

important; it is debatable whether we should give priority to American feature films or documentary films in this respect.

John Ellis: My reason for concentrating on American classical cinema is, firstly and simply, because I am familiar with it, and secondly, because it is historically dominant in world cinema. It is as simple as that. And it is only when you begin to understand how this cinema works that you can actually begin to move away from it. What I have been trying to argue is that virtually everybody finds American cinema easy to understand--whereas people in Europe, for instance, find it very difficult to understand Japanese films. But it isn't just a matter of not understanding the assumptions that those films make about customs--the problem centres on the way those films are constructed (Ozu's films, for example).

I didn't mean to say that sound wasn't diegetic, but that sound is always less important in terms of truth. You mention documentary films: the reason why documentary films are made like they are is that the image is always the proof, the proof that the photographer was there. The sound (the reporter's commentary) may explain that the image is true, but it is the image itself which is the proof.

Geoffrey Blowers: John Ellis in his extremely lucid paper takes us on an historical journey through the labyrinth of film theory to arrive at a set of ground rules which attempt not only to define the illusion of reality in film but in a wider sense to pose an answer to the questions of how and why such illusions are immediately "given" and made available for inconspicuous consumption. I would like to take up one point that he makes. It appears that "desire" for cinema as a marketable commodity depends upon cinema's ability to construct audiences specific to certain types of film. Thus "obviousness" is located in cinema-spectating which, to quote John Ellis, is "not a characteristic of texts themselves so much as an institutional mode of existence and performance of those texts." More precisely it appears that elements of this

monolith, cinema, collude in the development of a mystery about particular films, a mystery which is only resolved by the spectator "taking his place," "seeing" the film.

Now as a psychologist, I am slightly perturbed at the model of man that is being invoked in this account to explain the immediacy of illusion, or more precisely, at which models of man are being repressed as arguments are advanced to substantiate semiotics' claim to privileged access to truth. While "structuralists" are critical of any attempts to conceive of man in unitary terms--a move that is indeed most welcome, at least to some whose discipline is psychology--there are many of us who believe that we are at least the fons et origo of our action. Yet structuralist accounts of man are concerned, it seems, to remove the individual subject altogether. The relevance of this point for theorizing about cinematic obviousness comes down to this: if meaning in film and an examination of the ways in which those meanings are communicated are the goals of semiotic enquiry, should individual members of a film audience be consulted? Do they contribute to our understanding of film by their own accounts, their individual perceptions? If the answer to this question is in any way negative, then it appears that we might be in a curious dilemma for we would need to reject the semioticians' account--since they also form a part of that audience. They develop their theories not in a vacuum, but by engaging like everyone else in the process of looking--albeit in a different attentive mode, or "set" as we might say in psychology.

John Ellis: I think what is at issue here is the question of the use of codes in semiotics. They are used for their potential rather than for their actual meaning. A code is a potentiality, a difference; all that semiotics is trying to look at is the text as a tissue of difference. It is not as though semiotics is legislating that there shall be a particular way of understanding a film; semiotics explains how a text or film is constructed, thus its conditions of potential meaning. Semiotics offers an analysis that does not seek to understand, merely for the sake of understanding, why it is that people do certain things with