They have to be loved. The whole world. Everybody wants to be loved. When I was seventeen, I could do anything. It was so easy. My emotions were so close to the surface. I’m finding it harder and harder to stay in touch.

As she speaks, her still image is repeated three times, each shot providing a slightly different framing and angle. The status of the lines delivered in voice-over is unclear: there is some question about who the “I” and “they” are. Do these lines represent an excerpt from the character Virginia’s lines in the play (thus written by Sarah, the playwright)? Or do they belong to Myrtle the actress, reflecting on her own past? The fact that they are delivered in voice-over at the start

of the film suggests yet a third possibility: that they have their source somewhere outside the diegesis of *Opening Night*, and may be attributed to Cassavetes the writer-director or Rowlands the actress. In this initial utterance of the speech, all four options remain open.

This speech will be repeated in a slightly different version towards the middle of the film in a scene in which Myrtle talks privately to Sarah about her difficulties acting her role in *The Second Woman*. The second version of Myrtle's speech runs as follows: "When I was eighteen, I could do anything. My emotions were so close to the surface. I could feel everything easily. But now, this is years later, plays later..." This time, we understand that Myrtle is speaking these lines about herself, and that they refer to her struggle to act the role of Virginia in an emotionally rich way. Nevertheless, the lines still resonate extra-diegetically if we understand *Opening Night* to be a late film in Cassavetes' career, and one which draws upon the history of his collaboration with Rowlands. The substitution of "eighteen" for "seventeen" and other small changes of syntax also makes us wonder whether these sentiments are to be attributed more diffusely. The emotional state described in the dialogue is thus not Myrtle's alone, but can be located with multiple enunciators, male and female. From the outset, the film indicates that it will not simply present a portrait of an aging stage diva; rather, Myrtle's dilemmas will be presented as part of a larger context.

The enunciatory status of Myrtle's speech may be better understood through recourse to the narratological concept of free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse in a literary text consists of a grammatical structure in which the tags that normally function to assign an utterance to a character (pronouns, quotation marks) are eliminated, such that the utterance is simply incorporated into the larger prose structure of the narrative.⁸ In *Story and Discourse*, Seymour Chatman notes that in the free indirect style, "character and narrator are so close, in

such sympathy, that it does not matter to whom we assign the statement... A feeling is established that the narrator possesses not only access to but an unusual affinity or ‘vibration’ with the character’s mind” (Chatman, 207). Unlike an interior monologue, in which the narrator appears to gain complete and unmediated access to the character’s thoughts, free indirect discourse retains enough of a separation between narrator and character that we understand them as two distinct subjectivities or enunciative positions. These positions, however, mingle or “vibrate” together to such an extent that we can no longer say for certain which words and sentiments are fully proper to each. In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal likewise calls attention to the narrowing of the chasm between enunciation and diegesis which occurs with free indirect discourse. In this situation, Bal writes, the narration effectively makes itself into “a virtual actor,” and as a result, “narrative levels begin to intertwine.”⁹ Although the categories of literary “narration” and filmic “enunciation” do not map fully onto one another, we may still see how in both cases, textual planes come to meet each other at a half-way point which is neither fully within nor fully exterior to the diegetic world — much like the shots in *Opening Night* taken from the edge of the dais.

A return to narratology is also useful for illuminating aspects of Pasolini’s notoriously ambiguous discussion of the free indirect form in “The Cinema of Poetry.” In that essay, Pasolini offers the following formula for free indirect discourse: “the author penetrates into the spirit of his character, of whom he thus adopts not only the psychology but also the language” (Pasolini, 549). Both Bal’s and Pasolini’s formulae emphasize the intertwining of voices which occurs in the free indirect form. For Bal, the narrator places him- or herself “on the same level” as the characters within the diegesis; for Pasolini, this figure adopts the “language” and “psychology” of the character. This gesture, it should be noted, can be viewed as an appropriative one. Rather

than let the character speak for him or herself and report the words verbatim, the author chooses to let the discourse remain indirect and unmarked, such that the words and sentiments no longer “belong” grammatically to the character. It may seem to us at first that the character has been dispossessed of his or her voice, robbed of it by the author. Another way to view this situation, however, would be to say that the author steps down from the enunciative throne to commune with the characters. If the character has been robbed of an authoritative voice and the privileges which accompany it, then so has the author. Likewise, Cassavetes’ spectator finds that he or she no longer has recourse to a stable position outside the diegesis from which to approve or censure the characters’ tales. As Carney notes, viewers of Cassavetes’ films are not permitted “to stand above, beyond, or outside of the characters and experiences...[they] must be involved with them, be actively engaged” (Cassavetes, 197). It is the destabilization of this external position — the position from which authoritative or moral judgments may be made — that comprises the most radical and potentially productive side-effect of the free indirect form.

What is true of the free indirect style in literary language applies doubly for cinema. Speech within a film, of course, is typically represented in the equivalent of a direct, tagged form: when a character delivers his or her own lines in a scene, there can be little ambiguity as to who is speaking. But Pasolini is less interested in verbal language *in* film than with how filmic images are themselves enunciated. In “The Cinema of Poetry,” Pasolini concerns himself primarily with the question of whether there is such a thing as a free indirect form of visual or perceptual enunciation. He begins his discussion of visual enunciation by considering the reverse case of “direct” cinematic discourse. In direct literary discourse, Pasolini writes, “the author puts himself aside and allows his character to speak, in quotation marks” (Pasolini, 550). Direct cinematic discourse, he concludes, therefore “corresponds to the ‘subjective’ shot” (Pasolini,

550). For example, the point-of-view shots in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* in which Scottie looks into the Thorwalds' apartment through binoculars are clearly assigned to him: the reverse shot of Scottie's look is the equivalent of the verbal tag "he sees..." while the iris framing the spectacle corresponds to the quotation marks which identify what is enclosed within them as a direct, "verbatim" account. Dream images and hallucinations are likewise generally attributed to a single character through dissolves or fade-ups, visually "punctuated" as belonging to a separate layer from the rest of the diegesis. A free indirect cinematic discourse, then, would have to shed both the tag and the quotation marks while preserving the tie to the character — that is, without completely handing the image over to the narrator. Pasolini concludes that despite the apparent difficulty, "a free indirect discourse is possible in cinema all the same" (Pasolini, 550).¹⁰

A key example of this intertwining occurs in a scene which directly follows Myrtle's second utterance of her speech about her difficulties acting. Sarah, the author of *The Second Woman*, asks Myrtle how her problem may be best addressed, and in reply Myrtle mentions a young girl named Nancy — a fan who has been killed in an automobile accident earlier in the film while hounding Myrtle for an autograph. Myrtle has continued to be affected by this stranger's death, and has adopted her as her "first woman": a creative resource whom she imagines present and speaks to from time to time in order to help her to act her part in a more open way. Concerned that Myrtle is not merely imagining but hallucinating Nancy's ghost, Sarah asks, "Is she here now, in this room?"¹¹ Following this question, the film cuts to three consecutive close-up images of Myrtle taken from three slightly different angles: first an eye-level shot, then a slightly higher-angled profile, and finally a medium-angled shot, a few degrees different from the first. Myrtle's facial expression is troubled but ambiguous: it is unclear whether these shots represent her reaction to Sarah's somewhat condescending question or

whether they are meant to indicate that Myrtle has momentarily dissociated from her surroundings. It is also unclear whether these three shots are to be read as three chronological images in sequence, as three slightly different versions of the same diegetic event, or possibly even as images which do not completely belong to this diegetic world inserting themselves into the scene.

In an unusually precise passage from “The Cinema of Poetry,” Pasolini provides specific examples of techniques by which the free indirect mode may be achieved in cinema. One of these techniques takes the following form:

The close follow-up of two viewpoints, scarcely different from each other, upon the same object: that is, the succession of two shots which frame the same portion of reality first from close in, then from a *little* farther away; or else first head-on, then *a little* obliquely; or else...on the same alignment but with two different lenses. (Pasolini, 552-3)

The repeated shots of Myrtle at the end of this sequence indeed appear to “frame the same portion of reality” with small displacements in succession. Their repetition lends an emphatic quality to the image, as if a word or phrase were being repeated with slightly different inflections. These images display an “insistence” and an “obsessiveness,” to quote Pasolini, which seem inappropriate to the event depicted. We may wonder why *this* image among all others bears repeating and what we are supposed to gather from it, for it fails not only to provide an answer to Sarah’s question, but also to clarify what Myrtle is thinking and feeling. We must garner their affective content not simply from Myrtle’s facial expression, but also from their visual inflection: through repetition, the affective coloring of the diegesis comes to pervade the enunciation. Contrary to the conventional function of the close-up, affect is not condensed into a single reaction shot, but is instead diffused throughout a series of shots. Furthermore, the varied camera angles seem to crowd the film with multiple, invisible respondents to Myrtle’s dilemma.

The reaction shot becomes an opportunity for the camera to react in turn — and to suggest that an array of reactions to a given situation remain possible.

Ray Carney provides helpful remarks about the camera angles and dispersed points of view in *Opening Night*. In *American Dreaming*, he writes,

Much of *Opening Night* is deliberately assembled out of a series of wrenchingly abrupt 90 and 180 degree changes of camera position that make the focus pullings of *A Woman Under the Influence* seem gentle and humane in comparison...[the] shifts of camera placement represent not the sensitively shifting and adjusted perspectives and focuses of an ideally responsive observer or participant to a scene, but a series of irreconcilably conflicting points of view from the perspectives of many different audiences or participants. (*American Dreaming*, 263)

My interpretation of these shifts, however, is more optimistic than Carney's: I read the multiplicity of angles not as a sign of irreconcilable conflict, but as a sign of the impossibility of ever fully separating these ostensibly distinct points of view. In his chapter on *A Woman Under the Influence*, Carney does offer a different account of Cassavetes' jumps cuts and mixture of spatial coordinates, an account which is more in keeping with my interpretation of *Opening Night*: "The slides and shifts of focus force a viewer, like an ideally responsive character, to juggle two, three, four, or more perspectives at once in any one scene, no one of which is more definitive or final than the others" (*American Dreaming*, 199). Although Carney does not use the term "free indirect form" to refer to this multiplicity of perspectives, we hear the echo of Pasolini in his description.

In *Cinema 1: The Movement-image*, Gilles Deleuze offers a loose but helpful gloss upon Pasolini's notion of free indirect subjectivity. Deleuze writes,

But the camera does not simply give us the vision of the character and of his world [in free indirect cinema]; it imposes another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected... We are no longer faced with subjective or objective images; we are caught in a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-

consciousness which transforms it...It is a very special kind of cinema which has acquired a taste for 'making the camera felt.'¹²

Deleuze helps us to understand that this combination of the two visions does not simply multiply the points of view or render them ambiguous. Rather, this enunciative form takes us beyond the dichotomy of the subjective and objective. In free indirect cinema, we are not simply provided with an objective view of a character followed by a subjective image of what he sees in his world, for we can no longer speak of objective shots which appear to come from a transcendental perspective. But nor can we speak of subjective shots which may be traced directly to a particular eyeline, for they are already enfolded within a larger structure which transforms and reflects them.¹³

Deleuze's reading of Pasolini furthermore helps us to understand that the term "subjective shot" is a misnomer — or rather, that a fully "subjective" image is less common than we generally assume. Point-of-view shots, eyeline matches, and shot-reverse shot structures are, finally, not really about subjectivity. They are about the association of a character's spatial coordinates with the eye of a camera which still represents perception as an objective affair. Point-of-view shots rarely tell us anything about what a character is thinking or feeling, only where he or she stands in a geometrical relation to another object. Dream images, hallucinations, and false flashbacks often offer up a more fully subjective version of perception, in the sense we are now considering. However, these types of images are often "subjective" only in the limited sense that we understand their contents to belong to another register of the diegesis: in *The Wizard of Oz* or Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Window*, for example, they are marked as belonging to a separate narrative plane which, by the film's end, will be designated as "false." Rather than intertwining existing narrative levels, these devices tend to carve out additional ones which are clearly differentiated from the rest of the discourse. A notable counter-example is provided by

the dream images in Valie Export's *Invisible Adversaries*, in which images of ice skates walking on concrete are presented more for their affective tonalities than for their narrative content.¹⁴

Maureen Turim points to additional instances in which flashbacks overlay character subjectivities with perceptions of the diegetic world, and blur rather than demarcate narrative planes. In *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, Turim provides the following analysis of flashback imagery in Delluc's *Le Silence* and *Fièvre*:

Events in the past are available only through the filter of a troubled or ambiguous memory; events in the present are subject to the intrusive associations of the past which determine their shape. The kind of subjectivity this implies is not simply a unitary individual's perspective; focalization, while always marked, is itself disordered, impulsive, charged with the forces of desire. Subjectivity here is of a different order than it is in fictions in which a character is assigned a more singular and unified subjective reality.¹⁵

In this case, the device of the flashback is mobilized not on behalf of subjective consolidation, but on behalf of subjectivity's interpenetration with the diegetic world. Rather than strictly demarcating which images belong to Dorothy's imagination and which to reality, Delluc's flashbacks, Turim indicates, create a subjective indeterminacy that resembles what Pasolini calls "free indirect subjectivity."

The sequences in *Opening Night* involving Nancy, Myrtle's ghostly "first woman," could be said to constitute examples of "subjective" images which do not participate in free indirect cinema. By the third appearance of Nancy's ghost, the film indicates more or less explicitly that these are hallucinatory images, and that they are not to be taken as an authoritative component of the filmic world. They are directly attributable to Myrtle, and to an unstable state of mind. The close-ups of Myrtle and the images of her on stage seem to represent collective affect: they reveal that Myrtle's dilemma is not hers alone — even when she appears to be acting out. The hallucinatory images, by contrast, are evidentiary of a "pathological" affect for which Myrtle is

solely responsible. There is a slight degree of enunciatory ambiguity in these scenes — the film leaves open the possibility that spectators will disagree about their attribution and status as fully hallucinatory or not. But there is no collaboration between different enunciating positions.

In other scenes, however, the collaborative dimension of the free indirect form becomes explicit. The producers of *The Second Woman* attempt repeatedly to contain Myrtle's digressions. In *Opening Night*, however, Cassavetes seems to thrive on them. There is one scene in particular in which the film's enunciation seems not merely to adopt Myrtle's "language and psychology," to quote Pasolini, but to respond to and take its very cues from her speech and action within the diegesis. In this scene, Myrtle has just had her final confrontation with Nancy's ghost. At this moment, she decides to pay a visit to Maurice in hopes of discussing their previous romantic involvement and the ways in which it affects their performance. As Myrtle knocks on the door to his apartment, the camera zooms into a close-up of Maurice opening the door and peering out at her. "So the big star pays the little actor a visit," Maurice quips. As Myrtle attempts to talk to him about the play, Maurice interjects, "I was thinking about the opening. I want to get some sleep." He is about to shut the door when Myrtle says, "Let's take this thing and dump it upside-down. There has to be something more when two people have cared about each other for a long time." "You want me to make an ass of myself on that stage," Maurice counters. At this point, Myrtle turns around and walks away down the hallway. The scene is edited in a shot-reverse shot pattern. The rarity of this shot pattern in Cassavetes' oeuvre helps us to understand just how far removed Cassavetes' notions of "reaction" and "point of view" are from those offered by classical Hollywood.

Following a cut, the entire scene is repeated with different dialogue. It is possible that the second scene represents a second set of events which follow the previous ones chronologically.

However, the similarity of the camera angles and the lack of expository clarification suggest that they represent two different registrations of the same diegetic material.¹⁶ Once again Myrtle knocks on the door, and Maurice answers. “Well, look at this,” Myrtle says, after a brief pause. “You don’t even invite me in, don’t offer me a cup of coffee, a cigarette. Well. Love moves at a hell of a rate of speed, doesn’t it?” Unlike the others in the film, this repetition goes far a field from its original and manifests something like the peculiar authorial “vibration” with the character of which Chatman speaks. It is as if the film had decided to give Myrtle another chance — to help her imagine a “second take” for the scene with Maurice. Maurice’s attempt to shut the door on Myrtle and his fear that she means to perform her character at his expense in the scene’s first registration suggest a closure which the film refuses to affirm, even if it means replaying the scene over again and thereby disrupting its own enunciative structure. The opening-up which Myrtle seeks from Maurice is thus bestowed upon her at the level of the filmic enunciation.

This scene brings us to a second formal description of free indirect cinema that Pasolini provides in “The Cinema of Poetry.” In reference to Bertolucci’s *Before the Revolution*, Pasolini writes that the “intense moments of expression” in the film are precisely

those “insistences” of the framing and the montage-rhythms...charged, throughout the uncommon duration of a shot or montage-rhythm, until it explodes in a sort of technical scandal. Such an insistence on details, particularly on certain details in the digressions, is a deviation in relation to the system of the film: *it is the temptation to make another film*. It is, in sum, the presence of the author, who, in a measureless liberty, goes beyond the film and threatens continually to abandon it for the sake of an unforeseen inspiration. (Pasolini, 554)

Here we come to see additional stakes of the free indirect mode of cinema, for it is in the insistence on “uncommon duration” and “digression” that a potentially limitless creative activity is affirmed. The repetition of the scene with Maurice is crucial precisely because it leaves open the possibility that the scene could end differently than it does in the first instance. To leave the

first registration as the film's singular, authoritative version of the scene would be to insist that its characters, like those in *The Second Woman*, are doomed to act their roles by the numbers, that they have already become who they are, and that their relationships have stagnated to the point where they are no longer properly interactive. The repetitions in *Opening Night*, the ambiguities surrounding point of view, and the refusal of a strict demarcation between the stage and what lies beyond it all represent a commitment to a open-ended notion of acting, creating, and subjectivity.

It is notable that in the above passage, Pasolini seems to define cinematic authorship as the temptation to make another film, to "go beyond" the current film or even to "abandon" it. *Opening Night* helps us to add a corollary to this definition, for it registers this temptation, but without succumbing to it. *Opening Night* is a film about an actress who constantly threatens to abandon the play in which she has been cast: she walks out on rehearsals, shows up late to performances, and constantly complains about her character. Myrtle nevertheless remains involved not only in the play, but with the challenge of representing her character in a way that leaves her open to transformation. The film follows suit, constantly alerting us to the fact that this is not the only way this play can be performed, not the only way that these events may be played out, and, finally, not the only way that this film could have been made. The author is faced with aesthetic decisions which inevitably ramify in unexpected ways. Whereas the creators of *The Second Woman* insist that there is only one right way for the play to be staged and for the character of Virginia to be acted, *Opening Night* does not attempt to hide the fact that there are multiple forms this story might take — multiple ways to deliver the same lines, to show actions, and to reveal the response to them.

It is in the final scene of the film that we come to understand more fully the task of the actor and director according to *Opening Night*. This task is to remain attuned to the multiplicity of aesthetic possibilities for a given image — the “measureless liberty” to which Pasolini refers — without succumbing to paralysis in the face of them. I began this essay with a discussion of the film’s opening, and indicated that *Opening Night* surprises us by starting in the middle, both spatially and temporally, of the play that is the film’s subject. The film ends with the actual opening of this play, its debut on Broadway. Myrtle shows up late and drunk and practically has to be carried through her first few scenes. However, in the play’s final scene, an argument between Marty and Virginia, Myrtle makes a change to the script. After a set of lines in which Marty lectures Virginia about her visit to her ex-husband and her drinking, he says, “I’m only telling you what I think is important for you.” Virginia replies, “Well, I am not me. I used to be me. I’m not me anymore.” Maurice, thrown by the change, retorts, “What the hell do you want from me?” Eventually, however, he does take her cue and concurs that he too “is someone else.” The actors play out the remainder of the scene as a comedy, referring to the idea that they have been “invaded by someone else.” They end the scene with a brief slapstick routine in which they exchange positions on stage, walk past one another and grab each others’ legs. Following a rousing burst of applause from the audience, the film ends with a final scene backstage in which Myrtle is complimented on her performance.

Carney writes that the ending of *Opening Night* poses a problem, insofar as Cassavetes is “so much better at describing the bureaucracies of experience than the free, creative, imaginative movements of the individual, that he seems simply unable to get Myrtle out of the situation in which he has imagined her” (*American Dreaming*, 269). While Carney’s assessment seems fair at first glance, there is another way to read this ending that suggests that Myrtle does indeed

eventually find a way out. Myrtle's "I am not me" represents her most startling and resistant discursive gesture in the play thus far. It is also her most dramatic solution to the problem that the character of Virginia has posed to her throughout the film. Reminiscent of Rimbaud's "I is an other," Myrtle's declaration undoes the stagnation which has beset her character, unmooring her from the condition of "being" and compelling her co-star to act responsively rather than reactively. In *Opening Night*, the producers of the play fail to understand that Myrtle's aim is not simply to sabotage *The Second Woman* by disrupting its illusion for the audience, nor to steal the scene from Maurice. Rather, Myrtle's "bad acting" and abandonment of the script are attempts to project "an attitude which initiates the involvement with other persons," as the Burton Lane describes it. Cassavetes' is a cinema which cuts the tags from its characters lines and affects, complicating their attribution for audiences and authors alike. An expression of feeling is not reducible to a reverse shot which answers and closes the movement initiated by the previous one; it is an opening onto further action. Myrtle initiates this movement by opening up the play's enunciative aperture, giving its discourse a greater degree of autonomy.

3. The Close-up: *Faces* (1968)

We have seen in *Opening Night* how speech and perception participate in the cinema of poetry through the free indirect form. How do affects achieve this mobility? How might a film's enunciation come to situate and implicate itself in the round of its characters' involvements with one another? *Faces* provides one answer to these questions: it is through the close-up. Béla Balázs, the pre-eminent theorist of the filmic human face, suggests that the increasing use of the close-up in the silent film era allowed the face to "grow more and more visible, that is, more and more expressive... We saw conversations between the facial expressions of two human beings

who understood the movements of each others' faces better than each others' words."¹⁷ Balázs also suggests that in close-up, the face is moved out of cinema's usual spatial and temporal registers. In *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Balázs writes:

When Griffith's genius and daring first projected gigantic 'severed heads' on to the cinema screen, he not only brought the human face closer to us in space, he also transposed it from space into another dimension...The facial expression on a face is complete and comprehensible in itself and therefore we need not think of it as existing in space and time. Even if we had just seen the same face in the middle of a crowd and the close-up merely separated it from the others, we would still feel that we have suddenly been left alone with this one face to the exclusion of the rest of the world. (Balázs, 61)

Balázs suggests here that the face signifies with a unity which is not dependent upon its relation to the rest of the body or its surroundings. The close-up, that is, does not simply penetrate into the crowd and select out one face for a closer view; rather it lifts this face into "another dimension" for a special purpose. Cassavetes' *Faces* consists largely of such "gigantic severed heads" edited together with a regularity and resistance to spatial articulation perhaps not achieved since Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. For Cassavetes, as for Balázs, the close-up seems to exist in a register other than the spatio-temporal one presupposed by classical cinematic conventions. But for Cassavetes, it also refuses to signify isolation. In *Faces*, we may indeed react to each close-up as if we had "suddenly been left alone with this one face." However, Cassavetes is concerned at all times to avoid the close-up face's tendency toward solipsism. The rest of the faces in the crowd are not cordoned off from this one's expression, but wrapped up with its dramas, responsive to its play of features, and finally implicated in its dilemmas.¹⁸

Cassavetes' faces are the opposite of the wooden faces of film noir. As Deleuze writes in *Cinema 1: The Movement-image*, "The face is this organ-carrying plate of nerves which has sacrificed most of its global mobility and which gathers or expresses in a free way all kinds of tiny local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden" (*Cinema 1*, 88).

Deleuze's description of the face as a "plate of nerves" which may "gather" tiny movements together emphasizes the face's receptive and amalgamative capacities. The face is the consequence of a bodily division of labor: by delegating its mobility and "activity" to other body parts (hands, legs, and other organs which move "globally"), it gains a greater capacity to collect and register localized movements. Eyes and mouths become the conduit for tiny interactive dances which do not simply express psychical contents in a unidirectional manner, but rather reflect exterior situations. The face does not simply make affective utterances, but echoes others back and mingles them together: the characters' affects consequently become to some extent fused and indistinguishable from one another.¹⁹ Cassavetes' close-up faces are not simply identification tags which individuate their wearers; nor are they outward indices of interior states of mind. They are surfaces like film strips which cannot help but register imprints of that to which they are exposed and impress these traces back in kind. In this way do Cassavetes' faces come to participate in something like free indirect subjectivity. These affects do not "belong" to the faces which express them, nor are they "uttered" by their wearers in anything like a unidirectional manner.

In one sequence from *Faces*, Richard (John Marley) and Fred (Fred Draper), two upper-middle class businessmen, have picked up a call-girl named Jeannie (Gena Rowlands) at the Losers' Club in Los Angeles one night after work. They drive to her house to continue their carousal. Several drinks later, Fred begins to sing, "I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair." Jeannie emerges from the bedroom and begins to dance with Fred as he sings. In a mobile medium shot, Fred and Jeannie continue to dance, maneuvering somewhat clumsily behind a large table lamp which blocks a portion of the frame and, positioned in the foreground, momentarily intercedes between the dancing couple to form a visual barrier between them. A

low-angle close-up shows Fred and Jeannie with their arms above their heads while Jeannie executes a spin. The next close-up shot appears to follow a movement match on Jeannie's turn, but as the figures settle into the frame, we see that Jeannie is now dancing with Richard. A new shot reveals Fred dancing alone in low angle with the top of a door frame reducing his stature. The exchange of partners thus happens in the interstice between shots. What appears to be a movement match following in close succession masks the brief instant in which the dynamics of this situation have changed.

A series of quick shots, including a three-shot with Fred in the background and a jump cut emphasizing the spinning motion of Richard and Jeannie's dance, reveal Fred's increasing estrangement from the other two players. He continues to sing "I Dream of Jeannie," increasing his volume and "soloing" for attention. Soon, he cuts in between Richard and Jeannie. As he does so, the hand-held camera shifts so that a nearby light washes out the image. Again, the exchange of partners occurs in a moment of blindness; the act of "cutting in" is duplicated by a cut in the filmic image. And just as Richard and Fred vie for Jeannie's attention, so too the hand-held camera tries to insinuate itself into the dance. It hovers closely around the other figures, spins as they spin, and cuts discontinuously and a-rhythmically from its low angle, as if it were a small child hopping around the group of adults attempting to solicit their attention. The interactions among the characters are not simply documented, but mimicked by the camera, which descends from the enunciative throne to commune with the characters.

As I have mentioned previously, scholars and critics have often described Cassavetes' cinema as realist or documentary-like. But whereas conventional documentary cinema tends to follow the axiom that the camera should not be felt, Cassavetes' films constantly make us feel

the camera through hand-held filming, framing, change of angle, and editing.²⁰ As Jean-Louis Comolli describes it, Cassavetes' *Faces*

does not partake of the traditional role imparted to the cinema by the society of the spectacle, of a mirror which is declared to be "impartial;" that is to say, totally determined by the object whose image it provides. This is no longer a more or less faithful image that the film reflects back to society, but something completely different: a look, partial and provisional.²¹

In *Faces* — as in other examples of Cassavetes' cinema — each look is "partial and provisional."

It is provisional in the sense that we feel and are made aware of the camera as a situated, non-transcendental look, and in that it refuses to look once and for all. It is partial in that it does not aspire to wholeness, and also in that it betrays a partiality for certain types of images. This camera reflects back to the world not a reproduction of itself, but a subjectivity transformed by a "second consciousness" which exists in an interactive and affectively charged relationship to what it perceives.

As is becoming clear, Cassavetes uses the long shot and close-up in a manner opposite to their typical functions in this sequence. Long shots and three-shots signal separation, loneliness, and exclusion from the group, and they work to make the space of the apartment appear large and sectional. Movements in long shot are spread out and diffused, broad-stroked. Close-ups and extreme close-ups of faces, by contrast, signal proximity not only of the camera to the actors, but also of the actors to each other. That is, they suggest a system of affective involvement and response which is legible in the finely tuned attention to facial gestures. In close-up, the dead space which separates the characters is eliminated from the frame, and the camera's proximity seems to lift them out of their surroundings. The characters are consequently deprived of context: face follows face in close, dislocated succession. But it is in close-up that the face becomes what Deleuze describes as "an organ-carrying plate of nerves" which has "sacrificed its global

mobility.” It is in close-up that the face comes to participate not merely in an expressionism, but in something like the “impressionism” that Cassavetes refers to in his writings: it is capable of both impressing and being impressed.

Fred, rebuffed, now appears in close-up and suddenly remarks, “By the way, Jeannie, how much do you charge?” This moment constitutes the film’s first explicit reference to the possibility that the evening involves an economic transaction, rather than a strictly social one, as well as an explicit power dynamic. Jeannie turns away from Richard and looks toward Fred, surprised. The next shot introduces a composition which will be repeated twice in the remainder of this sequence. The film cuts 180 degrees to a shot taken from behind Fred’s right shoulder, such that part of his neck and head block a portion of the frame; Jeannie and Richard appear beyond him through the dark frame created by his silhouette. Like the shot taken from the rear of the audience at the start of *Opening Night*, this is a highly situated image which offers a less than ideal perspective on the events transpiring, and one which emphatically makes the camera felt. During the rest of the sequence, each of the characters will at one time be excluded and come to occupy the position in the frame which Fred does here. In each instance, the camera takes the side of the character who is currently excluded from the group, including his or her silhouette in the frame and filming from his or her directional point of view. Due to the unusual framing, however, the figure’s silhouette and eyeline function not as a transparent lens onto a perceptual field, but as a mode of blockage. We may indeed see the apartment from Fred’s vicinity, but we are positioned with him only in the spatial sense. That is, the camera neither condones nor censures his insult to Jeannie and the resulting disruption of the revelries.

The remainder of the sequence intersperses these three-shots with an escalating series of close-ups and extreme close-ups of the actors’ faces. Jeannie rushes over to Fred and hugs him,

saying, “Oh, Freddie, don’t spoil it for me please.” A close-up reveals Fred smiling faintly in her arms, then pulling away with an expression of mock sincerity: “I just want to know how much you charge, that’s legitimate, isn’t it?” Another close-up reveals Jeannie’s reaction; her expression is hurt but faintly pitying. Fred increases his volume and begins to shout at Richard: “What do you think she is? You think she’s a clean towel that’s never been used?” Four extreme close-ups of Jeannie and Richard, showing only vaguely downcast pairs of eyes, are inserted during Fred’s tirade. Although the argument primarily concerns Jeannie and Fred, the camera implicates Richard in it as well. After a long shot in which Fred concludes his outburst and attempts a clumsy reconciliation by putting his arm around Jeannie’s shoulder, she has her turn to defend herself. A harshly lit close-up reveals her dart-like eyes and hardened mouth as she criticizes Fred’s manners. Soon, however, she lowers her head; the hair which hangs down creates a silhouette which blocks the rest of the frame, as in the shot of Fred described above. Fred leaves abruptly, and Richard attempts to console Jeannie from across the room: “You’re a lovely girl.” His remark brings tears to Jeannie’s eyes, now visible in close-up.

In the space of three minutes, a strikingly compact series of affective reactions has taken place. As I have mentioned before, the close-up constitutes this film’s formal means of articulating synthesis, the long shot its means of separating characters from one another. The barrage of close-ups, that is, calls attention not so much to the conflicts and separations among the characters, but rather to the way in which these conflicts imply their mutual entanglement, their vast and seemingly unrecognized capacity to affect and move each other. Each expression by a character solicits reactions from the other two; each reaction in turn transforms the emotional content of the original expression and shifts the affective tone of the entire scene. From Fred’s expression of jealousy we cut to Jeannie’s sympathy, which, in turn, solicits scorn,

anger, shame, exhaustion, tenderness, and finally tears. The scene's affective contents seem to emanate not from the within the characters, but through the situation itself. The class and gender differences which inflect this situation, however, are not strictly attributable to the characters who would seem to embody them: the film does not let Jeannie function as a "representative" of the working woman any more than it lets Richard stand in for the upper-class white male. The tightly framed images of faces, articulated from an array of unassignable points, compel the viewer to enter the situation indirectly, refusing to let identification come to rest with any one point of view. To be "moved" by a character's situation, Cassavetes seems to say, means not to mimic this character and come to rest with him or her, but to be transformed and reshaped.

After Fred departs, Richard decides that he too will leave. He turns to Jeannie and says, "You're on your own again." Three shots edited in jump cuts show Jeannie and Richard kissing goodbye, their two faces merging together into a single image. The conflict, drama, and posturing of the previous scene nevertheless imagine a form of togetherness: of an affective responsiveness which comes to permeate an entire situation, showing how seemingly opposite reactions may come to follow from one another, how the facial expression does not stay with its wearer but affects the surrounding faces. The face, Cassavetes seems to say, is inscribed not from the inside but from the outside: it reflects and is fused with what it responds to and borrows some of the affect from what it looks at. What the face expresses, it also impresses upon the one who looks at it.

Once again, Balázs helps us to understand the larger implications of this theory of expression. *The Theory of the Film* contains a passage which seems to provide an antidote to the solipsistic, "physiognomic" account of expression that he provides at the start of the chapter. In this new passage, Balázs writes,

The film made possible what, for lack of a better description, I call the ‘polyphonic’ play of features. By it I mean the appearance on the same face of contradictory expressions. In a sort of physiognomic chord a variety of feelings, passions, and thoughts are synthesized in the play of the features as an adequate expression of the multiplicity of the human soul. (Balázs, 64)

Like Deleuze, Balázs here emphasizes the capacity of the face to gather and synthesize.

However, Balázs goes a step further than Deleuze, suggesting that the face may gather together contradictory, polyphonic expressions into a single, synchronic “chord.” We have something here like Freud’s description of condensation in dream language: opposing expressions are not canceled out by one another; rather, they coexist on the same face and are subsumed within its outline.²² Multiple terms exist in a relation of “play,” not strictly demarcated from one another, brought into a unified whole like the two faces brought together in a kiss. As a result, all affective positions in the scene are intimately implicated with one another.

Like it or not, Cassavetes fails to provide any locus of primary identification in this scene from which we might stand outside the situations depicted and decry one character’s behavior towards another. There is no position which would be able to anticipate or predict how this scene would turn out in advance, no author-oracle retaining this knowledge, and along with it, the ability to assess whether a given action is right or wrong, helpful or hurtful. Fred’s angry tirade is enmeshed in a situation involving his prior ostracization: his face becomes a condensed amalgam of aggression and vulnerability. Richard’s tender downcast eyes are fused with a hardened stare; his sympathy for Jeannie becomes inextricable from his failure to intervene in Fred’s attack. Finally, Jeannie’s angelically framed features fail to attest physiognomically to a “heart of gold”: innocence and experience coexist on the same face, in the shape of an eye and the depth of a crease. There is nothing behind the face but the history of the other faces which call forth its expressions.

Lest we decide to condemn Fred and Richard in favor of the wives they have left at home, the entire scene described above has a parallel later in the film in which the wives visit the Go Go club and pick up a young man named Chet (Seymour Cassel), whom they bring back to the home of Richard's wife, Maria (Lynn Carlin). As in the previous scene, singing and dancing together become part of an elaborate ritual of exclusions and convergences. A scene of group conversation follows, shot mostly in close-ups which alternate more or less equally among Maria, Billy Mae (Darlene Conley), Louise (Joanne Moore Jordan), and Chet. As in the previous scene, there is a moment of "break" from these forms which irreversibly transforms the dynamics of the group situation. In this case, this moment concerns the character Louise, who has been relatively silent and reticent to join in the revelries. After dancing with Florence (Dorothy Gulliver) and Billy Mae, Chet approaches her and begins to sing "Put on the red meat baby." Louise appears in medium shot, clearly embarrassed and uncomfortable. But soon, she shyly and reluctantly gets up from the sofa to perform a brief, awkward twirl. The hand-held camera dances with her as she begins to sing along with Chet, slightly off-key. As soon as Louise joins in the dance, however, Chet suddenly stops, assumes a pseudo-relaxed posture, and remarks, "I think we're making fools of ourselves." Louise halts; she has been tricked into playing the good sport. "Who are you to say I'm making a fool of myself?" she barks at Chet. "I have a college degree, I take care of a family of five." She brusquely packs up her things and leaves the house. Chet's remark to Louise functions analogously to Fred's question to Jeannie. The party likewise disbands; Billy Mae packs up her things. Before leaving, she turns to Maria to remark, "Well I think I maintained my dignity throughout the entire thing. I mean, hell, it isn't as if we did anything wrong. I am in love with my husband." The synthesis of the group gives way as its members stake out their own strictly delineated positions.

But the more the characters attempt to extricate themselves from each successive compromising situation, the more Cassavetes' camera implicates itself in these situations. In this film, the camera too comes to function like a face; it looks and reacts to facial expression. Each time it attempts to step outside the dynamics of the scene with a long shot, it finds itself once again enmeshed in the action, dancing along with the actors, moving in tighter to catch the tear in Jeannie's eye. There is no place in the frame to stand that does not cast a shadow on the floor or insert a silhouette. Each cross-cut from a husband-dominated scene to a scene involving the wives serves not to differentiate their modes of behavior, but rather to connect them up. The enunciating position is thus contaminated by and implicated in what it observes: no longer is there a discursive distinction between the camera-reporter and what it reports on. Cassavetes' cinema does not hide the author's complicity with what it portrays: the unkind behavior of the characters toward one another, their complex sexual politics, the gender and class struggles which permeate their interactions, are not offered up for the viewer's judgment. Rather, we are drawn into them as they unfold.

As Comolli notes, in *Faces* the characters' "own duration coincides precisely with that of the film" (Comolli, 38, my translation). Enunciation and diegesis occupy the same temporal register. It is as if the author were calling attention to his capacity to be just as surprised and baffled, cheered or saddened, and pleased or disappointed at the character's actions as they are with each other: this camera is no longer stony-faced. The film's enunciatory mode is thus antithetical to a documentary objectivity, where the camera endeavors to resist being moved by what it records, no matter how affecting the spectacle. There is, to be sure, a place for this type of cinema, but it is not to be found with Cassavetes. In Cassavetes' case, the camera remains

profoundly subjective — not in the sense of associating its point of view with that of a character, but in the sense that it is perpetually moved by and bound up with everything it sees.

As should be clear by now, Cassavetes' faces in close-up are free indirect cinema par excellence. These characters, says Comolli, are “unpredetermined, not posed from the start of the film...they constitute themselves gesture by gesture and word by word as the film advances” (Comolli, 38, my translation). Each group situation threatens to turn on a dime from merriment to anger, and from a space of relaxation to a space of raised defenses. And yet, it is precisely because this possibility for radical transformation exists at every juncture in the film, with the insertion of each new shot, that room for the unexpected and for choice remains. Contrary to the notion that *Faces* is a film primarily about bourgeois American neurosis and constraint, these characters seem to enjoy an incredible amount of freedom: unpredictable, they are never fated to turn out such-and-such a way; they are authored from a space which is analogous to the space of the film itself. This leaves them vulnerable, morally relativistic, and unstable, but it also puts them firmly on the side of transformative possibility.

* * *

In conclusion, I turn again to Ray Carney, who tells us that “Cassavetes defines selfhood as the capacity to allow oneself to be inhabited by other views” (*The Films of John Cassavetes*, 94).²³ We might take this as a kind of axiom for free indirect affect. Ultimately, this discursive form poses a number of challenges to conventional conceptions of subjectivity and cinematic expression. Indeed, a popular conception of authorship, in which every character represents some aspect of the director (or “is the author in disguise,” as it were), can no longer apply when enunciation and diegesis are so fully intertwined as they are in *Opening Night* and *Faces*. In an opposite gesture, the author of these two films embroils himself in the visions of his fictional

characters. Pasolini writes that in *Red Desert*, Antonioni finally succeeds “in representing the world through his own eyes because he has substituted, wholly, the world-view of a sick woman for his own vision, which is delirious with aestheticism, a substitution justified by the possible analogy of the two visions” (Pasolini, 553). Similarly, Cassavetes refuses to gaze down upon Myrtle and Jeannie from an authoritative or judgmental point of view. Rather, he forms an analogy between the camera’s vision and the visions of these women, participating in their world views, sharing responsibility for their reactions, and taking on their affects, be they ones of despondence or celebration.

¹ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 86.

² As Cassavetes said about *Opening Night*, “We’re going to take it objectively. It’s not going to be a subjective point of view which people can identify with quite easily, because I don’t want them to identify with performers, with backstage theatricality.” Although Cassavetes’ choice of words differs from mine, his comment makes clear that the film sets out to undo conventional, suturing structures of identification. John Cassavetes, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, ed. Ray Carney (London: Faber and Faber, 2001): 419.

³ To quote Roland Barthes, the above-described sequence could be said to “make the footlights a kind of uncertain barrier” (Barthes, 105).

⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, “The Cinema of Poetry,” in *Movies and Methods: Volume 1*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

⁵ These misconceptions were at least partially propagated by Cassavetes himself and perpetuated by the title at the end of *Shadows* (1960) which reads “The film you have just seen was an

improvisation.” Cassavetes’ method of improvisation does not involve ad libbed dialogue or scenes invented on the fly (with some exceptions, of course, notably the penultimate scene of *Opening Night*). On the contrary, his method involves sustained reworkings and polishings of the script. Ray Carney writes, “‘Improvisation’ was Cassavetes’ term for the use of discussion and rehearsal to suggest revisions to the text that he would then write into it... During the shoot, when Cassavetes used the word to describe what went on, he generally meant that the actor was encouraged to put his own emotional ‘spin’ on the lines” (Cassavetes, 217). Thus, “improvisation” for Cassavetes does not mean jettisoning the script, but rather producing a script collectively through multiple drafts.

⁶ Ray Carney comments extensively on the ways in which Cassavetes’ characters are always to some extent performing, adopting poses, or entering into predictable patterns of speech and behavior, patterns which the films encourage them to discard. Carney’s two books are the most thorough studies available of Cassavetes’ work. See *American Dreaming: The Films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Hereafter cited as *American Dreaming* and *The Films of John Cassavetes*.

⁷ Here I am drawing loosely on Hannah Arendt’s notion of action as theorized in *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), particularly pp. 184-192. In *Opening Night*, as in Arendt’s theory, “action” is neither individual nor heroic. When Myrtle complains that she is “not acting,” and that she wants to be able to again, she means that her character has become *too* individualistic and isolated.

⁸ For a clear, more extensive description of the free indirect style from a narratological standpoint, see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978): 198-209.

⁹ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): 47.

¹⁰ It is important to note that towards the end of this essay, Pasolini offers up the following critique of free indirect cinema: “All this belongs to the general movement of recuperation, by bourgeois culture, of the territory it had lost in the battle with Marxism and its possible revolution” (Pasolini, 557). This concluding remark strikes me as an unfortunate simplification and negation of the analysis which precedes it; if one were to read it symptomatically, we might even say that the author of this essay were attempting, in a last-ditch effort, to carve out a place outside the free indirect realm of this very essay from whence to judge it.

¹¹ Lisa Katzman interprets the hallucinatory scenes of Nancy thus: “Possession by Nancy becomes, as in classic Greek tragedy, the retribution of the Furies for the hubris of believing that one can control one’s muses.” See “*Opening Night: Moment by Moment*,” *Film Comment* vol. 25, no. 3 (May-June 1989): 38.

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 74.

¹³ Incidentally, Deleuze’s reading of Pasolini could be said to participate the free indirect mode it describes. In the above passage, Deleuze does not simply quote Pasolini directly; rather, Pasolini’s theory is “transformed and reflected” in Deleuze’s re-reading of it, most obviously through its being delivered in a markedly Deleuzian vocabulary and syntax. For this insight, I am grateful to Louis Schwartz’s observations in “Typewriter (Part 1): The Free Indirect in Deleuze’s

Cinema," a paper given at Narrative: An International Conference, Berkeley, CA, March 27-29, 2003.

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of these images, see my essay "Vision and Its Discontents: Valie Export's *Invisible Adversaries*," *Discourse* 22.2 (Spring 2000): 25-45.

¹⁵ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 74.

¹⁶ *Minnie and Moskowitz* also contains double registrations of the same diegetic content. Carney writes that "two takes of the same moment — Jim's 'I've gotta go' — are spliced one after the other" (*The Films of John Cassavetes*, 124).

¹⁷ Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover Publications, 1970): 73.

¹⁸ See Balázs's chapter "The Face of Man," for a consideration of how the close-up can express group affect. Though he frequently defines what is collective in the close-up as "physiognomical," I find useful, and less problematic, his allusions to a notion of collective or synthesized facial expression that can be thought about separately from his ideas about physiognomic classification. (Balázs, 60-88).

¹⁹ Here I concur with Carney's observation that "Cassavetes' every effort is devoted to preventing the close-up from isolating a character and setting him apart from, or above, the group" (*American Dreaming*, 101). Carney also writes that the use of extreme close-ups in *Faces* communicates "both the theoretical possibility of infinitely sensitive human communication" and "the unattainability of such sensitivity in ordinary life" (*American Dreaming*, 114); my reading stresses the former over the latter.

²⁰ I do not mean to imply that all documentary cinema makes recourse to the notion of a transcendental or unsituated point of view: Frederick Wiseman's documentaries provide one among many possible counter-examples.

²¹ Jean-Louis Comolli, "Two Views of *Faces*," *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 205 (October 1968): 38 (my translation from the French).

²² See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965): 313-315.

²³ Carney also suggests that Cassavetes allows himself to be "inhabited by other views" in a stylistic sense throughout his oeuvre. He writes, "The celebrator of pattern breaking kept breaking his own patterns...The few critics and reviewers who did manage to tune their brain waves to *Faces*' jittery movements, pressurized pacings, and crowded frame spaces were left gaping when it was followed by *Husbands*' static blockings, editorial *longeurs*, and visual airiness" (*The Films of John Cassavetes*, 185).