

PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON STEVEN SODERBERGH'S *KAFKA*

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The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end.

—Roland Barthes

The films of Steven Soderbergh form a cinema of disparity. His consistency appears in his inconsistency, with the themes in his various works quite divergent. His first two films, *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) and *Kafka* (1991), are especially distinct from one another, as from a restrained intimate melodrama Soderbergh moves to an extremely stylized art-thriller. The disparity in Soderbergh's oeuvre is a double one. It has to be conceived horizontally as well as vertically: horizontally, as appears from across a series of projects, and vertically, paying attention to the heterogeneity within *any one* movie. This aesthetic strategy makes his work quite a fertile ground for philosophical interrogation.

Self-Reflexivity

Soderbergh's films call attention to the nature of the cinematic image without disavowing the requirements of a comprehensible narrative. So *Kafka* is both a fantastic and spectacular story, even as the film broaches issues relating to the character of cinema. This is above all achieved by a discourse on cinema's mediality, on concretion and abstraction, especially as conveyed by the use of color and black-and-white photography. The film makes interesting points

about the disparity between heterogenic images by hybridizing the visible. The shift between the two modes of representation occurs when Kafka enters the castle for the film's showdown. This shift has two meanings. On the one hand, the generic mode shifts from mystery thriller to action adventure along the lines of James Bond movies. In *Kafka*, the eponymous hero is an inert man, more of a witness than a man of courage—but a man with a license to kill. But by entering the castle, Kafka steps into the age of modernity.

While Kafka is a sensitive observer of a dawning modernity who writes down his observations, he does not have his monitoring straight. Kafka may be a tormented prophet creating disturbing visions of the coming age of the novel. "You despise someone like me," the mad scientist tells him, "because you despise the modern. But you are at the very forefront of what is modern. You write about it, you document it. . . . Unlike you, though, I have chosen to embrace it." The scientist acts as an executor of modernism's dark side using state-of-art technology in order to fabricate a new kind of man. His aim is to gain full control over the human brain, exterminating all traces of individuality—a vatic image of coming totalitarian regimes: "A crowd is easier to control than an individual. A crowd has a common purpose. The purpose of the individual is always in question." The whole issue of modernism and ideology versus modernism and imagination is summed up in Kafka's response to his horrific discovery of the castle's secret: "I've tried to write nightmares, and you've built one." What Soderbergh addresses is the question of whether art can be held responsible for political consequences. Thus, *Kafka* refers not only to Kafka's work but also to its interpretation as a forecasting of modernism. And so Soderbergh's movie has to be regarded as a reading of readings, a lustfully layered metatext. In doing so it tends not to affirm the notion of Kafka's work as an unknowledgeable critique of modernism but the assumption that his writing's despair does the preliminary work for the transcendental acceptance of an inevitable fate. Resignation dominates when Kafka blends himself into modern society at the end of the movie. There is no way out of the labyrinth, no awakening from the nightmare.

The transition from the old Europe to modernity and the other way around is signaled by the switch from black-and-white to color images and then back again. It is a moment of shock that breaks with supposed social foundations. The certain gets uncertain, the secure becomes insecure. Soderbergh notes, "I liked the idea of opening the door and, all of a sudden, allow[ing] the foundation that had been established between the first 77

minutes to crumble at our feet, given the feeling that something was going to happen.” He notes further that “nowadays, the convention for using black and white is to reference a dream, a fantasy, the unreal. I liked the idea that in this case it would be the opposite. The more I thought about it the more I thought that certain story elements would be more forcefully expressed in color, like the idea of the microscope, of the brain and the eye.” Originally, the plan was to shoot the movie entirely in black-and-white. “We did a test in black and white and it did not work at all,” Soderbergh states. “As a whole, the film expressed and intensified reality so it seemed to me that we had to go a step further in entering the castle. For this part I wanted a colorful range, strange, disquieting, and uncomfortable.”¹

Soderbergh hits the mark with his observation about alienating empirical reality as fully as possible in the movie. He stands in opposition to Fernand Léger, who has noted that “color is a vital necessity. It is raw material indispensable to life, like water and fire. Man’s existence is inconceivable without an ambience of color.”² Instead Soderbergh is to be situated in the tradition of what Gilles Deleuze has called expressionism: “the precursor of real colourism in the cinema.”³ While black-and-white images heighten the impression of artificiality today, color usually denotes the experience of our common experience, reducing for the spectator the effect of looking at another, alien world. Soderbergh, however, does not use color stock to enforce cinematic illusion; his color images appear, in the words of Tom Gunning, “with little reference to reality, as a purely sensuous presence, an element which can even indicate a divergence from reality.”⁴ Of course, Gunning is not referring to Soderbergh here but speaking of early cinema. Yet Soderbergh uses color exactly in this sensual/sensational way: to signify unnaturalness and stress the contrived potential of his movie. Gunning’s remarks on the early cinema of attractions are reminiscent of observations made by Roland Barthes concerning color in photography. According to Barthes, color demolishes photography’s reality effect; it disrupts tactile immediacy. He regards black-and-white images as an emanation of the physical referent, while he stresses the artificial nature of color: “I always feel (unimportant what actually occurs) that in the same way, color is a coating applied later on to the original truth of the black-and-white photograph. For me, color is an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses).”⁵ The use of color in cinema is not essentially a coding of color. It creates its own context independent from the material world. Soderbergh’s colored images work as a color image in a Deleuzian sense, soaking up materiality: “In opposition to a simply

coloured image, the colour-image does not refer to a particular object, but absorbs all that it can: it is the power which seizes all that happens within its range, or the quality common to completely different objects. There is a symbolism of colours, but it does not consist in a correspondence between a colour and an affect (green and hope . . .). Colour is on the contrary the affect itself, that is, the virtual conjunction of all the objects it picks up.⁶ It is the color's sensual material effect that is of importance here; colors do not necessarily need referents. Instead of symbolic signification there are primarily processes of infiltration at work creating color's materiality from itself. While moving through light, color absorbs the surroundings, even the frame, constituting a transparent lucency. That is why colors have their own space of action, possibly working independently and separate from the space of pure representation. In Soderbergh they aim not at accuracy but at constituting attractions; they want to affect by their transforming qualities. Through color the cinematic screen forms a window to our emotions, letting us see the invisible: sentiment and sensation.

In the sixteen-minute colored sequence of *Kafka* Soderbergh gives his images a heavy patina. One is tempted to link this use to Paul Virilio's idea of a post-historical color, a color of inversion, "the colour of transparency, of the gleam or brilliance of metal . . . and in the future it may be the colour of the stealth bomber, that is, an absorbent colour that has no reflection . . . a colour in reverse."⁷ *Kafka* lets rubiginous and red-tinted compositions dominate the visible. These do not suddenly denote a higher level of mimesis redeeming dreary pictures. On the contrary, Soderbergh tries to go back to the age of the earliest color films. Edward Buscombe notes, "It has never been a question of what *is* real but of what is *accepted* as real. And when it first became technically feasible, color, it seems, did not connote reality but the opposite."⁸ Just as the audience in the earlier days of cinema did not regard color films as displaying a realist aesthetic, but as expressing a sense of magic and fantasy, the viewer of *Kafka* is reminded that there once was a time when filmic reality would be conveyed in black-and-white by convention; a time when color drew attention to itself, diverting attention from the narration; a time when color seemed to form a radical break in the structures of perception and therefore caused unifying principles to collapse. A single meaning "might at once be pulverized, multiplied into plural meanings. Color is the shattering of unity."⁹ Consider Julia Kristeva's idea that color is the one entity escaping symbolization as well as representation. It is instead a force of fragmentation, a delegate of disrapture, an agent of anarchy. Touch-

ing the unconscious, it produces an uncontrollable multiplicity of meanings relating directly to instinct and impulse.

As a consequence, there seems to be less need for interpretation in *Kafka's* color cinema than for the will to experience. From this it follows that feeling is meaning is the film's thinking. In a pre-oedipal economy of libidinal pleasure opposed to traditional logocentrism, it becomes necessary to shift the attention away from what the images connote within narration toward how they work on and within us. Perceiving cinematic codes is a corporeal experience of gaining the pleasure of audiovisuality primarily for the sake of audiovisuality. Instead of contrasting cinematic codes with equivalents in the "objective" world of experience, we may allow our desires to flow through the images themselves. And in this way the desiring self is absorbed in pure cinema. Jean-François Lyotard has described a very particular kind of passivity that matches the relationship between viewer and cinema: "The question of 'passivity' is not the question of slavery, the question of dependency not the plea to be dominated. There is no dialectic of the slave, neither Hegel's nor the dialectic of the hysteric according to Lacan, both presupposing the *permutation of roles on the inside of a space of domination*. This is all macho bullshit. . . . The passion of passivity which stimulates this offer is not *one single* force, a resource of force in a battle, it is force [*puissance*] itself, liquidating all stases which here and there block the passages of intensity."¹⁰ This submissive passivity conceived as a multiple drive is at work when we desire images and are not able to grasp them at the same time, setting free bursts of energy. There is no subject-object binary in cinematic pleasure but only incidents of intensity. They result from their powers to transcend signification and open up an illimitable gap of experience between screen and viewer that engulfs both: in a rhizome of conformations and colors. These are the ideas and experiences that the color sequences in *Kafka* engage.

Intertextuality in *Kafka*

A hybrid movie is composed of other movies. Or, as Steven Dillon writes, such films, of which *Kafka* is one, offer a "tour through cinematic memory."¹¹ There are multiple allusions as well as cross-references and direct quotations to film history in *Kafka*: from Robert Wiene to Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, from Carol Reed to Orson Welles, from Fritz Lang to Terence Fisher. A criminal case about dead pit workers near the area of Orlac hints at Wiene's

Orlacs Hände (The Hands of Orlac, 1924); Kafka's adversary is called Dr. Murnau. The score by Cliff Martinez hints at Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), quoting Anton Karas's famous zither theme while replacing the Austrian instrument with a Hungarian cymbal. The twisted camera angles and extreme chiaroscuro lighting harken back to Welles's *The Trial* (1962), a film adaptation of Kafka's unfinished novel *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1914–1915). Furthermore, some iconographic details come straight from Welles's adaptation of that novel, including the hideout of the anarchists, which is based on the painter's shed, or Kafka's walk to the castle, which is modeled after Josef K.'s way to the scaffold. Finally, the laboratory within the castle is a mixture of the lab from Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and the ones featured in the early fifties horror movies produced by Britain's Hammer Film Productions, in particular the one from Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). But above all *Kafka* is influenced by German expressionism. Soderbergh tries to resurrect the picturesque world of the cinema in Kafka's lifetime. He links him to the images cultivated in movies such as Wien's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920), *Genuine* (*Genuine: A Tale of a Vampire*, 1920), and *Raskolnikow* (*Crime and Punishment*, 1923), Karl Heinz Martin's *Von morgens bis Mitternacht* (*From Morn to Midnight*, 1920), Paul Wegener's *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (*The Golem: How He Came into the World*, 1920), Arthur Robison's *Schatten—Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (*Warning Shadows*, 1923), Karl Gruné's *Die Straße* (*The Street*, 1923), or Paul Leni's *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (*Waxworks*, 1924). *Kafka* is cinema as cinephilia: remembering reminiscence, reminiscence remembering.

The movie picks up the play with distortingly painted scenery, overlong shadows, and emphatically gestural acting, elements with their roots in German romanticism, an artistic tradition that emphasizes the unintelligible and the uncanny. Lotte Eisner observes about the generation of expressionists that “the hecatombs of young men fallen in the flower of their youth seemed to nourish the grim nostalgia of the survivors. And the ghosts which had haunted the German Romantics revived, like the shades of Hades after draughts of blood.”¹² Deleuze has spoken of a specific kind of motion in the haunted screen of German expressionism, a radical acuteness so it “can claim kinship with a pure kinetics; it is a *violent movement* which respects neither the *organic contour* nor the mechanical determinations horizontal and the vertical; its course is that of a perpetually broken line, where each change of direction simultaneously marks the force of an obstacle and the power of a new impulse; in short, the subordination of the extensive to intensity.”¹³ This

means that the actualization of virtual forms (the intense and expressive) begins to preside over states of equilibrium (the extensive and "realistic"). Mimesis makes way for distortion. Soderbergh elevates this kind of artificial intensity to become the film's most important guideline. His *Kafka* is expressionism in quotation marks, an ironic play with principles of the haunted screen. Therefore, the movie has to be regarded as a postmodern pastiche par excellence. Fredric Jameson defines the postmodern pastiche as a mode of utterance devoid of any political significance. In contrast to parody, the pastiche lacks subversive potential: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter." What once existed as discursive heterogeneity is reduced to unaccommodating stylistics. The pastiche results in "the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo.'"¹⁴

Historical time gets turned into simulacra; the past no longer leads to a historical sense but exists only as an annihilated memory of texts. *Kafka*'s citation of miscellaneous cinematic traditions perhaps transforms the film into a postmodern artifact, which "randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles." It is a paradigmatic "symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way."¹⁵ It seems to be exactly this waning of history with which Soderbergh again and again lasciviously thematizes, in films from *The Limey* (1999) up to *The Good German* (2006). In Soderbergh, there are no mysteries left; everything is definite and distinct. Every scene is overlaid by memories about other scenes, from other movies, from other characters, from other worlds.

In diagnosing the age of postmodernism Fredric Jameson draws on the psychoanalytical concept of schizophrenia developed by Jacques Lacan. Schizophrenia is understood as a breakdown in the signifying chain of language, that is, in the jamming of the syntagmatic series of signifiers that constitute an utterance: "What we generally call the signified—the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance—is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have

schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers.” The result is a linguistic disorder, a debris of unrelated signifiers that brings about the end of a seemingly harmonious relationship between past, future, and present: “The connection between this kind of linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a two-fold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present: and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time.” When the signifiers lose their connection to each other, temporal continuity collapses. Historical time becomes a perpetual present: “If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.”¹⁶

Soderbergh’s *Kafka* explicitly manifests this concept of schizophrenia. The movie deals with the idea of paranoia as a cultural metaphor. It shows a difference between modes of cognition and the order of things, fostering a suspicion that is directed not only against the things but also against mental activity itself. Kafka’s writing is characterized by the assumption of unfathomable power structures controlling the destitute individual. The question is whether what seems to be apparent is actually true or if it is a mere illusion. Therefore, an atmosphere of permanent threat arises. Menacing potentialities trouble the subject’s gaze. Fear and despair encroach on thought as well as on action. Kafka’s prose is full of subjunctives, and Soderbergh tries to transfer his verbal phrasing to the screen. Paranoiac suspicion emerges from artificial visual images dramatically departing from classical Hollywood’s style of illusionist transparency—the containment of all signs of textual production. Soderbergh’s neo-expressionist style creates a critical allegory of capitalism, which is producing the schizophrenic paranoid and trying to gain control over him at the same time. Thus, the apolitical—according to Jameson—forms of postmodern pastiche are repoliticized by cinematic codes of obtrusiveness, the disturbance of illusory unity. *Kafka* is itself the return of the repressed, the schizophrenic distortion of classical Hollywood’s bourgeois realism, its unstable equilibrium of harmony: the experience of pure material signifiers deviating from norms of transparency, that is, the masking of a movie’s materiality, the repression of excess. This sense of

divergence reminds us of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the political potential of schizophrenia. They wonder, "Is it correct to say that in this sense schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine, as manic-depression and paranoia are the product of the despotic machine, and hysteria the product of the territorial machine?" Deleuze and Guattari stress the revolutionary potential of this question. They identify the schizophrenic as an anticapitalist metaphor: "The schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel. He scrambles all the codes and is the transmitter of the decoded flows of desire." Of course, Deleuze and Guattari—like Fredric Jameson—do not speak of clinical entities but emphasize paranoid thinking as a possible disturbance in the order of hegemonic signifiers. The paranoid, they claim, "is not revolutionary, but the schizophrenic process—in terms of which the schizo is merely the interruption, or continuation in the void—is the potential for revolution."¹⁷ While Soderbergh's *Kafka* shows an apparently paranoid protagonist, it is the process of his thinking mediated through expressionist and decidedly antirealist imagery that forms the center of the movie. Thus, the film can be regarded as a dispute over the status of creativity and problems of personal identity. The self seems to be unstable, dissolving between fact and fiction. The boundary dividing Kafka's life from his work disintegrates; he seems to fall victim to exactly the opaque forces formulated in his writing. And yet the protagonist's suspicion is verified at film's end. It seems that there in fact *is* a conspiracy at work in Prague, as phantasmal powers actually try to eliminate individual freedom. But Soderbergh's *Kafka* fails to fully realize any revolutionary potential. Although succeeding in stopping Dr. Murnau's murderous experiments, his victory is ironically undermined. Life goes in Prague, and Kafka fits himself in the capitalist society again. *Kafka* is not a biopic. It is a thriller much in the tradition of the films of Alfred Hitchcock, who has defined the genre in his classic sextet: *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Secret Agent* (1936), *Sabotage* (1936), *Young and Innocent* (1937), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). Soderbergh's film is the tale of an incriminated innocent who must prove that he has been wrongly accused. "I wanted to stick to the thriller and, in a way, *Kafka* was the protagonist only by accident," Soderbergh said. His movie is a detective story, and the protagonist reminds one not so much of the historical Kafka but of Dashiell Hammett as seen through the eyes of Wim Wenders. For Soderbergh there are problems in a *Kafka* biopic as well as in a film version

of Kafka's writing. He faces the same problems Wenders had concerning *Hammert* (1982): "I thought a biography of Kafka would be boring. As for Kafka's books, they have certain faults as cinema material, as is evident in the cinematic adaptations I've seen. His works are grounded more on ideas than on events, which does not really work for the screen. As fascinating as Orson Welles' *The Trial* is, it shows its limits. As reader, of course, I feel differently and am very interested in his themes." Soderbergh found the solution by situating Kafka in an artistic ambience: "I thought the connection that Lem Dobbs [the screenwriter] established between Kafka and expressionism was pertinent, and that Doctor Murnau was a logical development of these ideas. His script seemed to escape all the traps of a biography and an adaptation, while keeping all that seemed interesting to me: the foreshadowing of Nazism by twenty years, the bureaucratic thinking leading up to the Third Reich, etc."¹⁸ Yet Soderbergh's staging often tends toward the hilarious. *Kafka* is full of physical comedy reminding us of the carnivalesque tradition in cinema repressed by the classic realist text. Dialogue is uttered disjunctively, especially by the two assistants who get assigned to Kafka after his advancement. They continually play with objects and form a kind of human perpetual motion machine, acting in conjunction and in conflict at the same time. Moreover, the character of Gabriele Rossman seems to be straight out of a Howard Hawks movie. She is a modern sister of Bonnie Lee from *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), Marie Browning in *To Have and Have Not* (1944), or Dallas D'Allesandro in *Hatari!* (1962): a tough woman needing no protection from the male hero. Rossman acts resolutely, always aware that a shut mouth catches no flies.

Soderbergh's movie juxtaposes the funny with the horrific. In this way, he paraphrases Kafka's literary world: the Kafkaesque, that is, an infusible contradiction between the reality of individual experience and the reality of collective life, the existential angst of overpowering authorities threatening every bit of individualism. It is not dramatic action that dominates the film but spirit and sentiment, atmosphere and aura. Instead of aiming for logical composition, Soderbergh allows cinematic mood to overpower the visible. This temper seems to stem straight from Kafka's prose. Life and art are short circuited. In the movie Kafka moves through a world gone to pieces: a madhouse where everything is in motion, fragmented and confusing. Thereby, he seems to meet the products of his creative imagination. The fictitious diffuses into the factual; the factual opens up toward the fictitious. As Geoff Andrew notes, the film is a "distillation of Kafka's preoccupation with in-

dividuality, alienation, bureaucracy and oppression.”¹⁹ Soderbergh's Prague appears to be filled with locations from Kafka's writing: narrow corridors, overcrowded document dumps, dark attics, and unending staircases. A lot of figures (though not the names of those figures) derive directly from his stories: Eduard Raban is the protagonist in the tale “Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande” (Wedding Preparations in the Country, 1907–1908), Karl Rossman plays the leading role in *Der Verschollene* (*Amerika*, 1912–1914), and K.'s landlady in *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1914–1915) is called Grubach. And the mysterious castle is a place of anonymous power in *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*, 1922), while the torture and experiments in the castle hint at the execution machine described in the story “In der Strafkolonie” (“In the Penal Colony,” 1914). Moreover, many details correspond to Kafka's troubled life. The sculptor Bizzlebek stands in for his longtime friend Max Brod, whom Kafka advised to destroy all of his writings in case of his death. Soderbergh emphasizes Kafka's difficulties with women as well as the novelist's problematic relationship to his father. The author's famous *Brief an den Vater* (*Letter to His Father*, 1919) is cited directly. Nevertheless, it is “Kafka” we see in *Kafka*; it is not Kafka: it is a virtual character, not the representation of a historical personage. In one especially self-reflexive scene, Inspector Grubach poses a question after mumbling, “Kafka. Kafka, Kafka. . . . Is that your real name?” He answers, “Yes. Why shouldn't it be?” Of all the fragile identities presented in the movie, the title character is the most unstable.

Toward a Minor Cinema

Constituting a discourse on nonidentity and schizophrenia, Soderbergh's *Kafka* asks to be read from a Deleuzian perspective. Deleuze and Guattari argue that three elements constitute what they call a “minor literature.” Such a literature contrasts sharply with a mainstream national tradition: “the first characteristic of a minor literature . . . is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization,” a deracination that casts it adrift. Such writing, as a result, is decidedly political, critically microcosmic. In minor literature “individual concern . . . becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it.” And yet this form of the political is inseparable from collective thinking: “What each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. The political domain has contaminated every statement. . . .

But above all else, because collective or national consciousness is 'often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,' literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of the collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation." Finally, of particular importance thereby is that a minor literature does not refer to a subject: "There isn't a subject, there are only collective assemblages of enunciation."²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari do not see a vertical, that is, a dialectical operation at work in ideology but a form of specific systems working fluidly.

In this, a minority literature finds its potential for resistance. Kafka's prose not only exterminates the subject; it also works antimimetically, being filled with lines of flight. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that such a writer "deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification."²¹ Here there is a counterbalance to the postmodern loss of history mourned by critics such as Fredric Jameson, a compensation that gives the notion of apolitical pastiche a new spin toward the radical. Deleuze and Guattari describe, according to Jameson, a "whole new type of emotional ground tone" called intensity.²² It is exactly in intensities that a minor literature creates vibrating sounds devoid of any obligation to signify. In its mixture of Czech, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Prague German Kafka's writing makes "the German language take flight on a line of escape" from its centripetal monologism, its tendency toward standardization. The result is that Kafka becomes "a sort of stranger *within* his own language," simultaneously occupying a place both within its different systems and on its margins.²³ Similarly, Soderbergh's film becomes a stranger within its own language, that of cinema. The pastiche assemblage of quotes and references to film history generates a schizophrenic line of flight from the constraints of mimetic representation or historically determined structures, including the monologism of classical Hollywood conventions. This expressiveness does not depend upon the language's power to constitute and then refer to "the real." It is a form of expression based on desire alone, and this desire is formed by the will to acuteness. Soderbergh's minor cinema produces intensities attached to the cells of cinema like a virus, "where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs."²⁴ To put this most simply, *Kafka's* subversive quality depends on the supremacy of the sign over the referent, the stressing of self-contradictory elements in the filmic text via the intensive: the confusion of fact and fiction, the opening up to a figural excess, that is, the stylization of sight and sound. In Soderbergh's *Kafka* pastiche, the world is a bricolage of texts, its

structure the form of a play that deterritorializes, dismantles, and perhaps points toward the disempowering of the seemingly unmovable powers of the classic realist text. Thus, the aesthetics of *Kafka* seem to possess their positive alternative exactly in their mobilization of negativity. Soderbergh's displacement of logical signification causes a reversal of mimetic codes of representation initiating a play of signs down a syntagmatic chain of destabilization, which not only foregrounds the materiality of its construction but also liberates contradictions. The emphasizing of disunity creates a textual economy bringing about its own dissemination.

Notes

1. Quoted in Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret, "An Exploration of the Work *Kafka*," in *Steven Soderbergh Interviews*, ed. Anthony Kaufman (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2002), 49–50.

2. Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 119.

3. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (London: Continuum, 1992), 52.

4. Tom Gunning, "Colorful Metaphors: The Attraction of Color in Early Silent Cinema," *Fotogenia*, no. 1 (1994): 249.

5. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Press, 2000), 80.

6. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 118.

7. Paul Virilio's statements are made in the movie *Une anatomie de la couleur* (1996) by director Henry Colomer.

8. Edward Buscombe, "Sound and Color," in *Movies and Methods: Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 88.

9. Julia Kristeva, "Giotto's Joy," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), 221.

10. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 63–64.

11. Steven Dillon, *The Solaris Effect: Art & Artifice in Contemporary American Film* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2006), 27.

12. Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), 9.

13. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 51.

14. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991), 17, 18.

15. *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

16. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

17. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 33, 35, 341.

18. Quoted in Ciment and Niogret, "Exploration of the Work *Kafka*," 46 (first quote), 48 (second and third quotes).

19. Geoff Andrew, *Stranger Than Paradise: Maverick Film-makers in Recent American Cinema* (London: Prion Books, 1998), 26.

20. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16, 17, 18.

21. *Ibid.*, 22.

22. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 6.

23. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 26.

24. *Ibid.*, 13.