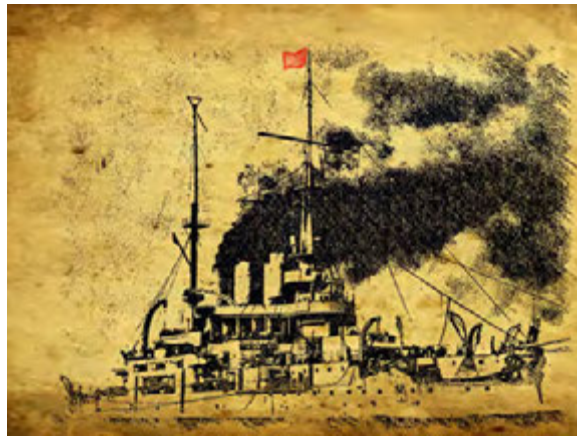


Freeze Frame



Nigel Helyer

Acknowledgements and Publication information.



Fictionalising fiction - As a thirteen-year-old lad I, along with a couple of friends were once left to kick our heels for the day in central London —we were the crew in a sailing regatta waiting for our helmsman to finish work. Being both wary of getting lost in the capital and having little or no money we decided to visit the cartoon cinema, that in those days was located on the main concourse of Victoria station. However, unlike each Saturday morning, our encounter was not, as we had imagined, with *Bugs Bunny* or the *Invisible Man* but with something indescribable and utterly alien. I left the cinema with mixed emotions, no longer an innocent, for I had seen my first film by Jean-Luc Godard and my experience of cinema had been irrevocably changed!

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Freeze Frame.

A Cinenovel in 52 Reels.



Quelle est votre plus grand ambition dans la vie?

Devenir immortel et puis mourir.

Jean-Luc Godard, *À bout de souffle* 1960.

Preface.

The twilight of the Gods - a Deluge in the Underworld.

*In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river...*

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper*

T. S. Elliot.

Hades, they used to say *as hot as*...but that is no more. It has been a spectacular transformation, at first, the surface of the River Styx, forever inky black and sluggish, is infected by eddies and vicious sucking whirlpools that claw at its banks, grasping clods of clay and carrying them away downstream. In short order Charon refuses to operate his ferry in the increasing turbulence, mooring it with double lines to the Underworld shore and stands alternately scratching his forehead and that of his hideous dog, with his dirty nails. When Hermes appears on the far shore with an attractive female shade Charon simply shrugs his shoulders and gestures to Hermes, with a lazy flick of a hand, to take her back from whence she came — and naturally no complaints from her!

A day or so later and the whirlpools are overpowered by oily standing waves that eventually break into a foaming torrent. At this moment the King of the Underworld, his wife and entourage, arrive at the ferry and announce to Charon that the main chamber of the Inferno has flooded and it is high time to abandon the Kingdom of Darkness before they all drown.

The King's party boards the ferry settling uneasily on its gunwales and sodden floorboards, Hermes glides over to complete the crew and with Charon's misshapen dog finally coaxed onboard they cast off into the deluge and race toward one of the watery exits of the Underworld.

After an eternity of living in a dark, sulphurous atmosphere, the King and his minions are much troubled by the searing light that glitters over the deep azure waters that they find themselves cast adrift upon. They screw up their eyes and look back at the shadowy maw of the enormous cave from which they have been ejected to see billows of steam and violent broiling as the black waters of the Styx clash with the crystal blue salt sea.

In the clashing waves struggle the creatures who inhabit the entrance, Penthos who brings grief; Curae anxiety and Nosoi the bearer of diseases. Wildly splashing next to them are Geras the bearer of old age; Phobos the fearful; Limos who spreads hunger and Aporia, need. Thanatos the bringer of death struggles to keep his head above the foam and Algea who administers agony slips beneath the surface forever. Sleep casting Hypnos thrashes about next to Gaudia the one of guilty joys; whilst Polemos the warlike is rescuing Eris who oversees discord.

All those aboard turn to look at Charon, who grimly hangs onto his steering oar, as if to ask him their whereabouts, Charon's eyes widen and he performs yet another of his famous shrugs, they are dispossessed, disinherited and certainly lost at sea. The transition from the turgid waters of his routine ferry crossing to navigating the glittering tumult of the sea will take him some time to comprehend and even longer to master. There is nothing for him to do but slowly scull the craft until they find dry land, should it take it a day or a year, that is the task — and there is plenty of time to reflect upon the future and the possible competition for souls in this unknown world.

Whilst in control of Hades they have of course been made aware of other forms of eternity, their shades are often well travelled and well informed, and naturally as they have nothing much else to do they chatter away constantly.

The Romans they know all about — very good at building and keeping records, running campaigns, wars and conquests — in this regard, they are certainly very productive in producing an endless supply of shades. But the Romans are essentially unimaginative pragmatists, stealing ideas wherever they find them, changing the names of the Gods; even changing their beliefs holus-bolus and in the course of it making a terrible mess of the afterlife. In their decline, they have even adopted a bizarre foreign idea of eternal life, where the righteous float around in the high-voltage clouds strumming lyres — only the wicked enter the Underworld — a very uncouth and truly undemocratic concept.

The shades of merchant sailors have relayed that far to the East there also exists an exotic cult of reincarnation. An endless carousel of life and death churning from one existence to the next in a vicious cycle that can only be broken by a super-human effort to achieve spiritual purification, a pathway not open to most mortals. Instead of being gently transported across the Styx to mingle with the Poets and Philosophers, the unfortunates are consigned to return as cockroaches or donkeys, depending upon their spiritual progress — a harsh prospect for most!

Throughout the interminable voyage the King and his subjects debate their prospects, how will they run their business with such unfair competition for souls? More importantly, where will they establish a new Kingdom?



Reel No.1. The Orpheum.

In which the Children visit the Orpheum cinema.

The children sweep into the arcade hooting spontaneously to one another, their voices sounding out the reflective surfaces in a running liquid torrent.

The arcade has painted cast-iron columns and riveted iron trusses; tea-coloured stains seep from the cracked enamel that is gradually being shed like a snake skin. The reinforced glass ceiling panels are the colour of boiled sugar bon-bons, pale violets, faded lime green and a yellow close to urine. Small shops line each side of the iron-framed construction, although only a tobacconist who does not actually have tobacco for sale; a newsagent, whose only trade is in local gossip and a lady's accessory shop that displays items that are several decades out of fashion, remain. There are several dusty *To Let* signs hanging with an embarrassed air in the display windows of the remaining frontages.

At the, once regal, end of the arcade stands the *Orpheum*, an early Art Deco building with a slightly mismatched Art Nouveau entrance — the stucco arch resembles a yawning mouth topped by a snub nose and two abstract eyes that swirl into floral tresses forming the door framing. The front-of-house Box-office is partly glazed, its curved frontage pierced by a small semi-circular aperture in the plate glass, just large enough to permit the passage of tickets across the well-worn timber counter; brass edged to match the polished brass ticket machine. The Box-office is flanked on either side by arrays of faded monochrome cinema stills — the stars and starlets of the previous century. A cardboard sign written in cursive hand-lettering is pinned above the Box-office window.

Showing Today, The Old Town.

The Matinee programme is due to start. Above the auditorium, the Projectionist's hands move deftly to lace up the first spool of the

show. He is in no real hurry, he is a dealer in memories, distant memories, all of which require time — and besides, the audience for the matinee are predominantly children, the majority of whom have avoided buying a ticket and so would be the last to make a fuss.

Their technique is quite simple and usually tolerated by the cashier and usher who turn a blind eye. At least two of the better-presented children hand over the obligatory small silver coin at the ticket booth, they are well mannered and politely take their tickets that spit out of the brass machine and then enter the auditorium on their best behaviour. Once inside their pretence is dropped, as rather than taking a seat they slink to the side of the cinema and slip behind the heavy velvet drapes that conceal the rear fire exit. Quietly as possible, they press down the horizontal metal bar to unlatch the door and silently beckon the rag-tag group of friends into the darkness.

A straggler arrives, too small to keep up with the vortex of child energy. The small child raises herself on tip-toe and extends her arm to reach over the sill of the Box-office counter. In her hand a brightly patterned carapace of a mangrove crab — a disc of red and yellow symmetrical markings resembling a Rorschach test.

The grizzled man behind the counter stares at the diminutive child and then at the fragile disc and suddenly the aroma of crab swirls about his palette — a gentle breeze blows through the Box-office carrying the scent of mountain herbs and, through the glass, he spies the distant Aegean sparkling in the afternoon sun, a light haze of woodsmoke drifting from the cooking fire. The small girl continues to stare at the old man, whose eyes are focussed on an invisible horizon, his being strangely absent, transparent as if he was no longer in his ticket booth. It lasts for only a moment, he clears his throat and re-inhabits his familiar gruff demeanour, banishing the stab of memory.

Not known for his eloquence he leans forward and snatches the crab shell, grunts and jerks his head towards the cinema entrance, the girl

wrinkles her nose in a grin of accomplishment and scurries through the red drapes into the gloom of the auditorium.

As for money, it is rarely used and when it is its value is principally symbolic. Certainly, some coins are jangling about in the odd pocket, but they come from many ancient sources and people have little regard for their denomination or provenance, a coin is simply a metal disc that can be given, passed onto another as a token of thanks for some small service — or on the rare occasion to obtain a service. Entry into the *Orpheum* is the one place where this symbolism is strictly enforced as no one may enter without first offering a token, the Box-office man still has an ear for the jingle of copper or silver.



Reel No.2. The Old Town screening.

An antique documentary is shown to the townspeople.

It is the moment — finally, the moth-eaten red velour curtains are drawn back by their tarnished golden tassels and the house lights extinguish. Conversations drop to whispers and fingers freeze on the paper wrappers that have suddenly become indescribably noisy.

Above the sea of heads the motes of dust, that saturate the air, burst into a flickering dance, animated by the cone of light that terminates in a giant Cockerel which prances and crows silently in a display of Gallic pride, before fading into the image of an elegant paddle steamer gliding effortlessly toward a pier.

The water glistens and glints in the strong sunlight and the steamer pulsates in flares of over-exposure, now nearer and sharper, now receding into the shimmer of the lake. Now the screen fills with the churning nebulae of the paddlewheel, a mandala of foam hovering in the centre of the screen, then a fluttering swan with an elegant crown encircling its serpentine neck, the regal insignia of the shipping line, or perhaps this is indeed a visit of the royal yacht? An elegantly painted name-board bearing the script *Syracuse* glides across the silent auditorium. All to the accompaniment of the faint clatter of the projector as it claws down on the torn sprockets of this well-worn memory, marking the passage of time, faded images of a now faded town.

The children fall into a reverie, transported to the town as it once was, splendid with lakeside promenades, where well-appointed young men in summer flannels and Panamas pass by a Lido, thronged with bronzed bodies; and now the rowing clubs with moustachioed oarsmen indistinguishable from one another in their straw boaters and linens. Elegant women, walking arm in arm on the boardwalk, Broderie Anglaise parasols and broad smiles for the camera.

A perspective of the lake bordered by pine forest shade, sheltering tea houses and private dachas — a uniformed maid smiles and waves from a heavily carved wooden veranda where she is watering flower boxes.

The camera glides along a boulevard in the upper town, passing gleaming landaus drawn by sleek plumed horses, the occupants waving to promenading couples; its view then turns towards the town square. A fountain flanked on one side by the town hall and on the other by the cast-iron and glass arcade that still houses this very theatre; the dissonance rings softly — what was once precise, serene and bathed in eternal sunlight now only inhabits this darkened hall like a sad ghost in solitary confinement.

The projector clatters across a series of splices and the scene jumps incongruously to the mute performance of a uniformed town brass band — the camera pans to reveal the massive dark form of a steam locomotive, partially shrouded in vapour, an iron leviathan that has come to rest at the rail terminus. The fog dissipates and well-dressed people parade past the camera, some of them smiling directly into its glass eye. Their black-suited, insect-like movements, are staccato and slightly too rapid as if pushed by an invisible force from one position to the next. A final close-up of a well-fed smiling citizen sporting a top hat and the credits flash up abruptly, lettered in the ancient script that only a few of the very old can read nowadays.

The audience stirs and slowly regains the present, then gradually files out of the rows. As they stand the worn fabric seats send out more clouds of dust as they spring up against the seat backs. Only one schoolboy remains, a slight hiss of a graphite stick on coarse paper as he carefully notes the timing and camera perspective associated with each splice in the film.



Reel No.3. The Box-office Man.

*The Box-office man visits the town museum
to look at a vase and reflects upon his fate.*

The Matinee is over and the Box-office clerk has some free time until the evening session — he will do two things this afternoon to while away his time. Firstly he will visit the café and secondly the Town Museum.

Haros, as he likes to be called, an invented name for sure, is of indeterminate age — yet another old but ageless Greek migrant, with greyed curly hair and a permanent two-day growth of silvered stubble about his chin. Many find his coarse features rather intimidating; crooked yellowed teeth, as if from too much nicotine and his blazing bloodshot eyes — certainly not a character to argue with. His elevated position as the gatekeeper of the *Orpheum* seems to give him the license to dress in an eccentric manner — a threadbare but conspicuously expensive suit, dark, pinstriped and one size too big for his shrinking frame, and something like a pointed red fez jammed over his curls.

The townsfolk find him generally reserved of speech although prone to occasional terse statements which demonstrate that he is quick-witted but sharp of tongue. Haros is naturally more loquacious with the other Greek migrants — he always wins at chess in the local café where he meets with the Projectionist. They sit at their usual corner table, the light falling across the board from the street window, a bottle of clear spirit between them, and asleep at Haros's feet is a scruffy oversized hound with a malformed head.

Haros attempts a smile as yet again he declares checkmate and drains his glass — time to go. The hound struggles lazily to its feet and pads alongside his master, head down and drooling. Together they walk slowly through the afternoon humidity of the abandoned town square toward the museum of antiquity. The museum was bestowed upon the town almost two centuries ago by an aristocratic

family who built a summer mansion on the hillside, now a universe of fungal growth, partly submerged in reed banks, the home of eels and wading birds. The museum, however, being built as part of the Town's civic precinct in the upper town, is in relatively good condition, as is its collection, which is typical of the late nineteenth century — a scattering of antiquities; some regional prehistoric stone and ceramic artefacts and motley collections of colonial bric-a-brac.



Figure 1. A Greek Krater depicting Charon's Boat.

Haros, who has but a single interest, follows his habitual route through the empty museum to a vitrine of Greek vases. His focus is directed toward one particular Urn — smooth polished earthenware with a dense black image of a rowing boat touching the shore. A bearded man stands on the prow wearing a rough tunic and pointed hat, oar in hand. He is receiving a passenger, bought to him by Hermes the psychopomp, and is no doubt waiting to extract the Oblos that is concealed under the tongue of the torpid traveller. The migrant stands immobile save for his fiery red eyes that devour the scene — finally he grunts, turns and exits the museum, never

looking to the left or right. This single image fixed in his mind is his connection with the real world. The dog, who has been waiting in the shade of the marble portico lurches to its feet and follows.

The Box-office man struggles with his current situation, he had not foreseen his redundancy; of being forced into a semi-retirement where he is obliged to live off a meagre supply of de-valued coins, supplemented by taking his old boat out into the marshes on fishing trips, returning with catches of unidentifiable marine creatures that he trades with the townsfolk — activities well below his station.

He and his fellow migrants — all exiles — have washed up in a place where exiles might be sent if there was a State capable of prosecuting deportation, but this would require a form of political organisation in excess of that which exists anywhere. Here there are no cruel border guards or inhumane detention camps, just a welcoming community of simple people who scratch a living with remarkable good nature. Haros is numbed, a passive observer who is no longer the master of his fate, as both his former world and this world crumble. He and his small band of companions have drifted into a life of isolation — stumbling upon a place that is fading from the cartographic record and dissolving into the gentle static of amnesia.

Sometimes it vexes him that the Projectionist tells him that there is still valuable work to be done — that the Cosmos requires them to continue their ancient task, even if it seems futile in circumstances changed beyond recognition. Haros may always win at chess but the Projectionist is possessed of a superior spiritual understanding of fate — so Haros bides his time and keeps the faith.



Reel No.4. Chewing Gum and the King.

A story of Beauty and the Beast in which the Beast is cruelly murdered.

A globe, the world perhaps, surmounted by an enormous radio tower, lightning flashing from its tip, coded messages streaming into space. The letters...

R
K
O

A Radio Picture

...stream across the screen from left to right. A strained and scratchy orchestra accompanies the credits that crawl up the screen. The beast is dead, the beauty saved and the world is back in equilibrium — so ends the sad tale of King Kong — throats are cleared, noses blown and eyes dried.

The children are simultaneously elated and exhausted, their emotions frayed by the scale of the drama and by their confused allegiance to both the savage and the civilised.



Figure 2. R.K.O.

They thrill at the sight of American bi-planes soaring in formation above the New York skyline; clench their fingers on firing buttons as the screen fills with a frontal view of the powerful rotary engines surmounted by blazing machine guns and hold their breath each time Kong raises his paw to his chest wounds, swaying slightly in a rehearsal for his fall. Intuitively they recognise that wild untrammelled things have always stood for rebellion and the pure energy necessary for change — however fearsome and alien the intelligence that motivates.

Two other significant events occur during today's performance of the tattered 1933 copy. The show halts sometime after King Kong curls his fingers around the heroine, an encirclement that mirrors the giant wrist cuff, shining metallic against the dark fur of his right hand. Then the angry buzz of a dislodged swarm as the biplanes appear in the sky, Kong carefully sets Anne Darrow down on a ledge, his emotions switching from enthrallment to rage as one by one, the biplanes roll out of formation and commence firing.

At the crucial moment the house lights come up to a dull yellow accompanied by the sound of severed film ends thrashing against the body of the projector, mixed with a collective groan from the audience. This is sweet music to the children's ears — this is a particularly good place in the drama for a breakage, as the trimmed film fragments will doubtless contain images of American fighter planes, and even King Kong swinging his massive arms out, perhaps even crushing one in midair.

Some of these images will turn up the following week in the tray of the usher as she walks up and down the aisles at intermission. She has an array of homemade delicacies — but most importantly the brightly coloured envelopes that are emblazoned with the word *Orpheum* and the image of a swan with a golden crown around its slender neck. Each slender package contains a rectangular slither of pink chewing gum together with the real treat, a neatly cut single 35 mm frame excised from a damaged section of the film.

The collectors' instinct for such unusual images creates an agony of anticipation. However rare or random these breakages might be the children secretly wish for a second disruption to the session in the hope that it will be even more profound and dramatic.

Towards the inevitable conclusion where King Kong is riddled with bullets and wavers atop the skyscraper the projector again clatters noisily over the splices of a previous repair and then suddenly jams. King Kong is falling but suddenly halts, then begins to shimmer, the grain of the frame loosened by the heat of the lamp, Kong is roasting over the cannibal's fire, he boils then he flares into vapour and is gone, on the screen a blinding white replaces Kong's total blackness.



Figure 3. King Kong.

The cinema is plunged into sudden darkness and filled with a chorus of exclamations and murmurs. The Projectionist dowses the projector lamp, then the house lights glow momentarily as he hauls the severed film-ends onto the splicing desk where he begins to excise several frames from each side of the vapourised section. He carefully primes the new ends and glues the celluloid together with solvent.

He is deft from regular practice and re-laces the machine in just under a minute. The film rolls toward its conclusion, slightly shorter and now missing the moment of Kong's death — the beast is now

simply a huge inert corpse lying in the street for all to gawk at — diminutive men strut past demonstrating their superior courage and intelligence.

*And Lo the Beast looked upon the face of Beauty
And it stayed its hand from Killing
And from that day it was as one Dead.*

The children burst from the cinema doors re-inhabiting their voices which have been reduced to sidelong whispers for the past two hours. On their way home the children relive the narrative. They grimace at one another, bare their canines, beat their chests and swipe passing insects from the air with mock rage. Some fly ahead buzzing with arms outstretched. After the initial enactments fade they begin to pick apart the narrative and eagerly discuss the potential images that will appear in the confectionery tray the following week — they also ponder why the scenes containing the death of a character never appear in the chewing gum envelopes — is this simply chance or by design? This is one of the great mysteries of the *Orpheum*, one which they are determined to solve.



Reel No.5. A Special Screening.

A rare glimpse of the catastrophic floods that changed the world.

The handbill dances in the wind on its thumbtack —
Roll up Roll up A Special Screening of “Deluge!”

This evening a special viewing showing a documentary film of the region, recently discovered in the attic of the town museum. A rare find — this film was made over a period of two decades, from 1928 to 1958 some 150 ~ 120 years ago.

Unsurprisingly the auditorium of the *Orpheum* is packed. The townsfolk know that the film is ancient and fragile and that perhaps this is the only time it will be screened. The children have been exempted from classes so that they can attend. The house lights dim and the curtains swish back in a pall of dust, someone sneezes on cue.

A distant aerial shot of the town in summer and the introductory text slowly scrolls up the screen.

This documentary by the Northern Regions Film Unit illustrates the catastrophic flooding of our region, in particular, it captures scenes of the drowning of the river valley and the eventual disappearance of the endless pine forests; the gradual inundation of the lower town with its river steamer quays, warehouses, light manufacturing and artisanal workshops as well as the majority of working-class houses. It captures amazing scenes of the sudden flooding of the livestock markets where terrified animals are swept away in the deluge.....

Northern Regions Film Unit — 1928 ~ 1958

The cockerel prances once again, croaks silently and the word *Pathé* made of a strange orange peel typeface is followed by the word *Deluge* in gesticulating italics.

A glaring white snowscape. Pan across to two cross-country skiers who emerge from a dense pine forest and come to rest, leaning on their poles at the edge of a frozen river. They want to cross but cannot as huge blocks of ice constantly rear up in the turbulent undercurrent — the ice plane breaks up and hurtles downstream.

Close-up of a Bear cub clinging to a pine sapling at the edge of the torrent — in the background its anxious mother roars and head rolls as the cub sways in the spray.

A forester poles his punt through a flooded forest towards his cabin, submerged to the window sills, he ties his boat to the porch rail and wades through the entrance to emerge moments later with some unidentifiable possessions that he loads aboard; he poles his punt away into the featureless woods and disappears from sight.

A cut-away shot of a moody sky pierced by lightning; cross-fade to sheets of incessant rain; cross-fade to a sequence filmed in the lower town, amongst the wharves and workshops. The river is in full spate and a group of sailors are struggling to secure a river steamer to the wharf which is almost submerged by the swollen torrent. Pan to a constant stream of people carrying heavy parcels and cases who are scrambling across the bucking gangplank.

Close up of the steamer funnel, with its be-crowned swan emblem — the steam whistle blasts and the vessel pushes out into the swirl of an angry river, to be swept away downstream — possibly never to return; fade to black.

Under pressure, a waterfront warehouse collapses and folds into an origami boat that sails off downstream, following the recently departed steamer, as if the passengers were calling for even more possessions that are seen leaking from the carcass of the structure.

Workmen pull heavy items from the remaining shoreline buildings and load them into a motley array of transports heading for higher ground in the bourgeois parts of town — a shot of rooftops only just

visible where the steamer wharf once stood, the river distended into a swirling lake; then cut to a temporary camp of canvas tents and a communal soup kitchen erected in a tree-lined boulevard with large villas set back into manicured gardens. People wave at the camera and smile as if this was the start of a summer vacation. The words:

Twenty Years Later.

At this point, the generic orchestral music that has until now accompanied the film is replaced by location recordings and the grain of the film stock becomes finer.

A panning shot from the upper town looks out over a vast lake bordered by marshland, the once endless pine forests only evident in the silvered tips of the larger dead trees that break the surface. The sounds of Cicadas and Tree-frogs pulse in waves as a vista of unfamiliar plants are shown colonising the marshy fringes, trees with giant leaves and aerial roots, strangler vines and Aerophytes. Close-up of a large reptile climbing the trunk of a tropical tree.

Water level — a tracking shot from a punt slowly gliding along a miasmic shoreline, a babble of water from the bow. Rotting tangles of vegetation crawl over barely recognisable summer houses, the spire of a church pierces the tepid water, its weathervane surmounted by a huge grey heron that takes alarm and wafts away with slow sweeping flight.

The punt makes a slow turn to the right creating a panorama. Mangroves line the shore; dissolving into a heat haze of undulating water bound by no horizon; then a pan back to the tangle of the shoreline which reveals the remains of the upper town perched at the end of its ridge. The Town-hall bell sounds out as the camera reveals the civic buildings at the summit still intact, lower down some prominent mansions and the old rail terminal. The camera travels along the grand boulevards that once encircled the midtown which are now encrusted with a collection of smaller habitations and small kitchen gardens — moving lower still the rotting remains

of dachas and summer villas, now the domain of eels, amphibians and fungi; more jungle sounds.

A long shot of a watercraft, low in the water, slowly approaching the shore. A female voice crackles from the speakers, evacuated children, some hundred of them, are crammed into the old wooden cargo boat. Close-up of small schoolchildren packed like sardines in the open deck area — each clenching a small bag and sporting an identity tag that flutters in the gentle breeze. The narrator identifies a string of northern logging towns and small mine sites located in the once vast frozen forest lands, which today he announces, are submerged under steaming marshland and mangrove wastes. It is only the children under seven who have been granted asylum, the narrator fails to explain the fate of those who remain behind.

Close-up of a makeshift wooden gangplank, children disembark in single file, some look directly at the camera, a few smile but most look exhausted and anxious. Onshore a huddle of adults organise the children into lines, distributing fruits and bread, looking at name tags and fussing with luggage. Finally, small groups wander away from the water's edge, passing between crumbling buildings, overgrown with creepers, to follow the lane that leads to the upper town — to a new life as the female voice announces with official enthusiasm.

Night falls, and the sun sinks through the foliage which is now screaming with Cicadas, Tree Frogs and the whoop of night birds. Giant Flying-foxes twitter and screech as they crash into the massive fig trees and thickets of strangler vines. Close-up of a Flying-fox gliding clear of its roost followed by the night sky. In these high latitudes, the night is not truly dark during the summer and not at all on this particular evening, as the Aurora Borealis flickers electric green across the heavens sending huge columns of light flickering diagonally to the North, where the rumble and flash tell that an enormous electrical storm is berthing.

A final slow cross-fade to a wide shot of the surface of the miasmic water that has replaced the river valley and original pine forests

with an immense horizonless lake, once again the image of the few dead tree masts and a single church spire peeping above the water. The credits roll — the audience applauds in a subdued manner and the house lights glow dimly as people begin to leave. In the front row, three children close their notebooks and stow their graphite sticks in their shirt pockets — they calculate five or six generations have passed since their refugee ancestors arrived here.



Reel No.6. The Lakeside — Children's Domain.

We visit a ruined dacha and learn about a new world map.

A diminutive girl with the almond eyes of a Tartar steps up to the counter of the Box office and fixes a quizzical gaze upon Haros, its stolid guardian. Without uttering a sound she slides a single sheet of paper through the small arch-shaped aperture in the plate glass that separates them — the grizzled man impassively returns her gaze.

Haros slowly lowers his eyes to the paper, rotates it 180 degrees and takes in the scrawl, drawn in thick graphite on rough homemade paper. The drawing is naive but contains all the salient details. Peering from within a circular form, a window, a harness, perhaps a wreath, is the head of a feline creature, its maw agape and surrounding it a text, obviously copied on-the-fly in imperfect letters.



Figure 4. M.G.M.

ARS GRATIA ARTIS

The man grunts and lifts his eyes to look at the small child, who simply raises both hands, palms heavenward and simultaneously lifts her shoulders to perform a perfect impression of her grandmother asking a silent question. Turning back to the drawing Haros fumbles in a drawer beneath the countertop, extracts a graphite stick and begins to write simple block capitals in the English language:

LATIN NOT GREEK

And under this:

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

This is followed by a curving line terminating in an arrowhead that indicates the Logo. He then draws another arrow that points to the Feline creature and writes:

LEO THE LION

Finally, he writes:

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER *MGM — STUDIO IN HOLLYWOOD*

Pleased with his work he nods, almost affably and slides the page back across the polished wood and through the little arch in the glass. The girl wrinkles her nose in a half-smile, nods a couple of times and skips through the door into the tropical light that filters through the coloured glass panels that form the roof of the arcade. She stops to perch on the lower steps and consults the drawing — slowly sounding out the block letters of the English text, a difficult language but one which has gradually become the lingua franca of this isolated community of migrants and refugees. When she has mastered the words she skips away to the afternoon meeting at the lakeside — she is resolved to adopt a new nickname, from now on she will be known as MGM.

The children form a fluid, self-organising group, bound together by a pact that keeps them largely independent of the world of adults. Their only real point of contact is their fanatical attendance at cinema screenings and their ancillary passion for collecting the chewing gum envelopes that contain the discarded frames culled from film breakages

As a meeting place, they have adopted the salon of a derelict dacha which is slowly dissolving into the mud and slime of the mangroves — its lower section already the home of slithering amphibious creatures and mud crabs that raise their large blue claws in an insolent warning. The children steer clear of the inhabitants of the lower story, preferring the slight mildew of the salon with its long worm-riddled table that at one time bore entire sturgeon and pyramids of champagne glasses. The once polished surface, now milky with damp supports a new version of the world — a matrix of thirty-five-millimetre celluloid frames.

One child has a passion for maps. She has a broad face, high cheekbones and upswept eyes that burn with intelligence and independence. The children call her The Navigator as she is creating a chart of the known world. The Navigator keeps an eye out for the movements of the Gypsy, the mysterious one who constantly travels but she also keeps tabs on the Box-office man and his loping hound, trailing them to the Town Museum. Whilst the old man stares fixedly at the images drawn on broken clay pots neatly arranged in dusty cases, she stares up at the two large maps that hang in the main hall, their lacquered linen surfaces, cracked and yellowed with age, suspended between polished hardwood rods.

One map is mostly covered in a faded pink — entire continents formed by a jigsaw of interlocking pink territories each emblazoned with a Latin script. The other map is principally red with names in the mysterious Mosfilm script. She tries to reconcile these two geographies but they seem to represent different worlds, both show places that she imagines no longer exist but above all else, for her, it is the dove-tailed forms that glow with beauty. The serpentine demarcations of rivers and the crenelations of coastlines — the place names curling along mountain ranges and arching over deserts, counterpointed by the legends sitting neatly in their sensible boxes in the lower corners. But these lands are no more, she has no compass and no means of travel other than that provided by the *Orpheum* — it is from there that she is spinning her web of place names and unknown destinations, spinning a collective fate.

The Navigator imagines tracing her fingers across the faded maps in this dusty and barely visited place — pale blue expanses furrowed by the dark blue lines of steamer routes plying north and south between the river settlements that long ago slid beneath the surface.

The Navigator has commandeered a large wall in the salon of the musty Dacha — a wall with a view. The hand-painted wallpaper is pasted onto a thick cardboard backing to form a giant paper tapestry that hangs free of the neatly squared-off pine logs which form the walls of the Dacha. The scene is idyllic, a view of the lake as it was in the old days, the air is clear and bright, the sky a pale blue and the water shimmering, framed by pastel-coloured reedy fronds and in the distance a blueish shoreline.

She has taken this backdrop as the foundation for her new world — pinning to it small oblongs of card bearing the names of all the places she has encountered at the *Orpheum* — the only name that is missing is the town where the *Orpheum* stands. Each card bears her careful cursive lettering in turquoise ink and sends out tendrils of red woollen thread to other place names, some are connected by a single thread, Skull Island to New York City, others by multiple connections, Casablanca to Paris, Lisbon and America. A few are isolated and are possibly islands, Odessa, Washington DC, Bikini and Kansas, their threads hang limp, awaiting a potential connection.

The large ornamental doors show their serpentine brass handles to the outside world. It is now late on a Sunday afternoon and the only time in the week that the *Orpheum* is closed. The Greeks have installed themselves on the terrace of the *Café des Poètes*, once a fashionable feature of the town square but now comfortably worn and familiar. Only the Projectionist is absent from the games of Chess and Dominoes, the players well lubricated by the local firewater — as usual, the big man is working in the Projection room on business that the Greeks do not discuss in public.

Below in the mangrove thickets that line the lake the heat of the day hovers unabated in the humid air as the children slowly gravitate

towards their refuge. One by one they arrive at the semi-submerged villa and gingerly traverse the gangplank that arches over the algal water, to scramble across the rotting sill of a window. They drop down into the pale green light and thick musty air of the salon and move toward the central table, each clutching a small paper envelope bearing the image of a swan, its neck encircled by a crown.

Finally, they are all assembled, twelve children standing around the vast table, dressed in motley garb and as clean as children who run wild can be expected to be, the rents in pants and jackets painstakingly darned and patched. Each child in turn slips a precious film frame from the paper envelope and holds it up to the watery light of the lake-facing windows, squinting with one eye. A plane in close up with a pilot in goggles; Kong grimacing as he leans out from the spire of the Empire State Building attempting to snatch a biplane from the sky. Another child describes the beautiful woman lying on the pediment, terrified of the beast but somehow immune to the hail of machine-gun bullets and another sadly describes the look of anguish on Kong's face as he finally realises that the game is up.



Figure 5. Skull Island Map.

The Navigator begins to wonder about the two main locations in the drama, the place called New York is devoid of foliage but is full of very large buildings, even larger and much taller than the *Orpheum* or the Town Museum. Then there is Skull Island, its location shown briefly in the film on a very simple paper map; she points out to the group that in contrast, Skull Island seems to have no large buildings,

just a few flimsy huts but it does feature a huge wall, the other side of which there are endless trees and jungles, rather like their own surroundings. She turns to her panoramic map and considers the probability that Skull Island could be somewhere in the vast lake that spreads out over the horizon, and conversely that New York, due to its different composition and lack of flora must be on the other side of the world.

The children agree and so the Navigator moves the Skull Island card much closer to the centre of her map, which is symbolised by a small drawing of the *Orpheum*, she connects a strand of red wool between the two. Then she moves the New York card far to the right side of the map and adds a longer thread to make the tenuous connection with Skull Island. The children wonder how they should deal with the scenes that show people talking into listening machines that are connected somehow to other places, this happens in many films and often there is a title indicating the name of the location but that is all — the details of the distant places are never revealed. Perhaps those people are in the next room; the next town; or even in New York which is now on the other side of the world. They finally agree that no conclusion can be drawn but they will pay special attention in future to identifying these invisible connections.

They do however all agree that the creatures on Skull Island are all rather familiar but appear to be much larger than the local reptiles and arboreal primates. The local primates are simply irritating as they are experts at stealing food and carrying away small items, especially notebooks and valuable graphite sticks. The local reptiles however are in another category, especially the amphibians which are capable of destroying small fishing boats and their crews — for this reason the shorelines of the lake are mostly deserted and the children use the wariness of the townsfolk to their advantage as their Dacha is beyond their orbit — but naturally, such seclusion is not without risk.

Then a second round of images is produced. Three arms, now four, are held aloft, each head upturned and cocked to one side, eyes asquint, to follow the four square-rigged sailing ships as they roll

gently, sails slack on a glassy sea. The afternoon light shimmers on the small pieces of celluloid as they sail around the centre of the room. Another arm is raised this time a view of the ship from the stern of a whaleboat, the steersman holding his oar with a fierce look of concentration on his face.

It is possibly the last time that Gregory Peck will stump across the quarter-deck of the *Pequod*, the print is in tatters, sprockets shredded and brittle — to the Projectionist it seems that his ancient projectors, *Der Rot Czar* and *Die Dicke Berthe* have conspired to destroy the film, chewing and spitting out frames in a feeding frenzy, possibly they have formed a pact with the White Whale itself to destroy the world of men. The already truncated copy is now a mere gloss of the original narrative, shards of torn celluloid snaking across the floor of the projection room. The Projectionist has begun to wonder if the two machines are deciding fate rather than he? Are he and his entourage simply doing their bidding?

The children however are ecstatic with the surfeit of images stuffed into the confectionary envelopes that the Usher pedals at each intermission and at every interruption during the subsequent days, images that will be held aloft to the light by a flourish of arms, to reveal the progress of intertwined dramas.

The small Tartar girl steps to the centre of the meeting and announces that henceforth she wishes to be known as MGM and that she believes there is a special connection between King Kong, the lion called Leo and the vengeful whale named Moby Dick, that they work in concert and seek retribution. She has memorised the places in the story; New Bedford; Port Bikini and has seen the word PACIFIC on the map in the captain's cabin — the Navigator grins at her cousin. Finally, she holds aloft a single frame of the eye of the white whale, a huge mournful lens peering out surrounded by roughly scarred skin — and she recites by heart:

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life

*imparted by a gently rolling ship;
By her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God.
But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch;
Slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror.
Over Cartesian vortices, you hover.
And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather,
with one half-throttled shriek, you drop through that transparent air
Into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever.
Heed it well, ye Pantheists!*

She moves to the table and lays down her frame adjacent to an image of King Kong atop a huge building, grasping for a Biplane — tilts her head to the right and lets out a girl-sized roar.

Other images follow a pale-skinned man laying in a bed next to a huge dark-skinned man who is tattooed all over is placed next to the captain holding a harpoon aloft that is burning with fire. Next, the young man, the storyteller, laying half-drowned on a coffin that somehow floats upon the water. The images are laid in the centre of the table, slowly building outward like a never-ending game of dominoes. The ships are placed in a circle, mastheads pointing inwards as they are inevitably drawn into the vortex created by the whale.

It is a story in which only Ishmael survives, clinging to the carved coffin of his soul mate the tattooed Indian harpoonist. A coffin that should have sunk into the earth bearing the corpse of a dead man but which instead floats on the surface of the Ocean carrying a live man to his salvation. Ishmael is rescued from this coffin buoyant and is laid spluttering on the deck of the *Rachael*, water burbling from his sodden lungs, his spittle merging with the brine — the children recognise him as a storyteller and understand that he is blessed.

The Navigator calls the meeting to order, there are three new names to place on the world map. No one in the room has seen a whirling vortex on the endless lake, but some claim to have seen very large

creatures surging from the depths, jaws snapping — and there are rumours in the town about fishing boats being swallowed whole.

MGM is confident that the souls of King Kong and the White Whale are conjoined and therefore the PACIFIC is possibly near Skull Island, perhaps the Lake itself is the PACIFIC; perhaps Port Bikini is where the shadowy Gypsy travels to find the grey canisters; even the Scavengers may go there. New Bedford with its men who drink and dance together is harder to place, it bears little resemblance to Skull Island or New York, nor to the town itself. The children decide that the *Pequod* must have travelled very far and so New Bedford is placed at the edge of the world and Port Bikini is also relegated to the extremities — however the paper rectangle bearing the word PACIFIC is placed adjacent to Skull Island close to the centre of the world.

The evening light is fading and finally, the air over the lake is cool enough to form a slight mist. The children ease themselves out of the window frame like a clip of parachutists and slither down the gangplank into the low vapour that floods the mangroves. As they begin to walk slowly together uphill through the woodland outskirts of the town they come to an abrupt halt. Before them in a swampy depression amongst the tree-ferns, an image inhabits the mist, flickering in and out of focus. At first too difficult to resolve but then two biplanes come into focus, head-on and very close, spitting fire. It is a still image, much like the ones laying at the centre of their large table, an image frozen in time but here the swirl of the mist animates it slightly. The two planes hang mid-air for several minutes appearing to fly through the light cloud and then they gradually fade. The children rub their eyes and regard one another quizzically — one of the group, the small girl pulls out her notebook and graphite stub and notes down the time, location and composition of the phenomena, she will solve this mystery.





Figure 6. A Phantom winding spools.

Reel No.7. Spider Web Castle.

A tale of ghosts, walking forests and karma.

Finally, some new films have arrived at the *Orpheum*. The Gypsy has been away for several weeks but has now returned with his punt full of grey metal canisters, reels and reels of tightly wound images. The children occupy their favourite row in the centre of the auditorium three rows from the front, craning their necks to watch the giant image flicker above them. Several of them clutch small notebooks and one even has an old pocket watch, the hands of which still move, although with unknown precision.

A title sequence displaying strange icons splashes across the screen — then a rider rattles from right to left toward a mist-shrouded building — he hammers on the huge door. Men dressed like crayfish communicate by shouting, some fall to the ground and talk others sit on stools. Each time the crayfish men speak a text in Latin script appears at the bottom of the screen but both speech and script are unintelligible — until one of the children lets on that she can understand fragments of the talking — she informs the others that her great-grandmother is an Ainu who travelled from an island far away to the East before it disappeared beneath the waves.

Next, two men are riding horses very fast through the misty rainforest — the children note that the forest mist has a familiar look to it. Suddenly the riders encounter what appears to be a phantom sitting in a room winding film from one spool to another, he sings as

he rewinds the spools and laughs with a high-pitched voice when the horsemen shout at him. Just as the spool is finally wound and he begins to stand....the sprockets tear apart above in the projection room, the broken ends flailing noisily against the machine. The screen momentarily dazzles the children before the projector lamp is doused, now all they can see is a greenish rectangle floating before them in the gloom. The child with the pocket watch counts around the face, about 18 marks of the big hand — it is noted down. Moments later the action resumes, the phantom is nowhere to be seen but now the forest is full of corpses, human skulls and bones lay in large piles — the two men do not seem to be disturbed by this carnage and gallop off into the mist again.

Much of the action is mysterious and the small girl who comprehends just a fraction of the dialogue is constantly pestered for clues which she provides with uncertainty, complicating the drama even more. Why the children wonder, is the white horse so crazy. Why do the men kneel at supper, but refuse to eat food? Is it because another phantom is about to appear, a phantom only the King can see and whom the King attempts to slice with his sword?

Eventually, the King rides into the forest to seek out even more of these translucent beings who make him rage and laugh — are they perhaps his ancestors or his friends? Back in the stronghold, activity is building, the sounds of movement and the rattle of weapons seep out from the mist that swirls everywhere. Anxious looks on the faces of the watchmen, strange laughter uttered by the King. Then it all changes — the King surveys the scene outside; appearing out of a deep mist, the forest seems to be moving, treetops waving in the vapour. The King recoils but then moves back to take another look but the trees are still advancing, he recoils again, falling back against the wooden wall. A final time he looks in horror at the approaching treetops broaching an ocean of mist — he scurries back to the balcony overlooking his men amassed in the yard below.

Complete stillness.

Suddenly the air is pierced by the hiss and thud of an arrow launched from below, then another — in an instant the wall is a pin-cushion of quivering shafts.

The King roars in pain as he drags an arrow from his side — the castle yard fills with the rattle of armour as if a thousand small crabs clashed together. A hundred arrows are notched to bowstrings then fly upwards studding the wall with their long shafts. The King bellows — trapped high up on the open wooden balcony, he lunges sideways clearing a path through the forest of wooden arrow shafts that hem him in.

More arrows slither from leather quivers and in a haze of clicks notch onto the taut sinew bowstrings and fall against the polished bow-stocks. Above them the King raises a terrible howl of anger which is immediately followed by an extended creaking issuing from the entire yard as bowstrings are drawn taut to two hundred shoulders, flight feathers brush against the ear of each archer. Again a momentary calm in which nothing moves. The King shudders as the air is rent asunder by the whistling of tip and fletch, immediately followed by a drum-tattoo as the arrows drive into the massive wooden wall — into the armour of the King.

A momentary silence, followed by a quiet gurgle as the King grimaces open-mouthed — astonished by the arrow balanced in his neck.

He pirouettes and glares down at the archers below, incredulous that the prophecy is unravelling, astounded at the impertinence of these small men. Staggering, his power fading, he is supported by the creaking thatch of wooden shafts that have sealed his fate. A group of archers hesitantly approach the foot of the wooden stair but scuttle back as the King, bristling with arrows and eyes wide, half walks, half falls, down the steps towards them. A view from behind as the King, still standing, lurches towards the throng assembled in the mist that fills the castle yard. He moves to unsheathe his sword but falls forward immobile, the wind whistles around his desolation.

Motionless — the yard is full of helmets, lances and immobile banners, then the screen buckles, pustules form which quickly slide across the scene, erupting in burning scabs before the screen smokes into a bright white rectangle. The house lights come up and the projector beam is cut, the screen is dark — a rare moment when a jamb coincides with a death. The boy with the pocket watch moves his finger around the dial counting, small hand five marks, big hand forty-seven marks.

Up above, peering at the screen through the small glass port, the Projectionist asks himself, what does the King see in this final moment, what is his last, enduring vision of this world?

The proscenium arch of the walled castle yard. Two hundred archers clad in light bamboo armour and simple helmets all brandishing bows, some with arrows notched to string. Now all are frozen in awe of the King burbling, as his death rattle hisses through a larynx pierced by a long slender arrow, the iron head floating above his right shoulder, the square-cut flight feathers above his left. In the King's gaze the archers will never again move, he will contemplate this scene as he enters the Underworld glaring at them for all eternity.

The children barely recall the conclusion, after this nothing counts, they have seen the phantoms that control destiny plying their trade, rewinding the spools — this is all that matters. They quit the cinema, squinting in the afternoon sunlight, but they are not yet back in this world, all around them phantoms are at work in the forest, shuttling fate backwards and forwards.



Reel No.8. The Serpent.

The tragic death of the Poet's wife, his rescue and his journey to the Old Town.

Subliminal — the eye in an involuntary response to a flicker of movement grazing the field of vision — an ancient reflex. Or an involuntary recoil at a crooked stick fallen across a dappled forest path, so it is strange; strange and sad that she succumbs that way to an unrecognised serpentine shadow blended too well with the murk of the rainforest that she and her husband are cursing for its sucking leeches and stinging plants.

Sweat in the eyes, buzzing distractions can close down vision; creating a tunnel that forgets itself, a misplaced step, a bite so swift that it seems unreal but instantly followed by a tsunami in the blood, a flood of panic that spins into an uncontrollable vertigo of fear.

He tries to soothe her, to talk away the danger as he tightly binds the twin puncture marks. He lifts her trembling body across his back, already sensing futility as he struggles towards the shoreline — her skin already clammy, her pulse erratic. Eventually, they break from the tree cover and gain the lakeshore where he lays his wife gently on a bed of flattened reeds but she is still, she will not move again, nor smile, nor talk — she will be forever absent.

For once he, the famous poet, is dumbstruck, no thoughts, no words, only a maelstrom of submerged screams that refuse to rise to the surface — he stares at her expressionless face waiting for her to turn and acknowledge him but she ignores him.

Sounds encircle him, dense and persistent, jolting him from his trance, the light has faded and the air is thick with the drone of insects — he glances at the pallid light reflected from her face and shudders as he realises what will happen to her soon. Her soul may have flown far away but her inert body remains defenceless against the mill of nature. He covers her the best he can with a shroud of

dry reeds, allowing himself a slight separation in which to mull over this dilemma.

He sleeps fitfully, haunted by images of grotesquely large serpents twining around his wife's limbs whilst she stares at him fixedly, a beautiful smile lighting up her face. He wakes with a start as something slithers across his face, or was this a creature from a dream? He is already sweating in the morning haze. He looks around, half expecting his wife to greet him, but she remains motionless under her covering of reeds, the only movement is that of foraging iridescent flies.

He exhales heavily and stands to move away from the body — he squints into the morning sun filtering through the low mist that hangs over the lake and there unmistakably is a boat with a tall figure at its stern silhouetted against the light — he shouts as loud as his parched throat allows. The figure stops sculling the craft and turns his gaze towards the shore, slowly he sweeps the oar across the stern and moves landwards, gliding to a halt in the fringing reed bank.

Once again the Poet is struck dumb, partly as he cannot begin to piece together his story, but partly because he is awestruck by the figure that beckons him on board. The man, or is it several men combined, is flooded with a youthful vigour that has been poured into the wiry weather-beaten body of an old warrior — his garb is likewise well worn but of an extremely superior quality that well matches his refined features.

The Poet gestures to the shroud of reeds that barely disguise the body of his wife — the boatman simply nods as if possessed by a premonition. Clearing away the covering of reeds the Poet inhales a different scent, no longer the intimate perfume that enveloped so many happy memories. This new, cloying scent is corrosive, filling his nostrils with a blade of amnesia as he manhandles the body onto the boat, placing it where the boatman indicates. She lies between two neat arrangements of battered grey canisters, some secured with leather straps and all with faded labels — they seem vaguely

familiar to the Poet but he cannot place them. He sits in the centre of the vessel, between his wife and the boatman, facing forward, drifting into semi-consciousness as he listens to the sweep as it slices the water behind him, a liquid pulse to replace hers.

They travel like this for two days and two nights, the boatman remains at his position, slowly sculling the craft across the oily waters of the marsh — he does not rest, nor eat, neither does he utter a word. The writer is in a swoon, not even capable of brushing away the flies and stinging insects — he is mute, exhausted and hungry.

At dawn on the third day, a new vista rises through the mist — dead ahead a conical mount set on a horizon of low hills. As they approach the Poet sees that the mount is inhabited, a shoreline fringed by mangroves, punctured by derelict buildings and semi-submerged villas but on the higher ground the slopes are covered in once-elegant mansions and at the summit a grouping of large civic buildings and ancient trees.

Finally, the boatman ceases his sculling and lets the vessel ease alongside a ramshackle wooden jetty that protrudes between two drowned villas — he skilfully drops mooring lines over the bollards and motions to the Poet that he should go ashore with his wife's body. The Poet is stiff after the long journey and he struggles to manoeuvre the corpse ashore, it too somewhat stiffer.

By contrast, the boatman sweeps up the stacks of metal canisters under each arm without apparent effort and follows the heavily burdened Poet onto the hardstanding and onwards up a narrow cobbled street that leads towards the town. The two men carry their respective loads, the Poet bent double, grunting with each step and the boatman almost floating his heavy load uphill, the Poet squints sidelong through his sweat, in sheer disbelief at such ease.

After a while they come level with a treed area bounded by a low stone wall, the boatman stops abreast of a gate and simply nods sideways, the Poet follows this indication and passes through the

opening to realise he has entered an ancient graveyard. He turns to thank the boatman but he is already some distance away rapidly ascending the hill. Taking a survey of the graveyard the Poet notices that whilst certain parts are cared for, the majority is abandoned, overrun by tropical creepers with lurid blossoms that festoon the older trees. Ornate headstones and angels with broken wings gyrate out of the long grass, he can see no fresh graves. He sets his wife down in a small glade between two rows of ancient cypress pines and walks back to a derelict building, returning with a rusty spade and pick.

Sweat mixed with tears lubricates two hours of hard labour in the humid air. Finally, he sits on the pile of fresh soil and contemplates the terrible task of lowering his wife into the grave. He has attended many funerals, solemn affairs run to a strict protocol, designed to smooth ragged emotions but this he knows will be different. Finally, he gathers the courage to move, grasping her body under the armpits and slowly drawing it backwards toward the maw of the grave. Once his feet sense the edge he lets himself slide into the pit, easing the corpse toward him as he sinks lower. At first, she seems to resist this final insult but as his feet touch the bottom the body acquiesces to its fate and tumbles in after him, pinning the Poet to the ground in a small avalanche of soil, the living pinioned by the dead. A bolt of panic surges through the Poet's frame, he screams, he fights and wrestles with the corpse—soil showers down on top of the two combatants. Finally, he is on all fours, triumphant, crouched over her body, resentful that she had tried to bury him alive — remorseful that he had fought with her in this parting moment.

He claws his way to the surface and looks down one last time at the woman he had loved, barely visible under a layer of fresh soil — he sighs and slowly shovels the small mountain of earth into the grave. There is no headstone so he digs around the roots of a small flowering bush and replants it in the mounded earth. He snuffles and turns away, it is time to leave her to slumber — time for him to find his place in this new world, time aplenty to recall why fate decreed that he and his wife should have started on this journey and why she abandoned him at the end of the world.

Reel No.9. First observations of the Town.

*The Poet's first impressions of his new surroundings as
an extract from the logbook of MS Syracuse found by
the children after the sudden departure of the Poet.*

The Logbook of the M.S. *Syracuse*.

Entry No.1 — The year 2078; Week 41; Day 7.

Finally, I have found a place to settle, after two terrible nights in the marshes that crawl with insects and other biting creatures I am here, alone in another graveyard, one full of decayed hulks, slimy ribs stripped of planking rise out of the mud like the skeletons of beached leviathans, rusty lumps of anchors and steam engines poke from the eddies. But for myself, I have found what was once an elegant pleasure yacht, abandoned on the shoreline, rusty and overgrown but watertight and habitable.

I reimagine that day and my pleasant surprise as I slip over the gunwale onto a solid deck, to find that the glass panes of the wheelhouse are still intact, although all vestiges of paint and varnish have long since peeled away from the timber-work. The companionway door creaks on its hinges and a faint odour of hempen rope and machine oil envelops me, I am amazed that the ship is dry. The ship's wheel is mounted on a wooden column topped by a brass binnacle with a compass — that tells us we are heading northeast. Galvanised voice pipes sprout on the port side — as the new Captain I shout an order below, thankfully no one answers. On the starboard side, the brass levers of the engine telegraph with its glass dial showing in one direction *Voraus* and the other *Zurück* each section subdivided into equal segments from *Stop* to *Voll*. A feeling of joy overcomes me as I grip the wheel, which refuses to budge, and tries to push the telegraph lever forward, which likewise is stubborn, I shout the order full steam ahead into the voice tube anyway. I have regained my voice, and found a foil to my sadness, if only for a moment!



Figure 7. The wreck of the Syracuse.

I test the first rung of the stair, it bears my weight and I am moving down into the main salon — again dry but dishevelled, the emerald green velvet lounges that line the salon seem to be held together by dust alone, I avoid them for fear of being buried alive for the second time and decide that the wheelhouse and the deck shall be my principal residence, it's an outdoor life for me!

The Logbook of the M.S. *Syracuse*.

Entry No.2 — The year 2078; Week 43; Day 5

Life falls into a pattern, I have organised the ship, securing a sunshade, a hammock and a grill for cooking. The ship's magazine is well equipped with fishing equipment which to my surprise, is still in good order along with utensils and even a wooden crate of paper and writing equipment — all of which are unknown in the local town. There are even a few worm-eaten novels and of course nautical manuals and charts, all of which by now are completely outdated.

It would seem that what is now a fetid mangrove-lined sea was, perhaps two hundred years ago, a fine broad river. I have learnt that centuries of deforestation in the distant mountains wrought irreversible changes — the winters faded, the rivers raged, farmland eroded and then completely disappeared. The valley towns were engulfed, only the upper part of this provincial hill-town was left stranded; an island surrounded by a vast shallow lake. Eventually,

freshwater was exchanged for brackish, marsh birds mixed with sea birds.

I have spoken to Haros, the sullen Greek who stands guard in the box office of the curious town cinema, he tells me that over the past 200 years the stands of Pine and Beech have fallen and rotted — their rich compost now circulates in the veins of cloud forest trees, creepers and Aerophytes, who's foliage breathes in the heavy moisture saturated air and whose roots drink in the fungal mats of ooze.

The hillsides of the town, once terraced with fine wooden mansions are now lapped by this brackish and horizonless miasma. Only the tips of one or two spires breach the surface to act as navigation marks for those foolhardy enough to brave the creatures that slither and snap in the tepid brew. The original river wharfage that berthed elegant paddle steamers like my own is long gone, replaced by a ramshackle water-frontage thrown up amongst the drowned mansions and villas of the once fashionable hillsides — but even these are semi-derelict, with piles of abandoned refugee boats rotting in the reeds and mangroves.

*Placid, forgotten, hidden.
Scoured hulls of rotten planking
Slimy stumps, snakes and insects
Waterbirds, languid calls.
A fabled cinema.*

The town must have been filled with smart establishments overflowing with guests in the summer months — rambling wooden tea-houses with rose gardens, and honeysuckle-covered verandas, glorious but sleepy, the kind of town that young people with imagination and ambition would yearn to leave — only returning to visit their ageing parents on ritual occasions. At these times they would be overcome by a sense of claustrophobia and futility, paralysed by a fear that they would be trapped like a forlorn horse caught in quicksand.

The Southern face of the Town: I have started to explore the surroundings — none of the streets in the town are straight, they curve lazily around the contours of the hills and intersect in an apparently random manner. Large houses hide behind moss and ivy-covered garden walls, enclosing semi-wild gardens that speak of armies of hired gardeners who laboured long ago. What was a grand treelined boulevard in the fashionable district on the slopes below the town hall and the main square is now flushed with muddy water, methane oozing to the surface. Timber houses deliquesce with fungal luminescence in the heavy night air which is dominated by the whirring of insects, choruses of bullfrogs and the slithering of creatures too hideous to countenance.

The Northern face of the Town: The furthest I have ventured is to the northern perimeter of the town which is set into a ridge of higher ground, originally heavily forested in Pine. Here the route of the old freight line is traced by a series of pulpy sleepers and eroded iron that turns gradually northwest towards abandoned forestry and mining settlements — but nowadays toward nowhere in particular — the locals say that the frigid northern zone is uninhabitable, a place of violent electrical storms and incessant rain.

The town railway terminus, derelict for decades, moulders, its cast-iron columns bleeding rust and the glass canopy fractured. In its heyday a single narrow-gauge line carried an infrequent train that rattled slowly through the dense conifer forests to a small industrial settlement some 50 miles further west, bringing skilled labour and the occasional holiday outing. There are also traces of a trolley line that ran from the terminus, crossing in front of the town hall and winding its way toward the lower town, where parallel streaks of rusting metal slide beneath the water en route to the now-submerged steamer wharves.

But it is the cinema that at once attracts and confuses me — as do the strange group of foreign migrants who run it. The building which is called the *Orpheum* is set back from the town square and is reached via a short glass-roofed arcade that runs between the one remaining café and the town hall that both stand facing a small

square. I have been told by the townsfolks that it is the only cinema still operating in the entire world — but then how would they know? The arcade has painted cast-iron columns and riveted iron trusses with reinforced glass ceiling panels the colour of straw. Some derelict shops are integrated into the iron-framed construction although only a tobacconist, a newsagent and a lady's accessory shop still operate selling hand-made products and herbal remedies. *To Let* signs, faded with age, hang in the remaining vacant spaces.

Adding to my fascination is the tribe of children who haunt the *Orpheum* — ragged but smart; secretive but curious, castaways dreaming at the end of the world. A world surrounded by jungle and bounded by wetlands — a spa-town transformed into a watery tomb with a forgotten past and an unimagined future.



Reel No.10. Cinema notes.

The Poet imagines a film scenario.

The Logbook of the M.S. *Syracuse*.

Entry No.3 — The year 2078; Week 45; Day 3.

If I was commissioned to write a film script about this place it would be just like Russian cinema. Very, very long, with endless static camera shots and minimal or no dialogue — no one would ever speak on a telephone, for here they do not exist. There would be no gunshots nor vehicle chases. In fact, it would seem to the audience that the narrative was unfolding in real-time — that the film might never end, or perhaps would simply merge with their nightly dreams.

I would write the story as a slow-motion post-apocalypse but one without pestilence, there would be no extra-terrestrials and no explosions — a few quiet whimpers perhaps. It would open on one grey morning when the energy behind the motor of progress had simply stopped spinning — there would be an interminable eerie silence. The citizens would slowly turn to face the long shallow gradient of entropy fading into the distance, with resigned expressions. They would learn to take it as an inevitability but one which could be managed as if it were a chronic but not a terminal disease.

The audience would also learn that the old world of Myth has been abandoned — collateral damage in the gradual process of dissolution and decay — but might my script not be better if belief in Myth could increase? Here I would introduce the Greeks, the outsiders who operate the run-down cinema. I would cast these characters not as simple refugees escaping catastrophic flooding or violent electrical storms but rather as exiles, outcasts from another part of the Cosmos. A group of fallen angels expelled from the heavens and forced to migrate to the mundane world, obliged to take up residence, to find gainful employment. Or perhaps I could

make them fugitive double agents who are seeking refuge in this fading world?

It is not as if anyone would have stopped them from setting up shop here, there are no closed borders; there are no such thing as frontiers any more, and even if there were who would be on patrol? Of course, once there must have been checkpoints with lifting booms, small kiosks and officious guards, for there are still visible remains of these crumbling structures; faded schedules for river steamers, corroded rail heads, a chaos of rusting tracks leading into the rainforest along the hilly ridges — roadsteads leading to places that no-one has visited in living memory.

The mise en scene is a town in exile — in reality, the entire region is in exile, in exile from whatever remains of society; in exile from politics and the means of production. But ironically for the cast of characters any sense of distance, of remove, is completely absent — replaced by a conviction that this is the new centre of the world — an interesting concept in a place obscured by a fog of amnesia. Only the Greeks, as they are called by the townsfolk, appear to have any experience of the greater world, or what is assumed to be the world and whatever knowledge they possess they keep silent about. Do they do this because what is beyond the horizon is too terrible to recount, or just because it is identical to the town and therefore has no currency in the telling? Perhaps the Greeks judge it kinder to let the townsfolk exist in their gentle somnolescent void, where time slowly pools in damp eddies, sinking into the hollows like marsh-damp; the heat of history gradually draining from memory.

In any case, these recent Greek migrants keep to themselves. Now and then, when pressed by over-enthusiastic locals, made voluble by schnapps, the Greeks remain civil enough and attempt to provide some kind of plausible explanation, one that will resonate with the limited experience of the townsfolk, coming up with something that will satisfy their normally tepid curiosity. After all, like everyone else they too are refugees and like everyone they too must also try to scratch a living — this approach elicits some nods of sympathy, as

who indeed is not a migrant and who has a real job in this town? People work, yes of course, but these are the subsistence occupations — growing a kitchen garden, fishing, repairing decaying houses, collecting firewood, working as one might have done a thousand years previously.

Gradually a general understanding will play out — that the Greeks originate from a place very far to the South. That they arrived after a long journey across the endless lakes and marshes, poling their old pitch-blackened boat which is owned by the man who works in the Box-office of the *Orpheum*. Everyone knows that he keeps it moored at the lake edge, tied to the second-storey balustrade of an old mansion. He often goes fishing to catch eels and other malformed creatures, some of which he trades locally and the rest he feeds to his monstrous dog. But one thing is obvious to all, the Greeks are different — they have an inexplicable power over machines and images that is truly magical. How should I bring these strange worlds alive?

But one thing is for certain — there will be no happy endings!



Reel No.11. Water Beetles.

Ellen visits the marshes to collect insects and encounters an apparition.

Her mother smiles as she ushers her daughter out of the house, in one hand the girl is clutching a tarnished zinc cylinder and in the other a long bamboo pole to which a small net is affixed. The early afternoon sun has seared away all activity in the town — another deserted Sunday. However, Ellen is glad to escape the house which is airless and humid and filled with inert bodies whose only movements are aimed at disturbing flies.

She picks a route from the shade of one hard etched shadow to the next and quickly descends through the town toward the lakeshore but once beneath the canopy of the forest she relaxes her pace to enjoy the pale green half-light that penetrates the rainforest canopy. The white net flies like a small flag and the empty zinc canister beats against her leg like a drum in perfect time.

Her mission is to forage for giant water beetles in the swampy depressions behind the mangrove forest not far from the children's meeting place, where later on she will spend the evening. The pond lays some fifty paces from the shoreline, a muddy reed-filled area, a place of perpetual haze filled with the intense buzzing and chirping of an unseen host of creatures. The girl is well prepared, dressed in a long-sleeved homespun tunic and with her hands and cheeks covered in an oily herbal unguent, concocted by her mother to deter the swarms of biting insects.



Figure 8. A Giant Water Beetle.

She squats motionless like a heron in the reeds, scanning the surface for the large iridescent blue beetles that occasionally row themselves lazily backwards across the meniscus of the pond — her bamboo pole extended horizontally — beak-wise.

Her mother will crush the brilliant blue wing cases to extract a vivid dye. She is also rather partial to the beetles when roasted on an open fire, a taste that the girl is yet to acquire. The surface sends out a shimmer of V-shaped ripples, the net flashes down then twists and in a trice, a large blue insect is thrumming like a tambourine inside the zinc canister. The captive calms down in the darkness as soon as Dorothy replaces the lid. The girl plays the Heron for another hour, her sharp eyes and rapid reflexes quickly fill the canister; now a heaving blue mass of legs and antennae.

Stillness and heat — she is gradually mesmerised by the motes of dust that settle on the surface of the pond; by the slight movements of the reeds in the sluggish air and by the inquisitive glints of sunlight that seem to be also searching for something in the waters. She is just like her cat who although apparently asleep is always ready to pounce. But she is dreaming now, for in the centre of the lake she imagines a miniature three-masted sailing ship, its sails hanging slack as the vessel drifts on the glassy surface. She tries to surface from this reverie, rubbing her eyes with the palm of her hands but the ship persists, flickering in and out of view in the vapour that hovers above the surface of the pond.

An enormous enamelled dragonfly rattles close to her right ear and flies directly through the ship's rigging to disappear in the haze, then moments later returns, piercing another mast. The dragonfly makes its programmed turn to resume its box-pattern search, poised to devour anything in its sight. Once again it flies through the apparition — the girl is by now fully awake and wracking her memory to locate this scene — she has seen this vision once before — but where?

The wings of the jewelled dragonfly clatter as it banks away over the reeds and is gone — the spell is broken — her canister full and the sun is losing some of its heat. Ellen walks home distracted, her thoughts cast adrift in another world.



Reel No.12. Meditation on the Gypsy.

The Poet paints a portrait of the Gypsy and his travels.

The Logbook of the M.S. *Syracuse*.

Entry No.4 — The year 2078; Week 49; Day 4.

In truth, I owe him my life.

In the town, he is known as the Gypsy, not so much for his looks, for although he is unshaven and often unkempt he still cuts quite a striking figure. His nickname of Gypsy comes more from his habits and behaviour, his ability to change and adapt quickly, never settling in one place too long, always dealing, trading and scavenging. However, it must be said he has a regular association with the Greek refugees who run the decrepit old cinema. It turns out that he is their principal supplier of ancient zinc canisters that protect the fragile films which he manages to unearth in abandoned libraries, archives and film theatres far away in the Arid southern zone and even in the ruins of the storm-lashed north — both over the horizon of memory and imagination. He travels light outbound but can bring back heavy loads, poling his punt across the marshlands or trekking through the cloud forest to places where none of the townsfolk would dare venture.

I now know that he could of course do this differently, an effortless glide across the bubbling surface of the algal slime, but not being pressed for time, in fact being a possessor of time, he chooses to travel in a manner that breaks a sweat in this tropical haze. The Gypsy leans his torso forward and simultaneously hefts down and to the right on the long black wooden pole, sliding the punt forward across the lake. Large serpentine-necked waterbirds flush up to the sky in awkward panic as the punt brushes through reeds and across Waterlily pads, leaving behind an inky black swirl reflecting the silver haze of the morning sky.

The Gypsy repeats the motion over and over, slowly propelling the small vessel toward no apparent point on a featureless horizon

made of haze — he is thinking of nothing, wrapped in a blanket of humid air and the stench of rotting vegetation. Time is of no consequence for him, it neither flows nor repeats itself. Indifferent to *Chronos* — the rushing stream of time that sweeps all away in entropic decay, the Gypsy identifies more easily with *Kairos*, the still lake of time in which we bathe and where we may, at the opportune moment, make a definitive action. The Gypsy imagines the moment that the arrow leaves the bow or the shuttle as it flies from one side of the loom to lay another thread in place. He is after all a flickering instant, an *Atoma* of time, floating in a sea of other temporal atoms.

Eventually, after a hundred more wading birds have screeched into the air at his approach the black prow slides onto a muddy bank, prickling with the roots of mangrove trees. Orange-clawed Fiddler Crabs rattle away; a black reptile rotates its eyes and flicks its tongue, tasting the stranger's odour. The Gypsy hisses at the creature in sheer delight, at its iridescent armour, at its indifference and its impenetrable mind, a denizen of the old world, older even than the world of the Greeks.

Having secured the punt to a stunted trunk and shouldering his knapsack the Gypsy pushes through the mangrove fringe into the rainforest tangle, pulls a bush razor from his pack and blazes a trail to the North-west — he walks for some time enjoying the endlessness of this fetid green world. He ascends a mound in the dense undergrowth — upon reaching the summit the Gypsy looks out across the mess of vegetation crawling over ruined buildings, prising masonry blocks from the sagging walls of this long-abandoned small town, once snowbound each long winter, but now uninhabitable due to the unceasing monsoonal storms.

The Gypsy lets himself float vertically and hovers above the mound for a moment then he quietly drifts over the faint street plan searching for the larger civic structures that would have been the centre. Descending on a pile of columns he, pushes through the crumbled stone archway bearing the single word KINO, scanning for the stairway to the projection booth and adjacent film storage room. The projection booth is empty, a gaping hole where the

machines would have once proudly stood, the Gypsy peers below and there they lay in a nest of mouldy red velvet mezzanine seats — the engines of a fallen angel.

Treading lightly, as only the Gypsy can, he approaches the adjacent storage room and smiles as the rusted steel door falls away at his touch, revealing several corroded racks of Zinc canisters, labels eaten away and clasps fused. He picks some at random until his canvas knapsack is bulging and extraordinarily heavy but again this never poses a problem, physical mass is simply a function of gravity, a force that fluctuates and which is easy to manipulate when necessary.

Leaving the crumbling relic of the KINO the Gypsy pushes through the vegetation that obscures the street crossing and passes between two stone pillars that mark the beginning of a colonnade. Here the vegetation still shows remnants of exotic species, massive hardwood trees tearing up an ornamental stone terrace, a mossy plateau where long ago a carp pond rilled. The Gypsy pulls back a tangle of creeper throttling a lichen-riddled statue — and there appears Pan still leering his goatly rutting smile. Rut away my boy, rut away in this desert of green and dream of better times, dream of your family and your father. The Gypsy lets his hand glance gently down the vegetal stubble of Pan's cheek and turns away into the jungle a shadow of sadness passing over his face.

These regular scavenging forays usually follow the same pattern, a meditative and seemingly endless water journey, followed by a strenuous transit through the forest tangle — both extremely enjoyable in their physicality and temporality.

Then after a successful hunt for film canisters a rather bland return. Skimming over the forest canopy with the payload until the punt is recovered at the edge of the lake, the journey takes as long or as short as he pleases. If the whim takes him to play chess with the other Greeks in the small corner café and drink the aniseed liquor they mysteriously obtain, then maybe the return journey is quicker than the muscle-powered version. On this occasion, he is in the

mind for solitude and a long slow voyage back. He hasn't eaten for several days, but naturally, this is not a deciding factor, eating is merely an occasional pleasure, like intercourse and sleep.



Reel No.13. Battleship Potemkin.

The true story of a Russian uprising.

Eisenstein settles back into his seat in the screening room and lights up a cheroot, the blue smoke performing arabesques in the projector beam. His assistant bends to his ear, and whispers a message, Eisenstein nods and the assistant gives a thumbs up to the operator in the bio-box. The final spool of rushes of *Battleship Potemkin* flicker into life. In this scene Potemkin is steaming out of Odessa harbour manned by a revolutionary crew to face a flotilla of Tsarist warships — the prospect is grim.

Action stations; bugles blare, canvas covers are stripped from the big guns. The telegraph indicates full speed ahead as the cadence of the soundtrack gradually increases the strident tick-tocks matching the urgency of the action. The crew of Potemkin signal with semaphore flags *Join Us* and simultaneously run the Red flag up to the masthead. All of a sudden the bubble of tension bursts as the crews of the Tsarist fleet disobey orders and refuse to fire on their comrades, Potemkin sails on with impunity to the cheers of the sailors who line the decks of the dreadnoughts.

Eisenstein is focused on the sequence where the red flag is hoisted — his anxiety is justified. Due to the chemistry of the black and white Orthochromatic film stock that his cameras use, the red flag that flutters up to the masthead appears as a solid black. Black is the Anarchist's flag, something that Comrade Joseph Stalin would not be at all pleased with — a solution needs to be found and the sequence re-filmed.

For the re-shoot Eisenstein decides to fly a white flag from Potemkin's masthead as she approaches the Tsarist flotilla. Ironically the revolutionary crew of the Potemkin now appear to be surrendering! Days later Eisenstein sits crouched over the editing bench in the cutting room, a fresh print of the naval confrontation spooled out in front of him. He is hunched over a lightbox, a magnifying eyepiece clamped over one eye, a fine sable paintbrush

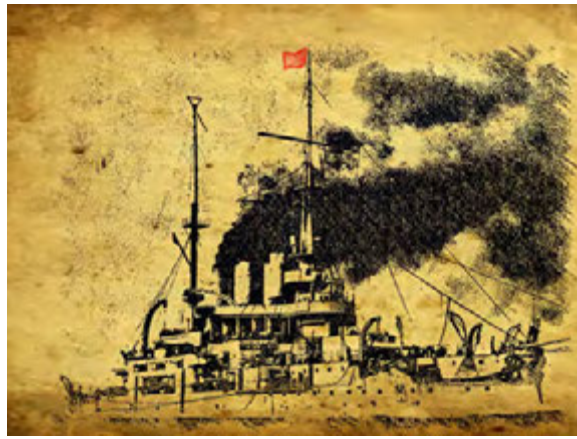


Figure 9. The Battleship Potemkin.

in hand and an inkwell of vermillion ink at the ready. Eisenstein works into the small hours very carefully colouring each of the one hundred and eight frames. The white flag of surrender is re-born as the blood-red flag of the people's revolution — a small drop of red in a long monochrome montage — but Stalin would appreciate this. Sometime later however the Supreme Leader would become difficult with the fine opening words of Comrade Trotsky.

The spirit of mutiny swept the land. A tremendous, mysterious process was taking place in countless hearts: the individual personality became dissolved in the mass, and the mass itself became dissolved in the revolutionary impetus.

Replacing then with a starker text by a Comrade Lenin — as Comrade Stalin prepared to hunt down Comrade Trotsky and his family.

Revolution is war. Of all the wars known in history, it is the only lawful, rightful, just and truly great war...In Russia, this war has been declared and won.

Poor Madame N. Poltavseva, the visit to the Optometrist had been tiresome — the weight of the complicated metal frame burdened by its multiple lenses pressed too hard on the bridge of her refined nose. Besides the darkroom was stuffy and overheated, and as a consequence, the apparatus kept sliding down her nose, lubricated by the flush of perspiration that increased as she became ever more

flustered. Each time the optician moved in close to adjust the lenses she shrank back to avoid his breath — a combination of poor oral hygiene and strong alcohol — so much to endure and to top it all off her daughter's maid had taken sick and so the grandchild was squalling in its perambulator in the waiting room with her daughter, irritating the other patients and increasing Madame's level of anxiety.

At last Madame, Poltavseva walks out of the stuffy clinic, with a rather fashionable and consequently expensive pince-nez balanced upon her well-proportioned nose. Her granddaughter Irena immediately quietens as she propels the perambulator along the promenade towards the Odessa steps where there seems to be a large crowd gathering in celebration. Madame is rightly curious and hands over the child to her daughter so that she might walk quickly ahead. On the glittering water, out in the bay, she spies the grey bulk of a Russian Imperial battleship, moored bow onto the shore, surrounded by a flotilla of small boats, creating quite a festive scene. It is only when Madame Poltavseva immerses herself in the throng that she senses her misjudgement — festive it had appeared but in reality, the crowd is agitated, nerves stretched to breaking point. A clatter of hooves, a crackle of rifle fire and Madame is swept down the incline whilst all around the townsfolk stumble and fall, many stay where they lay.

Madame Poltavseva is overcome by the visceral roar of the ship's big guns, which is immediately followed by the whine of massive projectiles screaming overhead and terminated by a ragged thunder, as the City Opera House crumples under a direct hit. People begin to scream, people begin to run. She looks towards the City only to see her daughter caught in the melee at the top of the steps, she is trapped between the crowd and a line of advancing Cossacks, rifles raised. Her daughter shields the baby carriage with her body clutching the handle behind her. The sharp report of another volley and she folds forwards, stumbles and the baby carriage begins a terrifying career, bouncing down the Odessa Steps. Madame screams and then falls silent as a Cossack bullet smashes through the right lens of her new pince-nez.

At this exact moment the wilful projector No.1 *Der Rot Czar* jams completely, the blood-splattered visage of Madame Poltavseva stares rigidly at the audience, then her skin begins to erupt in a series of gruesome pustules, her nose slides over her cheek and finally, she vanishes in a swirl of vapour. Momentarily the screen flashes brilliant white, then all goes dark until the auditorium is illuminated by the pale house lights. The Usher with her tray of homemade confection steps into the breach, passing along the central aisle, scanning each row for custom. Up above the Projectionist is carefully removing the charred frames and is rapidly splicing the film back together — he notes that this break coincides with the death of a character, and he makes sure the damaged frames are carefully stored in a special bin, these images will not end up in the children's chewing gum packets!

The house lights are extinguished and the small fidget sounds of fingers on the paper wrappers of the Bon-Bons subsides. They are still called Sugared Almonds but in truth, the nuts are coated in some kind of honey mixture. Sugar is unknown in the town but honey is to be found in the jungle — large black wild bees build massive free-hanging tongue-shaped combs the size of tombstones. A few of the hardiest townsfolk harvest the honey at night when the bees cannot fly — they say the sweetest honey is gathered under the flickering green light of the Aurora Borealis.

The children let the honey coating slowly dissolve before biting through the almond. One child is busy making notes of the sequence on the steps — in particular, she is describing the image of the young mother, her long dark hair, black dress and her hands clasped to her midriff, jet black blood oozing through her fingers which form a vignette around a metal art nouveau belt buckle cast in the form of a Swan.

The Projectionist muses that if only the battleship had not made an appearance in spool No.1 approximately 76,500 frames previously, Madame Poltavseva would have enjoyed a pleasant promenade with her daughter and young baby Irena near the Odessa steps on that day in 1905, some 173 years ago. Madame Poltavseva would

have gone home to her bourgeois villa quite exhausted from the unaccustomed task of pushing the perambulator. She would have roused the sickly maid and sat with a samovar of tea, a strong drink concealed by her side.

Lacing the second reel onto the behemoth *Die Dicke Bertha*, the *Orpheum's* No.2 projector, the Projectionist counts silently, this is the forty-seventh time he has shown *Battleship Potemkin*. It is not a very good copy, worn and scratched and by now littered with repair splices, over the past decade it has gradually shrunk and is now increasingly prone to damage. The Gypsy found this copy in an abandoned union headquarters in the northern zone; an area depopulated due to the destructive electrical storms and violent winds that emanate from the polar region — once a zone of permafrost and glaciers but now a maelstrom of shifting weather fronts. Shortly after his visit, the entire town was erased by a tornado of gargantuan proportion, the remains of the Workers Party Cinema Club film collection spiralling upward into the stratosphere to be scattered across the vast uninhabited marshlands. Images of political rallies, state-funded coal mines, heroic action and saccharine love scenes dissolving in the nitric acid leaching from the celluloid.

Several of the children are also veterans of *Battleship Potemkin*, each with their favourite scene and some in possession of a thirty-five-millimetre frame, excised from the decaying film on account of torn sprockets or other breakages. There is a black market that draws the children to the cinema and to the attractive female Usher who, during intermissions and in the regular breakdowns of the old and fragile films, distributes her homemade confectionary. The Usher has a regular supply of these short strips of film discarded by the Projectionist in the course of effecting running repairs — a familiar event at each screening — the result of ancient film stock and projectors, worn but with a voracious appetite for celluloid.

Each evening after the *Orpheum* closes its doors to the townsfolk the Usher sits at the wooden bench in her small workroom wielding a large pair of dress-makers shears gently slicing between each frame.

She then places the frame, along with a tiny rectangle of homemade chewing gum, into an equally tiny paper envelope that bears an image of a crown encircling the neck of a swan and emblazoned with the word *Orpheum* in red cursive script. This is a currency for the children who vie to form collections and who weave the images into new stories during their frequent meetings on the upper floor of their semi-submerged bourgeois mansion house close by the lakeside.

Rewind — the little girl in the fourth row of the auditorium is taking notes, she neatly writes *Mosfilm* then *Act I: Men and Maggots*. All is going well until the end of the first reel. The crew have been poorly treated and forced to eat rotten meat — sanctioned by a toady of a ship's Doctor. The men are angry and restive and in a show of solidarity refuse to eat the Cook's Borscht which is full of maggot-ridden meat — they choose bread and water and some unidentifiable stuff in tins.

The meal is over and the men clean up, one sailor holds up a plate upon which the text reads, *Give us this day our daily bread*. He lifts the plate, possibly to dash it to the floor in anger, but at this point, the screen again glows brilliant white for two-seconds before the house is plunged into complete darkness marked by a collective grunt of dissatisfaction. In a moment the house lights come up and the smiling Usher appears once again from the side aisle with a confectionary tray balanced at her midriff. A couple of the other children log the timing and scene of the breakage in their ever-present notebooks.

The lights are dowsed and *Potemkin* continues, now a few frames shorter. The plate does indeed fly to the deck and smash into pieces, the action closes. The text *Act II Drama on the Deck* appears and events get darker on board as the Officers threaten to shoot the mutinous sailors. The children know this drama off by heart now — a call of *Smash the Dragons* ignites a free-for-all in which the action favours the crew.

Officers and the Ship's Doctor are thrown overboard but sadly the instigator of the moral outrage is shot and falls from the ship, draping himself on a block and tackle, a pieta swinging just above the water. The dead crewman is the martyr that propels the rest of the drama as he is bought ashore in a steam pinnace, laid to rest on the quayside with a sign on his chest *For a Spoonful of Borscht*. Eventually in the *Dead Man Calls Out* sequence, the citizens are rallied to the cause.

The children wonder at the crowd scenes, at the scale of the buildings in this place called Odessa, and naturally at the massive iron ships that are on fire with palls of smoke billowing from each of them, so different from their local wooden fishing craft that can barely carry three people. But it is the actions of the characters that confuse them the most, the raised passions, the shouting and the tears; the cruelty and the violence that appear from nowhere — is this how the world once was?

The girl in the seventh row concludes in her notes:

Two breaks in the Mosfilm this afternoon — one at the end of Act 1 (plate smashing) lookout for this! Second break — Lady with glasses, shot (will not see these — she is dead)! Point of discussion for the next meeting!

She also writes:

Why does the Usher have such a sad smile when she is so beautiful?



Reel No.14. A Scavenger Barge in Dock.

Traders arrive to barter goods and gossip.

Early morning, the air is still but not yet oppressively hot, a light mist hangs over the lake. Out of the haze, the bulk of a Scavenger barge drifts towards the ironically named Town Dock. It ties up alongside the rather elegant balustraded stone landing that was once the garden terrace of a handsome bourgeois mansion, now conveniently submerged to form a quay. Once the vessel is secure the crew of five feed kindling into the small cast-iron deck stove and brews an infusion to accompany their breakfast of dried fish and biscuits. Then they set about rummaging the ship, selecting trading items for the townsfolk who will gradually filter down to the quay by mid-morning.

The Scavengers have two principal functions, the supply of old manufactured goods, otherwise unobtainable and the even more important role of carrying news, or rather gossip from the few far-flung colonies scattered beyond the horizon. Come mid-morning the crew have stretched a couple of dirty tarpaulins on the stone terrace and spread out an array of rusty hand tools, hammers, blunt chisels and axes, chipped ceramic vessels and a brace of extraordinarily beautiful unblemished mirrors in golden frames.

The towns-folk for their part carry down their trade items, rounds of beeswax, pots of yellow honey, and mead in well-scuffed bottles. From the rain forest, a variety of special herbal remedies, ersatz tobacco and a species of mildly psychotropic mushrooms dried and laced on a thread, which are always popular with the Scavenger crews. Trade is brisk and surprisingly someone manages to talk the mirrors out of the Scavengers for a necklace of mushrooms. No coin is used in the trade but a few coins are given as tokens of trust and goodwill, which is all they are valued for.

Once the trade concludes the crew retire under the shade of an old sail rigged across the main deck of the barge and sleeps for an hour or two. They wake, drink more of the infusion from small glasses

and set about filling a small hand cart with a selection of different goods, technical items, reels of copper wire, delicate glass globes in card wrappers and a few rusty grey canisters. The cart is carefully manoeuvred down the gangplank and the crew set off up the lane towards the town square and the *Café des Poètes* where they will find the Greeks at their midday meal.

The crew jostle and rib one another as they haul the cart into the town, they are rough diamonds but without a bone of malice in their bodies. Likewise, the townsfolk, for all their privations and isolation are generally a happy lot, they are mostly the descendants of refugees who escaped from the drowned cities of the terrible storm belts to the North and who arrived as child transports decades back, most of them too young to remember the evacuations or the way of life that they were forced to quit — sometimes amnesia is a blessing.

The Greeks are a different matter. The Scavenger crew treat them with marked deference as they draw up to the table where the Projectionist, the Box-office man, the Janitor and the lady Usher sit, with glasses of clear spirit and plates of fried fish set before them. A bout of cap doffing, smiling and nodding ensues before the Greeks invite the crew to pull up chairs and share some of the local firewater. Based on his observations the nominal Captain of the Scavenger crew holds a few theories about the Greeks — they are foreign, not simply refugees, but from somewhere incomprehensibly far away — they have very strong accents and their manners are markedly different from the townsfolk.

The Greeks talk and argue passionately, they appear to have an entirely alternative grasp of the world and know how to work things, how to make inanimate objects function — the projector and lights in the *Orpheum* being the most spectacular example. The Scavengers comprehend this in an entirely subconscious way and long ago decided that they would be well advised to offer a tribute to the Greeks at every visit — simply to grease the wheels of fate.

The Scavengers explain that they have voyaged from a recently abandoned enclave many sea miles to the East where they had seen

the remaining inhabitants departing in an Ark that they had constructed from the sorry remains of the fishing fleet. The enclave is slowly unravelling, the food supply unstable and the buildings are in a state of collapse. Only two ancient women elected to stay put, preferring to die on home-ground rather than make a long and uncertain journey to the arid lands far to the South. To their surprise, the enclave boasted a moth-balled Museum of Sciences and Natural History where most of the animal specimens had rotted or been eaten by rats but which also contained some curious apparatus, and here the Captain gestures towards the hand cart, brimming with boxes of glass lenses, brass contraptions of unknown function, reels of insulated copper wire; porcelain insulators; switch panels and some large zinc disc-like canisters, all too familiar to the Greeks.

For their part, the Greeks put on a show of gratitude for this welcome tribute and ply the crew with more liquor and offer plates of fish and the dark seedy bread of the town. The parley is a success, the Scavengers safely assume that they are under the aegis of the Greeks — and the Greeks are acknowledged for their elevated but ill-defined position. The rendezvous is concluded by a short walk to the Janitor's workshop at the rear of the *Orpheum* where the crew unload the hand-cart and bid their farewell.

The Projectionist stoops to pick up the three tarnished grey canisters and reads the labels — written in looping blue ink the word *Orphée* No.1 reel of 4; *Orphée* No.2 reel of 4 and *Orphée* No.3 reel of 4. Too bad that the last reel is missing but this is such a rare find that the Projectionist is very happy with his gift.



Reel No.15. *Orphée* and the Children.

The Children attempt to decipher mysterious codes.

*Mirrors are the doors through which Death comes;
look long enough in a mirror and you will see Death at work.*

They occupy an entire row, in the otherwise almost deserted cinema, all twelve children, their expressions quizzical as they strain to plumb the mysteries hidden beneath the grainy surface of the film. This is the second time that they have watched this scratched old print with its incomprehensible soundtrack and equally undecipherable subtitles — all they have been able to deduce is that neither language is Mosfilm.

Three of the children pull out their notebooks and pencil stubs as the titles roll, each of them copies down the script *Orphée* then they wait — they have been instructed by the Navigator to pay special attention to the mysterious number sequence that she insists are the coordinates to a very significant location. The three try and make some sense of the action, sitting through a brawl in the café, the dead man in the car and a beautiful female apparition in a bedroom, their pencils poised. The man is pulling on heavy rubber gloves that come up to his elbows and then he moves towards the mirror, his extended fingers dissolving into the surface — he keeps moving forward as if sleepwalking and vanishes into another world, dark and ruined.

The children try to follow the mysterious character, tense with anticipation as they wait for the special sequence, then suddenly it appears and for once the subtitles assist their task by providing numerals. The central male character, whom they decide to label *Orphée* after the title of the film, also holds a notebook and pencil, he is focused on a device inside the black carriage that has already been featured in a couple of previous scenes. The children like this character, his energy, and resolute actions but especially because he

writes and makes copious notes just as they do. He is a writer, a poet perhaps?

Orphée is again seated in the large black carriage listening intently to a series of signals, he holds a notebook and chews his pencil as a means of concentrating, or perhaps because he is finding it difficult to concentrate. He is obsessed with the beautiful woman with long dark hair and these mysterious messages which must be from her — she is surely attempting to contact him? The dark woman was left in the ruined city, *Orphée* and the Driver of the carriage returned only with the woman with short blonde hair whom they nickname the Muse. Since leaving the dark city *Orphée* is not permitted to look at this blonde Muse who nonetheless constantly provokes him to do so.

The Poet is back at his post in the carriage — he listens, listens and writes but then the driver disrupts *Orphée's* concentration by indicating that the blonde woman is about to arrive, *Orphée* must avert his eyes whilst the driver and the Muse sit in the rear seats of the carriage. *Orphée* attempts to ignore them and continues to listen intently.

The device inside the carriage bleats out a series of high pitched sounds followed by a tonally neutral male voice, speaking in a measured manner a series of numbers that magically appear in the subtitles — 38; 39; 40 then more words; 38; 39; 40 — again words, 38; 39; 40. More words follow, again another series of high pitched sounds and the number 2294, before the mysterious sequence is drowned out by the dialogue between the male lead and the woman sitting behind him. Voices are raised and a low-level argument ensues but loud enough to obscure the vital numerical series. Later the children will compare notes to ensure that they have the same numbers which will be carefully scrutinised by the Navigator at the next meeting down by the lakeshore.

The blonde woman leans towards the Poet, sliding her hands gently over his shoulders and she begins to caress his neck. *Orphée* tilts his head toward his left shoulder rotating his chin upward until his gaze inadvertently falls upon the small mirror mounted on the roof

of the carriage. His eyes meet those of the Muse and with supernatural precision the projector stalls. Film from the top spool of *Der Rot Czar* spins out over the floor of the projection room in a dry crackle of celluloid — immediately the Projectionist leaps from his chair where he has been reading. In the auditorium the eyes in the mirror light up then begin to slide down the woman's cheeks, in a trail of blisters, the image burns in a pall of vapour — the auditorium is momentarily filled with pure white light.

By the time the Projectionist has extracted the damaged footage and re-spliced the film, she has vanished, *Orphée* and the Driver peer into the rear seats — but it is as if she was never there. A few moments later the film tail runs through the gate and it is over — the final reel is missing and the story remains unresolved. The lights come up. The children know to keep their eyes open in the rainforest pools during the following Sunday afternoons.



Reel No.16. The Children encounter the Poet.

The Children discover a stranger who sings like an Angel.

The strong lanky boy, whom the children have labelled Gort is searching for the large bee combs that are found in swampy areas, they hang from sturdy branches like golden tongues guarded by very large and aggressive bees. It is a precarious task but if a comb can be dislodged over water the angry inhabitants are either forced to leave or drown. If the hunter can somehow evade their fury the reward is twofold, a plentiful supply of honey and a large amount of sweet-smelling wax which is needed for tapers and candles. The children's meeting place has all but run out of its lighting supply and it has fallen to Gort as the largest and strongest of the children to provide illumination.

He is carefully making his way along the swamp fringes dodging the leaves of the giant nettle trees that break through the continuous canopy of the mangroves. In one hand he carries a stout pole terminated by a sharpened square iron blade, in the other several bunches of wax impregnated reeds, in his carry pouch a fire flint and balls of dried moss. These are his tools for the capture of a comb of almost his own weight. His eyes dart from the canopy to the ground beneath his feet and the adjacent water edges which teem with slithering creatures many of whom can deliver a bite from which recovery is not guaranteed — securing lighting is no mean feat.

He is some 900 paces to the east of the children's Dacha when he hears a sweet voice drifting through the forest, so sweet in fact that he completely forgets his mission and creeps closer to the wonderful music. As he nears the source of the melody the rusty hulk of an ancient paddle steamer appears through the tangle of foliage. Driven ashore in a gale and abandoned decades ago the vessel has slowly settled into a part mineral and part vegetal state. Aerophytes sprout from the stumps of flag masts and large nests of twigs plug the twin funnels, moss and small ferns consume the wooden rubbing strakes and handrails. But upon the foredeck stands a man,

stripped to the waist, a muscular bronzed torso and shock of wavy blonde hair, singing to his heart's content, singing like a bird — the usually implacable Gort is transfixed.

The man, who is in his mid-thirties, is busying himself with a small brazier from which issues the smell of grilled fish, entrapping another of Gort's senses. Gort slaps his calf — the insects in the swamp are vicious. The man immediately stops singing and peers in his general direction but seeing nothing returns to his supper preparations, he then takes his meal and walks under the sunshade draped across the wheelhouse and fore-deck and falls into a hammock.

Entirely forgetting his original task Gort silently takes a path skirting around the paddle steamer and the other rotting hulks in the ship cemetery and scurries back to the Dacha where he leaves his bee hunting tools for another occasion. He then makes his way toward the upper town to find his companions to share the news of the stranger. But something in the back of his mind is troubling him, this is a face he has seen before, a voice that he has heard before, he just cannot say where or when. Gort is a big strong boy, but rather slow in reckoning, and this half knowing begins to torture him.



Reel No.17. Another Sunday Afternoon.

The Greeks meet in the Cafe and the Children meet in the ruined Dacha.

It is approximately noon, the clock in the tower of the Town Hall strikes twelve, courtesy of the Janitor from the *Orpheum* who has taken it upon himself to resurrect the long silent mechanism. He considers that his efforts bring a sense of equilibrium and temporal flow to the town which has for too long wallowed in stasis. Besides the Janitor likes to think of the bell strikes as simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal, he imagines the sound waves speeding outward over the town rippling through the alleys and boulevards but also acting to turn attention toward its centre, drawing people to the focus.

It certainly has this effect on the Greeks in any case, as they slowly gather at the café terrace in the town square, pulling together a couple of round tables with age-worn marble surfaces, dragging the heavy cast iron chairs into place. They stretch and yawn in the heat waiting for the patron to take their orders, as is usual only the Projectionist is absent on these Sunday afternoons.

The Greeks remain at their station for the entire afternoon, tapping down the bone Domino pieces, smoking the locally made cheroots and gradually losing focus as they empty jugs of mead and bottles of honey schnapps — come evening the heat and alcohol render them comfortably insensible.

At the same time in the lower outskirts of the town, another regular Sunday assembly is taking place as the children weave their paths through the rainforest and mangrove swamps to finally skitter across the precarious gangplank, to drop through the empty window into the fungal odour of their Dacha.

Once all hands are present the tallboy nicknamed Gort makes an apology, he has failed in his task to secure beeswax for tapers but he has a reason that overshadows this slight inconvenience. He begins to tell his companions about their new neighbour encamped on the

abandoned steamer beached in the ship cemetery some hundreds of paces away. Directing his gaze upward he describes the magical voice that so entranced him.

Some of the children express discomfort about the proximity of a stranger, but the small twins pipe up with the opinion that anyone who can sing like an angel cannot pose a real threat, maybe they might even become an ally — the matter is left hanging as the children get down to their normal work.

They turn to the centre of the table where the arrangement of 35 mm film frames lays like an uncontrollable game of Dominoes. At the very centre several images of biplanes in close-up, with grim-faced pilots wearing goggles adjoin a single image of the giant ape King Kong reaching out to crush an aircraft. Next to this a soulful image of the watery eye of Moby Dick, accompanied by a rosette of sailing ships about to be swallowed by the deep. Below the sailing ships an image of a white man and a black man laying in a bed together and next to this Islanders performing a Gorilla dance in front of massive stone gates.

Now the children start to reveal their latest windfalls, a Russian sailor brandishing a dinner plate, he appears angry — he hated the food comes the explanation; then an image of a crowd of youths fighting in a café, another child holds up a closeup of the brawl, placing it next to the Russian sailor, she tries to make a sensible connection, but heads shake — the sailor belongs to the huge metal ship and the café scene many of them recall is in a village but possibly it might be a village in Mosfilm? A third image from the café fight, this time with a close-up of a man with a square chin and shock of blonde hair is passed around, each child holding the flimsy rectangle and squinting one-eyed toward the light — but at Gort, it stops, he shakes his head, rubs his eyes and squints again — he breaths out sharply, regards his friends and tells them with a wavering voice that this is almost certainly the stranger, the man now living just 900 paces from the Dacha in an abandoned paddle-steamer — this they collectively decide is not a normal situation, they need to sleep on this one!

The light is falling and the children decamp, carefully balancing across the gangplank and moving into the swampy undergrowth, their minds focussed on the threat or opportunity posed by the newcomer. In the largest of the chain of ponds an image is forming — on the far side of the pond a distinct band of what might be mistaken for haze caps the reeds, and through the haze, a line of men in white uniforms appears, rifles raised to their shoulders. In the middle of the pond, a perambulator floats just above the surface at a jaunty angle. The children troop by oblivious, immersed in their thoughts.



Reel No.18. Shadowing.

*The Children decide to spy upon the Orpheum's Janitor
and the Box-office man.*

The children are gathered at the Dacha to discuss several new factors in their plan, at the top of their agenda are two important issues. Firstly their meeting place has until now been a well-kept secret, unknown to the townsfolk who avoid the dense lakeside jungle on account of the swarms of biting insects and carnivorous amphibians. That the stranger has encamped so close compromises their invisibility.

Gort speaks up and reiterates how well the handsome stranger sings. He is obviously not a Scavenger who has jumped ship, in fact, he seems more like one of the Greek refugees in his bearing. Gort's expression is quizzical as if he still does not believe his intuition but once again mumbles that the stranger looks exactly like the Poet in the old *Orphée* film. He moves to the sprawling web of images on the table and holds up the character in the café fight scene.

He scrutinises the small black and white image, nods slowly, exhales audibly and shrugs his shoulders slightly, offering the frame to the group. The image makes the rounds, each child recalling the scene and memorising the features of the square-jawed man with flowing hair.

The Navigator steps up to the table and with a ceremonious flourish produces a small leather-bound brass telescope and with a series of sharp metallic clicks extends the device, holding it to her right eye whilst closing her left. She then offers it to the child to her right and it passes around the group accompanied by a series of gasps — another well kept secret and one capable of verifying the identity of the stranger.

The children hatch a plan that will see Gort lead a small party to the boat graveyard early one morning. They will be armed with the telescope and carry an envelope containing all of the film frames

that depict the character *Orphée*. If there is a positive match they will summon up their courage and approach him for a parley. Other elements to consider are the recent arrival of new films bought by the Gypsy, who has been away in the Northern Zone for several weeks which may provide fresh information for the development of the Navigators World Map.

Next, the children discuss the ongoing trips made to the Town Museum and Town library by the Janitor and the Box-office man, whom it seems have recently increased the frequency and duration of their visits. They decide that it is time to shadow the Greeks more closely and appoint the two small girls, Katrina and Katja the identical twins, as their spies. The two, ironically dubbed by their companions, as King and Kong in reference to their diminutive size and placid nature, are thrilled at their clandestine assignment. Knowing that they are impossible to tell apart gives them an advantage and already creates a great deal of confusion around the town.

The twins are truly identical, such that even their closest friends cannot distinguish one from the other. Their mother, as is common, chooses to dress them in matching outfits, which only compounds the situation. As a consequence, the group has requested that they wear a small badge of identification. King wears a small cloth patch pinned to her sleeve; a five-pointed white star on a blue background, whilst Kong sports a red stripe on a white ground, this carries the nickname joke even further as these symbols originate from the flag of the Empire State in the film from which they take their new names. The twins of course play along with the scheme but as twins do they swap their badges and their assignments daily in the knowledge that they will never be identified. Although small in stature the twins share an almost total knowledge of one another's moods and perceptions as if telepathically connected to a world entirely distinct from that of their comrades, a world where objects become thoughts and thoughts fuse with emotions and intuitions — they inhabit a commonwealth of meaning unknown to most.

The light is fading and the children squeeze over the window sill and slide down the gangplank to land in the soft ooze of the lakeside. They slowly file through the marshy terrain, already mist-shrouded, their eyes alert for the ghostly images that occasionally materialise in the watery depressions that line the route. They have almost completed their transit through the marsh without an encounter when the child who has adopted the MGM Lion as her talisman and who has fallen behind the main party, catches a pair of eyes staring back at her through the mist. She freezes, tries to call out but is transfixed and struck dumb. The eyes have no face, and they stare back with a look of alarm — or is it horror. The tiny girl finally manages to call out and the group runs back imagining one of the local reptiles is on the attack, but no, MGM stands rigid, mouth agape, pointing into the mist.

The eyes continue to stare, unblinking, unmoving. The air is completely still save for the evening flight of insects preparing for their night-time foraging. The children turn to one another, nodding knowingly, they are the eyes in the mirror — the mirror in the carriage, they can almost hear the numbers; 38; 39; 40... Their world is becoming more complicated, denser and perhaps darker.



Reel No.19. The Parley No.1 and No.2.

The Children visit the stranger's camp and unsettle him with images.

Parley No.1

The die is cast, the stranger appears to be less of a stranger than simply strange — familiar but unknown. A small party plays truant from their small schoolhouse that operates from the council room in the old town hall and has assembled at the Dacha. Gort, the Navigator, who clutches the brass telescope and the twins who have assembled a series of all the 35 mm frames that depict the *Orphée* character.

Quietly they walk in single file along the lake's edges, eyes peeled for reptiles warming themselves in the early sunlight. As they approach the embayment that is littered with the rotting hulks of old fishing boats they hear faint strains of singing; Gort turns and smiles nervously. The old steamer comes into view through the tangle of undergrowth and the children take up a sheltered position behind a fallen trunk. The Navigator slowly extends the brass telescope and balancing it across the fallen tree pulls focus on the man who is sitting at the stern of the hulk, singing softly to himself and gazing distractedly into the water as he fishes for his breakfast. She has a good view of his profile from this angle but not his features.

Finally a fish bites, the man jerks his bamboo pole upwards and hauls in a decent-sized fish, as he turns to lower his catch onto the deck the Navigator catches her breath, it is him for sure. The twins produce the 35 mm frames and hold them slightly aloft as reference. The telescope is passed around the small group as they watch the man clean his catch and place it onto the small brazier; blue smoke and a delicious aroma drift skyward.

The children huddle to plan their strategy. They know the film narrative, up to a point, three-quarters through the story. They have seen the man in the flesh and they have seen his phantom eyes in the swamp — but how these three-forms can coexist does not seem

possible — even so they have to confront this anomaly and indeed the man himself. At their last meeting in the Dacha they had agreed that should the man be identified as the *Orphée* character a meeting with him was vital; however how this should be achieved was not discussed. For want of a more sophisticated plan the Navigator simply clambers over the fallen tree and walks toward the hulk, collapsing the telescope as she goes, the remaining children follow gingerly in her wake.

The Navigator puts two fingers to her lips and whistles causing the man to jump up in surprise, she stands and waves, he hesitates and then returns her wave, next he points to a scramble net, woven from jungle creeper, that is draped over the bow. The four children swarm aboard like monkeys.

They stand awkwardly face to face on the deck, at a loss for an introduction, finally one of the twins rummages in her carry pouch and pulls out a series of five small envelopes adorned with the white swan and the title *Orpheum*. From each one she slips a 35 mm frame into the palm of her left hand and offers them to the man.

He holds each frame in turn up to the morning light, the café scenes, the fight and a close-up of what appears to be his portrait, something vague stirs in the back of his mind, a worm of recognition buried beneath layers of darkness. He hands the images back to King and raises both palms skyward in a gesture of indecision and confusion. There is no doubt these are images of himself, but their origin eludes him — and as to how these wild-looking children are carrying them is a total mystery to him.

King pulls out two more images from the well-shredded film — the dark-haired woman and the blonde woman, the man regards the dark-haired woman wistfully and nods, but when he sees the frame of the Blonde he shudders and his eyes water. The children are convinced, convinced and confused but now certain that he is *Orphée* — the man is simply confused.

He bids them sit and offers to share his breakfast — he recognises that he needs to befriend these strange children, that they are the entrée to this new world into which he has fallen; for the moment they know more than he does. The children in turn understand that this man, this character, is their key to unlocking the hidden structures of their world. That his being, that shifts between reality and dream, is inseparably linked to the operations of the *Orpheum* with its cabal of Greek refugees and especially with the enigmatic figure of the Projectionist. This is a pathway they must take together and follow regardless of the outcome.

After a meal of grilled fish, the children confer and make the radical suggestion that the man, whom they will henceforth call *Orphée*, should attend their next Sunday meeting at their Dacha, once he is sworn to absolute secrecy.

As soon as they take their leave the man slumps into his hammock, a whirl of vertigo coiling around his brow, scattering his thoughts. He clutches at the coarse fabric of the hammock realising that at this moment its rough texture is more substantial than he, that it resides in a single domain, that it will one day disperse into brittle fibres perished by the sun and humidity. For himself, he is no longer sure if it is this or another reality that he occupies, perhaps several worlds simultaneously — and that the bridges between them are vague and poorly remembered.

Parley No.2

The children gather early, prompted by some inexplicable urge to be house proud, and prepare the Dacha for their visitor, paying special attention to the giant amoeba of film stills colonising the table. The Navigator inspects her world map, hoping that *Orphée* may provide some additional geographic information, something that will pierce the fog of forgetting or provide a pointer to a future.

As the sun rises to its first-quarter footsteps are heard outside on the gangplank accompanied by a short whistle, the Navigator shrills back and the silhouette of *Orphée* fills the window frame. He drops to the floor and surveys the scene in some amazement. The room is very business-like well arranged with a large central table covered in a maze of film frames and flanked by a huge wall hanging with what appears to be a global map, marked with trade routes and destinations picked out in brightly coloured threads. He is non-plussed but smiles broadly nevertheless.

The children firstly explain that they are the descendants of migrants who were evacuated here some six or seven generations ago, mostly the young children of miners from the frozen north, but some from the arid south. They go on to explain that until the recent influx of the so-called Greek Refugees the town had been completely isolated and self-sufficient in a primitive way and for the majority of inhabitants this is still the way they live. However, as soon as the Greeks arrived certain things changed, they revived the old cinema, magically re-inventing light and motion. They also made contact with the small bands of travelling scavengers who now bring useful items from the outside world, including a supply of zinc canisters that contain ancient films. Why the Greeks operate the cinema remains unclear but certain inexplicable events appear to leak beyond its walls.

For his part, *Orphée* recounts his arrival here and the tragic death of his wife, a blonde it seems who was bitten by a viper — he tells briefly of the mute otherworldly stranger who rescued him. About his former life, he is hazy but he claims to be a writer and a poet of some repute. Of his life before he set off on this current journey he has but vague recollections — a dark-haired woman and her limousine — a comfortable villa that he once owned in a land far away and before that, even murkier dreams of sparkling seas and mountainsides, of feasts and music, of athletes and beautiful women.

The Navigator presses him about the coordinates 38; 39; 40. *Orphée* is again puzzled by shadowy memories but then he recalls the

carriage, yes he sat in a carriage and listened to secret messages — the dark-haired woman, she lived in a ruined city under a dark sky, perhaps an underground city but where exactly...he slowly shakes his head. To close the parley they decide that an understanding of the *Orpheum* and its Projectionist is vital — they will take *Orphée* to spy on the Projection room during the next screening.



Reel No.20. The Electricians Manual.

*King visits the Town Library to observe the Janitor
and learns about Washington Direct Current.*

One of the shelves in what remains of the public library holds a row of ten slim volumes. Bound in soft black leatherette and beautifully printed on onion skin paper, edged with a sheen of gold, the title page bears the words:

The Complete Electrical Manual, Published New York City 1914.

The volumes are kept in closed reserve, a house arrest conferred by their value, they may never leave the faint odour of mildew that pervades the building, and with which all book learning has become associated.

It is one of the recent migrants who consult these volumes, the lumbering Janitor from the cinema, thumb-nailing the pages that concern electrical generators, dynamos and incandescent lighting. The townsfolk regard the Janitor with a mixture of awe and suspicion as one possessed of almost magical powers, a big man, surly, with sparse words but extraordinary skills.

Sitting at the supper table in the flickering light of tapers and oil lamps, a grandmother will, on occasion, pull out an old cloth bundle and with an ironic flourish, hold up a brass screwed glass globe, telling the small children that this fragile transparent object once would burn like the sun at midday, banishing night into the corners of the room. The elderly in the room will sigh sadly under their breath whilst the young ones will screw up their noses in mild disbelief, unsure of these ancient stories of illumination. But in the back of their minds there is lodged a hint of truth in what the old lady says as they all know that similar inexplicable things happen at the *Orpheum* — that some magic is worked there with light and dreams, but only there.

The Janitor once worked as a simple blacksmith, he is handy around tools and materials, but his current position demands an entirely

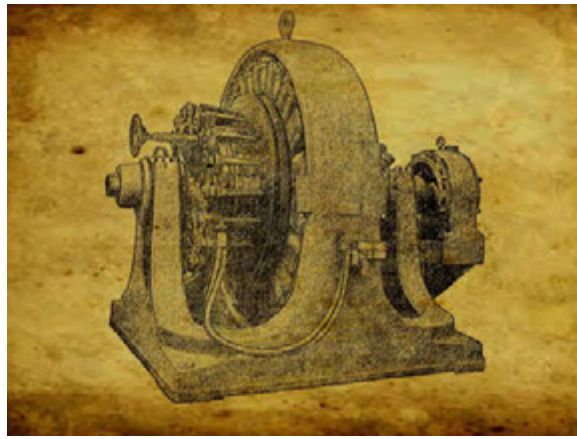


Figure 10. The WestingHouse.

new understanding of invisible energies, the conversion of solids into heat and of heat into light, something not to be achieved with a mere hammer and anvil and so he reads and he reads, he draws schemes and diagrams and he talks to the itinerant scavengers, the scrap dealers who pass through the town carrying strange ancient items from the outside world.

Whilst the town slumbers in total darkness the Janitor works his alchemy, feeding timber shingles into the maw of the boiler, the stomach of the wheezing iron and brass steam engine that spins a drive belt around the humming, squat blue-grey beetle, emblazoned with the word: *Westinghouse*.

Like the old engine hauled out of a wrecked paddle steamer by the town's salvage crew, the Westinghouse is also securely bolted down to the floor of the machine shop which abuts the rear of the *Orpheum*. In addition, the Westinghouse is tethered by thick cables that run through the walls and up to the projection room where they feed the big machines that only the Projectionist and the Janitor may touch. This is the magical chain, the transformation of mangrove timber into flame, flame into steam, steam into motion, motion into electricity and electricity into light and again motion — the Janitor closes the furnace door and slowly limps away.

The Janitor cups his forehead in the cradle of his left hand, elbow resting on the dark wood of the reading table. Just enough light

filters in through an oriel window set high in the masonry eave of the building for him to copy out a circuit diagram.

King sits inconspicuously at a study desk behind a barricade of dusty bookshelves, drawing images of airships that she is copying from the yellowed pages of a huge encyclopaedia. She is not certain what these objects are or how they support themselves over the buildings and rivers, as unlike birds and biplanes they lack wings. Every so often she quietly approaches the shelf to peer at the Janitor from between two large folios, who remains motionless his gaze fixed on the open page. King has been tasked by the group to shadow the Janitor's movements, in particular, his forays to the Library and must compile her observations into a report.

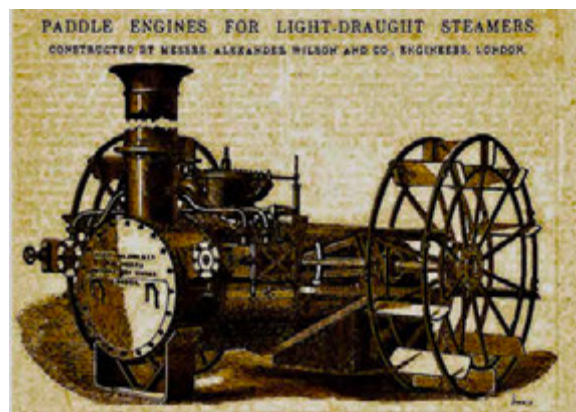


Figure 11. The Steam Engine.

The afternoon wears on and the light gradually fades, finally, the Janitor stirs, heaving himself upright to slowly walk toward the wide wooden staircase that leads to the portico, via the museum halls below. King listens to his gait, a solid step followed by a prolonged scraping sound as his lame leg is drawn forward in a slow rhythmic pattern. Then a variation on the duet as he negotiates the staircase, and finally the faint drumbeat of his exit.

When all is quiet King closes her notebook, now half-filled with designs for flying machines and approaches the book that the Janitor has left open on the reading table. The paper has a wonderful lightness about it, crisp and perfectly smooth, along its edges a slip

of gold finer than a human hair. King opens her notebook and begins to copy down some of the symbols and diagrams, even though they are indecipherable they must surely mean something. A picture of a cylindrical device with lines radiating from one end and a shaft at the other, surrounded by three arrows turning in a circle, underneath the markings *110 DC*.

At the top of the page the text in Latin script; *Chapter 3. DIRECT CURRENT (DC)*. King makes a connection that will please the Navigator — she has discovered the meaning of DC uppercase, the DC in the film KingKong (her namesake) now falls into place:

Washington, Direct Current.

In the failing light, the girl quickly leafs through the volume, its pages rustling beneath her delicate touch.

Chapter 4. ALTERNATING CURRENT has a small paper bookmark slipped next to a page displaying yet another curiously shaped object. It reminds her of the wheel and axle assembly of a donkey cart, but denser and obscure, she decides to draw this one quickly before the light goes and the ancient caretaker closes the library doors.

This object has a few more wires and the name *WESTINGHOUSE* written across its body, there are some pencil notes in the margin, but these are not in Latin script or Mosfilm, all she can discern are the letters *AC*, but where is this curious place?

King slowly walks back across the town square, picking her way through the tangle of the once formal garden beds, now a hybrid of wild dog roses, medicinal plants and tomato plots. She rests on the worn limestone capstones that mark the edge of the ornamental fountain, a marble nymph struggling to break through the riot of verdure that the stagnant pool supports. King opens her book to gaze at the delicate graphite drawings of cylindrical and spherical flying machines that crowd the pages. A clatter in her ear, not quite metallic but neither soft — and a giant dragonfly passes, turns

ninety degrees flies another short segment and makes yet another turn to take up a parallel flight line — skimming the fetid surface of the water. It swoops and lifts a water boatman as it skitters across the oily meniscus. Again it rattles past King, makes two right-angle turns in rapid succession and continues its relentless search of the water below. Wings interest King, not the wings of the angry aeroplanes of the film for which she is named, but the wings of creatures, the pulsing translucent blades that propel the giant dragon-flies or the feathered wings that float across the lake when the sky fills with flamingos and spoonbills, so many that the air thrums with the soft pulse of quill on-air — King dreams of flying one day.



Figure 12. Drawing of an Airship.

Candles are being lit in the surrounding buildings, King closes her book and walks home to the apartment that she shares with her sister, parents and grandparents. They have tried as best they can to make a cosy home in the voluminous ground floor spaces of the First Commercial Bank — draping homespun rugs over the marble arches and columns, converting the strong room into a pantry and

the teller's counters into a kitchen sideboard. King and Kong share a bedroom under a domed ceiling handsomely appointed with a huge chandelier that sparkles in the sunlight but no longer shines at night.



Reel No.21. Observing the Projectionist No.1.

*The Projectionist at work; the Day the Earth Stood Still
and the Second Law of Thermodynamics.*

It is a Saturday early afternoon, after the matinee and partway through the afternoon session, which is showing *The Day the Earth Stood Still* for the twelfth time, two small children are stealthily leading the young writer *Orphée* along a carpeted corridor on the top floor of the *Orpheum*. Ahead in the gloom a heavy door, button upholstered in shabby maroon leatherette is set into a dark varnished wood surround, pierced at eye level by a small square window of thick wire-reinforced glass. Above the door, a sign *Do Not Enter, Session In Progress* surmounted by a feeble red lamp in a plain brass fitting. The corridor is deathly quiet but as the trio approaches the door the faint sounds of film spooling through machinery can be heard from within.

The writer *Orphée* cautiously peers inside, the Projectionist is sitting at a small desk placed to one side of the room, eating a biscuit. Centre stage the two massive projectors — one has the text *Die Dicke Bertha* painted on its side, in a graceful female cursive, white against the gunmetal grey of the machine — the other bears the legend, *Der Rot Czar* in red.

The writer tells the two children to ready themselves with their notebooks for his observations...he recounts quietly:

The Projectionist looks at his watch, regards the spool coursing through *Die Dicke Bertha* and stands. He picks up the second reel of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and carries it over to the second machine running through the routine that is second nature. First, he mounts the spool in the top spool box and folds the hinged tip of the shaft to secure it. Next, he pulls out the leader and threads this through the top firetrap assembly. The film is laced through the projector by opening and shutting the roller arm assemblies in order, starting from the top sprocket. The Projectionist checks that the loop is the correct size between the intermediate sprocket and the gate which

appears to be some seventeen perforations between the last tooth of the intermediate sprocket and the entrance to the gate plate.

The Projectionist knows that too big a loop will cause noisy running and too small a loop may cause film damage — even though with the stock he is showing this is an inevitability. He ensures that the loop between the last tooth of the intermittent sprocket and the idler roller axis is exactly fifteen perforations long.

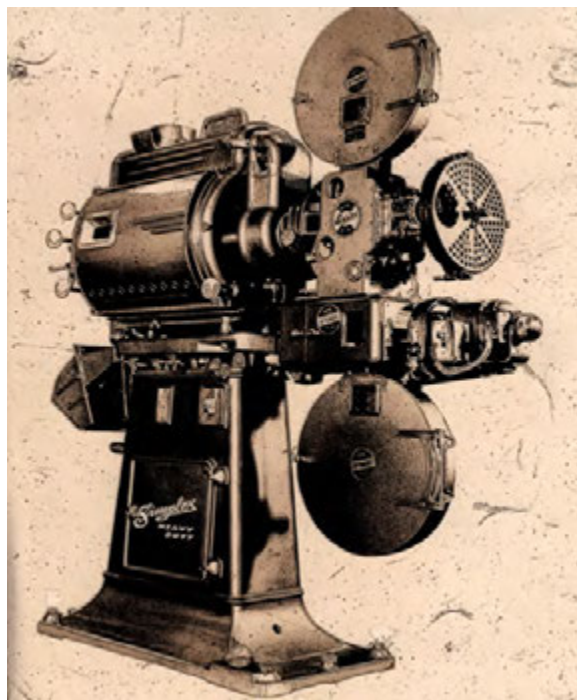


Figure 13. The *Rot Czar* Projector.

He then laces the film through the lower firetrap, inserts the bottom spool and again folds the shaft hinged tip to wind the film around the hub, using the small slots — then he shuts both top and bottom spool box doors.

The Projectionist finally takes up the slack between the lower sprocket and the spool and between the top spool and the top sprocket, checks that all roller assemblies are closed and carefully rotates the projector forward employing the inching knob on the motor.

The Projectionist looks down at his watch, looks up at the rattling spool on the first projector and then squints out of a small glass window at the screen in the auditorium for the two small dots that will appear in the corner of the image, indicating the cue for the second projector to run.

He strikes the arc, well in time — switches on the second machine, slowly rotating the lever and remaining in the mid-position for at least one-second so that the projector can gather adequate speed and only then flips the machine into the run position, opening the lamp house dowsers. At exactly the right moment, when he can see the two cue dots in the final moments of the current spool, the Projectionist pushes the control knob and the second projector rolls into action. The audience notices nothing of this changeover.

The Projectionist peers down into the auditorium once more — on the screen an image of an ancient television receiver showing a man wearing a hat talking into a microphone, more important news. He returns to his, now cold tea and looks at his watch — another twenty minutes until the next change-over.

Orphée indicates that his observations are concluded, nodding to the two children who close their notebooks and fade away down the corridor and back into the auditorium, just in time to see the silvered giant robot Gort shuffle out of the spaceship. They sink back into the velvet seats, marvelling at the immobile silver colossus and the shining metal disc of a ship sitting inert in a park full of men with weapons.

The young writer also turns to leave, unsure if his observations have clarified anything — he has been invited to visit the children in their rotting mansion hideout to collect the notes. Quietly he pads down the silent corridor and slips out into the warm humid air and the buzz of insects. He makes his way downhill to his swamp-berthed home, the faint whirr of the projectors echoing in his thoughts and merging with the chorus of Cicadas pulsing from the forest.

In sharp contrast to the dead acoustics of the heavily carpeted corridor, the projector room exists as a cloud of machinic hum; the continuo of motor noise is inflected by the precise small sounds of film being positioned in the gate, the clicks and snaps of spring-loaded rollers, the whirl of the shutter and the slither and rustle of the celluloid itself. A chatter of irregular squeaks as the film scrapes the edge of the spool and the clatter of the sprockets past the claws in the gate — it is a symphonic room.

The Projectionist is, as usual, wearing slippers and occasionally peers out of the small observation windows at the screen over the heads of the audience, who have partly obscured themselves in a cloud of cigarette smoke. The haze forms an almost palpable creature animated by the projector beam, a dancer in a cone of light.

How long he has been here is a question the Projectionist cannot, or will not, contemplate, an eternity perhaps, an eternity that has immediately followed the previous eternity. In any case, he has come to almost enjoy his new incarnation, after all, he has been able to maintain many of his old friendships and together they have resumed a version of their former roles, even though it has meant some drastic simplifications and transformations.

In his spare time, a luxury which everybody in this isolated town has plenty of — the Projectionist is writing a diary, or rather a philosophical examination concerning his two beasts, *The Die Dicke Bertha* and *Der Rot Czar* whom he now regards as sentient beings. He thinks of these creatures as memory engines, transmitters of super-real memories that seep into the uneventful events of everyday life. Quotidienne lives that have no access to the past, origins, or to land. Everything that once existed has been washed away; washed clean by floodwaters, flensed by the winds and dissolved in the heat.

The Projectionist has come to realise that the spools, which the two creatures consume, start off cold. The head spool is cold but the take-up spool is always warm — the gate and sprockets are intensely hot, momentarily irradiating and exciting each frame with the radiant light and heat of the arc lamp — and all too often seizing

and vapourising a frame, which fills the projection room with a strong smell of broiled celluloid, as the image and its memories disassociate and drift into thin air. He ponders these moments of ignition where a face or a body suddenly freezes and in an instant convert to another form — the spell is broken — the soul departs, translocated in time, space and physical register. He plays a special part in this.

His creatures are heat engines, consuming the energy produced by the wood furnace far below in the belly of the old Alexander Wilson steam engine. This is the basis of all life thinks the Projectionist, it is the basis of time — from hot to cold — that is how life runs, heat slowly trickling down the slope of life and time — but his two metal memory machines work in reverse, cold spools to hot spools — they are time machines that swim upstream in the *River Chronos*, they reheat dead memories, rekindle the past.

In this respect, he differs from his friend the Gypsy, that swimmer in the placid *Lake of Kairos* a tepid lake with a constant temperature where time is halted, peppered only with atomised events, moments with no trajectory, decoupled from cause and effect. Of course, he and the Gypsy are both exceptions to the fundamental laws of physics. Thermodynamics cannot touch them, never have, never will. This is sometimes a comforting thought; at other times it disquiets him.

His work here has an essentially mundane aspect — the running of a faded cinema in a small isolated and self-reliant township. He and his refugee friends supply almost the only connection with the world beyond. In any case, none of the townsfolk exhibits a real curiosity to travel into the vast miasmic hinterland, nor do they have much of a grasp of history. So much has been submerged and dissolved that it has leached the collective memory, replacing it with an amnesia that makes day to day living practical and simple.

There is just one social phenomenon that draws his attention and puzzles him. He is curious about the small group of ragged children, descendants of the original child refugees who arrived decades ago

who were escapees from the drowned mining towns in the once frozen north. These great-grandchildren, avid patrons of the *Orpheum*, collectors of cinema memorabilia and keen note-takers, have inexplicably become obsessed with information about the world beyond, the past and presumably their future. What their objectives are, remains unclear but the Projectionist concludes that they have some kind of plan, perhaps the development of an alternative history or perhaps the elaboration of a new creation myth capable of putting together the scattered fragments of this dislocated world — whatever it is they are secretive and organised.



Figure 14. The flying saucer and Gort.

Spool number three rattles into play and the children gawp at the spaceship control room — light and glassy, eerie undulating music fills the auditorium, unearthly and disquieting. Suddenly the mood changes and the music becomes urgent with dramatic peaks propelling scenes of a vast city filled with metal vehicles, all of which suddenly stop everything stops, no light, no movement — panic. Perhaps this is what happened, scribbles one child, is this why we are here in a place without motion without light?

The Projectionist laces up the final spool; this is his favourite part of the film, which miraculously has never torn apart and in which there are no fragile edits or repairs. The female has bought a message to the metal man from the dying space traveller — she has

fainted on cue as Gort the robot, visor up, approaches. More unearthly music as the female is deposited in the control room and the robot departs to jailbreak the now dead space traveller. Now comes the sequence that fascinates the Projectionist.

A remarkable feeling of *déjà-vu* overtakes him every time he cranes his neck to the glass of the small observation port of the booth, to watch as the limp body of the spaceman is revived inside something resembling the glass casing of a huge theatre lamp. He witnesses time running backwards, from death to life, or from his perspective, from life to the next form of existence — for him, this makes everything worthwhile.

The children in the audience also like this scene but have to fight back feelings of disappointment each time the celluloid fails to jamb — robbing them of a supply of precious frames. They must be patient as breakages are inevitable at the *Orpheum*. They register the names of the principal characters, Klaatu the space traveller, Gort the indestructible metal robot and Helen the female from the earth. Loud organ music announces the departure of the symmetrical metal spaceship leaving behind a city park packed with anxious scientists and uncomprehending military.

The audience shuffles out into the early evening heat and the Projectionist rewinds the spools one by one, placing them back into their zinc canisters. Today there are no clippings for the Usher to package and certainly no burnt frames associated with death scenes — those very special coincidences that he waits patiently for; hopefully one of the two rapacious projectors will shred the print on the next showing.

The children walk into the old town square and sit on the marble edges of the defunct ornamental fountain, they discuss the smoothness and seamlessness of the flying disc, the power of the metal man and the strange networks of men who wear hats and communicate by talking into little boxes. They look up and spy a shooting star arching across the sky and a spark of hope ripples through their thoughts.



Reel No.22. Observations on the Orpheum.

The Poet recounts the strange fate of the lost film frames.

The Logbook of the *Syracuse*

Entry No.5 — The year 2078; Week 51; Day 1

The ragged children have shown me the Projectionist at work. The projectors are surely keepers of a collective memory! They have seen every image of every film that runs through their mechanisms. The Projectionist is the high priest, he is the one who protects and serves these oracles of light — but what immortal hand wrought them?

The films that trickle into town are in short supply, and those that are available in the *Orpheum* are old and fragile, as are the venerable projectors — this is a dangerous combination. All of the films are shown on a regular rotation so it is inevitable that damage occurs on an equally regular basis even though the Projectionist is diligent in his efforts to service the machines and is assiduous in carefully repairing damaged film. Even so, as short sequences of frames are removed each time there is a breakdown, the re-spliced sections inexorably begin to shorten the film and begin to introduce unintentional juxtapositions in their stories.

The children have told me of two other situations that arise from such unfortunate damage. Firstly the Projectionist does not discard the damaged sections but collects them into two quite different categories. The first is a general category of breakage and these he collects, placing them into a big brown paper bag that he will later pass onto the attractive female Usher, whom I now know is his wife — a mismatch if ever there was one!

She in turn cuts these short discards into single frames with a pair of dress-makers shears and packages them with some of the confectionary items that she distributes at the start of Saturday matinees; at intermissions and of course, during the frequent pauses for film breakages. Suffice it to say that the children are avid

collectors and trade these precious images, meeting together to lay out their spoils in various narrative sequences, some of which are based on their growing knowledge of the *Orpheum*'s repertoire, others which seem to be genuinely alternative narratives.

The children think the Usher is depressed or homesick for another place, or perhaps her mother and family. When she passes bonbon to the children her smile is faint and melancholy and she always avoids conversation; perhaps the Projectionist has cast a spell upon her? Only the Gypsy brings a hint of lightness and sparkle to her eyes.

The children believe that there is a second category of salvaged film which is much rarer and is thus of special importance. These are the sections of corrupted frames that coincide with the imminent death of a character — this they claim is a portent of the highest order; most especially when the film has fouled the gate and the frame has shimmered, slid into distortion and finally boiled into cellulose vapour.

They say that these special fragments are reverently removed from the projector, the damaged section laid out on the splicing table and excised from the feed and take-up spools. The film is then skilfully and rapidly reunited with quick-drying celluloid solvent glue and re-laced. They tell me that these frames never appear in the confectionery tray of the Usher — they circulate in another form that they are only just beginning to understand.

It is time for me to revisit the *Orpheum* and investigate!



Reel No.23. The Aether the Projectionist and the Electrotachyscope.

The Projectionist performs a dark ritual; the Children see a vision and a soul is transmuted and translocated.

The Greeks are assembled at the *Café des Poètes*, sprawled in the afternoon heat haze and now well lubricated by strong liquor. As usual, they argue points of philosophy for no good reason other than sport, they wave their arms extravagantly, grimace to reinforce every point and crash their glasses onto the chipped marble tabletop to provide additional emphasis — as the afternoon wears on they will lose their passion for debate to embrace a stupefied silence. Otherwise, the town square is deserted, the usual pallor of sleep has descended to smother another endless Sunday afternoon.

The Projectionist is as usual, absent from the noisy debates; he is alone in the projection room of the *Orpheum* and will remain there until nightfall, although this afternoon he is not as alone as he imagines.

The Poet is led to the rear of the *Orpheum* by two of the children who skilfully slide a thin strip of copper between the leaves of the emergency exit and silently trip the latch. The three slip into the dark cavern of the silent auditorium, the only illumination coming from the three small glass ports up in the projection booth. They carefully make their way up the slope of the aisle and breathing in the musty odour of the velvet drapes at the rear of the auditorium, they quietly make their way to the service stairs that lead to the projection room.

The carpeted corridor is dark and silent, instinctively they trail their fingers against the walls as a means to orientate themselves as they glide moth-like, towards the dim yellow glow of the small glass window in the Projectionist's door.

He is stooped over a lightbox, a pair of half-rimmed reading glasses perched well down on his nose. In his left hand is a magnifying loupe and in his right is a pair of scissors. The Projectionist tilts his head to one side and then to the other as he brings a strip of badly damaged film into focus. He hesitates and then begins to excise a series of single frames from the damaged strip of celluloid.

He lays the singed frames out in a sequence on the lightbox, carefully counting until he has twenty-four. When he is satisfied the Projectionist puts down his loupe and scissors and moves to the rear of the room to grapple with a bulky shape shrouded by black drapes. Shuffling backwards the Projectionist wheels the cumbersome object adjacent to the projectors and slips off the cloth to reveal a large disc, about the size of a regular donkey-cart wheel, mounted vertically on a mobile stand. At the top centre of the disc, a very large glass tube protrudes from a metal bracket and is connected to one red and one black wire which trail across the floor. Protruding from the centre of the contraption is a large iron crank with a wooden handle.

The Projectionist spins the handle and observes the motion of the wheel, he moves to his workbench and returns with a small oil can and lubricates the crank and the central axle, spins the wheel again and nods in approval.

The three take turns in peering through the wire-reinforced glass window, the children on tip-toes with craning necks and outstretched chins, as they see the Projectionist gradually fill the twenty-four small rectangular apertures that are evenly spaced around the circumference of the wheel. The 35 mm frames are secured one by one with tiny metal spring clips; once they are all in place the Projectionist stands back to survey the mechanism. All is in order as he next stoops to pick up the two heavy-coloured wires, dragging them across the floor to a metal box affixed to the wall behind the projectors. He winds each wire onto a porcelain post and then screws them tight. Now, something unexpected happens — the Projectionist pulls on long leather gauntlets, then places a black leather helmet on his head — he pulls down a dark glass visor to

cover his eyes then immediately reaches out and snaps a leather-bound handle sharply upward. Instantly the room is flooded with a blinding light emanating from the glass tube attached upper part of the wheel mechanism — quickly the Projectionist grasps the crank and begins to wind furiously.

Sweat runs through his eyebrows the salt blurring what little vision

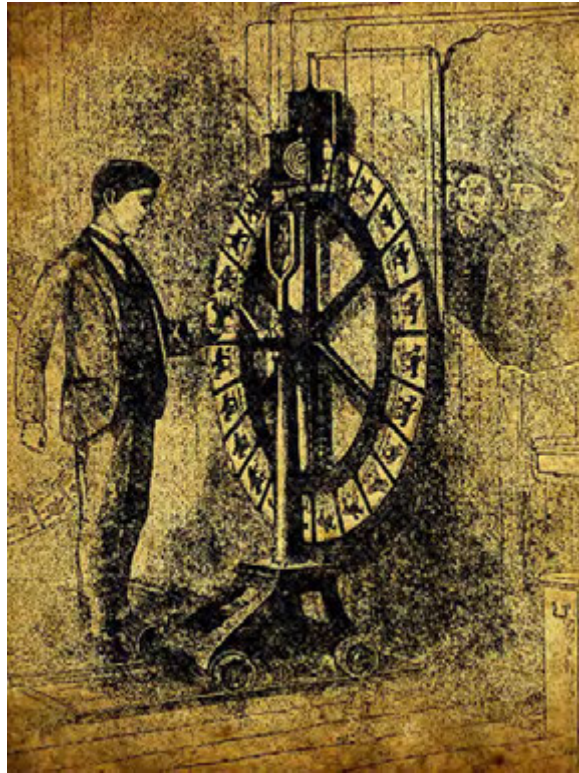


Figure 15. The Electrotachyscope.

he has through the darkened glass; the leather reeks of stale sweat and sulphur and the acrid smell of burning carbon arcs — it comforts him — these are the smells of home, his real home. He thinks of his beautiful, sad-faced wife — she hates these odours, she hates the dark, all she wants is to run in the sweet herb meadows of distant mountainsides and to be with her mother, the Gardener woman. What has become of her and her seasons he wonders as he cranks even more speed into the machine and thinks of his sweet young wife?

He winds and winds, the wheel blurs into a uniformly smooth surface, the images forming a black streak at its edge. He does not stop, he winds and winds, the room is now filled with a high-

pitched roar and a pulsating light, silhouetting the man and his black helmet, streaking the walls with violent shadows. Finally, he staggers back, thrown away from the machine that has now taken on a life of its own. He falls against the bulk of a projector struggling to regain his balance — transfixed by the halo of fire swirling before him. Gradually the pitch of its roar diminishes and the halo changes from a searing white to orange, then to cherry red. In the corridor, they exchange glances and agree in whispers that the show is over. They quietly retreat down the corridor to make their escape unobserved.

Down near the waters edge a second party of children are quietly sitting amongst the series of small ponds some 100 paces inland from their Dacha. Some of the children are almost asleep in the waning light, others are swatting away the attentions of large insects, but all have been instructed to keep their eyes peeled for any vaporous images that form in the haze hanging above the small pools. Time passes uneventfully, toward the onset of dusk the group begins to rouse itself — one young boy, his chin drooping on his chest, is deep in dreams when a large biting fly pierces the skin of his cheek. From within his dream world, he slaps his attacker and simultaneously jerks himself into wakefulness. He starts forward and there caught in his gaze a ghostly image of a young girl in ponytails throwing a pail of water directly at him. The boy recoils and then rubs his eyes and takes a second look, the girl is still there as if wading waist-deep through the swamp, scooping water and launching it toward him. He calls his comrades who gather round to stare at this silent tableau — suddenly someone recognises the situation, they blurt out cheerfully;

The Wicked Witch is Dead.

Of course, only the previous Wednesday the *Orpheum* had run the film for the first time; a girl and a flying dacha; a strange man-creature; a machine-man; a man of straw and something about beings called wizards and witches. Unfortunately, the film was in good condition and had only two breaks, one when the girl and the dog were flying off in their Dacha and then another right at the end

of the story when the green-faced flying woman suddenly dissolved as soon as she was splashed with water. No frames had appeared in the Usher's tray as yet and the children had not met to exchange theories concerning the characters and their dancing and singing routines — it would be another week before they would match stories with the two who had spied on the Projectionist.

Finally, the wheel of the machine comes to rest, the Projectionist approaches the electrical box and throws the switch downward, instantly the light vanishes from the room, now illuminated only by the glow of the lightbox and a single incandescent glass sphere. The Projectionist pushes up his smoked glass visor and lifts off his helmet, his hair is slick with perspiration. He slumps down into a chair, pulls off the long gauntlets and wipes his brow with the back of his jacket sleeve; slowly calming his breathing. After a few minutes' rest he approaches the machine and inspects the apertures into which he had affixed the film frames, as usual, nothing remains, just black carbon smudges on the metal clips and aperture edges, the images vaporised, he detects a faint whiff of sulphur.

The Projectionist leaves through the manual that the Janitor had supplied after he had constructed the machine. The Janitor had found the design in a technical publication housed in the town library — he called the device the *Electrotachyscope*, after an 1887 invention of Ottomar Anschütz, designed to transmit short bursts of animated motion from chronophotographs arrayed mandala-like on a spinning wheel of fortune. The Janitor had skilfully constructed an extremely powerful Geissler gas discharge tube and connected the wires to the steam-driven Westinghouse generator down in the yard below. This arrangement allows the Projectionist to transmit images of the deceased each Sunday afternoon when the *Orpheum* is closed — they transform on a discharge of twenty-one thousand lumens, kilowatts of precious energy. The Projectionist knows this is different from the old ways, it lacks ceremony and pomp, and of course, there are no physical bodies to transact — but it is satisfying in its own way. Regarding the Westinghouse, the Janitor had once quipped *C'est brutal, mais ça marche* — and that's the way we must live now.

As for the Janitor he is still not entirely sure of the exact purpose of the machine, or what exactly the Projectionist does during his lone Sunday afternoon sessions. It is simply not a topic of discussion amongst the Greeks but it is obvious to all that whilst image fragments of general breakages circulate via the Usher's confectionary tray to the group of children who are assiduous collectors, there are some film sequences that are excised but which are never seen again.



Reel No.24. The Dorothy phantom.

The Children muse upon the portals between worlds.

As tradition dictates, everything stops on Wednesday at noon, the school closes, as do the handful of shops. Nothing ever happens past noon. The children traipse from the classroom towards the shade of the ancient trees that partially obscure the Town-hall to discuss the twin episodes of the previous Sunday — the report from the secret observation of the Projectionist and his bizarre electrical contraption and the simultaneous appearance of yet another phantom image in the marshes near the Dacha.

Finally, the *Penny has Dropped* offers the small freckled girl, nicknamed Dorothy on account of her obsession with Julie Garland, but no one understands this turn of phrase that she has picked up from her ancient Great-Grandmother. She brushes her mop of red hair back and explains that it means something obvious is finally revealed — the others continue to stare blankly at her.

Undaunted she suggests that each Sunday the Greeks laze in the *Café des Poètes* except for the Projectionist, he is never there because he is in the Projection room working the contraption. It is precisely at this same time, late on each Sunday afternoon, that the children slide down the gangway of the Dacha to head back up the hill towards the Old Town, that the strange phantoms images appear, hovering above the ponds. That is the Penny Dropping!

Hands fly up all around in a babble of voices eager to offer an opinion or pose a question but MGM holds aloft a page from her notebook, a series of drawings that record the moment that the Wicked Witch begins to dissolve in *The Wizard of Oz* as a result of a bucketful of water that Dorothy launches at her. This very instant coincided with a jam in the projector causing the Witch to freeze. At first, she bubbled with pustules, her ugly face distorting even more, then she boiled and finally she burnt away.



Figure 16. Madame N. Poltavseva.

But MGM points out that the phantom image on the previous Sunday afternoon was of Dorthy, bucket in hand and an arc of water flying across the pond, not the image of the dissolving Witch. Penny number two is about to hit the cobblestones! The children think back to all of the ethereal images that have flickered and drifted above the dark waters of the ponds. They are all associated with the death of a character, but none of them corresponds to the actual scene in the film.

The children's thoughts are frozen for a moment before they gradually thaw into a collective realisation that they have all been facing in the wrong direction, in fact exactly one hundred and eighty degrees in the wrong direction.

What is it that King Kong sees as he finally loses consciousness, releasing his grip on the spire of the tower and falling from the summit? Biplanes! What is it that Madame N. Poltavseva looks at in alarm as a bullet smashes through her new pince-nez? The smoke from a fusillade of Cossack rifles and the perambulator containing her grand-daughter Irena hurting towards her down the Odessa

Steps! What is it that the Muse in the film *Orphée* sees as she vanishes? The eyes of her beloved, *Orphée*, framed in the mirror of the black carriage!

So it is as Dorothy claimed — something obvious is revealed, at least the linkage between the alchemy worked by the Projectionist each Sunday afternoon and the corresponding ghostly images that inhabit the lakeside ponds. The rest, the motives, the mechanisms and the meaning remain a mystery. The tension is suddenly released by a poor rendition of;

If I only had a brain...

Laughter ensues as the conversation turns to ponder the Wizard film with its two intertwined worlds, one as if filmed in a warm moonlight, a soft earthy cast — the other world, perhaps only the blink of a rotary shutter away, is infused with the saturated colours of the jungle.

The boy Gort claims that the girl in pigtails must be related to the Poet as they can both sing like angels. The sharper children grin and point out that the half-men; the metal man who cannot find his heartbeat and who is perhaps related to Gort's robot namesake; the straw effigy man, who seems to function without a brain and the half-lion, half-man who is fainthearted, all manage to sing a lot too, so perhaps they are also cousins to *Orphée*? They joke that *Orphée* might come from the Munchkin village as they do nothing other than sing. Gort remains silent and crestfallen.

The Navigator turns the conversation to Dorothy's flying dacha that, inspired by the words of her flying song, takes to the skies and travels from the world of Kansas to the land of Oz and the Emerald City and when she decides to return home, all it takes is three clicks of her special red shoes. How the Navigator wonders aloud, can the doorways between worlds be so easy to open, by a song and the clicking of heels? Is it perhaps the powerful instinct to find the place

of origin, like a bird flying to its nesting tree or eels swimming across oceans to their watery birthing place — she thinks of a final image.

There's no place like home.

She thinks of her map, of the growing tracery of places that they have seen in the *Orpheum* and wonders if any of them might be home, their place of origin? She closes her eyes and imagines the mist swirling about a mass of helmeted warriors, bows in hand, their hard piercing stare sharper than their curved swords, poised but immobile. They come from another world, and they have been sent to yet another, but no song, no shoes could take her there — but all the same, they haunt her vision, they now exist within her. She glances at Gort, in his slow manner he too is thinking hard about home, or how he might find the right one. The Poet had kindled a flame of curiosity within him that now gnaws at him visibly, he is searching for a portal.



Reel No.25. The Return.

The Poet struggles with his loyalties and commits to a one-way ticket.

Light summer clouds gently sway in the afternoon sky as the Poet drifts in his hammock on the deck of the *Syracuse* — birds chatter in the forest canopy and the thick scent of creeper blossoms intoxicates the air — but his thoughts do not match this idyll. The Poet is adrift unable to find a holdfast. It is one thing to touch and feel the here and now, to pinch himself awake and be in the skin of the person cast up in this isolated town, the man who recently buried his wife in an abandoned cemetery — but there is something else submerged and just out of frame, out of focus — memories that will not swim to the surface.

It started with the images, those tiny monochrome slips of film that the children had shown him during their first encounter. At first, he imagined a doppelgänger, a body double or an impostor — but like dark water seeping under a doorway in a flood, he began to recall places, the fight in the café but especially the dark city and the pale woman with long raven black hair, now he is haunted by her alabaster skin and the coolness of her touch.

But he is aware that even deeper he has another existence, ancient and hard-worn, something full of sunlight and warmth, full of fragrance and melody but something he cannot reach, stifled behind heavy drapes.

Demons call to him from the forest canopy — should he talk to the Projectionist and request a private screening of Cocteau's *Orphée* before it disintegrates. To see himself as a sleepwalker trying to awake in a heavy dream; he can almost reach out and touch his double, he feels the pressure of the wall of liquid mercury crushing his fingers under the rubber gauntlets, he too can slide through the liquid gateway to the other side. He falls back in his hammock, half recognising, half remembering, his body dragging like an anchor through silt. His breathing is shallow and fast, his mind's eye veiled;

he pulls himself together quits the *Syracuse* and walks through the mangroves towards the old town.

He is standing beside his wife's grave in the tangle of the old cemetery, the shrub he planted has now grown so tall that he looks up at the pale yellow blossoms that mimic the colour of her hair — those golden strands now entwined with roots. He inhabits several beings at once, each one proposing an argument, an action to take, a path to follow. A flickering of *déjà vu* suggests that he must follow the ancient path, the journey into darkness and the return into the light but the ending of this story is obscure, something is wrong here. Then he hears the numbers

38; 39; 40 je répète, 38; 39; 40 je répète, 38; 39; 40

And he knows what he will do, her dark hair is calling him. He will petition the Projectionist and his attractive wife the Usher, he will request a very special favour, a once-in-a-lifetime favour.

He is sitting with the Projectionist as they run the film through the flatbed editing machine, watching the images dance on the poorly illuminated screen positioned between the two spools. There he exclaims, where my eyes meet hers, just for one-second. The Projectionist turns to him as if to confirm that this is really what he wants to do — this is a walk down a one-way street, no looking back, but the Poet is eager and resolute.

The Projectionist glances up at the Usher who is looking over his shoulder at the screen, she nods and the Projectionist picks up his shears and carefully cuts between two frames. He slowly counts 24 frames to the right and snips again, exactly one second, and the Poet exhales. In two days, at precisely 5 pm on Sunday, the Projectionist will carefully place the 24 frames, that depict the character *Orphée* staring into the eyes of the mysterious dark-haired woman, into his spinning contraption — the Poet well knows the routine and the consequences.

The Poet has thirty hours to go, and he must put things in order. The Projectionist has simply asked him to lie in his hammock aboard the *Syracuse* on Sunday afternoon and advised him to avoid a heavy lunch. Before this enforced siesta he will arrange to visit the children after the Sunday Matinee has concluded and invite them to visit the *Syracuse* at sunset that evening. Although he cannot reveal his plans he wants to make a final gesture toward them, a little gift. Since his arrival he has been writing observations in the ship's half-filled log book, he also has a good brass compass, and some recent maps from his journey here, even the key to the coordinates for the City of Paris and directions to the entrance to the underworld as shown in Cocteau's film. Perhaps they will find these things useful.

On Sunday morning, as he bids them farewell, he urges them to monitor the low-lying ponds in the late afternoon when they quit the Dacha and before they visit the *Syracuse*. Then he returns to his vessel and assembles the logbook, the compass and maps and writes down the full set of coordinates for that other *Café des Poètes*, his country villa and the entrance to the underworld. He leaves these items on the chart table in the ship's wheelhouse, knowing that the children will find them that evening. With a quick glass of schnapps and the Poet lowers himself into the hammock and drifts into a deep slumber.

He is travelling in a large vehicle, panelled in walnut with soft brown leather upholstery, it is dark and he is sweating. Lying between him and a beautiful woman is a young and handsome man, whom he realises is injured, and unconscious. They are rushing to a hospital when the woman fixes him with sombre regard and he knows instinctively that the young man is dead and that they are going somewhere else. All of a sudden policemen are riding huge black motorcycles on either side of the vehicle, he is seized by panic, but the two outriders roar off ahead leaving a pall of dust behind them. The vehicle has vanished as has the dead man. He is standing in a dark place surrounded by crumbling walls, a woman dressed in black is approaching him, he recalls a faint smile — his heart is racing.



Figure 17. The Black Limousine.

As the smile fades he encounters the Gypsy, rather a new version of the Gypsy, clean-shaven, youthful and also smiling, who extends his hand in greeting and beckons the Poet to join and follow him. He finds himself seated on the polished deck planks of the raised steering platform, his feet swinging gently as the vessel rolls with the following swell, before him forty or more bronzed torsos, sinews cracking as they pull against the long oars. In the distance he can hear extraordinarily beautiful female voices calling, he wants to leap over the side and swim to them but his fingers have responded involuntarily — brushing against strings. In a trice he too is singing, a haunting mysterious melody that has captured the ears, eyes and souls of everyone on board. On he sings, louder and louder, on and on he strokes the strings of his lyre. He can no longer hear the intoxicating song of the women, the ship races forward, ploughing a furrow through the glittering blue sea, escaping the terminal embrace of the *Syrens*.

The bow lifts and then plunges, a ball of spray jolts him awake. The Poet is blinded by the white-hot afternoon sun, he tries to raise his hand to shield his eyes but is overcome by a swirl of vertigo, his hands stay clenched on the edges of the hammock, nausea surging through him. The sun is spinning faster and faster, searing an afterimage through his eyelids he holds on, terrified as the hammock gyrates wildly.

Then nothing — no fire, no sound, he blinks, tries to grasp the hammock, feel for the solid deck beneath him, but nothing. He

touches his hands together and then feels his face, yes he is still in one piece but for the moment stalled, floating in nothingness.

Gradually out of the shapeless murk something begins to consolidate, a figure and close at that, a pair of dark eyes, a hand moves toward him and gently touches his left shoulder, he has a glimmer of recognition, he knows this face.

Late afternoon — the children have finished their meeting and slowly slither down the gangplank and into the mangrove to scan the watery depressions as the Poet had suggested. They sit around quietly in small groups to survey the four ponds, brushing away buzzing insects and talking quietly about the matinee they had attended that morning — a Mosfilm about tractors and steamships — hard to imagine how people made these things or why indeed they wanted them, but that was all ancient history.

The boy with the wrist clock lifts the leather covering and consults the dial, the small arrow is on the fifth mark and the big arrow approaches upright when a cry from the adjacent pond draws the expectant group together. There, floating in the haze two unblinking dark eyes gaze towards them, turned slightly upward, then smiling lips begin to form and finally the oval of a female face, not instantly recognisable, but somehow familiar. She hangs flickering in and out of focus as the mist eddies through the image. Then slowly she begins to withdraw, cheeks first, then lips and finally the dark eyes diminish and dissolve. The children look at one another in mild puzzlement, no one can put a name to this partial apparition. They decide to visit the Poet on the *Syracuse* and ask his opinion.

As has become customary the Navigator signals with a whistle, but there is no response, a second shrill but again silence. The children swarm up the rope net and clamber onto the deck, the ship is as quiet as a grave. Gort lifts a hatch and gingerly makes his way below deck but encounters only a jumble of decayed lockers, unhinged doors and mouldy cables, no sign of life below. The Poet's hammock swings gently in the slight breeze as the Navigator makes for the wheelhouse which is surprisingly clean and orderly, with

neatly stacked cooking utensils, a box of clean and folded clothes and on the chart desk a small bundle tied in twine with a note:

*To the Navigator and crew.
38; 39; 40 je répète, 38; 39; 40*

The children crowd around the chart table as the Navigator unpicks the knot and smooths out the wrapping cloth, revealing an old leather-bound log book, a fine brass sighting compass on a lanyard, several maps enveloped in a transparent case and another note from the Poet.

My young friends, I hope I will not have disappointed you but with the assistance of the Projectionist I have returned home, well to one of my homes and one of my roles. It has been a difficult choice for me and I am sad to say goodbye in this manner but the die was cast and fate has had its way.

I am sure that you had already realised that I was only a temporary visitor to this place and that my world is linked to that of the migrants who operate the Orpheum. A word of caution, they are not who they might seem and although you have nothing to fear from them, you cannot easily enter their realm.

I have left you the physical coordinates to some of the places in the film Orphée — I speak the truth when I say that they exist in reality but I imagine they now lie under many fathoms of water. Good luck with your journeys.

Orpheus.



Reel 26. The Children's Strategy.

*The Navigator discovers a secret Atlas
and the Children invent a new game.*

The Poet has vanished into thin air, his sudden departure disturbs their world which until now has placed the *Orpheum* at the centre of the old town and the old town at the centre of the universe. He has left behind the endless lake, the mangroves, the crumbling elegance of the town square, his temporary home on the abandoned steam yacht — the body of his wife and even perhaps his own. The Poet has crossed over from the physical world into the world of the shadows that flicker through the *Orpheum* and beyond into the Aether — a place of phantoms, signed off by a pair of piercing beautiful eyes hovering in the mist for a few minutes. The vacuum he has created resides in the mind of each child — inextricably drawing them toward a destiny they can sense but not yet describe.

The Navigator begins to imagine a map that charts several worlds simultaneously. She pictures the roll of the dice and the chequered board dotted with snakes and ladders that they so often play in the Dacha. In her mind's eye she sees a stack of boards — snakes writhing and ladders propped between each level — players' counters tumbling from one universe to the next or climbing the rungs into the attic of the unknown.

From now on she will focus her energies on monitoring the Gypsy's visits to the town library, based on her hunch that the Gypsy and his travels to the outer world may provide them with a trajectory, a plan and a point of departure.

She follows him to the library and at a safe distance secludes herself well out of sight to observe as he approaches a massive mahogany bookcase full of folio-sized tomes. He looks around and reassured that the library is empty gently flexes his toes to glide upwards to the decorative cornice of the bookcase. Bending forward he grasps a huge folio and in a cloud of dust, pulls it from its hiding place, then

effortlessly drifts back to the floor placing the folio onto a reading table. He stands to admire the volume and then lifts back the heavy binding to reveal a brightly coloured Atlas.

The Navigator struggles to suppress a gasp as she squints from between the two stout volumes of *The Colonial Gardeners Manual*. From her vantage point, she can briefly see the pages as they slowly turn under the Gypsy's hand but she cannot make out any detail. He pauses, picks up a pen, or is it a brush and begins to draw onto the map. He does this on a series of pages, seeming to make cross-references as he moves the leaves back and forth, annotating as he goes.

After more than an hour he appears satisfied and closes the covers with a gentle thump and a corresponding swirl of dust. Once more he makes a careful scan of the library and assured that he is alone, takes up the volume and slowly floats to the top of the bookcase supporting the heavy object in the palm of one hand, as might a professional waiter balancing a tray of glasses brimming with champagne. When he is level with the top of the bookcase he slides the Atlas back into its hiding place. Floating back to the floor the Gypsy once more surveys the library reading room and then quietly pads to the entrance — thoughts of his next journey musing on his next journey.

When all is quiet the Navigator creeps from her concealed position to look up at the bookcase that reaches almost to the mouldings of the double-storey ceiling. She realises that the only way she can consult the tome is to climb the seven or eight vertical paces and examine it in situ as it is doubtless almost as big as she and twice her weight.

Wiping her palms on her shorts she grasps the first of the heavy mahogany shelves and with a spring launches herself toward the second. Past volumes of classical literature, past two shelves of poetry, and a miscellany of leather-bound Latin and Greek texts she finally surmounts the finial carvings and sprawls into a soft layer of book dust that stings her nostrils. Suppressing a sneeze she edges

towards the Atlas and wedges herself against the wall. Bracing her feet against the carved edging of the bookcase she heaves open the cover which thankfully just clears the ceiling. The Atlas, the first she has ever encountered, is a marvel. The world as it once must have been, passes before her eyes, places long gone, shorelines reconfigured, valleys drowned, forests burnt and then the Gypsy's pages.

Heavy with annotation, blue washes over green land, new coastlines and on the endless waterbodies veins of thin dark blue lines, a webwork of voyages leading to bright red circles that rise out of the blue expanse — these she realises must be settlements, but settlements situated on mountains, high ranges and plateaux. The Navigator is in a trance of wonder, mesmerised by the tracteries of the Gypsy's hand, until her eyes are riveted by the image of a white swan with a crown encircling its neck and the word *Orpheum*. There, at the tip of a narrow isthmus that protrudes into a vast expanse of blue is the town, no name, just the word *Orpheum*. To the landward side a sinuous mountain ridge runs northward to eventually cross a heavy black line marked *Uninhabitable* — this she guesses is the zone of perpetual violent electrical storms and polar hurricanes that the old people talk about.

She pulls a scrap of paper and a graphite stick from her pocket and begins a rough copy, noting the names and approximate locations of the red circles that are nearest to the place marked *Orpheum*.

Kislovodsk
Vladinavkaz
Pristina
Sofia
Davos
Tyrnyauz
Smolijan
Zenenchuiskaya
Tomislargrad
Karachayevsk

Zakopane
Jaca
Gheorgheni

But nowhere can she see Skull Island, Washington Direct Current or Spiderweb Castle. Several pages later she finds New York and Kansas — they are covered in a deep blue wash.

Turning the pages further she discovers a blot, still damp from the Gypsy's brush, a prominent red circle with the text *Lhasa* and close by *Norbulinka*, around the latter a maze of blue lines and calculations and notes in an unintelligible script and the number 1950. She counts the pages *Lhasa* is seven pages of mostly blue away from the *Orpheum* page, she calculates there are at least twenty red dots close to the direct route. Is this the Gypsy's new voyage she wonders? The Navigator works quickly, making a series of sketches and notes, pages covered in question-marked comments and she leaves the Library just as the evening begins to darken into night.

Snakes and Ladders — at the Navigator's suggestion, the children erect a second table in the salon, reclaiming it from one of the many dank unused and unusable rooms of the dacha, their hands powdered with the pale green dust of mould. They pile their work materials at one end of the work table and under the instructions of the navigator begin to make a series of facsimiles of their tattered Snakes and Ladders board. Gort takes two of the others, Dorothy and Belmondo, out into the forest to collect suitable sticks for the construction project — some straight and others exceptionally sinuous.

Using knives salvaged from the *Syracuse* they cut and trim young bamboo canes and disentangle sections of twisted jungle creeper that are attempting to strangle the smaller trees. They also strip fibre threads from Cabbage Palm fronds for bindings and gather the deep orange sap from hardwood trunks which acts as a strong adhesive. On their return to the dacha, they find the card chequer-boards cut and already coloured with a series of charcoal and red ochre squares. Another hour of intensive group activity is required to

mount the three oversized gaming boards one above the other. Each layer is supported by eight small but sturdy bamboo ladders which are complimented by twelve twisting snakes — the chatter amongst the children produces multiple versions of the rules that will be required to play this new game, who goes up or down and how?



Figure 18. Three dimensional Snakes and Ladders.

The children are eager to test the new game but before they get absorbed in this pastime the navigator lays out a sheet of coarse paper with the series of settlement names.

Kislovodsk
Vladinavkaz
Pristina
Sofia
Davos
Tyrnyauz
Smolijan
Zenenchuiskaya
Tomislargrad
Karachayevsk
Zakopane
Jaca
Gheorgheni

Then she recounts the story of the Atlas and the inexplicable abilities of the man they call the Gypsy. The group listen wide-eyed, King and Kong maintain a semaphore of eye contact as the Narrator describes the Atlas, the annotations showing places that escaped the inundation and the remarkable slighting of the *Orpheum's* Swan banner. King and Kong have concluded that today's two events, the novel version of Snakes and Ladders and the revelation concerning the Atlas are related and more than just symbolically.

Kong points to the three layers of the gaming board, in turn, uttering a single word each time her index finger grazes the cardboard edge of each layer.

Orpheus
The Poet
Orphée

Gort, who has been despondent since the man with the golden voice has vanished, instantly looks up at the board and something falls into place for him. The Poet, the singer on the wrecked boat, the man he so admired; *Orphée* the same man but a mere fiction in celluloid and Orpheus a fairytale character from the mists of time, somehow related to the Greek refugees at the *Orpheum*. They are one and the same, they are, at this very moment circulating somewhere on this games board, slipping down the smooth scales of snakes from the here and now into some other world, then climbing, grasping the rungs of ladders into another time and another place — perhaps he is everywhere at once. For the first time in weeks Gort feels the knot of anxiety that inhabits his neck dissolve, he moves his head from one side to another with an audible crack — King and Kong conclude they are on the right track.



Reel No 27. The Gypsy visits the Dali Lama.

The Gypsy and the Man with a Movie Camera journey east.

ཨ་མ་ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ཁྱོད་

Despite the heat, the Gypsy is dressed in a long black riding coat of waxed cotton, as usual, he is unshaven and with a faraway look in his eyes. He is standing at the end of a rickety wooden landing where his long pitch-covered boat lies. He looks out across the still waters of the lake — looks at nothing more than that place where the water becomes the sky. Exhaling gently as if releasing a thought, he bends to untie the coarse fibre line that tethers his craft and steps aboard. Taking up the pole he propels the craft out into the lake until the town falls astern and is subsumed in the heat haze. Clear of the eyes of the townsfolk he stows the pole and makes himself comfortable in the boat as she begins to defy gravity and time. He grins, thinking of Helios and his daily chore, driving the sun chariot across the sky; at first, it must have been an exciting prospect for the young man but surely the novelty of eternal circumnavigation would have quickly palled?

The Gypsy allows himself to be rocked to sleep, his head resting on a canvas rucksack and his boots up on the thwart, time passes, time is of no object and time is of course relative! He finally awakes as his boat nudges against something firm, opening his eyes he encounters two broad grinning faces surmounted by bright yellow haloes, and he grins back. Arms are outstretched and the Gypsy is assisted from his boat by the smiling men and set down on the shore of a small island in an ornamental lake. Taking in the view he notes that there are three islands, each surmounted by a Palace and each linked to the shore by a stone bridge. The lake is surrounded by orchards in full blossom and alive with the twittering of small birds. The Gypsy breathes in the scent, the air is thin with a cool edge to it, quite unlike the heavy moisture-laden atmosphere of the Old Town, he breathes deeply again — the men in the broad yellow fur hats continue to smile politely.

His two hosts respectfully indicate that he should remove his boots and as soon as he is barefoot they bid him follow through the luxuriant gardens to a small guest house where he is shown to a well-appointed room. Here an ancient woman, her features tanned and wrinkled, serves him warm tea laced with sour butter, the Gypsy feigns pleasure which naturally prompts the old lady to pour him more. When she is satisfied that he is satisfied, she leads him to the adjacent bath-house, motions to a set of colourful garments laid out on the daybed and then to the tub of steaming water — the Gypsy follows her orders with an obedient nod.

The news of his arrival has spread through the Palace like wildfire and rumours spread that he is either an otherworldly visitor or a sinister agent of subversion — how otherwise could he have appeared out of nowhere, floating in his boat on the ornamental lake in the south-western corner of the Norbulinka Summer Palace; itself ringed by massive walls and set atop of Parkori Peak? In due course a trio of elegantly dressed officers sporting mustachios pay the Gypsy a visit, they sit around a low circular brass table set for tea and try out a series of different languages, Tibetan, Chinese, French, German and finally English. The Gypsy indicates that he is fluent in the last three but will converse in English as the officers appear to be extremely proficient in this tongue.

A series of pleasantries ensure that avoid direct questions but gradually a jigsaw image forms in the minds of the three Intelligence Officers confirming to their professional chagrin that their visitor is neither a foreign spy nor a terrorist or even a confidence trickster. Rather he would seem to be a Cinema enthusiast who also has extensive knowledge of the Tibetan concept of Bardo. They depart in a flurry of smiles and handshakes, mildly disappointed that they will have no opportunities to ply their spycraft. As they take their leave they assure him that the appropriate representatives of the Palace will visit him shortly.

A day later and an even more elaborately dressed pair of Officers request that the Gypsy follow them immediately but decline to state their destination. On impulse, the Gypsy carries with him his bulky

Rucksack. During their circuitous route the two point out the various features of the Summer Palace including the famous East Gate with its two Snow Lion statues covered in white silk *Khatas*. His guides reel off a list of ancient dates associated with the various phases of buildings and the terrible period of destruction when the Heavenly Empire of China invaded, forcing the fourteenth Dali Lama to escape to Pakistan — long ago, in 1959, the year of the Pig. They explain that he lived in exile for some time before being reinstated after the Heavenly Empire itself descended into internal political turmoil and collapsed due to a series of allegedly natural disasters generally referred to as the *plague of the chain reaction*.

A harsh clash of brass and a powerful blast of horn that shakes the gut — all heads are bowed. A richness of vermillion fabric and a shimmer of gold fill the Palace interior, and there, perched on a velvet cushion at the summit of a tall Dias, sits a young boy, dressed in simple ochre robes, beaming down at the Gypsy. Solemn texts are chanted, more horns are discharged followed by more chanting — then a tiny voice:

Okay.

The young man looks at his aides, to the left and then to the right, ushering them from the great hall with a simple gesture of his out-turned palms. The rustle of fabric and the padding of bare feet on polished wood fades to leave the boy and the Gypsy alone. They look at one another with curiosity, and with the reverse motion of his palms, the boy bids the Gypsy approach. They sit together on the cushioned Dias absorbing one another's presence in silence. Then the Gypsy unlaces his rucksack and presents the boy with six polished zinc canisters.

They sit side by side in the centre of the middle row of the cinema waiting for the monk in the projection booth to lace up the film. The boy is excited to be back in this small auditorium and explains that the Norbulinka cinema is one hundred and twenty-eight years old. Built by an Austrian mountain climber for his predecessor the

fourteenth Dali Lama who was a real film buff and who gave his foreign friend Heinrich a film camera to make documentaries on Ice Skating and traditional Tibetan festivals. Heinrich had escaped to Tibet from the British Raj in India and stayed in Lhasa for several years powering the antique projectors left by the British with an old gasoline motor salvaged from a Jeep — he was good with machines. The glass scallop-shaped lamps that stud the walls dim and the screen comes to life.

Человек с кино-аппаратом

The Gypsy has presented the Seventeenth Dali Lama with a virgin print of *The Man with a Movie Camera*, now one hundred and forty-nine years old which he found sealed in a coffer in the Mechanics Cooperative Workers Club of Tomislargrad. The film was never shown, he found the six zinc canisters sealed with grease and unopened, the print in perfect condition. The Mosfilm is silent and preceded by a series of titles.

Man with a Movie Camera
A six-reel record on film
Produced by VUFKU in 1929
excerpt from a camera operator's diary
ATTENTION VIEWERS
This film is an experiment
in cinematic communication
of real events
Without the help of inter-titles
Without the help of a story
Without the help of theatre
This experimental film aims at creating
a truly international language
of cinema based on its absolute separation
from the language of theatre and literature

His Holiness, as the Gypsy has been instructed to call him, is glued to the screen, capturing every detail of the opening sequences of the film. The Gypsy glances down at the boy's hands, the seventeenth Dali Lama is counting off each and every camera angle and edit, shuffling the Bodhi seeds of his Mala bracelet with a complex series of finger movements. Then the penny drops, the boy has an Eidetic memory, and his gestures are mnemonic codes.

- ◆ A frontal view of an antique film camera, with wooden housing with a single brass lens and hand crank — fills the screen.
- ◆ A diminutive cameraman hauls a tripod surmounted by a similar camera and sets up a shot on top of the giant camera, and films something off-screen to the right.
- ◆ Image of a building.
- ◆ The cameraman takes his equipment and disappears from the summit of the massive camera.
- ◆ The cameraman takes his equipment and disappears through some large drapes.
- ◆ View of a theatre interior from the rear showing a draped proscenium arch.
- ◆ Side view of theatre seating.
- ◆ View of theatre seating from the stage.
- ◆ A series of close-up details of a theatre interior.
- ◆ Close-up side view of a film projector.
- ◆ Close-up as Projectionist approaches machine.
- ◆ Close-up of a shiny film canister.
- ◆ Close-up of hands opening canister and removing film roll.
- ◆ Close-up of lacing film.
- ◆ Close-up of hand-pulling cord and seats folding down.
- ◆ Close-up of film on sprockets.
- ◆ Close-up of hands removing rope barriers.
- ◆ Ariel shot of an audience entering theatre.
- ◆ Seats folding down.
- ◆ Audience filling an auditorium.
- ◆ Side view of four rows of seats folding down.

- ◆ View of audience milling in an auditorium.
- ◆ Close-up of a single seat folding down then occupied by an adult with a child, the child looks at the camera.
- ◆ Wide shot of an audience from the screen.
- ◆ Detail shot of the theatre chandelier dimming.
- ◆ A series of shots of musicians.
- ◆ Close-up of a Trumpet and hands.
- ◆ Close-up of a French horn.
- ◆ Close-up of a Saxophone.
- ◆ Close-up of the bow on Cello.
- ◆ Wide shot of an orchestra pit and Conductor.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Double Bassist.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Trombone.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Percussionist.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Violinist.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Trombonist.
- ◆ Tight shot of two Violinists.
- ◆ Close-up of carbon arc electrodes drawing close to one another.
- ◆ Tight shot of the Projectionist adjusting position of electrodes.
- ◆ Close-up as an arc strikes in a ball of light.
- ◆ A tight shot of the Projectionist adjusting arc illuminated strongly.
- ◆ Close-up of the arc.
- ◆ Close-up of the Projectionist.
- ◆ Tight shot of the Conductor with rapid arm movements.
- ◆ Tight shot of the Trombonist working slide.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Violinist bowing and fingering.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Trombonist.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Violinist.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Percussionist beating kettle drums.
- ◆ Tight shot of the Saxophonist mouthing reed.
- ◆ Tight shot of a Double Bassist bowing.
- ◆ Wide shot of the orchestra pit in action.
- ◆ Close-up of the film running over sprockets.

- ◆ Tight shot of the conductor in action.
- ◆ Fade to black.
- ◆ The numeral 1 appears centre screen.
- ◆ Image of a window, dolly shot towards the interior.

The Dali Lama turns to the Gypsy with a grin, comments that now the fifty-seven shots that comprise the prelude are concluded, and now that we, the audience have been instructed in the mechanisms of cinema production and consumption, the film can start!

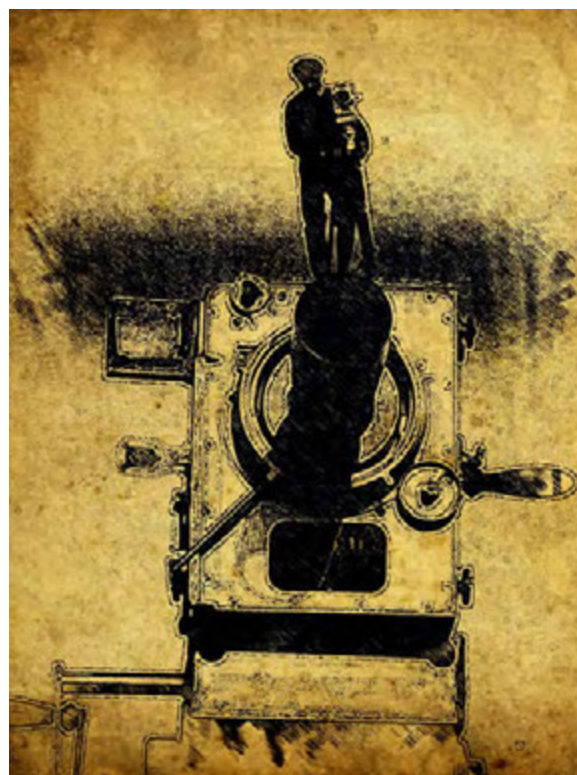


Figure 19. A Man with a Movie Camera.

The Gypsy drifts back to the *Orpheum* and the Projectionist's wild claims for his two muscular projectors *Der Rot Czar* and *Die Dicke Berthe* and his insistence on their capacity to memorise every image that whirs past the sprockets and flashes through the gate. The Projectionist is convinced that they possess a photographic memory and are therefore the keepers of the past and arbiters of the future. Having a special relationship with time the Gypsy is open-minded about these claims, can these machines of brass and steel, glass and

electricity have sentience? Maybe so, or maybe it is just the Projectionist who rolls the dice of chance and fate.

The boy is visibly energised by the frantic stream of images and layers of superimposition — the camera is ubiquitous, an all-seeing glass eye rendering life transparent and exposed, available for all to scrutinise. Unlike his own serene surroundings, the man with the movie camera lives in a vast city, one that slowly wakes each morning. The glass eye peers at sleeping citizens, laid out on benches, in parked Landaus, in gardens, even at rows of identical infants, the pudgy larvae of factory workers.

First to awake are the machines; aeroplanes roll out of the hangars, trams from their sheds, busses from the depots — gangs of stokers energetically shovel coal into furnaces causing the chimneys to belch — pouring the life-blood into the wires and pipes that fuel the metropolis. By now the Cameraman is ready for work, a large open-top automobile picks him up and carries him away under bridges, over railroad tracks, to race along the wide boulevards, all the while he cranks the handle of his camera, absorbing every aspect of the living city.

He cranks and he films — movement — crowds that surge around city squares, trams that snake between the masses, the spinning bobbins of textile mills and the muscular steel joints of industrial machines. A series of 35 mm film frames, the faces of children, strips of cine-film festooned down a wall-mounted light-box, then film spinning across the editing bed. In a dark room a woman scrutinises a sequence, her shears cut between frames and the segment is spooled into a tight coil.

The frenetic work of fingers — fingers that connect cables across telephone switchboards, fingers that pack cigarettes into cardboard cartons, fingers that type, faster and faster, intercut with, fingers cranking film cameras, fingers sharpening razors and meat cleavers, and fingers spinning the flywheel of a sewing machine, faster and faster.

The man with the movie camera takes a tour of coal mines, factories, foundries and hydro-dams — he flies high above the dam spillway in a wooden gondola, and nothing escapes his view. As the steel flank of a steamship slowly pulls away from the quayside its banner proclaims.

Defend the security of the Soviet State.

He cuts to images of soviet beauties sunning themselves at the beach, legs, toes, beach callisthenics, and swimmers. Then onto the Proletarian Film Theatre, next a Bier Halle, and the V.I. Ulianov's Workers Club in Odessa — where men play chess, chequers, read newspapers and women shoot carbines at Uncle Fascism targets, then take pot-shots at crates of empty long-neck beer bottles. In the Lenin Club Yalta with its sign proclaiming The First Five Year Plan the camera regards a loud-speaker, and a man operating radio valve equipment. The circular form of the speaker transforms into a miniature screen presenting at first an accordion, then an ear, followed by a piano keyboard and a finally a singer's mouth, bathing the men and women who are peacefully playing chess and chequers, in a sea of musical delights — a silent film dreaming of a noisy world.

Then the camera performs on its own, the tripod walks about until the camera box slides along the bench and opens its lid. The tripod draws itself up to its full height and then squats down to allow the camera to slide onto its mount, where it performs a display of all of its functions in a coquettish manner.

It all becomes clear in the final scenes, a big city square crammed with masses of people — towering over them stalk two three-legged aliens, their huge machinic heads swaying back and forth absorbing the life energy of the crowd — No.17 looks earnestly into the eyes of the Gypsy and suggests to his new friend that this is an extraordinary story of the ordinary!

As they slowly walk back to the Palace the boy is piqued by his inability to discern the true nature of his enigmatic guest. He is a man who appears to occupy several beings simultaneously, rather than following the usual pattern of progress from one existence to the next in an unfolding sequence. For him, it appears that all the Bardos have fused permitting him a fluid transmigration between a fleshy form into a state of pure concentration, or perhaps sheer luminosity. Yet walking by his side is a palpable, ordinary man with grey stubble on his chin, a man who sits in cinemas, who eats and sleeps and plays chequers. The boy, who is himself the reincarnation number seventeen, is impressed by his new friend from some distant world, who is somehow reminiscent of Heinrich Herrero — perhaps even Austrians can be reincarnated?

They have enjoyed endless hours of lighthearted conversation but the deeper exchanges have all been wordless. The boy smiles and places the white lustre of a Khatas around the Gypsy's neck. Then he presents four canisters secured with yellow silken cords, blessing both the Gypsy and the bundle for their safe homeward journey.

One final smile, accompanied by a little wave and the two take their leave. An entourage of chanting monks escorts the Gypsy to his boat, their prayer wheels whirling as they pace through the gardens. Stepping aboard the Gypsy stows the gift under a thwart and taking up his pole grins at the monks who continue their throaty tones. He poles the craft out into the centre of the lake to a point equidistant from the three islands with their castles and ornamental stone bridges — laying down his punting pole he waves at the throng on the shore and vanishes into thin air. As if they expected this exit the monks burst into laughter and wild applause, they imagine the *Sidpa Bardo* the karmic hallucination of rebirth that will deliver the Gypsy instantaneously to his destination.

The light glints through the crudely cut glass tumbler with its charge of sticky honey schnapps, held aloft in a toast by the Gypsy. His glass rings softly as it grazes that of the Projectionist and the Gypsy downs the contents in one and immediately purrs out an authentic rendition of;

Om Mani Padme Hum

The Projectionist rolls his eyes and wonders if the Gypsy has finally gone over to the other side, perhaps he is seeing too much of the world, taking in too many alternative perspectives? Still, he is intrigued by the gift from Number Seventeen as the Gypsy calls him — he has never viewed *On the Beach*.



Reel No.28. On the Beach.

The Children divine omens in the voyage of USS Sawfish.

Initially, the Children are disorientated by the press of men in a small room full of instruments, projectors perhaps, or items that the Scavengers might bring. Men talk into machines, then three sharp blasts of a trumpet and they are transfixed as water bubbles stream over the screen. A dark blade pierces the surface of the lake, emerging to reveal the codeword 623 — the Navigator scribbles it down quickly. Then there is an unrecognisable melody and endless names in scratchy lettering.

The ship is barely afloat, a slender blade slicing through the water, finally, it comes to land in a place called Melbourne — prompting the Navigators graphite stick to dance across her notebook.

There is no colour in this film and its story swings between people drinking infusions in bed, drinking schnapps and arguing, escaping in small sailing vessels and having loud and sometimes fierce conversations. There is no colour but there are many places — the children are busy writing them down:

Melbourne
Frankston
America
Iwo Jima
Manila
Australia
Rue de Rivoli
Port Barrow
San Diego
Bering Straits
San Fransisco
Alcatraz

Big towns are teeming with activity, crowds ply the streets on horseback, in horse-drawn vehicles, bicycles, the rest walking

quickly. Then in contrast there are towns, totally silent, empty of life, masquerading as architectural models.

The men are trapped inside the ship 623 and they can only see the world through metal tubes — they spy on deserted towns, empty harbours, sometimes they call aloud through another type of speaking tube, but no one listens to them, at least no one answers.

Only two men decide to leave the ship. One man wants to go fishing and swims ashore to find a little boat in which he sits quietly in the sun. He talks to the men trapped inside 623 who look at him and speak to him through the tubes that pierce the surface — the man is happy as he has caught a fish or two for his supper, 623 bids him good luck and farewell.

The other man who escapes from the ship is dressed in a Bee-Keepers costume and paddles ashore in a small boat made of inflated animal skin. The men inside 623 also watch him and sound a siren several times as if to speak to him or call him back. He leaves his skin boat and walks around the deserted harbour buildings that are full of machines that spin and hum — perhaps they are powering an enormous cinema in the city.



Figure 20. The Sawfish.

He enters a room in a school or library, there are papers and work tables but his interest is caught by a small glass flask tied by a lanyard to a curtain that flutters in the breeze. The small flask sits on top of a metal handle that clicks up and down. The sound catches

the interest of the Bee-Keeper who examines the glass flask and then begins to tap away at the metal handle. The men trapped in the ship listen to the stream of clicks and appear to understand it as a message, an alien language perhaps, maybe even an insect language.

Window shade tugging on a Coke bottle.

623 sends out a final siren blast in response to the frantic clicking and the Bee-Keeper decides to return to the ship, casting away his skin boat and costume when he arrives.

There are other men encased in smaller machines, each as noisy as a thousand Cicadas. They move extremely fast, each one chasing the others. These men all wear helmets and visors and hold onto circular handles for dear life. The children immediately think of the helmet-clad Projectionist and his Sunday evening activities. Then one of the children points out that these machines are probably smaller, angrier relatives of the black carriage that *Orphée* rides in although they lack the special voice speaking in numbers — only here each machine has a number painted on its side. The children watch as the machines collide with one another, rolling over and over, some burst into flames, what should they learn from this?

The woman who likes to drink alcohol and the man who lives in the metal ship 623 are good friends, perhaps they are man and wife? As the streets of the city slowly become emptier and emptier she decides to travel in her machine to the beach. The man climbs into 623 and sails it away from the land — she watches 623 as it pushes through the waves and disappears across the vast lake — they never meet again.

There is still time brother.

It has something to do with sickness, to do with an unravelling of the world, but nothing that the children can recognise. There is no violence, no visible catastrophe, only a mournful emptiness and a

sense of people calmly waiting for an exit. It is not the same in the Old Town, here life is simple, each day the same as the next, unfolding slowly and quietly. No one is haunted by ghosts of the past or by fear of the future. Are the men trapped inside 623 trying to send an omen?



Reel No.29. Two Incidents and a Vision.

The Box-office man steals an ancient vase; The Gypsy catches King red-handed and the Children witness a transformation.

Kong is still on the trail of the Box-office man, she scuttles from one dark pool of shade to the next as Haros shuffles slowly along past the town square towards the old museum, his dog leaving a trail of drool in the dust. The dog slumps in the relative cool of the marble portico as its master disappears into the building, Kong cautiously edges past the fearsome-looking beast, which merely follows her with its eyes and snorts.

Kong tiptoes through the entrance gallery with its troupe of marble statues, some with broken noses and one now headless, past the blackened skeleton of a fearsome sized crocodile and onward towards the antiquities gallery. She hovers at the entrance as she knows that Haros will be standing transfixed staring at the urn with the image of a riverboat and three figures, two men and one graceful woman who is about to board.

She hangs back discreetly just able to keep him in view past the other vitrines, but suddenly she hears the sharp crash of glass showering to the floor, next the sound of heavy footfalls fast approaching. Before she can move the Box-office man is face to face with her, the precious urn in his hands and a look of horror on his face at being caught red-handed.

Haros is working his jaw and lips in a semblance of speech but Kong can hear nothing, his shoulders are shrugging involuntarily and his eyes are wide — the urn is the still centre of a storm of confusion. Distraught, the Box-office man slumps onto the base of a stone column, cradling the urn in his arms he bumbles away in Greek. Kong squats next to him, her attention moving between the scene on the urn and the man's incomprehensible monologue. He keeps pointing to the tall figure standing on the prow of the vessel and pounding his heart with his right palm, shaking his head in time.

Kong brings the two images of the Box-office man together, the rather frightening gruff guardian of the *Orpheum* who demands small copper and silver pieces from everyone who enters and this unhappy whimpering soul torn apart from his true place in the world. Kong knows she is probably too young to understand this spectacle, too young by millennia maybe but now for the first time, she can see him guiding his longboat across a black river, a pale shade standing in its bow.

Haros looks up and nods at her in acknowledgement, a trace of a smile passing across his features. He sniffs, wipes his nose in the back of his hand and slowly stands up, hugging the vase as he would an infant; he shuffles out of the museum, his dog struggling to its feet to follow.

Kong walks into the hall of antiquities and stands in the patch of broken glass looking through the shattered pane at the empty vitrine — assured that she had not imagined the incident. The man Haros has claimed his past but has shown his hand to the child, he is no longer a source of fear but of wonder.

A mere three days later the Navigator visits the library for a second look at the Atlas, this time she has a new notebook and several sticks of graphite and ochre, ready to make accurate copies and notes from the Atlas. Again she wipes her palms dry on her shorts and launches herself towards the shelves laden with heavy tomes that have remained unopened for many years, carefully feeling for finger-holds as she ascends. Dropping over the decorative moulding that announces the top of the bookcase she settles into the dust next to the Atlas.

There are some new annotations since her first visit, a tracery of new routes that lead north of the red circle marked with the image of the white swan that she knows is the town. She wonders what it must be like to enter the zone of electrical storms, where does all that energy come from? Where does it go to? What does it eat? What eats it?

The Navigator is carefully measuring graphite stick lengths across the vast blue expanse of the enormous pages when she feels a quick tug at her left ankle, acting on reflex she pulls her feet up to her chin and twists her head to confront whatever creature has climbed up after her, expecting to see the yellow fangs of a tree monkey. The prospect of a nasty bite instantly recedes, instead, she freezes in panic under the steady gaze of the Gypsy who is hovering only inches from her. He reaches past her to close the cover of the huge volume and with one hand slides it towards him, the other hand grasps the Navigator's leather belt and gently lifts her over the sill of the bookcase and slowly glides downward with his two loads to the library floor, settling the volume in the reading table and the girl on the floor next to himself.

The Navigator, in full anticipation of the Gypsy's fury, tries to control her breathing and racing heartbeat but there is no tirade, the Gypsy just looks down at her with a grin. He opens up the Atlas to the page with the *Orpheum* and drops his right index finger on the red circle and winks at her. She is disarmed by his openness, as is he by her curiosity. They spend the next hour together pouring over the coastlines, drowned cities, mountaintop refuges and the traces of the Gypsy's voyages to distant ruins in search of abandoned archives and crumbling cinemas.

Made confident by his complete calmness the Navigator tells him of her own map that is slowly evolving in the ruined Dacha by the lakeside, and of the group of children who are gradually piecing together the story of King Kong, and SpiderWeb Castle, of the white whale Moby Dick and Dorothy of the flying dacha. The Gypsy gives her an indulgent but slightly quizzical smile and asks if he may visit their Dacha on the following Sunday — without thinking the Navigator agrees.

The Matinee session is about to begin, the children are in a huddle, Kong and the Navigator are whispering the details of their respective encounters with the Box-office Man and the Gypsy to looks of growing disbelief rapidly followed by alarm when the Navigator finally brings herself to mention the Gypsy's imminent

visit to the Dacha that very afternoon. Before a mutiny breaks out the lights dim and the screen bursts into life, suppressing any further discussion.

An ancient silent film scratches onto the screen the title is not English or Mosfilm, announcing:

La Voyage dans La Lune
Star Film
Paris 1902
Geo. Melies

Men wearing tall conical hats and wrapped in long gowns are gathering under the vaulted ceiling of a museum crammed with astronomical devices, astrolabes, distaffs and an enormously long telescope. Jauntily dressed girls parade in and out distributing telescopes to the assembly and in short order a lecture begins with the speaker gesticulating heavenward and drawing diagrams on the blackboard — a trajectory of sorts. It is impossible to deduce the reason but the entire assembly is agitated — finally amidst the commotion six of the men remove their robes and quickly depart the excited gathering, wearing their regular jackets and top hats.

The children think of the Janitor as the next scene takes place in a gigantic workshop, set under a glass roof. Centre stage men are hammering rivets into the metal plates that form the skin of a cylindrical machine that tapers to a point at one end; alongside men are working the anvil and carpenters are preparing timber. Into this hive of activity step the six men, who interrupt the work to inspect the structure, climbing in and out of it, talking to the workmen and generally disturbing their labour. They are then led up to the roof of the workshop, a skyline of chimneys belching fume and vapour; here the men raise their telescopes to the heavens and wave their arms at the sky.

The machine is complete and positioned next to the breech of a huge cannon that points heavenward — the six men prance around next to the craft, they doff their hats, bow, and as is their habit, wave their

arms about. A girl in a sailor outfit helps the men climb into the machine, closes the hatch and removes the wooden stepladder. Next, a team of ladies in identical sailor suits form a chorus line, pushing the projectile shaped craft into the bore of the enormous cannon, their task completed they turn to face the audience and wave their hats excitedly.

The children see that all is ready, the cannon aims for the stars, a troupe of sailor girls mount the platform with a flag flanked by two trumpeters who play a silent fanfare — finally, a sailor climbs up to the breech-block and lights a fuse; a sudden puff of smoke and the distant moon appears like a shining disc.

The disc begins to grow in size and soon reveals a melancholy face — the projectile plunges directly into the right eye of the Moon causing it to wince and causing some creamy substance to trickle down the Moon's sad cheek — this is immediately followed by a close-up of the craft coming to rest in a fantastical rocky landscape. The hatch opens and the six men emerge in their top hats, each brandishing an umbrella. They stand, backs to the audience, admiring a spectacular Earth rise over the contorted moon rocks.

After narrowly avoiding an explosive geyser of steam and flame the men are overcome by fatigue and lay down to sleep. Travelling from stage right to stage left a shooting star passes over them as they dream, then the seven stars that form the Plough appear, a human face smiling down from each star — another vision, a star adorned with two women, a woman sitting on a crescent moon like a trapeze artist and the planet Saturn, someone leaning from the planet's core onto its rings — collectively they cause a deluge to fall on the sleeping men — perhaps stardust or possibly snow, as when they awake they stamp about and flap their arms in an attempt to keep warm.

Now the adventure begins in earnest as the party climb down a crevice into an underground cavern — an underworld of fungal growth. The lead astronomer plants his umbrella and it immediately grows into a mushroom the size of a small tree, which triggers the



Figure 21. The Moon Landing.

appearance of a Moonman — a creature with a striped carapace and a multi-spiked head. The Moonman dances about on all fours until one of the men beats him with an umbrella and he vanishes in a puff of smoke; another creature bounds up and he is dealt with in the same manner, ending in a puff of smoke.

Then from stage right, a hoard of angry Moonmen storm the scene giving chase to the Earthmen, who are next seen rope-bound and man-handled into the court of the King of the Moon. The King sits on his throne, flanked by two Moongirls and attended by spear holding guards, all have striped carapaces and shard covered heads.

The King angrily berates the six explorers who are paraded before him, their hands tied behind their backs — but one of the Earthmen breaks loose, he rushes towards the throne flailing his arms in the air, lifts the King above his head and dashes him to the ground. The inevitable happens, a large explosion of smoke and the King is no more, the Earthmen flee — stage left — followed by a hue and cry of spear-carrying and very hostile Moonmen.

The last of the fleeing men put up a brave fight, dispatching two Moonmen with his umbrella, he dashes to the Projectile which is perched precariously on the edge of an abyss, closing the hatch on his five comrades who have made it inside the craft. Quickly before the war party catches up, he dives for a rope and slides over the precipice, tugging hard to dislodge the machine; a Moonman in the vanguard leaps onto the rear of the machine with such force that

finally it overtops the cliff and falls headlong into the ocean far below. The children are delighted as the Projectile plunges beneath the waves, passing medusae, fish and newts to hit the bottom alongside the wreck of a sailing ship. The craft then bobs to the surface and the next thing they see is a twin funnelled paddle steamer towing the craft into harbour, the six men sitting on top of the hull waving wildly to celebrate their escape. In the closing sequences the success of the voyage is celebrated by an official parade, with a team of uniformed girls pulling the Projectile on a float, which is decorated with tresses of flowers and a placard proclaiming:

Star Films Paris

They are followed by a platoon of girls, rifles at sloped arms escorting the six intrepid explorers who return the exuberant greetings of the crowds. One by one the men are greeted by the Mayor who places a garland of flowers on each man's head. They are extremely pleased with themselves, especially so when their captured Moonman, who must have clung onto the craft throughout the escape, is roughly bought in by two sailors and paraded in front of the cheering crowd.

FIN

Sitting in a small circle under the shade of a Bougainvillea tree Dorothy and King finish their précis of the *Le Voyage dans la Lune* which has confused the children in several ways. Even the Navigator has not seriously considered the possibility of sky travel, for her the only possible movement is across the surface of land or water; mostly water. Now the children remind her of the silver flying machine piloted by Klaatu and Gort and of course Dorothy's flying dacha — at this point, King holds up her notebook full of flying machine sketches — so there may be something of the truth in this? Gort is sad, worried by the fate of the Moonmen who so easily succumbed to the violence of the scientists and were so easily destroyed by the swipe of an umbrella — and what if they should travel here, would they be seeking revenge? Belmondo pipes up

with the date 1902, he has quickly calculated the one hundred and seventy-six-year gap between then and now and suggests that the threat of an invasion of Moonmen has long passed, and perhaps also the possibility of travel across the sky, Gort nods quietly and a smile returns to his face.

The children make their way down the sloping lanes toward the lake's edge — the Navigator's only justification for inviting the Gypsy to the Dacha is based upon their previous friendship with the poet *Orphée* but even so the children are nervous about the impending encounter and needle her with a string of concerns.

They sit in the cool pallid green light of the Dacha, listening to the whirring of tree frogs and water lapping against the lower storey of the building, an aromatic scent fills the room from the small burners placed at each window, a deterrent against the striped swamp mosquitoes which would otherwise render the slowly dissolving wooden building uninhabitable. For once they sit in silence, waiting, each child unsure of this encounter, trying to imagine who the Gypsy might be.

Then without a sound the light of the entrance dims, obscured by a figure that fills the timber frame. The Gypsy steps quietly into the room, pauses, smiles and makes a little bow. As one, the children stand, as he approaches and as one they all sit when Kong offers the tall stranger a chair at the end of their long table. Slowly he takes the room in, his eyes finally coming to rest upon the large map composed of paper name places and trailing threads of connections and routes. He stands and approaches the pale hand-painted wall covering, a faded vision of a former era, with its sparkling blue water, paddle steamers and happy relaxed holiday-makers on the promenade, now a backdrop to the imagination of these children, an imagination fuelled by the contents of the grey canisters he brings in from the ruins.

He catches the eye of the Navigator and asks two simple questions:

Where is it that you want to go?

What is it that you want to find?

These are not questions that the children can collectively answer easily — firstly it would be useful to find out exactly where they are! Perhaps then what has happened? Perhaps who the Gypsy and his friends, the other Greeks, really are and why they had come here? Only then might they begin to formulate a future.

The Gypsy stands and reminds the children of the girl Kong's recent encounter with Haros the Box-office man — Haros, the Gypsy continues, is homesick, not simply for a place but for who he was and how he lived in that place. Sadly none of these things exists anymore and Haros, in fact, all of the Greeks are homeless orphans, living without a real home or authentic purpose. Then he asks every child to picture the ancient vase that Haros had stolen from the museum — stepping into the centre of the salon the Gypsy slowly lifts from the floor, hovers above it by two handspans and then cross-fades into another being.

Suspended in front of them is no longer the sinewy Gypsy with his grey curls and unshaven jaw, dressed in his customary manner; a worn but well-tailored black suit and collarless white cotton shirt. What they now see but cannot comprehend, is a powerful but slender youth, with tresses of black hair and an oiled beard who is dressed in a short flaxen tunic, worn under a heavier woollen cloak which is adorned with coloured panels and pinned at his right shoulder with a golden clasp.

Starkly different from the greenish afternoon light of the lakeside the figure emits a subtle glow, which flows around his contours and flares around the golden wings that sprout from his sandalled feet and helmet. In his left hand a winged staff, about which two snakes are entwined, glows the brightest of all.

The children are transfixed, mouths agape, eyes locked on the vision, then the being fades back into the familiar form of the Gypsy. The children remain hypnotised, the Gypsy walks back to his seat and loudly clears his throat, the spell is broken — the children stare at him and the Gypsy stares back the asks once more:

*Where is it that you want to go?
What is it that you want to find?*



Figure 22. The staff of Hermes.



Reel No.30. Fade to Black — A private screening.

The Greeks hold a private party to contemplate Vampires.

The clatter of dominoes suddenly ceases, a double six remains poised above the marble tabletop, as the two players look up, mildly puzzled at the approach of the Projectionist. The brilliance of the afternoon sunlight is swallowed up by the darkness of the suit that covers his tall, powerful frame. His appearance at the *Café des Poètes* on a lazy Sunday afternoon is a surprise to the domino players, the Box-office man and the Janitor, also to the Projectionist's wife, the young and beautiful Usher who is deep in conversation with the Gypsy, sitting with his arms folded on three zinc canisters placed on the table in front of him.



Figure 23. Film Cannisters.

The Projectionist lowers himself onto a cast-iron chair nodding an acknowledgment to the others and directs a second nod at the waiter who is idling on the terrace, who soon returns with the Projectionist's habitual order, a glass of liquor and an ersatz coffee. The Usher offers the Projectionist a quick smile and the Gypsy nods a greeting as he gestures toward the pile of canisters that the Projectionist has been eying ever since he arrived. The Gypsy passes the top reel of the stack and the Projectionist squints at the tattered label, inscribed in blue ink.

Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie Des Grauens.
Murnau, Prana-Film, Berlin 1922.

The Projectionist's eyes widen noticeably and immediately he fumbles with the clasps that secure the two sections of the canister. Pulling the cover off he exhales a gentle gasp, a copy in perfect condition, an incredible find, considering that all of the original prints had been burnt long ago. He smiles — this, of course, is the second unusual event of the day.

The Projectionist is so taken by this new acquisition that a third surprise quickly follows. He insists that the gathering decamp immediately to the *Orpheum* for an impromptu screening of the new film; he even makes a concession and allows the others to bring along some bottles of honey brandy and snacks for the unscheduled private seance.

The session will proceed one reel at a time with the Projectionist running between his booth and the auditorium each time he has laced a fresh spool. The unusually cheery group sit in the seats normally occupied by the children, rows three and four, centre screen — the sweet spot.

The auditorium is filled with a festive air as corks pop out of bottles and liquor gurgles into glasses as they wait for the Projectionist to lace up the first spool. The house lights fade and the screen splutters into life as they hear the heavy footsteps of the Projectionist hurrying down from the booth to join them.

Act I.

The title *Overture* fills the screen to the accompaniment of deep dark symphonic music by Erdmann as the inter-title proclaims. Then the words *Nosferatu a symphony of Horror* followed by more inter-titles in the form of a book page sets the scene.

*Vampyres, Terrible Phantomes
And the Seven Deadly Sins*

Perhaps this antique silent film will prove too naive for the sophisticated intellect of the Greeks, prone as they are to open verbal warfare on the field of ideas — but perhaps what it lacks in terms of

the protagonist's acting techniques is compensated by the sheer directness of its story of the undead. The five sit together alert to every reference to the life beyond and how it is sustained by the warm blood of the living. *Nosferatu* is divided into a series of Acts that loosely correspond with the reels. As the Projectionist is the sole operator of *Der Rot Czar* and *Dicke Berthe* the little group enjoy the intermissions enforced by the Projectionist as he charges up to the projection booth to lace the next spool. In the auditorium, the post-mortem of each act is carried out with increasing dramatic effect as they down ever more liquor and snacks provided by the Ushers plentiful tray.

Act II.

Lost in thoughts the Usher watches Hutter eat his first meal under the penetrating gaze of Count Orlok in his gloomy castle that reminds her of the leaden density of the Underworld. As Hutter slices his bread the Usher's thoughts drift to her mother's kitchen in the sprawling farmstead set in billowing cornfields and olive groves. A servant girl sits across the table from her pinioning a huge oval loaf of coarse grain bread under her left arm as if playing a mountain bagpipe. She draws the gleaming knife towards her carving a thick slice, such a perfect image of a village peasant. The Usher breathes in the sweet earthy smell of yeast laced with the almost imperceptible acrid tang of the carbon steel blade.

Count Orlok raises his extraordinary eyes above the parapet of the Bill of Sale, his gaze drilling into the very psyche of Hutter, then Hutter's knife slips from the loaf, just a little nick on the thumb, a tiny rose of red.

*You've hurt yourself
The precious blood!*

Shouts Count Orlok in alarm as he leaps to Hutter's side, pouncing on the swelling droplet, Hutter recoils in terror but Orlok follows, his predator's mind working fast. The next morning Hutter awakes alone slumped in an armchair, the Count nowhere to be seen — the Usher raises her delicate fingers to her slender neck as Hutter

inspects himself in a small mirror, remarking on the two prominent mosquito bites below his left ear.

Every time Count Orlok appears on the screen the Box-office man's ugly dog raises its misshapen head and growls — Haros jabs at the brute with his bony elbow to keep it quiet. Haros has his eyes glued on the lid of the sarcophagus, peering through its cracked lid he can see a sliver of a skull, the jawline boasting two prominent fangs! The ill-fated Hutter recoils but then in a frenzy of determination, he pushes the heavy lid away to reveal the Count, asleep in a bed of earth dug from a plague cemetery. The Box-office man looks the shade up and down, he scratches his temple —how many of these blood-suckers has he seen in his interminably long lifetime he wonders? Many, but in his world all of them are female.

He is standing in the stern of his ferry, as it chafes against the shore of the Underworld, across the unguent surface of the Styx stands the Psychopomp with a group of revenant forms. The head and torso of a beautiful young woman nestled in the slippery reptilian coils of her lower body, the tail already attempting to curl around the Psychopomp's winged feet. Next to her is the Phantasma of two Gello, young women who have died virgins, both still lusting to harm the children of happy parents. He has seen these dark cargoes so many times but once across the river most of them never enter Hades as they are forced to lodge forever in Tartarus, a place so far from the light of day that it takes eleven days for a Bronze anvil to fall from earth into its profound darkness.

So it is strange that this blood drinker is a male and that he somehow prefers the dark places and avoids the Light of Aether. The dog snorts, and Haros cracks its skull with his elbow!

Act III.

The screen flashes the hieroglyphics scrawled onto the tail leader in perfect synch with the sound of film flapping against the projector. The Projectionist hurls his bulk towards the stairway at the rear of the auditorium and the Usher once more offers the traditional delicacies, dried fish, sugared almonds, and honey schnapps, then

she sits with her demure, melancholic smile and listens as the Gypsy describes his favourite sequences so far and of his travels to distant abandoned places.

Above him, a flight of broad-winged sea birds thrum over the collapsed roof of the laboratory as he moves cautiously between the mildewed benches, some still laden with glass cylinders, bleached amphibians and ghostly serpents floating dreamlike in their formalin wombs. He can almost hear the lecture in progress as Doctor Bulwer goads the unsuspecting fly towards the innocent-looking plant, the students lean forward with the same macabre enthusiasm of men attending a dogfight. Silently the plant enfolds the fly, like the slow blink of an eye fringed with lashes of steel.



Figure 24. A Venus flytrap.

Like a Vampyre, No?

We are back in the town gaol with the demented Real Estate Agent Knock, fully under the influence of Nosferatu — he is demonic, erratic but with lightning-fast reflexes — his gaze focussed on his prey, a fly which he grabs in mid-flight and snaps into his mouth.

Blood is Life
Blood is Life.

The Gypsy gazes through a magnifying loupe into one of the glass cylinders, a translucent marine polyp, its tentacles slowly wrapping

around a Diatom, paralysing and then digesting its prey, he hears Doctor Bulwer speaking to his students.

*Clear almost bodiless,
Little more than a Phantome.*

His mind drifts back to the prison cell where an ecstatic Knock points at spiders — a close-up view filling his vision with a huge spider embalming an insect in its silken thread. Stepping back, he sees the guard produce a rope and proceed to bind Knock to prevent any further attempts to bite the prison governor.

The Gypsy passes through a stone arch, leaving the laboratory to enter a large hall, also roofless. He looks up and suspended from the remaining roof trusses the skeletons of two Pterodactyls and perched on their outstretched wings a family of red-eyed crows cawing as if they had just stripped the flesh of the monsters.

The Usher is spellbound, she imagines herself escaping this place, riding with the Gypsy to the faraway — to anywhere where there is light and life, to her mother's farm perhaps. She jerks her eyes away from the Gypsy's face, her reverie broken by the rapid heavy footfalls of the Projectionist entering the auditorium, another reel spooling through the machines.

They sit in silence now travelling two journeys, one at sea and one through the mountains. At the inter-title *End of Act III*, the Projectionist races to the booth and the conversation is taken up by the normally introverted Janitor, a mountain of a man, quiet and gentle and above all practical.

Most of all the Janitor is obsessed with machines, machines that have the power of motion, machines that have the seed of life in them. The rolling motion of the ship *Empusa*, its complex arrays of pulleys and wheels sends him into a dream of childhood. His home in the watery sea cave and the vivacious girls who cared for him and who encouraged his curiosity in the material world — the world of things and action and beauty.

He wonders aloud at the stupidity of the Port authorities in Galaz who inspect the six coffins, tearing one open to reveal putrid soil infested with plague rats — but then still embarking the cargo to Wisborg anyway — just six crates, no passengers, strange!

Then the inexorable elimination of the ship's crew, the laborious sewing of the canvas hammocks around the corpses, corpses with a rash at their throats until finally, just two men remain, anxious and fearful. He sees the Mate pick up an axe, but nothing like the ones he would make, the Mate wields a truly inferior axe — he follows him below into the hold and stands behind him as the axe smashes down splintering the lid of the crate and rats pour out. The mate makes to swing again but freezes as Nosferatu rises stiffly from his slumber, his gaze fixed and his talons outstretched before him. The axe falls to the deck. The Mate, fear coursing through his veins, runs to the companionway, but does not stop and leaps into the ocean from the starboard bow. The Master at the helm looks on terrified. As the last soul aboard he lashes himself to the ship's wheel, thereby sealing his fate, a gaunt figure with exaggerated talons moves across the deck towards the Captain who looks up in horror.

The deathship had a new captain.

The Janitor knows the ship is now sailing itself, guided by the spirit, trimming its sails setting its course, as if overseen by an inner intelligence. As for the people involved the Janitor shrugs and suggests that they really didn't think things through.

Act IV.

As in all dramas, the final act is where the fates are most closely bound together, plaited tightly into inescapable tresses and all in the auditorium know that the Projectionist will claim this collision of fates as his domain. The magic is working, Ellen's heart is in conflict, torn like the tides of the ocean, the sun pulling in one direction and the moon in the other.



Figure 25. Count Orlok's shadow.

It began on the very first day in the Castle when Nosferatu chanced to see Ellens's portrait in Hutter's silver locket — instantly he captured her psyche.

Your wife has a beautiful neck!

The Projectionist imagines himself standing next to Nosferatu, both looking through the window frame of the derelict warehouse that overlooks Ellen's room. Ellen wakes in fright, looks at the sleeping form of Hutter, slumped in an armchair at the foot of the bed, she is drawn to the window and flings it open presenting herself — an invitation. The Projectionist watches Nosferatu as he turns and walks towards the staircase to quit his building.

Ellen's blood is surging, she shakes Hutter awake and pleads with him to run and fetch Dr Bulwer, then faints onto her bed — alone and defenceless. The Projectionist imagines himself seated comfortably in Hutter's still warm chair, he looks across the room directly at Ellen who is in a swoon on her bed — she rises once more to look at the warehouse across the river, Nosferatu is nowhere to be seen.

An elongated shadow creeps up the stairway, Ellen turns her back to the open window transfixed in horror as Nosferatu's spidery shadow is projected in profile next to her bedroom door. The Projectionist turns to his left as the door bursts open, Nosferatu fills its frame. Ellen's left-hand covers her left breast and feels her heart

pounding, she stumbles backward and falls onto her bed. The Projectionist watches the shadow play cast by the Count's talons moving across Ellens's nightgown. The shadow hand suddenly clutches at her heart and she crumples in a swoon.

The Projectionist sits back, quietly listening to the gently sucking sounds as Nosferatu drinks his fill throughout the night. The ghoul is intoxicated and certainly infatuated, so much so that the gentle pump of Ellen's blood is only interrupted by a cockcrow, out there on the rooftops, heralding the first rays of light. Nosferatu slowly lifts his head from the perfume on her neck and turns his head to the left, sensing the fatal glimmer of daybreak.

Again the cockerel struts on the rooftop as the gables of the warehouse across the river are struck by the first direct rays of sunlight. The Projectionist watches as Nosferatu draws himself up to his full height, turns away from the bedside and walks across the room toward him, passing through the growing light in the window frame. The Count claws at his heart with his left hand, his right shielding his eyes from the brutal rays of the sun. Nosferatu stops in directly front of the Projectionist, leans back, twists to his left to face the window, his right hand raised to shield himself from the deadly rays — and then vanishes.

The Projectionist drags his mind back into the auditorium as he concludes his interpretation, as for the rest of the film he is disinterested, the vanishing moment is everything for him. He slumps forward and demands a drink of strong liquor from his wife.



Reel No.31. The Return of the Count.

The Projectionist exorcises the competition but pays a heavy price.

The Projectionist is completely obsessed with the film *Nosferatu*, in particular the last reel, the ghoul feeding on the innocent maidens neck, the crow of the Cockerel and the final moments where the Vampyre is dissolved in light.

He begins to visit the *Orpheum* alone at night — screening and re-screening the final scene until the inevitable occurs, *Die Dicke Bertha* clamps her teeth down on the film at the crucial moment. As *Nosferatu* fades into thin air, he is also broiling in the projector gate and dissolving on screen. The Projectionist is seized by alarm, somehow he cannot conceive of this scenario and it takes several seconds for him to haul himself out of his seat and leap up the rear stairwell to the projection booth which by now is full of smoke and burning celluloid — the feed spool spilling snakes of tangled film across the floor, the take-up spool spinning idly.

He douses the projector lamp, cuts the motor and throws a heavy cloth over the projector gate to smother the smouldering residue. Lying at his feet the severed frames of the Count's final seconds, the Projectionist pulls the burnt ends from the floor and the take-up spool onto his cutting table and counts out twenty-four frames, seven from the spool and seventeen from the celluloid on the floor. Carefully he excises the single frames with his shears.

He lays them out in order on the lightbox, squinting through his loupe he surveys the progression from substance to the immaterial and ponders the destination of the Count's transformation. He also realises that the unconscious form of Ellen, drained of her precious blood is the last thing the Count would have seen as he perished.

He is unsure this time as to what action he should take — should he project these final twenty-four frames into the Aether, sending them to the other side? He has a premonition that *Nosferatu* might be different, resistant in some way but surely he is a fiction like all the

other characters, although the young poet, Orpheus also caused him to have similar doubts about the exact nature and location of the afterworld into which his charges are cast.

Late one night, well after the *Orpheum* has closed its doors, when the Greeks have drunk themselves insensible in the café and the towns folks are asleep in bed, the Projectionist finally overcomes his anxiety about dematerialising the vanishing form of Nosferatu. He pulls out the cumbersome Electrotachyscope, strips away the heavy black drapes and drags it into position at the centre of the projection room. Frame by frame he works around the wheel until each of the twenty-four apertures is filled. He immerses himself in the familiar odour of sweat-soaked leather as he pulls on the protective helmet and his arm length gauntlets and then turns clumsily to grope for the heavy electrical cables on the floor, which he drags across to the switchboard on the wall, winding the cable ends around the two copper terminals mounted on a porcelain insulator block. He throws the wooden handle of the switchgear up in a shower of sparks and immediately lowers the dark smoked glass visor before spinning around to face the glare of the machine.

Grasping the crank with both leather shod hands he frantically whirls the wheel into a dizzying blur, faster and faster, the pitch rising to a penetrating whine. All he can see through the dark rectangle of his visor is a shallow rainbow of greenish incandescent light gyrating through the curtain of sweat that is running down through his eyebrows. Finally, the arc of light suddenly flares then immediately dulls, he staggers back a pace releasing the crank and supports himself against the flank of one of the projectors as he drags down upon the electrical switch — immediately plunging the room into darkness.

Visor up and helmet off — it is done, the ghoul is exorcised. Although he knows no one will witness her brief appearance, the Projectionist imagines Ellen's recumbent form drifting for a few seconds in the mist above a fetid pond, somewhere out in the darkness of the lakeside. She lies prostate in a deep peaceful sleep, her skin as white as her nightgown, the first rays of daylight casting

strong shadows across her pillow. But no, he is mistaken, there is a witness — a tall weightless creature, its feet making no impression in the mud that oozes around the verdant pond. Its frame is elongated, with fragile arms drawn up to its chest, terminating in tortured digits armed with claws. The bulbous head is ghostly white, dark eyes set into deep sockets, tapered ears and two cylindrical teeth protruding over the lower lip. The creature stares at the slowly fading image of Ellen, sighs, and then turns away to walk towards the Old Town.

It halts its silent march at a gate in a low stone wall and as if commanded, passes into the abandoned cemetery to stop under a small tree festooned with yellow blossoms. It paws at the ground with its right foot moving its head from side to side in mild agitation, something familiar begins to work in its mind. From above in the tree canopy a bird shrill, then another, a call and response of song that heralds the pre-dawn. The creature is suddenly alert and moves toward the shadow of a small stone building partially obscured by creepers. Two bony hands extend toward the ancient door and pierce its substance, melting through the timber as if it were mist. The creature fades from view and goes to ground.

The following week the town clinic reports two cases of fever, one person bitten by a bat and a second attacked by a monkey, both attacks occur after dusk. The nurse states that although such incidents are not unheard of she finds it unusual that in both cases she found deep puncture wounds on the left side of the neck and both victims were seriously anaemic.

Over the following days, several other incidents are reported, a shepherd reports finding his milk-goats dead in their stalls. The farmer inserts his butcher's knife into the belly of the beast deftly slicing from the udders toward the rib cage. Removing the viscera he reveals the flesh, alabaster white, entirely drained of blood as if it were the carcass of a veal calf. Three young girls wake a household with their terrifying screams one midnight after a huge black winged creature appears above their bed. Miraculously the creature

suddenly recoils on account of the necklaces of garlic that the children have been made to wear by their superstitious old grandmother, who claims that sulphur wards off devils and the undead.

Despite the growing frequency of these disturbing nocturnal events, the Projectionist continues his obsessive viewing of Walter Murnau's film in private. Each night after the audience files from the stalls of the *Orpheum* he returns to the projection booth and laces up the film, scurrying back to his favourite seat at the dead centre of the auditorium, row No.4 seat No. 17.

The Count snatches the silver locket from Hutter, his gaze consuming the delicate features of the portrait of Ellen, Hutter's young and beautiful wife. The Projectionist is enthralled by the Count's terrifying eyes that feast on the small image, a catalyst fuelling the chemistry of blood lust that binds the ghoul and the beauty inextricably together. He pictures his wife, her long slender neck and her olive skin with its fragrance of Rosemary oil and licks his lips.

The Count glides through the shadows of the Old Town coming to rest before the ornate bronze handles of the Cinema doors. He does not need to open them, raising a bony hand he melts through the mahogany and the plate glass and silently passes the empty Box-office. The Count stands at the rear of the auditorium inhabiting the darkness of the heavy velvet drapes, his eyes are fixed on the screen — watching himself clutch at the silver locket, drilling into it with his piercing gaze — watching the bulky silhouette of the Projectionist alone and mesmerised in the centre of the hall.

Such a beautiful neck.

The Count glides silently down the slope of the aisle and slips sideways along row No.5 coming to rest immediately behind the entranced Projectionist. Drawing himself up to his full height the Count tilts his head toward his right shoulder and fast as lightning darts forward, sinking his canine teeth into the solid flesh of the

Projectionist's neck. A tremor runs through the big man's body, he releases an ecstatic groan as his eyes roll back in their sockets. His frame droops.

He awakes to an artificial dawn, his head slumped against the seat in front of him. The auditorium is lit by the bright white rectangle of the screen and somewhere in the distance, he senses the whipping of the film leader against the body of the projector. He attempts to rise but falls back, his limbs leaden, he sits blinking slowly in a swamp of lethargy.

Two strong hands are gently shaking his shoulders, the Janitor gradually brings him back to consciousness, lifting him to his feet. Very carefully the Janitor manoeuvres his friend's dead weight to the exit doors of the *Orpheum*. They take the side alley to the deserted Town Square which they cross to enter the old Seminary that the Greeks have converted into their living quarters. The Janitor's insistent knocking is greeted by the sad face of the Usher as she pulls open the heavy oak door — together they manage to lay the Projectionist on a day-bed in the salon. The Usher mops his pallid brow feels for his weak pulse and swabs the two scarlet wounds on his neck with strong alcohol — her eyes meet the Janitor's, their worst fears are coming true. The Janitor silently shakes his head in dismay and takes his leave, limping back to the *Orpheum* to disconnect the electrical supply and hang a sign on the brass handles of the entrance.

Orpheum screenings are cancelled due to sickness.

The Usher looks down at the Projectionist, overnight he has become an old man, his power carried away by the river of Chronos — he now seems almost mortal. She moves to the window attracted by the sound of young voices, passing by are two small girls skipping along to school, both are wearing neatly braided garlands of Garlic around their slender necks. The Usher moves quickly to the pantry and takes down several plaits of Garlic bulbs. Laying them on the scrubbed kitchen table she carefully works them into two sturdy necklaces immediately slipping one over her head, the other she

secures around her husband's neck. She looks down once more at a frail old man breathing in his favourite odour — sulphur.

The Usher walks through the early morning sunlight to the produce market, nodding greetings to the old ladies that sit on wooden crates next to their baskets of aubergines, capsicum and tubs of olives. She has bought some packages of herbal medicines to exchange with the grey-haired grandmother who mainly trades in Shallots and Garlic. This morning the bargaining is less relaxed as the demand for Garlic has been sharp, but eventually, the Usher obtains an adequate supply to garland the other Greeks, The Janitor, The Box-office man and the Gypsy if she can find him!

The heat of the day presses down on her as she walks up the cobbled street to regain the town square, where she sees the three men lounging at their normal table in the café. She joins them, ordering an ersatz coffee as she takes her place at the table. Opening her bundle she shows the men the fresh garlic and offers to make them each a necklace before the sun sets, patting her own neatly formed garlic braid. The Gypsy cannot decline her offer and beams a smile in her direction, but the Box-office man is his usual gruff self and suggests that he is well protected from imaginary beings, having dealt with revenants for most of eternity. The Janitor smiles at her in a fatherly manner, shows her his massive gnarled hands and taps the sheath of his exceptionally sharp knife as a polite way of telling her he is more than capable of dealing with a scrawny old Count, especially one that is already dead! The Usher responds to his bravado with a quizzical look and a shrug but knows he and the Box-office man are both set in their way and have been for eons.

By mid-afternoon she has braided up a fine necklace for the Gypsy, as well as a few small bracelets for good measure, a light knock on her door and she finds him, a bottle of honey schnapps in his hand. The Gypsy kneels next to the Projectionist, cradles his head and encourages him to drink a little of his favourite liquor. The big man sips the liquor slowly and sighs, they know that he will recover but that his future is now set on a different course; he must now endure the fate of all men. The Projectionist lays back on the pillow and falls

asleep, the Usher and the Gypsy sit quietly together at the kitchen table, sipping the honey liquor, their fingertips touching.



Reel No.32. Fear and Famine.

The Count faces starvation but is saved by the elixir of the Gods.

The Count lays awake all day in the darkness of his stone sarcophagus deep in the underground crypt of the abandoned cemetery. A gnawing hunger denies him sleep, even worse he is tortured by the sound of birds squawking and chirping in the trees above. The Count hates birds; creatures that masquerade as little angels, bats are more to his liking. His talons lay crossed over his chest, rising and falling with his shallow breath and as he stares into the darkness he curses the wily old grandmothers of this backwater settlement, superstitious and canny, who have found a sure antidote to his predations, now everyone here smells of foul garlic. He dreads the thought of another night slinking through the undergrowth sniffing out sleeping tree monkeys, they smell almost as bad as garlic and even worst they do not succumb to this hypnotic gaze, they fight back and even bite! He breathes in the stench of the clammy soil and resolves to fly over the town one more time, just in case someone has been negligent, some tender necked child whose necklace has fallen to the floor; a pang of hunger shudders through his body.



Figure 26. The Count flies out.

The night owl, one of the birds he does tolerate, wakes him with its tenor call, the Count raises his left palm to the heavy stone slab above him and slides it aside without apparent effort. He raises vertically from his tomb, brushing the earth from his costume and

flexes the wing muscles in his shoulders. He glides through the stonework to stand under the night sky, moonless and without a star to be seen, a good night for hunting. A flap and he is gone, an extra-large bat flitting toward the town.

He settles on a roof ridge, his sensitive nostrils quivering, no good here, all sinking in the rooms below, he flies on to the next line of buildings to be offended yet again by the sulphurous vapours. He lands on the stone gable of the old seminary, listens to the loud snoring coming from an open window just below his perch and flutters down to the sill. From inside the sound of two men snoring in a perfect duet, one a semitone higher than the other — and not a sniff of garlic. Certainly not the beautiful aroma of a young child or the intoxicating musk of a young woman but the slightly acrid and salty odour of male energy.

The Count stands over the first bed, a giant of a man deep in slumber, he lowers himself slowly to the brawny neck and using more force than usual sinks his fangs deep into the flesh — a short grunt, the man stiffens but immediately relaxes — the Count almost chokes on the rush of vital fluid.

Lifting his head from the now silent victim the Count silently approaches the second man but freezes as a low rumbling growl issues from beneath the bed — this must be the Box-office man and his ugly dog — hunger drives the Count onward. He extends his wings and lifts from the floor to hover horizontally, extended above Haros and like a lover intent on an embrace. He falls body to body mouth to neck and violently bites into the man's tough skin. A violent tremor runs through Haros, an arm attempts to brush the Count off and the dog growls but then all subsides and the Count drinks his fill.

An hour later he is perched on the window sill almost too full to fly back to his roost, neither of the men is now snoring, the Count can just detect a counterpoint of shallow breathing. He hears the Owl call again and launches himself into the darkness.

The next morning the Box-office man and the Janitor do not appear at the café for breakfast, the Usher sits between the tired form of her husband, and the mercurial energy of the Gypsy, who after coffee volunteers to rouse their comrades. He soon returns radiating anxiety, grasping the hand of the Usher he asks her to follow, at the same time gesturing the waiter to serve another coffee to the Projectionist who is bereft of energy.

They enter their quarters and run-up to the room shared by the two men, who are both in a deep sleep, their skin as pale as the sheets they lie in. It is immediately obvious what has befallen them, they have the same scarlet marks on the neck and both are extremely difficult to wake. Most alarming of all they, like the Projectionist, look twenty years older, their cheeks sunken and their hair almost white — they too are now walking the road of mortality.

The Usher brews a strong sweet ersatz coffee on the small stove in the adjoining kitchen and they prop the two men upon their pillows coaxing them to drink, gradually they surface from their unnatural slumber to complain of terrible headaches and strange nightmares. The Janitor looks into the distance as he tells of his mother who disowned him, of being ridiculed by her, of his feet being attached to his legs backwards. Now he is falling, his mother has thrown him from the Heavens and he falls and falls for an eternity before crashing into the Sea where he imagines that he drowned, the air and light being sucked from his lungs and filled with salty water. The Box-office man begins to mumble incoherently about losing his flesh and feeling a terrible cold and of pulling a dark cowl over all that remained of him, a yellowed skeleton. That the wind howls through his ribcage.

The two men remain in bed for the next two days, garlands of garlic nailed to their bedposts. On the third day, they blink their eyes in the bright sunlight as they stumble across the town square to the *Café des Poètes* to sit with the old man that is the Projectionist. They nod greetings as if to a perfect stranger that whom they are forced to share a table— they sit together slowly scrutinising one another and what have they become — old Greeks — performing the daily

rituals of retired village fishermen, sitting in the sun, sipping liquor and occasionally commenting on the weather or how the local coffee is not as good as it used to taste in the old days.

The Gypsy and the Usher are assisting the Projectionist to walk to the *Orpheum*, which has now cancelled all but a few screenings. Slowly they manoeuvre him upstairs and into the projection booth in order to learn how to lace the machine and operate the Geissler tube device. The Gypsy also takes instruction from him on how to stoke the Janitor's boiler and the procedure for running the Westinghouse generator up to speed. They have laid a strategy.

In the auditorium, they watch and re-watch the sequence where Ellen realises that her blood surges through her body like the tide on the shoreline, pulled not by the moon, but by the magnetism of the dark being that she is yet to encounter. At the very same time, she reads in the pages of Hutter's book on Phantomes and Vampyres that only the blood of an innocent young maid can trap the ghoul and throw him off his guard. The Gypsy looks long and hard into the Usher's eyes, he does not have to ask the question, she simply nods, knowing it is the only way to rid the town of this predator.

The trap will be set right here in the *Orpheum*, in fact in this very projection booth three nights hence. A special screening of a new film, *The Island of Lost Souls* tops the bill and a packed theatre is anticipated, especially in view of the recent closures.

The Count is on meagre rations, the townsfolk are now virtually immune from his nightly predations and even the foolhardy Greek men who, too feeble to protest, are now garlanded with the stinking herb. The ghoul is out each night prowling the outlying small-holdings for warm-blooded creatures, goats, calves and even dogs, although he shudders at the thought. As he enters yet another byre, rearing up over a curly horned sheep, he dreams of his high-perched castle and of the naive village girls that he takes into his employ. As the morning approaches the Count takes a turn above the roof-tops of the Old Town, and there, in a white chemise, leaning out of a window is the sad-eyed, beautiful Usher, the thought flashes across

his mind that she is now almost a widow; his pulse quickens, he has finally made contact.

It is the afternoon before the evening show — upstairs in the Projection booth the Usher and the Gypsy are at work, hunched over the lightbox, spooling through the final reel of *Nosferatu*. Ellen is lying on her bed in a swoon, the shadow of the Count's gnarled talons creeps across her nightgown grasping at her bosom — she convulses. Carefully the Usher slices through the film with her dress-makers shears, counting out twenty-four frames, which the Gypsy clips one by one into the apertures of the Electrotachyscope that is positioned in the centre of the room immediately behind the two projectors, the heavy cables already connected — its powerful beam focussed on the entrance to the projection room.

A tall dressing mirror stands just inside the Projection booth door, placed at an angle of forty-five degrees, in such a way that it gives a good view of a wicker lounge chair to anyone who enters — the trap is laid. Below in the auditorium, the screen lights up to show a mountain encircled by a band of stars and the pronouncement:

A Paramount Picture

Then the twin peaks of an Island can be made out through the sea-mist — another title:

The Island of Lost Souls

Out of the vapour the ship *Covena* slowly comes into view and... action; a castaway, drifting off the starboard beam. A man, pulled from the clutches of the sea, comes to in a cabin under the gaze of a stranger. The children being to feel uncomfortable when they realise the ship has a cargo of caged animals that howl and snarl. The Captain is a rough-necked drunk, he attacks a servant but this is not a man, but neither a beast, a *half-man* the little girl Dorothy blurts out, just like in *The Wizard of Oz*. There is bad blood between the Captain and the rescued man who tries to defend the snarling man-beast.

More sea fog and the *Covena* rafts up alongside a white sailing schooner to unload her strange cargo of animals — they drift off the coast of an unnamed island; unnamed and not shown on any of the charts. As the last of the crates of hyenas and gorillas hover above the schooner's deck the Captain roughly beats Edwards, the castaway, throwing him overboard onto the schooner's deck; the *Covena* casts off and steams into the haze. Several of the children quickly note that the ship is registered in San Francisco and that it is headed to Mombassa via the island of Apia — and that the unnamed island belongs to a certain Dr Moreau.

Edwards looks around in shock, apart from the man who nursed him back to health on board the *Covena*, the schooner's complement is entirely composed of hybrid creatures, almost human but also almost animal, he looks towards the two peaks of the island that loom through the haze.

A tall dark form appears in the gloom of the drapes at the rear of the auditorium, he casts an eye over the sea of heads that face the screen and at the flicker of the screen itself where Dr Moreau is showing his tropical gardens and house to Edwards — there are strange-looking animals everywhere and even stranger looking, natives. The Count sniffs the air nothing but the stench of garlic in the hall but his blood is racing, the delicate Usher is very close, close and somewhere in the air above. Stealthily the Count fades from the auditorium and slowly mounts the rear stairway to the projection booth, his blood racing through his veins with each deliberate step.

He pauses outside the button upholstered door and squints through the small wire-reinforced glass panel — there lounges the Usher drinking honey schnapps, quite alone in the room. The Count flings the door open, fixated upon her image but at that instant, the Gypsy throws the switch of the Electrotachyscope and cranks the device with all his might. The Count is caught in a blinding light, a light that carries the image of Ellen in her nightdress.



Figure 27. The Island of Lost Souls.

Two images simultaneously stream into the Count's eyes; a reflection of the Usher, who is smiling at him seductively, superimposed with the vision of Ellen, supine on her bed, her hand clasped over her heart — two maidens brim-full of such sweet innocent blood, offering themselves to the Count. The ghoul is momentarily transfixed as the two women fuse into one — desire overcomes him — he rushes forward, and collides violently with the angled mirror which shatters into a thousand pieces. The Count is illuminated by the full force of the powerful Geissler gas discharge tube that sears the image of Ellen into his retinas.

He halts, mesmerised, his talons extended at shoulder height as if to pounce but he is rooted to the spot. The Gypsy winds faster and faster, a blur of incandescent light arcing across his smoked-glass visor, sweat and the smell of burning filling his helmet — then Ellen ignites, her fine nightgown erupts into brown pustules and streaks of burning celluloid spray out across the room like a meteor shower — suddenly she is gone, she is vapour and smoke — a pure intense white light burns into the depths of the Count's eyes.

From the side the Usher grips the arms of her cane lounge watching the spectacle unfold — to her left, standing between the bodies of *Der Rot Czar* and *Die Dicke Bertha*, is the taut form of the Gypsy, working the machine feverishly — his cowled head taking the form of some mythological creature. Before her, the spinning disc of the machine spitting a halo of spark and smoke and projects a burning white light that has transfixed Count who stands immobile in the

shards of the broken mirror which reflect a kaleidoscope of burning sparks around the room.

A final flare of light and it is only two that remain in the Projection Room. Where the Count stood, there remains a small pile of black dust and a scattering of smoking bone buttons from his jacket. The Usher moves to the wall and throws the switch as the Gypsy stands back from the machine, the room returns to a subdued light, accompanied by the gentle sound of the sprockets racing through the projector gate — the steady reassuring sound of life projected — a life lived exactly half in the light and half in darkness, as decreed by the spinning shutters of the two machines.

The Minotaur removes his mask and smiles at the Usher, he pokes at the small pile of carbon dust with his shoe, the trap has worked, the Count is either no more or has returned to somewhere unreachable and unknown.

They turn to lace up reel number two of *The Island of Lost Souls* onto *Der Rot Czar*. Down below in the auditorium no one is any the wiser.



Reel No.33. Gort is Unhappy.

*Gort discusses three layers of existence with the Greeks
but leaves crestfallen.*

Gort finally plucks up the courage to approach the three older Greeks, who over the past few weeks seem to him to be so much less imposing than before, not only have they reduced in physical stature but they have become almost friendly. The *Orpheum* now only operates a few days a week and runs only one screening a day at that, a type of late morning matinee. These days the Projectionist, the Janitor and the Box-office man can always be found dozing in the sunlight at their regular corner table on the terrace of the café every afternoon until sunset.

Gort carries the awkward cardboard construction with its three layers of Snakes and Ladders towards the café, his mind a scramble of questions without any structure and no opening gambit. He halts in front of the three old men and stands with his mouth agape, his tongue in knots. True to his old form the gruff Box-office man glowers at him and tells him to spit it out, sit down and place the games board on the adjacent table. Gort does as he is bid and sits facing the three men, who gaze at him in mild amusement. Eventually, he begins to explain the cardboard construction, repeating the words of his friend Kong as he lightly touches each of the three layers:

*Orpheus
The Poet
Orphée*

The Projectionist nods slowly and begins to explain that yes, these are three manifestations of one being and it is true that they exist in multiple places simultaneously. As is implied by the boy's gaming board, the world is littered with connections between time and place and it is often pure chance that decides where and when something is manifest — and with a faint grin he says, you can never be certain

of anything! The old man takes a piece of charcoal stick and draws on a paper napkin:

$$\Delta q \times \Delta v > \hbar / m$$

Funnily enough, he continues, none of this has anything to do with the partition of the Universe into The Upper World, Earth and the UnderWorld, or what the Christians would call Heaven, Earth and Hell, they are simply convenient images that contain an unfathomable reality — the Snakes and Ladder construction that sits on the table between them is a much more accurate model of the Cosmos.

Gort is not able to keep up with much of the conversation and in the end, blurts out that he wants to be with the man who sings like the angels wherever he is. The three old men smile at one another and shake their heads. The Projectionist asks the boy how he imagines the three of them could help him; after all one is only a retired Blacksmith, the other an out of work Ferryman and he himself used to run a funeral Parlour, a big one admittedly but still a funeral parlour! What is more, they had only a brief encounter with Orpheus, and whilst he seemed very personable and possibly quite talented, he had some powerful and complicated emotional attachments and seemed to be in a desperate hurry to leave the town; although quite where he went is unclear.

Gort is crestfallen and the Greeks feel sorry for him, they call the waiter over and order the boy a honey milk drink and salted nuts, slap him on the back a few times, tousle his hair and tell him to take some singing lessons himself, perhaps that way his hero will hear him across the Aether. Gort snuffles a thank-you and settles down to sip his drink thinking that perhaps this is good advice — he loves to sing!



Reel No.34. A visit from Spring.

The Goddess of the Harvest visits the Children's Dacha.

Today each child can sense a change in the atmosphere, the breeze is gentle, warm and for once dry. Viewed from the Town-Square the Lake is free from its perpetual blanket of haze and the Cicadas and Tree-frogs are singing to a different tune.

The school afternoon session is almost over when a gentle rap on the door reveals the Gypsy, the Usher and an unknown woman whose presence fills the classroom with warm yellow light as if the orb of the sun was setting behind her on the horizon. A complete silence — then the Usher simply announces the stranger as her Mother who desires to meet the children and visit their Dacha.

The wide-eyed teacher rings the handbell and dismisses the class but the children remain rooted to their wooden benches; she rings once more and the spell is broken; the children file out of the dusty hall to follow the beacon of light that is moving across the square towards the Lakeside. The Gypsy and the Usher walk on either side of the Golden woman leading the way downhill to the children's encampment. As they enter the forest, they are surrounded by the crackle of fresh leaves twisting from jungle vines — blossoms suddenly burst from the branches of rainforest trees and there is a rustling of growth through the under-brush. As they approach the gangway to the Dacha, creepers chase up the wooden planking of the building and as the woman climbs across the gangway to pass through the window, even the moss that gnaws at the rotting woodwork glows an iridescent green.

For the first time, the pale green glow of the salon is irradiated by a warm, dry glow; the musty odour is no longer noticeable, in its place is the scent of mountain Thyme and Rosemary — intoxicating scents but foreign to the children.

She stands and smiles, looking into the eyes of each child one by one, then she turns to the mosaic of film stills that spawn, amoeba-

like across the huge table, snaking this way and that. Smiling she lifts one or two frames but requires no explanation. Then she turns to the Navigator's work in progress — the world as we know it, now amended with the assistance of the Gypsy's revelations. She stands, nodding occasionally as she takes in the disposition of the locations, the connections and the speculative routes. Then she turns around to face the children and smiling she simply announces:

We have decided that you will come with us and know the world.

The children stand stock-still trying to focus on the woman's radiant face but to no avail — her features will not resolve; all they see is a halo of intense light animating the copper filigree of her hair.



Reel No.35. Preparations.

The Projectionist makes a gift of a film camera and says farewell.

The sequence is hard to recall, suddenly everything familiar is set to one side and things previously unimaginable occur daily. Even the weather has shifted, permanently it seems — each day the town is bathed in a warm and dry atmosphere with brilliant sunshine; each night is clear and cool under a mantle of sparkling constellations.

A meeting is called in the *Café des Poètes* with the three old men who are now a permanent feature of the terrace — they suit the place, giving it an air of continuity and authenticity — three old Greek fishermen reminiscing their past glories. All the tables and chairs are dragged noisily across the pavé to form an audience around the Projectionist, the Janitor and the Box-office man, who for one final time will hold court.

Next to his chair, the Projectionist has placed a large brass-bound mahogany case — the spoils of a scavenger visit. When the clasps are unlocked and the heavy lid opened a palpable gasps ripples through the assembly. For neatly stored inside the case is a brand-new clockwork powered Paillard-Bolex H16 movie camera, vintage 1935 complete with triple turret, interchangeable lenses and an extended magazine. Along with the case is another wooden box filled with 16 mm developing tanks and some jars of chemicals, ancient film stock and a suite of technical manuals concerning the manufacture and development of film. A large wooden camera tripod that is laying under the chairs completes the outfit. The Projectionist looks at the children with his rheumy eyes and with a faint smile pushes the camera case toward King and Kong knowing that they will struggle to carry it between them, but carry it they will. The children crowd around the open case running their fingers over the textured black leatherette camera casing the cool polished metal of the lens barrels with their silver lens caps and their precise markings — naturally completely baffled as to their function.

Eventually, the Gypsy and the Usher speak to the old men in a foreign language for what seems an eternity to the children, who only have eyes for the shining metal objects in the Mahogany case. Finally, a series of misty-eyed handshakes, and the additional chairs and tables are dragged back to their normal positions. King and Kong grapple with the hand-holds at each end of the case and putting on a brave face, carry the equipment case off to store it in the auditorium of the *Orpheum*. As they walk away Dorothy notices the Usher kneeling next to the still impressive bulk of the Projectionist, she is holding his hand, a tear in her eye — she will never see this man again, a man who has treated her roughly, and who has caused her unknown discomforts, but who still holds a certain power over her — until this sunny afternoon.

The Usher takes her leave and runs to catch up with the twins who are defiantly grazing their knees on the brass clad corners of the heavy case. Once inside the Cinema, the children learn that the lady Usher has an additional surprise for them. For the past few evenings, she has worked late into the night, leaning over the light box in the projection room. Like one of the fates drawing together the many strands of life, streamers of celluloid have converged on her bench from an array of spools and soft cloth sacks mounted around the room. Wielding her dressmakers shears and over the course of several nights, she has filled a small mountain of her tiny paper envelopes. Slicing scenes from films that will never again run through the gates of *Die Dicke Bertha* or *Der Rot Czar* — a *memento mori* of fragments set free from their roles and their stories — liberated and ready to bond with other free-floating images.

The children have already stripped the Dacha of the sprawling amoeba of images spread organically over the long table, carefully recording the position and provenance of each frame. Likewise, detailed notes of the Navigator's wall-sized map have been drawn up. As they leave the Dacha for the last time they stand as a group and look back, nothing of the original structure is evident — thick vines of Ivy and Bougainvillea give only a vague impression of its original outline, the entrance, a rapidly diminishing aperture. As

they leave the Navigator pulls the gangplank away, letting it tumble into the waters below.

Their next task is to visit the library — the Gypsy assisted by the Usher and a few of the children is collecting a selection of old volumes from the dusty shelves. Without standing on ceremony the Gypsy glides up and retrieves the Atlas which he has earmarked for the Navigator; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which he intends to give to his father and the three heavy leather tomes by Dante; the *Inferno*; the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* — these he will gift to No.17.

Some of the children are leafing through an illustrated copy of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and ask the Gypsy if the Juan Fernández Islands are on their route. They are curious about an image of a tall man clad like the *Straw-Man* — a plant fibre costume; a huge rickety sunshade over his head, a long gun over his shoulder and a very large boat-builders saw tucked into his rope belt. There again he is shown accompanied by a tortoise and in another image a dark-skinned native who has narrowly escaped becoming someone's dinner.

The Gypsy responds that the stories in some books are rather like Cinema; only fiction but that many are also based upon real events. In this case, an experienced sailor knew that his ship was not seaworthy and made a request to his Captain, a man called Dampier, to be marooned alone on a deserted island — he had good reason as his ship soon sailed to its doom — a full four years later the cast-away, Alexander Selkirk was rescued. So the story is true and yet it has nothing to do with the truth — only to the dreams and longings of all those who have never set foot on the deck of a sailing ship; those who prefer to struggle with storms and sea-monsters whilst dreaming in front of a wood fire on a cold, dark winters night. So there is no need to visit the Juan Fernández Islands the Gypsy smiles — after all you have already been there!



Reel No.36. Plotting a Route, the Briefing.

The Gypsy walks the dividers across the chart to lay a course.

The Gypsy leans the Atlas against a creaking oak-framed lectern, mounted on the end of the well-worn reading table, a double page of blue facing the children and the Usher — three stops only. Leaning forward he picks up a large pair of dividers and carefully pinions the small drawing of the *Orpheum* with a polished steel point. As he walks the metal bipod point over point, Eastwards across the blue expanse of the folio; the Navigator keeps count. The Gypsy looks up at her, she nods and the Gypsy turns the page — another double spread entirely blue — the dividers make a dash from the right margin to the left, another turn, the journey is a long one!

The dividers make their first stop, a solitary mountain-top that pierces through the surrounding ocean, this the Gypsy indicates is his Father's home and her's too, nodding towards the Usher. He emphatically lets the crew know that his will only be a courtesy stop, no dilly-dallying. He is quite clear; his father is an impetuous fellow, prone to rash and excessive actions — so everyone is to be on their best behaviour; no questions, especially about the family tree and no requests, lest they might be granted!

The dividers start dancing across more expanse of blue until they come to rest at a river mouth on a steep-sided island, this he indicates is the home of the golden woman, the Usher's mother — a different situation altogether, here they will learn something special, something that will potentially form a large part of their future. There they will rest and enjoy the beautiful surroundings and the wonderful hospitality of their hostess.

Belmondo raises his hand to ask a question, or rather to express his concern that they will be leaving behind the *Orpheum* — something they have all lived for these past few years, it is their only window on the world. The Gypsy nods silently and then with a wry smile on

his face tells them that he has an enormous surprise for them all but that they must be patient until the third and final stop.

Once again the Navigator is marking down each step of the dividers flashing legs as they stride across the ocean, heading North-East. The metal legs traverse page after page until they find an archipelago of islands arrayed in shallow arcs, some insignificant but others extensive — the steel point comes to rest at the centre of a red square, at the centre of a large oval island. Drowned mountain ranges thinks the Navigator; huge ranges and she drifts into a daydream of the top of the World.



Reel No.37. Under Way.

First port of call ~ Mount Olympus where they meet Zeus and Ovid.

The two pitch-black vessels chafe at their mooring lines alongside the improvised town wharf. The Box-office man's sombre barge, a recent gift to the Gypsy and his crew, wallows behind the Gypsy's long sleek punt. The children line up along the stone balustrade that once formed the parterre of an old villa, each child with a wicker rucksack and a cloth bag filled with supplies for the journey. They chatter amongst themselves, reminding one another of the ancient film that they all once saw that featured the original refugee children stepping ashore with their meagre possessions and name tags pinned to their jackets — tired and apprehensive, so many generations ago.

The Gypsy politely turns down the Children's enthusiastic offers to help load the cargo of crates that contain books; stacks of grey zinc film canisters and their precious film camera, he needs to carefully trim the cargo in each boat. He glides between the quay and the two vessels carrying the heavy items without any apparent effort — the children are by now accustomed to such daily miracles, inexplicable although they might be.

The craft are laden and one by one the twelve children step aboard, six with the Gypsy and six with the Usher and her mother in the Box-office man's old barge which is now attached by a stout rope to the stern of the Punt. When all is ready the mooring lines are cast-off and the Gypsy begins to slowly pole the two vessels away from the Old Town, out into the vast shimmering expanse of the lake. Once well out of eyesight of the town the Gypsy pulls in his pole and secures it, then instructs everyone to take their time and make themselves comfortable; heads down on their diminutive rucksacks, the woven reeds creaking softly as each head settles. In the few seconds before they fall into a deep sleep the children experience a rush of vertigo as the two craft glide up into the clear blue dome above the lake.

Time plays tricks — as if sensed through closed eyelids young Helios drives his solar chariot across the sky every few seconds; a metronome formed from light. The children dream in short animated sequences — here the *Pequot* riding through the storm, Ahab refusing to shorten sail, brandishing the harpoon glowing with St Elmo's Fire — a sign sent from above. On the horizon, through the sea mists a series of islands loom; the single peak of *King Kong's* domain and the twin peaks of the island of pain — for a moment Gort has a lucid vision of Orpheus singing on the aft deck of the *Argos* — a deep memory but not of one of his own, something that has crept into him from the belly of a snake or crawled up the rungs of a ladder.

Helios continues to spin subliminally across the heavens until the slumber slowly lifts and the company sit up yawning and rubbing their eyes. Ahead of the two vessels a mountain-top thrusts up from the azure ocean and beyond into the clouds above — at its summit a huge building with endless marble columns — if it is a building at all and not simply a play of the light. The children are confused, the structure appears to be a gigantic version of the Old Town Museum, they can even name all of the elements; the Pediment, the Cornices and the Frieze; the Entablature and the Architrave mounted on the Capitols of the Columns that rest on the Stylobate — why would anyone build a museum here, atop a huge craggy rock in the middle of nowhere? But soon they realise this huge building is home to the sun-bronzed bearded giant who, without ceremony, greets them with his guttural belly laugh. Is he really the father of the Gypsy and the Usher — surely would that not make the golden woman his wife?

In a grassy clearing, the children are bid to sit at the feet of the giant's Dias, besides which stands a lean and cynical looking man, certainly not a robust outdoor type. The Gypsy presents his Pater with a beautiful leather-bound tome of *Metamorphoses* and the bearded one is so overcome by joy that he releases a barrage of lightning into the sky, shaking up the clouds.



Figure 28. Zeus.

His slight companion finally removes his index fingers from his ears, and glances towards the book — it was a very long time ago that he published this one in ancient Rome — certainly before his exile to the lands of the savage Thracians — barbarians and illiterates all. An exile where he physically languished in both time and geography but which was intended by his enemies as an amputation of his intellect; extinguishing the perfection of the Latin language from his barbed tongue. Although living here as the appointed Poet Laureate is certainly an easy life he has to stay on his toes as his master has abilities so much more powerful than the Roman Republic — and after all his *Metamorphoses* can be read as a manual of unthinkable and painful transformations — yes he has learnt to bite his tongue and not the hand that feeds him — these days he bides his time!

It is obvious, even to the children, that the family dynamics between the Father, the Gypsy, the Usher and the Usher's Mother are not such that a prolonged visit is to anyone's taste. In particular, the Usher is agitated, she stares at the bearded host with a cold indifference — this is the man who pushed her into his brother's clutches and even worse who had designs on her himself — no rules

in this family, at least none she could enforce! Her steely looks have alerted the Gypsy who tactfully steers the formalities to a close.

As the children stand the bearded giant clasps the shoulders of each child and from behind an ear or under a chin he drops a fat golden bracelet into their hands and bids them go in peace. Just before the two small vessels cast off to drift into the blue waters, the thunder keeper asks after his brother. Stabbing the index finger of his right hand firmly earthward the Gypsy slowly shakes his head and answers with a single word:

Diminished.



Reel No.38. The Farm.

Second port of call ~ the farm of the Grain Goddess.

As the children settle back into their positions in the two vessels they compare their heavy golden bracelets, to find that each is engraved with an identical symbol — is it the numeral 4, 21 or 24, or possibly all three simultaneously? Belmondo suggests that this is most probably a part of the incomplete number sequence 38; 39; 40, so dear to their departed friend *Orphée*. The children decide to name the electrically super-charged giant 42124 — as this is certainly much easier to remember and pronounce than his real name, whatever that might be.

Sleep is soon upon them, each entering the welcoming darkness of their memories.

The Usher is curled up, her head resting upon her mother's thigh, deep in dreams. She stares into the mirror, her face in startling close-up, all detail, in the harsh glow of the illuminated frame. She is mesmerised by the fingers of the hair-dresser fluttering through her curls like small birds collecting nesting materials, then by the sea sponge on its delicate wooden handle that darts in and out eliminating every minute blemish of her golden skin. She sits without a single thought, happy to watch the dance of these two creatures that work so furiously together.

A sharp triple knock on the door behind her — *Five Minutes*.

Then it's on — another knock and a brisk woman with a clipboard — *time* — marches in and waves her out, she trots along behind trying to keep up — absolutely no nerves this time. For this sequence she is required to do practically nothing, no dialogue, no leading man to hang onto, just a single static overhead camera shot, a few subtle movements, a long slow zoom in and then out of the scene — and what a scene, who thought this one up?

She is playing someone called *Kore*; an antique grain maiden who spent half her life sleeping in a ceramic underground grain silo — why she simply cannot fathom, waste of a girl's time. She arrives on set and there, glowing under the studio lights and the camera on its travelling boom, is a timber scaffold and at its heart a giant ceramic bowl full of shining wheat grain.

She can feel the individual grains settling against her right cheek, they trickle into her tunic and between her breasts, she slowly extends her right forearm across the surface, as it glides the grain tumbles — she thinks of water; fluid as water, granular as sand. She knows that she has done this before; she knows that she has slept deep underground for months and months in this sweet-smelling clay vat of grain — she is the grain, she is the reason that grain exits.

Silence on set; and action — except she has nothing to do but to be asleep, to sleep in a dream; in a dream of sleep. The camera operator has a perfectly framed vertical image bounded by the silo and centred exactly on the head of the grain goddess, who forms a golden cypher half embedded in the soft glowing surface. Slowly; extremely slowly, the camera boom tracks down towards the goddess — she imagines how this will appear on screen, a gentle silent approach that terminates in all the fine detail of her left cheekbone, a cascade of her shining curls and the well-defined profile of her face partially sunk in the wheat. As directed she breathes slowly and deeply, imperceptibly moving the tiny grains and then she performs a couple of small head angle adjustments — after all, she is not a corpse!

Cut — that's a wrap.

But she never gets out — the lights go out completely, no one appears to assist her out of the prop and onto the scaffold walkway, back to the dressing room. Because there is no scaffold walkway, there is no dressing room, and because she has been sleeping here for the past six months. It is musty in here, the grain is freezing cold, she is cold, she is famished. She lies in the darkness listening, hearing the voices of the earth, of the creatures that bore through it,



Figure 29. Persephone and Hades.

that eat it, that make it — rumblings, creaking and small eruptions! She listens for a while, possibly a very long while, there is no way of telling in this profound blackness, then a different set of sounds from above, familiar sounds, sounds that come every year and announce the start of a new life, a new cycle of life.

Careful, rhythmic scrapings, dull earthen thumps, and suddenly a human voice and a sharp completely blinding slice of sunlight — the lid is off again! She presses her hands over her eyes as she slowly stands up into the narrow neck of the silo, her feet sinking unsteadily into the grain — dozens of hands dive down to gently support her and lift her into the bright daylight where she hugs; eyes still closed for the moment, but she hugs all and every human form that presses against her. She has returned, as she does every year, the keeper of the old grain, ready for the late autumn planting that follows the late summer harvest. You *Kore* are the link they chant as they dance around her, you tie the cycle of life together, the old joins the new, the old becomes the new and the new becomes the old!

She is walking in an upland valley, the air is mild and fragrant, buzzing with life, just over the rise she can see the roof of the farmhouse and turns to her mother beside her but before she can speak her mother smiles and says we are home.

Her mother smiles down at her daughter and quietly says we are home; the daughter turns to return the smile and slowly raises her head from her mother's lap as a flood of familiar images lap like an incoming tide against her childhood memories. The two vessels have navigated a small river valley fringed by low cliffs and now lie beached on a wide sandy bay that forms the eastern bank. Tamarisk trees reach down to the water's edge and beyond them, the blue-grey haze of Olive trees and the tinkle of hollow metal goat bells stretch away into the distance. The children stand gawping at the river water, they have never seen anything so clear — without a second thought they are naked and swimming, screeching and hooting — the Gypsy smiles at the Usher, her mother smiles at them both and takes her leave in order to prepare the afternoon and evening meals.

Helios has parked his chariot overhead for a lunch break, the oil in the leaves of Rosemary and Thyme vaporise in the heat and the birds have gone quiet as they hide in the shade. The swimming party ambles towards the farmstead through a small valley between limestone bluffs. The children dry off in an instant as they trail their hands through the waist-high wheat and barley fields that line the track. Ahead a long white-walled compound shimmers in the heat-haze that dances above the terracotta roof tiles. Set in the centre of the mass, an arched entrance large enough for farm wagons, leads into a rectangular courtyard full of rustic clutter — an array of granaries, stables, workshops and a forge. To one side a huge stack of new oil jars lay in new straw forming a semi-circular mound, their earthen mouths promising a trumpet fanfare. Next to these, a group of women work at a long trestle table, deftly weaving cane withies into panniers for the coming olive harvest. The opposite end of the courtyard is less industrious and given over to a lush kitchen garden that leads onto an arbour, over-run by an ancient vine. Set under the labyrinth of its twisted branches a long table is set for a midday meal.

The mother is seated at the head of the table, facing her is the Usher and lining each side are the children and the Gypsy. Piled before the

children more food than they have ever seen set on a table, and foods they have never seen, olives, for instance, grapes and apricots — cheeses and even meat. The oppressive climate of the Old Town produced strange jungle fruits and the Lake even stranger fish, but little else could be cultivated in the normal sense of the word in that chaos of mould and fungi. The children's eyes wander from one end of the long table to the other; two light sources envelop the party; the two women exude a soft golden glow — the Goddess of Grain and the Grain Maiden are finally reconnected and radiate a signal that the seasons are beginning their annual round once more, the children can sense a crackle of electricity in the air around them.

The Usher's eyes are fixed on the buxom serving girl, a fresh brown loaf pinioned under her left elbow as she draws a silver blade towards her, slicing off thick, fragrant slabs of bread. Suddenly she is looking directly through the eyes of the Count at the small rosette of blood that Hutter has drawn from his thumb as the knife inadvertently slips. Crossfade — she is looking down at her husband's punctured neck and as she watches the big man begins to shrink, begins to wither and curl up into an old man — a man without power, cast adrift in time, soon to share a fate common to most. A peal of laughter breaks her daydream and she realises that everyone is looking at her, smiling, it is then that she realises that a large brilliant-red butterfly has landed on her left thumb and is slowly opening and closing its wings. She lifts the creature to her lips and gently blows it into the summer air.

The meal under the arbour continues until dusk, testing the culinary stamina of the children whom one by one begins to fall asleep at the table. Graciously their hostess brings the gathering to a conclusion and the children are trouped off to a farm workers' dormitory where they are soon in a deep sleep, each on a fresh straw palliasse. In the morning they are shaken awake and fed in the farmhand's kitchen, on Goats cheese and warm milk and then assemble under the massive gnarled olive tree in the Courtyard.

The Grain Goddess and her daughter the Grain Maiden are seated together and greet the children one by one. The mother gives each

child a fresh loaf of bread, a hard white goat's cheese wrapped in linen and a bunch of dried grapes. The Usher hands out a beautiful velvet bag, hand-sown from the darkness of the *Orpheum*'s black drapes, inside each bag are two hundred and forty small envelopes bearing the insignia of the becrowned white swan, emblazoned with the word *Orpheum* — *so as not to forget your past as you create your future* — she incants to each child as they receive the gift. The Mistress of the farm casually remarks that the children will be returning to the farm each spring and each autumn — it has all been arranged, the Gypsy will take care of everything.

She and the Usher walk with the voyagers down to the sandy beach where the two vessels lay ready for the final stage of the journey.



Reel No.39. The Seaweed King.

In which Neptune is ascendant and paints the map blue.

Finally, the Usher and her mother turn and walk away from the shore as the Gypsy manoeuvres the two vessels out into the channel and downstream towards the open sea. The children begin to settle themselves for this final long leg of the journey; making themselves comfortable on the bottom boards, a folded coat under the head, a cap over the eyes, boots off! Her eyes begin to flutter, closing involuntarily in anticipation of the strange transition that she knows will occur very soon, now that the vessels are well out from the coast — she breathes steadily as a precaution against vertigo. The Navigator lets herself take in one last glimpse, out of the corner of her eye, she can see the Gypsy's tall dark silhouette on the prow and then she feels the boat move but this is an upwelling, a surge and a swell, the vessel is not lifting, it is being lifted from beneath.

The hull undulates slowly to the sound of a thousand tiny rivulets of water plashing to the surface — immediately ahead of the vessel a mass of kelp and bladder-wrack is emerging from the ocean, cascades of water draining from its bulk. She dreams of its form, a floating island in the shape of a human head, a cavernous mouth of glistening sea fronds, a conversation without words is forming. The weedy body extends down into the depths, on the surface its tendrils jostle and play around the two boats, sensing their fabric and their purpose.

She can hear the conversation between the Gypsy and the Seaweed being, a rushing of foam and spray, a sucking and bubbling and a trill of trickles; it babbles and burbles along in a sweet hypnotic pattern. The Navigator listens, catching not one word but understanding the drift. She sees the Seaweed creature sitting upright, it opens a beautiful folio to a map of the world, all green and yellow with mountain ridges in brown. Above the world the domain of the Heavens, of clouds then stars and below the dark rivers and caverns of the Underworld.

The creature dips its frondy hand into the water beside him and begins to paint over the map, splashing and blotting blue across the pages. The weed giant raises its right hand, clenching it into a fist and squeezes water into the entrance of the Underworld; the blue stain spreads into the River Styx and in a moment Hades has turned a deep and permanent azure.

Now both hands are hard at work trailing their algal tendrils back and forth, pushing blueness into every corner of the world, across forests and valleys, over mountain ranges — green is now aqua-blue; drowning lakes, rivers and bays — blue is even bluer. Only the very tops of a few mountains escape.

The creature sits back and contemplates his vastly expanded domain; he gurgles with pleasure as he thinks of his two brothers, the sombre one who hates the light and who only converses with dead philosophers and the troublesome one above, a bully really, who constantly upsets the lives of others! Well, now it is his turn to calm the world — the Luna dragged tides and the wind-driven waves will slowly wash the place clean again. Slowly he settles back into the water submerging his ears beneath the surface to listen to the chorus of Fish; the whirr and rattle of the Crustacea and the low pulsing codes of the Leviathan as they navigate from sea-mount to sea-mount across the aqueous vastness.

She is looking down at their two vessels, drawn on the map in black ink as two short lines, surrounded by nothing but blue, a blue that is still soaking into the paper. She looks harder and there, visible just below the surface, an animated greenish tinge of the algal being moving slowly, slowly away and then fading completely from the now dry watercolour.

The Navigator reaches out to turn the page of the Atlas, calling out to the Gypsy, but her fingers never quite reach the page and her voice stays on the tip of her tongue. She feels the giant form of the Seaweed king slide his back across the keel of the boat, a gentle rocking upsurge — then nothingness as the vessel lifts effortlessly away from the surface in a trail of drips.



Reel No.40. The Second Cinema in the World.

The Dali Lama screens a film by Vertov and conducts a quiz.

Time has been resting and they have taken advantage of the pause in his routine to drift across a vast expanse of blue — but now the travellers are slowly becoming aware of a drifting chatter of small birds and the laughter of young men — suddenly the air vibrates in a triad — the piercing boom of three low pitched gongs struck one after the other — everyone is now wide awake.

Their senses are filled with a riot of cherry blossom and the powerful scent of sweet honey-suckle — the two vessels are adrift between three palaces each set upon its island, and encompassed by an ornamental lake. They breathe in pure dry mountain air, in the distance, above the cherry trees and the tall encircling garden walls, glisten jagged peaks — the Gypsy grins at the monks that line the shore.

They glide towards the welcoming party who catch the mooring lines and secure the vessels — a clamour of helping hands rapidly bring the cargo and the travellers ashore and the throng sets off in a chanting, gong striking column, towards a sturdy three-storied mountain chalet. The children are greeted by a team of wizened old ladies with broad leathery smiles who gently but firmly show them to a communal sleeping room, each bed laid out with a simple costume. Next, they are rapidly manoeuvred into a steaming bathhouse echoing with the splash of water. An astringent vapour envelops them — the journey is now only a dream and although the warm humid air tries to ignite memories of swamp air, it fails. The steam works its magic; billows that flense the past and insist on the present.

The children sit awkward and cross-legged forming a shallow arc on the polished wooden floor, at their centre the Gypsy with a large bundle set before him. Behind them the hall is crowded with curious on-lookers; a sea of saffron and russet robes; the air pulses with the

murmur of voices and somewhere in the distance the low drone of chanting reverberates through the Palace chambers.

Then without fanfare, two huge monks, wearing tall yellow hats and carrying golden staffs appear at the summit of the Dias that rises directly in front of them. The children are so fascinated by the strange yellow hats that they fail to notice the small boy who walks quietly between his guardians and who promptly sits down, folding his legs easily into a Lotus pose. Suddenly their attention is drawn away from the shock of yellow as they realise the boy is wearing a pair of bright red shoes. The boy beams at them.

An involuntary whisper *Magic Shoes* escapes Dorothy, loud enough for all of the children to hear, the boy continues to beam at them and then quietly speaks:

Okay!

He beckons the Gypsy to approach and accepts the cloth bundle, carefully untying the plaited cord to reveal the three ancient leather-bound volumes of the *Divine Comedy* by Dante; the *Inferno*; the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*. The Gypsy modestly hopes that His Holiness will enjoy the trials and tribulations of the soul as it circles through the three major stages of the afterlife, ascending from the darkest depths; through purgatory and onwards towards the divine — a Bardo of sorts — different but perhaps not so very different!

*But already my desire and my will
were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,
by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars*

One by one the children are invited to greet the boy, each bowing before him to receive a pure white silk *Khata*, and in doing so each child drinks in two things, the boy's radiant smile and the shine of his incredibly red shoes — shoes that they know can make any wish come true.

Later that evening the Gypsy sits with them in the garden of the guest house drinking the bitter butter laced tea. Strange but benign he says, isolated but open; this will be your home from now on, but the farm and the harvest will also be a home to you. Tomorrow you will understand why I asked for your patience — tomorrow it all starts!

They walk through the mountain top town following the flowing robes and constant chatter of their guides, they are an object of curiosity, attracting a cloud of small children who run and skip alongside them. As they swirl through the narrow streets dressed in their plain tunics, trimmed with embroidery, the wrinkled fingers of the old point them out to friends who grin and chuckle at the newcomers.

Finally, they come to rest in a small forecourt that announces a two-storey building but one quite unlike the style of the architecture of the town or Palace. This building is quite plain, simple, symmetrical and without decoration save for the slightly curved mouldings formed around the main entrance and the window jambs. The structure is painted white, the doors a glossy black — emblazoned across the transom in vermillion the words:

BIOSCOPE

Anno 1950

Iron-Tiger 2010

No.17 greets the Gypsy and the children in the small cinema lobby and then leads them into the auditorium indicating the row that they should occupy; instinctively the children reach for their notebooks and graphite sticks, they sense some kind of test is about to begin.

The screen flickers into life with the words in Mosfilm:

Человек с кино-аппаратом

Mercifully followed by English sub-titles:

Man with a Movie Camera
A six-reel record on film
Produced by VUFKU in 1929
excerpt from a camera operator's diary
ATTENTION VIEWERS
This film is an experiment
in cinematic communication
of real events
Without the help of inter-titles
Without the help of a story
Without the help of theatre
This experimental film aims at creating
a truly international language
of cinema based on its absolute separation
from the language of theatre and literature.

The plot is strange, even for a Mosfilm and they only get to see the first reel, just up until the travelling shot that slowly zooms into the window when No.17 raises his arm and shouts — enough, thank-you — and the Projectionist douses the film and brings the house-lights up. No.17 perches himself on the small raised stage in front of the children and as usual beams at them for what seems an eternity; then he begins to ask some questions — yes this is a quiz!

How many shots include a movie camera?

Dorothy raises four fingers — No.17 reflects for a moment, smiles then nods.

How many shots include the Projector or Projectionist?

Gort surprises everyone by speaking out loud and clear; *Six!* — Okay!

How many shots include a Trombonist?

MGM; *four, please!* The children watch No.17's fingers as they tap silently against his knee; Yes good!

How many shots include a Conductor?

Belmondo raises a V sign and No.17 smiles again.

How many shots include film or sprockets?

The quiet boy *Mosfilm* waves a hand with five fingers aloft — correct again!

How many shots include the Cinema interior?

The Navigator offers thirteen; No.17 reviews his memory, trilling his fingers like a pianist — again this is correct.

How many shots include a saxophonist?

Kino says *two* — which is on the nail!

How many shots include The Cameraman?

Just three, offers *Queequeg* and again No.17 smiles as he sits back in mild astonishment — he turns to the Gypsy and quietly asks; *what brilliance have you bought me, my friend?*

He turns back to the children and asks a final trick question — what number precedes the closing image of the window? *Number One* they shout in unison!

Yes!

Okay.

The Boy surveys the children, and reminds them that there are protocols — in private, between them, he is to be known as *No.17*, but make no mistake, in the outer world he is always *Holiness* — a simple thing but vital for the equilibrium of all; so please not to forget!

No. 17 begins to tell stories — many years have passed, three incarnations since his predecessor No.14 was fascinated by seeing moving pictures at the British Mission just after he was enthroned one hundred and fifty-three years ago.

The profound darkness of a cinema

Our mind

The white light projected on a screen

*'Dharmata', 'sunyata'.
The various forms which appear in this light;
Illusory phenomena.*

They say that No.14 was always good with his hands, in another life he must have been a mechanic — always taking clocks apart, and he was good with projectors too, reputedly he could strip one down and re-assemble it in the dark in just under two hours!

The British Mission Man, Basil Gould, had even been there rolling cine-film when No.14 was enthroned in 1940, so he was a movie star from the very start, and Gould always invited him to his Mission Cinema Parties. No.14, like his immediate predecessor No.13, loved *Chumping*, the little bowler-hatted comedian with the clipped moustache that the Tibetans called *Kuma*, (the Thief) for his role in *The Adventurer*. No.14 also loved *Rin Tin Tin*, especially the scene where the clever dog uses the lady shepherd as a bridge across the mountain chasm in the *Night Cry*.

Basil Gould had an impressive collection of moving pictures; military parades and newsreels swarming with tanks and cannons reminding all in Lhasa just how powerful the British and their immediate southern neighbours, the British Raj in India were. The men and machines in *Desert Victory* played out a science-fiction scenario set in a featureless landscape; a flat two-dimensional world where everything is reduced to rubble and burning metal. Where there are no actors, nor props, no script or dialogue — just machines and onslaught. Basil Gould smiles confidently, intending to impress and reassure No.14. But the boy simply cannot accept the newsreel as reality; where does such a non-landscape exist? How are such huge machines possible; after the annihilation is reincarnation still possible? No.14 asks to see *Chumping* instead!

He continues, that after the British, The Heavenly Empire of China invaded and they also set up an open-air cinema in the *Wontoe Shinga* horse-market square. The Chinese hung a large white cloth on the facade of the *Trimon House* on the East side of the square and projected endless images of tractors; heroic workers building dams;

collective farms and documentaries on Joseph Stalin. But there was one film everyone liked *Bai Mao Nu* (The White Haired Girl) about a beautiful peasant girl escaping the clutches of her corrupt landlord. She is saved by her heroic sweetheart, a communist Eight Route Army soldier fighting the Japanese — a romance that emboldened visiting herdsmen to keep their girlfriends from shivering in the crisp night air.

Then it all stopped, the British Raj had long gone, even deserting India, The Heavenly Empire of China miraculously and mysteriously dissolved during the *plague of the chain reaction* — then the valleys and lowlands gradually disappeared and were replaced by a vast sea, all horizon, only horizon! Life went on, chanting went on — it was peaceful; there were no more visitors but sadly no more cinema and no more No.14 to fix the broken machines.

Two muscular monks carry a series of dusty wooden chests into the foyer of the BioScope, followed by the polished mahogany camera box and tripod that the Projectionist had gifted the children before their departure from the Old Town. They gather around and No.17 begins to open the chests one by one, revealing a treasure trove of antique film cameras; lenses; projectors; splicing blocks; developing tanks and glass jars with crystallised chemicals. One huge chest, he explains, is even full of spools of naked acetate film waiting to be coated in light-sensitive emulsion.

In turn, the children open the case containing their Bolex equipment, tripod and box of technical manuals and then proceed to reveal the twelve black velvet bags each containing two hundred and forty frames encased in small envelopes; the oversized world Atlas and finally their model of the universe in the form of a triple-layered Snakes and Ladders board.

It is the last two items that catch the attention of No.17. The pages of the Atlas are slowly turned accompanied by the Gypsy's narrative of expeditions to the far-flung corners of the drowned world — salvaging film from the few settlements with sufficient elevation above the waters — some long abandoned and derelict, others still

inhabited and willing to trade items from their defunct libraries, archives and long-closed cinemas. They search the pages of the Atlas to the North and the south of Lhasa. North to the place that was once the Heavenly Empire, they look for high altitude Prefectural outposts that may still hold useful equipment or materials; south to the old Raj that many decades ago had a flourishing cinema industry, they will need equipment, but most of all chemicals and acetate film.

Then No.17 turns his gaze upon the children's cosmic game and as he touches each successive layer No.17 speaks a single word:

Inferno
Purgatorio
Paradiso

He turns to address the group:

We are all enfolded in darkness, even the fleeting movements on the silver screen are composed only partly of light and life, the other half is profound darkness that connects the frozen moments as they are dragged one by one into the gate of the machine to be momentarily irradiated by the light of burning carbon before fading to blackness.

In this manner, No.17 continues; we understand this life as an illusion that flickers in and out of focus, floating to the surface of consciousness barely long enough to form a skein of reality, before returning to the eternal void. But smile for we are about to begin a new adventure — together we will become the new *Lhasa Film Institute*; the world's only film production unit and the BioScope will become the only Cinema operating on this spinning globe.



Reel No.41. The Plan.

Meditation classes, Archery practice and a dream of the Nouvelle Vague.

Small ripples dance across the surface of the ornamental lake and white blossoms drift down from the cherry trees as the children stand on the small jetty to farewell the Gypsy. He steps aboard his long sleek boat, dressed once again in his dark oiled cotton coat, a white silk scarf at his throat and a battered wide-brimmed hat pulled low across his brow. Enthusiastic farewells rise from the throng of monks and the children wear wistful smiles as their mentor reminds them that he will return in the spring to view their progress and then he will take them to the farm. Shouldering his pole the Gypsy slowly pushes off into the centre of the lake — one moment he is guiding his craft, the next nothing, he and the boat have vanished — as do the smiles of the children. The monks erupt into a frenzy of laughter, Dorothy bursts into tears and Gort knots his brow but they are given no time for melancholic reflection No.17 has been busy devising a plan of acclimatisation:

Breathing: Each morning the children adopt the Lotus pose for a session of breathing exercises designed to centre the mind and body and introduce calm and quiet.

The index finger of the right-hand closes the left nostril, right elbow raised to the level of the ear; breath in through the right nostril, one, two, three, four, five. Thinking of nothing; hold your breath, one, two, three, four, five. Slowly exhale, one-two, three, four, five. The index finger of the left-hand closes the right nostril, left elbow raised to the level of the ear; breathe in through the left nostril, one, two, three, four, five. Thinking of nothing; hold your breath, one, two, three, four, five. Slowly exhale, one-two, three, four, five. Repeat twenty times. Then breathe in and out rapidly through both nostrils one hundred times, or until dizzy. Lay on the back in the Deadman's pose — think of nothing for three minutes. Every morning young Belmondo begins to feel light-headed during the rapid breathing

exercise at around the eighty mark and falls back into the bliss of the Deadman's pose.

Swimming in front of his eyes his namesake is running from the police, who fire their pistols. He is hit, a dark patch of blood spreading across his back from the waistline — he staggers zig-zagging across the road from parked car to parked car until he collapses in the middle of the street. Close up of Michel, with sunglasses, close up of six police shoes forming a halo around him. Close up of his American girlfriend Patricia looking down. Now without sunglasses, Michel mouths some silent words and then speaks.

Michel: *C'est vraiment dégueulasse*; he moves his hand to close his eyelids and then dies.

Patricia asks Vital, the policeman who shot Michel;
Qu'est ce qu'il a dit?

Vital responds: *Il a dit que vous êtes vraiment "une dégueulasse".*

Patricia asks: *Qu'est ce que c'est "dégueulasse"?*

Belmondo hears the rapid breathing of the others fade away as they sink into the inert Deadman's pose — each child listening to the thump of their over-oxygenated heart.

Archery: MGM watches intently as her tutor selects a bow of the correct length for her small stature. As he pulls back the sheep's horn tips of the recurve bow to attach the bowstring he urges her to be very careful, one slip and the bow can take on a life of its own and can break a wrist. The creature of bamboo, horn and sinew becomes taut and nervous. MGM grasps its centre in her left hand, stretches her left leg forward, toes toward the target, her right leg slightly bent with the foot braced at right angles. She closes her eyes momentarily feeling the pent-up energy coursing through the polished wood — the King is leering down at her, howling from the fortress wall, his cuirass prickled with arrows, all around her the rattle of armour and the creaking of the arrow against bow-stock. She opens her eyes and slowly pulls the red flight feathers to her cheek breathing in the animal sent of sinew — the creaking tension

in the bow stock resonates with that in her arms. Breathe in; hold; count; release — the arrow escapes in a rush of air; the bow thrums in her hand like a harp. She looks past the vibrating bowstring to see the red fletches of her arrow quivering in the small earthen triangle sixty paces away — almost a perfect shot — her tutor smiles, next time he will yell in her ear just as she is about to let fly, as a test of her inner calm.

One by one the other children test their strength and concentration, drawing back their arrows in this daily routine which has quickly become a spectator sport with the locals who are surprised at how quickly the children have learnt the archer's skill. But the children can only look on in astonishment during the many competitions when horsemen thunder past at the gallop, losing arrows at the miniature targets with deadly precision.

Kino school: After breathing and archery, or perhaps some lessons in kite fighting comes lunch at the guesthouse. The old ladies have been gossiping all morning as they prepare the midday meal of *Chebureki* a deep-fried turnover with a filling of minced meat and onions followed by *Gyabrag* a pancake of barley flour, yak butter, dry cheese curds and sugar and, as usual, all this washed down by a never-ending stream of hot *Po Cha*, the yak butter tea which the children have learnt to enjoy.

Now physically and mentally nourished they troop down to the BioScope for an afternoon of study. Each day this is divided between simple technical work; the operation and upkeep of equipment or the development of a new screening programme for the BioScope; but the real work lies in the complex issues of future production — the plans for their first documentary film expedition and the necessity to source materiel in settlements to the north and south.

Only a few of the children have witnessed the Projectionist working his magic with the two huge projectors at the *Orpheum* — and then this was only as furtive glances through the small glass pane in the Projection booth door as Orpheus tried to glean information about the secretive Greeks. The manuals are spread out on trestle tables,



Figure 30. A Bolex H16.

and three antique 16 mm projectors are carefully cleaned and lightly oiled — the children take turns in naming the parts and practice lacing up, observing the slight differences between each machine. They run practice spools of badly faded film and hone up their cutting and splicing skills each time the brittle material tears in the sprockets.

King twists the silver clasp ninety degrees and lifts the side plate from the H-16 Bolex. She loads a spool of test film onto the upper feed spindle, flicks the two-loop formers away from the pressure plate and threads the leader around the two sprockets and onto the take-up spool. Clipping the loop formers back into the closed position she replaces the side plate and locks the camera. Next, she unclips and extends the long chromed handle on the right side of the camera and begins to wind the clockwork motor. King demonstrates the manual controls; exposure; frame rate; frame counter and so on — everyone will need to learn these by heart; then there are the lenses mounted in the rotating triple turret and their matching viewfinders to master. King puts her eye to the rubber eyepiece and squeezes the normal running shutter release, mounted just below the lens turret — the camera purrs like a cat, she looks up smiling with one word:

Swiss!



Reel No.42. A New Game.

The slippery game of Snakes and Ladders presages a voyage to the East.

The Navigator rattles the small cup and rolls the dice; a six. She slides a 35 mm frame onto the portal of the lower level of the gaming board — she throws it again and slides the image of Ahab forward four places, halting just before a ladder. The others roll in turn, waiting on the six that allow them to introduce their chosen character into the game. Gort rolls a six and pushes his image of *Orphée* across the threshold, then a five and *Orphée* scrambles up a ladder onto the second layer. The game continues into the late afternoon, a constant flux of images rising up ladders towards the final destination at the centre of the upper layer; or sliding down the slippery scales of a snake, hoping to avoid the dark centre of the lower board and oblivion. The twin Kong is the first to land at the centre of the upper board; she may now place her image of King-Kong onto the polished surface of the table, the centre of a new matrix of images, she may now also reach into her black velvet bag and select two new characters placing them onto the threshold of the game. Dorothy casts a three sending the Tin-Man slithering down the snake's tail to the very centre of the lower level, a dark and inescapable prison. The Tin-Man has to leave the game and is placed within a grid, reminiscent of a necropolis, at the far end of the gaming table where he will await other lost souls — Dorothy must also wait out a turn and then try again for a six. Almost simultaneously Belmondo and Mosfilm achieve the sweet spot of the upper level, their characters join King-Kong, the short-haired Patricia to the left and a Russian Marine to the right, a new sequence, a new history is beginning. They both push two new images across the start-line.

The Navigator is counting in her head, twelve players, each with two hundred and forty images — potentially seven thousand, two hundred frames to play out, the game is a serious undertaking.

After a supper of vegetable soup with lamb dumplings, the children gather around the pages of the Atlas. The Navigator has her tools before her, a compass; polished steel dividers and a sharp steel-nibbed pen set in a glass inkwell. She unrolls a paper scroll recently delivered from No.17 that contains a handwritten list of locations, with the approximate bearings and distances — the children pore over the vast blueness that surrounds Lhasa and consult the notes:

Tsetang.

Bearing; Southwest; 34 Nautical Leagues;
1890 fathoms above sea-level [1959 datum].

There are three caves in the mountainside to the east of the town and one is said to be the birthplace of the Tibetan people who issued from the mating of a monkey and a beautiful cannibal ogress. The name Ze Tang means to play on flat land. During the occupation of the Celestial Empire, the town boasted the Lhasa Cinema which screened Chinese films to the hordes of occupying troops who were garrisoned in the city. Now abandoned the cinema may be a treasure trove of items — look for this sign 电影 八一.

Thimphu.

Bearing; South by Southwest; 45 Nautical Leagues;
1215 fathoms above sea-level [1959 datum].

5th highest Capital City in the world — once has a small cinema industry and a single theatre; the Luger Cinema Hall.

Tawang.

Bearing; South by Southeast; 41 Nautical Leagues;
1620 fathoms above sea-level [1959 datum].

Tawang Monastery is said to be the biggest Buddhist monastery in the world outside of Lhasa, the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama and the refuge for the 14th Dali Lama when he fled from the forces of the Celestial Empire, claimed by the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh but now an independent Buddhist state. Possible stocks of film materials and archives.

Kathmandu.

Bearing; West by Southwest; 108 Nautical Leagues;
756 fathoms above sea-level [1959 datum].

A big city with many temples, in the old Kingdom of Nepal. It once had many theatres, libraries and several old cinema establishments such as the Vishwajyoti Cinema Hall, Jai Nepal Hall, Kumari Cinema Hall, Gopi Krishna Cinema Hall, and Guna Cinema Hall. You might find many resources here!

Nagqu.

Bearing; North by Northeast; 59 Nautical Leagues;
2430 fathoms above sea-level [1959 datum].

Nagqu is a sub-frigid zone with an extremely cold climate, a scarcity of oxygen, dry air, and storms; with no frost-free periods. It is famous for its annual horse race and may still have some workshops able to manufacture acetate film. Due to its frigid climate, any film stock will be well preserved.

The navigator dances the steel dividers back and forth across the blue expanse to locate the five mountain top settlements, joking that she is thankful that No.17 did not use the traditional Tibetan measurement of distance — reckoned in the number of cups of tea consumed during the journey and which uses a yardstick of sixty cups per day. The steel nib scratches a dark blue track from Lhasa looping south then north through a series of small red circles — the Rutter is complete, we must ready ourselves.

Ellen dreams of the ponds by the lakeside — hovering just above the surface her net is ready to pounce on a blue-bodied water-skaters. A sudden movement in the reeds opposite and she freezes — a grotesque form emerges, half-man, half-beast but Ellen remains calm, instinctively knowing she is in no danger, this is an angel of sorts. The creature begins to speak, a feline purr to its voice:

*Not to fear girl;
Not to go on all-fours;
Not to suck up Drink;
Not to eat Fish or Flesh;
Not to claw the Bark of Trees;
Not to chase other Men;
That is the Law;
Are we not men?*

As the creature attempts a smile two large canines slip over its lower lip, and then it continues:

You will travel on the waters — the black barge, you must change it; you must paint it; you must bless it; yes; change it; paint it; bless it — no more bad cargo, no more shades, no more pain.

Paint it blue like the insect buzzing in your net.

That is the Law.

A faint vibration runs through Ellen's fingers as the blue water-skater thrashes about in her net, she opens her eyes. Dorothy is tugging on her hand, time to get up Ellen, come on, get up, it's late. A week later and the Box-office Man's barge is hauled from the ornamental lake by a team of novice monks and is placed on massive wooden chocks. There are no boat builders in these mountains but plenty of skilled carpenters and painters and they set to work refitting the vessel under Ellen's watchful eye. They scrape and smooth until every vestige of darkness is gone. Then they dip their brushes into pots of the special blue paint that Ellen has mixed and with long slow strokes, they leave a shining glossy surface — a transformation, a boat the colour of the heavens. Naturally, everyone has a different idea for a name, they fly back and forth until they end up on slips of paper in a hat. King closes her eyes, swirls her hand around inside the hat and pulls out a paper:

623

Okay that's settled but Dorothy argues that the boat should also retain a connection to the Old Town, proposing an image they have all grown up with; the white swan wearing a crown around its slender neck — all heads around the table nod and so it is that the vessel now known as 623 has the emblem of the *Orpheum* painted at the bow and stern.

The naming ceremony — a team of novice monks gather around chanting, some senior monks beat bronze gongs and the Navigator stands atop a wooden stool reading from her notebook:

Oh mighty rulers of the winds, through whose power our frail vessels traverse the wild and faceless deep, we implore you to grant this worthy vessel 623 the benefits and pleasures of your bounty, ensuring us of your gentle ministration according to our needs.

She faces north, and pours strong alcohol onto the gunwale of the vessel:

Great Boreas, exalted ruler of the North Wind, grant us permission to use your mighty powers in the pursuit of our endeavours, ever sparing us the overwhelming scourge of your frigid breath.

She faces west, pouring over the bow:

Great Zephyrus, exalted ruler of the West Wind, grant us permission to use your mighty powers in the pursuit of our endeavours, ever sparing us the overwhelming scourge of your wild breath.

She faces east, splashing liquor over the thwarts:

Great Eurus, exalted ruler of the East Wind, grant us permission to use your mighty powers in the pursuit of our endeavours, ever sparing us the overwhelming scourge of your mighty breath.

Finally, she faces south, and pours out the remaining alcohol onto the steering platform whilst reciting:

Great Notus, exalted ruler of the South Wind, grant us permission to use your mighty powers in the pursuit of our endeavours, ever sparing us the overwhelming scourge of your scalding breath.

The novices gather round the hull of 623 shouldering the transverse poles and slings to lift her from the chocks, they ease her gently down the slipway and into the lake, where she bobs serenely; the yellow sun rises over the white mountain as the Snow Lion flag flutters on the jackstaff. 623 is no longer the black barge of the final

journey, but the heaven blue vessel of maiden voyages — the white swans look across the ornamental lake, over the garden walls, past the snow-tipped peaks and on into infinity.

Breathing exercises, rapid in, rapid out; the Navigator, head swirling, falls back into the Deadman's pose and envisions herself shouldering the long punt pole, now also a brilliant blue. She can clearly see herself leaning forward, leveraging the pole into the shallows, then later passing it through a rowlock and sculling the vessel forward — but for a journey measured in millions of teacups? Feverish brain — how does the Gypsy make the craft fly, he has never mentioned the magic trick, even thinking of it makes her dizzy, she has no idea how to do this. Behind her she can hear the chants and cries of the novice monks as they wave farewell, she sculls the craft, laden with camera boxes, and tripods towards the centre of the Lake — the crew have already settled down on their rucksacks — then nothing happens, she freezes.

The craft lies dead in the water, she leans against the pole disarmed, looking down past the waterlily pads, past the darting silver of the minnows, into the darkness that for all she knows goes on forever and ever — nothing moves, time ebbs and flows in tiny pulses — stagnant. The boat suddenly dips its bow and she looks up to see a familiar figure awkwardly balanced on the prow, the Box-office man, Haros is standing in his dishevelled clothing and dirty red hat. He is clutching the stolen urn with its image of a riverboat and three figures, two men and one graceful woman who is about to step aboard. Haros stares at the Navigator as he strokes the image on the urn then even though his lips do not move she hears his words:

*Never think of the destination but look deep into the swirling
inky darkness of the River and when you no longer see
anything your journey will begin.*

Haros then lifts his right arm and points skyward to the Southwest, touches his nose with his right index finger, grunts and leaps into the lake. The Navigator looks down past the waterlily pads, past the darting silver of the minnows, her gaze follows the trail of silver

bubbles that descend into the darkness, a darkness that she knows goes on forever and ever. The boat rocks quietly, pulsing out arcs of wavelets towards the shore. The Navigator stows the pole and lifts her right arm to point to the Southwest — then she opens her eyes to find that she is surrounded by her eleven comrades all drifting in the Deadman's pose.

Assisted by the ever willing novices, the crew haul the film equipment down to the lakeside where 623 rides resplendent in its heaven-blue paint. Kong has set up a heavy wooden tripod to support a camera and is documenting the embarkation. They carefully stow the cargo to trim the vessel and finally take up their crew positions, the Navigator on the sculling platform at the stern and Kong and camera installed at the bow facing back. Cheering and chanting, gongs and horns rise from the lakeside as 623 is edged away from the jetty and slowly poled out into the lake — the Navigator struggles to control her breathing, expecting at any moment the form of Haros to surge up from the deep and overturn his old boat. They reach the lake's centre, midway between the three island palaces; the chanting continues as the clockwork motor in Kong's camera purrs on and off — the crew is settled — as in her dream, nothing happens.

The Navigator's mouth is dry and her gut is in knots — without conviction, she nods at Kong, stows her sculling pole, lifts her right arm and points heavenward to the Southwest. For a split second the chanting erupts into cheering then instantly fades as the Navigator slumps forward in a faint — nothing and everything happens at once.



Reel No.43. Tsetang.

Where the Children discover a treasure in the rubble of a derelict city.

Who knows how many teacups would have passed the lips of a traveller nor how many circuits Helios had driven his chariot across the sky. 623 gently nudges against the clay banks of a small cove, surrounded by tumbledown houses and animal sheds. A small boy in an oversized khaki military jacket lifts a crooked stick to his shoulder and prepares to defend the city, Kong aims back and the clockwork purrs; the boy is not sure if he should retreat or call for reinforcements.

They secure the vessel, disembark and give the ragged child a cold steam-bun as a formal peace treaty, even so, Belmondo and Queequeg stay aboard to guard 623 as the rest of the party make their way toward the centre of the run-down settlement. Crumbling walls with Chinese texts, rusting webs of reinforcing steel sprout from shattered concrete and inside the compounds, on either side of the overgrown track the crushed metal bodies of military vehicles, some still bearing faded red stars edged with yellow.



Figure 31. Abandoned vehicles.

Up ahead they can see the domed forms of many semi-derelict Chörtens and there are several large Gompas higher up the mountain slopes, still flying prayer flags. In a small square they pass

a group of old ladies selling cheese and dumplings, they exchange smiles and ask after the old Lhasa Cinema. The old ladies chuckle and shake their heads but point further into the town; the children follow their crooked fingers. As they depart Kong smiles at the old ladies and the camera spins its spools.

And there it is, framed by an arch of collapsed cast-concrete power poles, black cables snaking across the boarded-up entrance, the Lhasa Cinema announces itself by the faded painted placards of the final screenings.

董存瑞

Dong Cunrui

Director Guo Wei 1955

Images of a handsome young Chinese soldier heroically dodging heavy gunfire as he runs towards the enemy bunker. On the next faded plywood panel, he has launched himself into the hornet's nest, confronting the enemy with a war cry and brandishing sticks of Dynamite. The final panel is consumed by a yellow Chrysanthemum of flame, decorated with fragments of stone and bodies with the text in Chinese, Tibetan and English:

For a new China!

The two strongest boys, Mosfilm and Klatu set to work with a pinch-bar on the boarded-up doorway which soon falls away to reveal a dusty but otherwise intact foyer, plastered ceiling to floor in film posters — resolute young men and women in plain army drab or worker's blue sporting red neck scarves, stare out with determination — around the Box-office window a halo of pale black and white photographs of more young movie stars dressed in the uniform of the Peoples Liberation Army of the Celestial Empire. The programme for the final month of operation announces:

南征北战 *From Victory to Victory*

渡江侦察记 *Scouting Across the Yangtze River*

祖国的花朵 *Flowers of the Motherland*

神秘的旅伴 *Mysterious Travelling Companion*

美国之窗 *A Window on America*

Kong sets the camera up on the tripod and counts the boys in — Action. The pinch-bar splinters open the heavy double leaf door to the auditorium — a clatter of wings as a flock of startled birds fly out of the long grasses and shrubbery that have transformed the rows of seating into a terraced garden. Through the gaping holes in the roof, a large Gompas can be seen perched precariously on a cliff-top, monks coming and going through the temple portal. The party back-tracks and locates the spiral staircase that leads to the projection room — here another scene of decay; the two projectors intentionally sabotaged beyond repair and the floor a writhing sea of film torn from every spool; trampled and cut. Gort locates the storage room and reports the same story, every last zinc canister ripped open and the contents spilled and trampled — a local rebuke to the departed military forces.

They take an alternative route back to their vessel, crossing the main town marketplace and downhill past a series of dun-coloured blocks, once daubed in Chinese characters but now overpainted in Tibetan. Then Ellen raises her hand and calls a halt — her quick eye has caught the characters painted high on a dusty three-storey concrete warehouse:

电影 八一

Ellen is convinced that this matches the single Chinese phrase in No.17's notes. The Navigator consults the text and there it is — but without explanation — one of No.17's less useful mannerisms. The pinch bar comes out again, and they swarm into yet another boarded-up building — one that is about to disclose its function.



Figure 32. A Chinese film poster.

The ground floor reveals a dirty delivery and storage space, an abandoned combustion engine vehicle resting on deflated rubber tyres. The truck is stacked with slatted wooden crates, each stuffed with straw that cushions a thick glass carboy. Standing in orderly ranks against the walls more encased carboys each marked with:

电影 八一
PLA Film Unit

The penny drops instantly and the camera rolls. On the next floor a technical store full of the type of salvage that the Scavenger barges would bring to trade in the Old Town, with the most precious items being reserved for the Greeks at the *Orpheum*. Walls lined with wooden racks, some with towers of Zinc film canisters; some with dozens of mouldy cardboard boxes protecting delicate electric filament lamps; and others with sealed cases of chemical crystals. Yet others with unopened boxes full of tightly wound virgin acetate film stock, waiting to receive a coating of light-sensitive emulsion — this is the motherlode.

A small screening room on the upper level leads to a suite of empty offices and an equipment store that houses a flat-bed 16 mm editing table, several projectors of Chinese origin and two beautiful French cameras with lens kits sealed in aluminium travel cases.

The children troop downstairs and carefully re-seal the building; take their bearings and divide into two groups. One returns to 623 to prepare an overnight camp whilst the other moves uphill toward the temple to make contact with the Abbott.

The Gompas has seen better days, the walls are pitted and in need of a coat of lime wash. The monks look world-weary and rather thin but the children are received with grace, and then with enthusiasm as soon as the Navigator produces the scroll with No.17's crest and stamp — call it a *Passepartout* he had said.

The Abbott is keen to learn about Lhasa, which for him might as well be in another world — easier to travel there in his dreams than over the trackless waters — he marvels at the ability of the children to voyage so many tea-cups on such an incomprehensible journey. In a jumble of English and Tibetan, the children explain their plans for a new Cinema Institute in Lhasa and their mission, as Kong captures the meeting through the camera's unblinking eye.

There are two things to accomplish, one concerns work and the second concerns pleasure. The Navigator asks the Abbott if his monks can assist in the construction of a large wooden cargo punt that can be towed behind their vessel in order to transport materiel and equipment from the PLA Film Unit store. The second request is to arrange a visit to the caves in the mountains to the east of the town so that they may film the birthplace of the Human race — the place where the Monkey God mated with the Demon Cannibal Princess whose issue were the first humans that danced and ran on the flat grasslands beside the mountains. The Abbott smiles and nods twice saying yes and yes.

More small boys clothed in ragged army tunics and armed with sticks now patrol the makeshift camp that has sprung up alongside

623's berth. The boys enjoy the game marching back and forth, challenging everyone who approaches although they readily accept bribes of bread and dumplings to ensure safe passage — the crew of 623 play along with them calling them the honour guard. Aside from the tarpaulins slung up to provide a cookhouse and rudimentary shelter for the crew, a second encampment houses the band of novice monks and the senior craftsmen, that the Abbot has provided, who are hard at work each day cutting and shaping the planking of a sturdy flat bottomed freight barge. Work is progressing well when two canvas topped wagons appear early one morning, each drawn by two large Yaks. The drivers beckon the crew to mount for the journey to the caves several leagues to the East.

Much like sailing over water the crew lie back as the wagons roll eastwards over the dirt tracks that wind over grassy uplands towards the mountains; the gentle rocking sends them into a deep sleep.

Young Kino looks out over the world, but there is no sign of land, a giant endless meniscus, a liquid world gently rocking his body and soul. Slowly he feels himself sinking as the water recedes to reveal mountaintops, then signs of life, small animals and flowers appear. There, up ahead, Kino spies the form of a giant monkey, loping on all fours towards the dark mouth of a huge cave in the foothills of a mountain. Here the monkey sits in self-absorbed meditation, perhaps practising breathing exercises. Eyes closed and as still as a mouse, the monkey continues his internal quest until an exotic female form casts an ominous shadow across the cave entrance. Monkey opens his eyes and before him are the bare breasts of a cannibal Goddess; she has a deal to strike and she is brazen — sex now or she will populate the world with monsters that will destroy all life, including the Monkey. Kino is wide-eyed as he sees the Monkey agree — the female Goddess mounts the Monkey who maintains his Lotus pose with surprising ease. She roars and pumps the Monkey sighs and groans, the rhythm increases to a crescendo and then in a shriek, the Goddess vanishes and the Monkey swoons into the Deadman's posture. Sometime later the Goddess comes

back with five hundred smiling naked people who run and play in the grass steppe in front of the cave. The Monkey looks up quizzically from his meditation as the Demon Goddess speaks but one word.

Tibetans.

The rocking stops, the Yaks snort, and the children slowly return to the world. The wagons are standing next to the mouth of an enormous cave entrance, overhung by tresses of creepers that trail down from the rocky slopes above. The crew demount and follow the guide into the cave mouth. As their eyes become accustomed to the dim light they realise that they are standing midway between two carved stone sculptures that tower above them. The Monkey God stands with a huge erection facing the demon Goddess who, legs akimbo thrust her giant breasts towards him — the children feel as if they have just fallen from her womb, that they are the first issue on earth. The guide beckons them further into the cave where they discover a third sculpture — the pair in union, the Goddess mounted on the seated monkey, their arms encircling one another backs perfectly straight and foreheads touching.

King and Kong organise the film shoot, first angle; the approach from the Yak wagons; then the yawning cave entrance and the dim interior. Meanwhile, a team has collected bundles of dry brushwood and placed them in discreet piles around the edge of the cave floor. On her count, the brushwood is fired and the cave is suddenly illuminated by a flickering yellow light. King rolls the camera, slowly panning across the two standing statues whose features are projected in a shadow play that animates the cave walls; the sex of Monkey and the Goddess vibrating in anticipation of one another — nothing in the many films they have witnessed at the *Orpheum* has prepared them for this.

On the return journey, the children are too excited to sleep — Kino tells them of his dream of the flooded world and the gradual appearance of the land and creatures; then of the coupling of the Monkey and the Goddess — exactly as portrayed in the statues. But

the strangest thing was the appearance of hundreds of happy naked people playing in the grasslands by the forecourt of the cave:

Tibetans.

The Abbot gives them a final blessing and places a gift for his Holiness in their safekeeping. The monks have done a fine job finishing the barge in a strong red ochre colour with the name *Pha Trelgen* (Old Monkey Father) painted in white on the stem and stern, the Abbott has a little chuckle as he points to the name. Kong is set up with her camera and tripod in the bow of 623 as the Navigator strains to pole the two heavily laden vessels away from the cove and out into the vastness of the sea. The platoon of ragged boys fire a 12 gun salute with their crooked sticks then jump up and down, shout and wave — the young novices giggle and cheer.

The Navigator looks over her shoulder, 100 paces, 200 paces, she is exhausted by the effort, the *Pha Trelgen* is loaded to the gunwales with materiel from the PLA Film Unit store and she is in a cold sweat, as ever doubting her mastery over the vessel's mysterious ability to voyage. The Navigator pulls the scull from the rowlock and stows it along the gunwale. She slips the brass compass out of her tunic pocket, holds it level and waits for the needle to settle in its bath of oil. She orients the red-tipped needle to the North, then marks northeast from the vessel's centreline. She slips the compass back into her tunic and calls for everyone to stow their gear and settle down.

The Navigator takes a deep breath, closes her eyes, raises her right arm and points to the Northeast — the house lights dim.

They are underway, leaving Santa Maria Island, in the periscope, they spy a man in a small boat up ahead.

On the external speaker:

This is your Captain speaking, Good morning Ralphie. How are you doing?

On the internal speaker:

I'm doing fine Cap.

On the external speaker:

Got any fish yet?

On the internal speaker:

I got one.

(The man in Periscope holds up a salmon.)

Hold on a minute, Cap — you're getting across my line.

In the USS Sawfish:

He's reeling us in.

On the internal speaker:

Say, Cap, I guess you think me a heel, jumping ship like that.

On the external speaker:

That's all right fella. I know how it was, I'm not going to take you onboard again, though. I've got the rest of the ship's company to think about.

On the internal speaker:

Sure cap, I know that. I'm hot and getting hotter every minute I suppose.

On the external speaker:

How do you feel right now?

On the internal speaker:

Okay so far. Would you ask Mr Osborne for me how long I'll go on that way?

On the external speaker:

He thinks you'll go on for a day or so, then you'll get sick.

On the internal speaker:

Well, it's a mighty nice day to have for a last one.

Wouldn't it be hell if it was raining?

On the external speaker:

That's the way to take it. Tell me what are things like onshore?

On the internal speaker:

Everyone's dead here, Cap — but I guess you know that. I went home.

Mum and Dad were dead in bed — I'd say they took something. I went round to see the girl, and she was dead. It was a mistake going there. No dogs or cats or birds or anything alive — I guess they're all dead too. Apart from that, everything is pretty much the way it always was. I'm sorry about jumping ship, Cap, But I'm glad to be home. I got my own car and gas for it, and I got my own boat and my own outboard motor and my own fishing gear. And it's a fine sunny day. I'd rather have it this way in my own hometown, than have it in September in Australia.

On the external speaker:

Sure fella, I know how you feel. Is there anything you want right now, that we can put out on the deck for you? We're on our way and we shan't be coming back.

On the internal speaker:

You got any of those knockout pills on board, that you can take when it gets bad? The cyanide?

On the external speaker:

I haven't got those Ralph. I'll put an automatic out on deck if you want it?

On the internal speaker:

I got my own gun, I'll take a look around the pharmacy when I get on shore — maybe there's something there. But I guess the gun would be the best.

On the external speaker:

Is there anything else you want?

On the internal speaker:

Thanks, Cap, but I got everything I want onshore, Without a dime to pay either. Just tell the boys on board hullo for me.

On the external speaker:

I'll do that fella. We'll be going now. Good Fishing.

On the internal speaker:

Thanks, Cap. It's been pretty good under you, and I'm sorry I jumped ship.

On the external speaker:

Okay. Now watch the suck of the propellers as I go ahead.

The *USS Sawfish* moves away from the small boat, its two bronze propellers pushing ahead at 10 knots, leaving the man fishing to catch another salmon.

The Navigator watches the metal blade of the conning tower emblazoned with the numerals 623 slice the waves as it slowly submerges to periscope depth. When the *USS Sawfish* has vanished below the waves the Navigator raises her head and there again, balanced precariously on the bow, is the shabby figure of Haros, holding his ceramic urn toward her, insistently pointing to the image in which the female shade is about to step onto the barge. The Navigator shakes her head firmly, Haros is disappointed but powerless and he promptly dives overboard, leaving a trail of tiny silver bubbles that stream past the sleek hull of the *USS Sawfish* to disappear into the depths. Three gongs sound, one from each of the

island palaces, Dorothy rubs the sleep from her eyes and takes in the familiar surroundings of the ornamental lake set in the walled garden; from the shoreline, a chorus of cheers as a band of novice monks wave a greeting — 623 is home.



Reel No.44. Feverish work.

A debut performance at the BioScope Cinema.

Each morning Tibetan lessons; Archery and butter tea, then feverish work at the BioScope. A stench drifts across the courtyard from a cauldron of simmering Yak hooves that provides a pure Gelatine base for the Silver Halide emulsion. A young monk slowly stirs the evil-smelling brew with a wooden pole — standing at his side Kino dreams of the slow movement of Yak's feet through the upland pastures transformed into the flow of characters across the screen, characters that live in a layer so thin and so fragile but who can perform such large and dramatic actions — how is this possible? Kino has much to learn, he turns to the novice and asks how thick the layer of Gelatine will be once it has dried on the acetate strips. The novice wrinkles his brow and then recites a series of measurements:

Aṇu, skra'i rtse mo — or eight atoms, equal to one point of a hair.

Likṣa or likṣā, sro ma — or eight hair tips equal to one nit.

Yākā or yūka, shig — or eight nits equal to one louse.

Yava, nas — or eight lice equal to one grain of barley.

Aṅgula, sor or sor mo — or eight barley grains equal to one finger.

Tāla — equal to twelve fingers.

And then declares with a confident smile:

Mmm...aṇu, skra'i rtse mo

One point of hair!

Kino passes his hand through his unruly mop imagining the thousands of potential characters clinging to each strand of his chestnut hair — thousands and thousands; the novice smiles and passes his hand over his own shaved skull with an imperceptible shake of the head, he mutters:

Stong-pa nyid

Emptiness.

In the monochrome red light of the darkroom the two Alchemists, King and Kong, work to transform coils of film into dancing images. They pour rainwater onto crystals in porcelain tanks; acetate is seared in one chemical then another, washed and dried — held up to squinting eyes and a look of wonderment for the magic worked. It is day fourteen since their return to Lhasa — they have spent an entire week in the sombre red glow followed by another; eyes fixed to the small flickering screen of the flatbed editing bench that shuffles film to and fro. King wielding a white wax crayon, Kong with a tiny guillotine and bottle of solvent glue — a heady mixture drawn from a Chinese flask labelled in Chinese and English:

Poison; dioxane, dichloromethane, acetone and methanol.

Nestling in white cotton bags mounted on the walls around them snakes of developed film lay waiting for their cue to enter the drama that the twins are brewing. In the adjoining room Mosfilm and Ellen work alongside two scribes from the Potola Palace painstakingly painting the titles; inter-titles and credits on large wooden panels ready to be filmed and cut into the finished item, the Title board is already mounted on the wall.

No.17 stands beaming at the head of a procession of monks which comes to a halt at the polished black doors of the BioScope. He looks up at the freshly painted graphic above the entrance — the eye of a movie camera looks directly at His Holiness, immediately to the left of the camera lens, the partially obscured face of a young girl offers the second unblinking eye.

A blast of horns and a crash of gongs and they are inside the building, the throng filling the auditorium to well beyond capacity. In a show of enthusiasm, No17 sits in the centre seat of the front row, and his immediate entourage noisily jostles for seats around him, the rest squeeze in anywhere they can find a place. As the house lights dim a tall figure draped in black elbows his way into the press at the rear of the room to stand with the novices and stray townsfolk.

Anticipation soaks up the last tiny sounds in the room save for the distant putter of the generator in the rear yard of the BioScope; a cone of light illuminates the dust hanging above the audience accompanied by the faint mechanical clatter of film racing through the projector gate.

No.17 adjusts his spectacles and concentrates, fingering his beads — he begins to memorise the camera movements and scenes as the titles scroll down the screen superimposed over an image of Potola Palace:

TITLE:

“Girl with a Movie Camera”.

Crawl:

*An Orpheum Production
in cooperation with the
Lhasa Film Institute
and the BioScope*

INTER-TITLE: The BioScope Lhasa.

EXT: Crossfade; to the forecourt of the BioScope, the doors open — dolly shot to the interior — pan to the right showing the Box-office and smiling attendant — fade to black.

EXT: Close-up; of a camera lens, the iris opens to reveal a vignette of the children seated for breakfast at their guest-house, they smile and wave at the camera, holding aloft cups of tea and pastries, an old lady enters the frame from the right and bows to the camera, waves and exits frame to the right.

EXT: Crossfade; to the forecourt of the BioScope, the children briskly enter from the right as a group.

INT: Cut; to a medium shot of children opening wooden cases of camera and projector equipment and setting the devices on trestle tables.

INT: Cut; to a medium shot of children learning to work with camera equipment — Insert shot; of camera interior with fingers indicating functions.

INT: Cut; to medium close-up of a boy holding camera and winding crank. POV; facing camera.

FLASH CUT: A rapid sequence of BioScope Interiors, Fade to black.

INT: Dolly shot; of camera entering the BioScope auditorium, panning around the stage area and seating, Jumpcut; to the projection room and Close-up; of hands lacing up the projector, Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: Archery.

EXT: Close-up; of Girl drawing an arrow, its tip pointing directly at the camera. Reverse angle; view along arrow shaft towards the target as the girl releases the arrow.

EXT: Close-up; as arrow buries itself in the earthen target. Crossfade; to mounted archers galloping past the camera in clouds of dust shooting arrows as they ride.

EXT: Medium shot; of children as a group sitting in front of a rustic hut, holding their bows, drinking tea and waving to the camera. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: The Gypsy departs.

EXT: Crossfade; The Gypsy stands in the stern of his punt waving to a group of monks on the shore of the ornamental lake. The Gypsy poles his craft to the centre of the lake. Reverse angle: shot from one of the Palace bridges. The Gypsy moves towards the camera,

waving novices behind him on the shore then disappears from view. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: Preparations for the voyage.

INT: Medium shot; at the BioScope the children are packing cameras, tripods and film stock into travel cases, a scene of busy organisation.

INT: Medium shot; at the Guesthouse, the children playing a game of snakes and ladders on a triple-level gaming board. Close-up; of hands shaking the dice. Close-up; of moving small images on the board. Close-up; of creating a mosaic of images on the table. Fade to black.

EXT: Long-shot; A group of novices working with the children on their vessel, scraping and cleaning the wooden hull. Close-up; girl with metal scraper working hard. Close-up of a boy with paintbrush applying a fresh coat to the bare wood. Close-up; of a novice painting a Buddhist image on the bow, he turns and grins at the camera. Close-up; the Navigator carefully paints the number 623 on the bow.

EXT: Long-shot; A group of monks cheer as the newly painted vessel is eased from the slipway by the novices and children into the lake. Medium shot of the Navigator waving a flag (a white swan with crown, on blue background) as she stands amidships in the vessel that floats alongside the quay.

EXT: Long-shot; the vessel is loaded, cases are passed hand to hand from the shore and stowed onboard.

INTER-TITLE: The voyage.

EXT: Long-shot; a big crowd partially obscures the vessel, the crowd parts to let the crew board. Crossfade; the crowd wave excitedly as the vessel moves away from the shore to the centre of the lake.

Reverse-view; Long-shot; of the crowd receding into the distance.
Fade to black.

Crossfade; to overexposed film with a faint image of Haros clutching a ceramic urn, gesticulating to the image of a boat. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: Tsetang.

EXT: Medium-shot; of a muddy bank with a ragged boy waving a stick at the camera, behind him a shabby town rises up the hill.

EXT: Medium-shot; the backs of a group of children walking up a pot-holed street lined on either side with ruined buildings.
Crossfade; to a 360 degree Pan; of the surroundings, broken walls covered in Chinese and Tibetan graffiti and a few burnt-out metal vehicles.

EXT: Medium-shot; a group of leather-skinned old ladies with toothless smiles. Close-up of an old lady speaking then pointing, camera Pans; to follow her bony finger which points towards the top of the hill. Cut.

EXT: Long-shot; the Lhasa Cinema. Crossfade; Medium shot: of two boys with a crowbar prising the main doors open. Fade to black.

Medium Close-up: The doors burst open and the group enter the building. Fade to black.

INT: Medium-shot; of the interior of the Lhasa Cinema. Pan; the camera takes in the Box-office with its array of faded photographs of film stars and large film posters showing heroic Chinese soldiers.
Crossfade; to view through the auditorium doors. Push in; to a view of the interior, roofless and overgrown with foliage, disturbed birds fly in alarm. Cut.

INT: Medium-shot; of the interior of the projection room with its sabotaged machines and tangles of torn and dusty cine film.

Close-up; of the boy Belmondo holding a torn film strip up to the light. Cut.

Insert shot: A soldier crouches in a trench, a dead comrade slumped next to him. Smoke and flash erupt all around and dirt showers down on him. He wipes the mud from his stern face. The soldier takes two hand grenades from a canvas pouch, one in each hand, he jerks out the pins with his teeth, yells and with a terrifying grimace scrambles over the brow of the trench and into the blinding smoke. Cut.

INTER-TITLE: A visit to the Temple; The Barge.

EXT: Long-shot; the children approach a large temple set on the slopes of a mountain.

EXT: Medium-shot; the children are greeted by the Abbot and monks at the temple gates Lines of prayer flags flutter in the background. Push in; the camera follows the group as they enter the temple.

INT: Medium-shot; of the reception sala, the children sit cross-legged in an audience with the Abbot.

INT: Close-up; the Navigator unfolds a large drawing (of a barge) and spreads it before the Abbot and his senior monks. Heads nod. Dissolve to.

Insert shot: of fingers tracing the lines and details of the drawing, showing side, elevation and vertical views of the barge. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: A visit to the Temple; The trip to the mountain caves.

INT: Close-up; Dorothy unfolds a hand-drawn map of Tsetang, again the Abbot and his monks lean forward to study the paper as Dorothy traces a route from the city towards the three sacred caves in the mountains to the East.

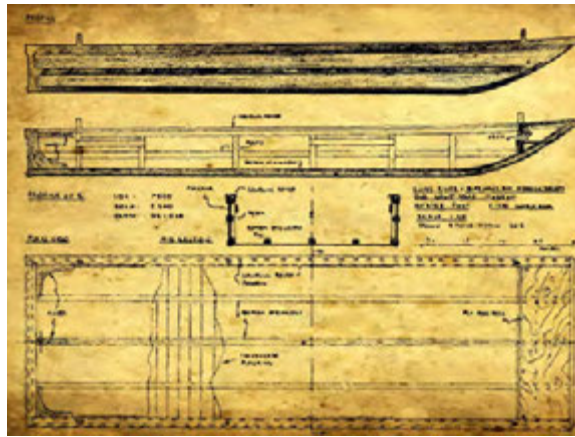


Figure 33. Drawing of a Barge.

INT: Close-up; of the Abbot nodding and smiling.

INTER-TITLE: Boatbuilding.

EXT: Long-shot; a gang of novices, the children and several craftsmen hauling timbers close by their waterside camp. Crossfade; monks sawing and hammering. Crossfade; craftsmen erecting the wooden frames of the hull. Crossfade; tanned old man hammering planking onto frames. Crossfade; camp dog pulling on a rope. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: The Mountain trip.

EXT: Medium-shot; Two wagons drawn by Yaks come to a halt beside the nearly finished barge and the children troop out of their tents carrying rucksacks, smiling at the camera, Mosfilm and Kino wave as they climb aboard. Crossfade; POV from inside the wagon awning looking ahead over the heads of the Yaks to show the mountain uplands. Crossfade; POV from inside the wagon looking rearward towards the second wagon, with a distant view of the city below. Cut.

EXT: Long-shot; the two wagons are standing near the entrance of a huge cave, the children descend and move towards the cave mouth. Fade to black.

INT: Fade from black; Medium-shot; of the cave interior illuminated by small brush fires set against the cave walls. Pan; across two large sculptures and a smaller statue in the rear of the cave.

INT: Medium-shot; POV; camera pointing upwards at the statue of the Monkey, its huge erect phallus animated in the flickering light. Crossfade: POV; camera pointing upwards at the statue of the Demon Goddess, her gigantic breasts heaving in the light of the flames. Fade to black.

INT: Medium close-up; Pan; the camera circles The Monkey and the Demon Yab-Yum sculpture. Crossfade; to Close-up; details of the hands; face and other details of the statue. Fade to black.

INTER-TITLE: The return to Lhasa.

EXT: Long-shot; Flags flying as the children move through the farewell crowd to board the two vessels which are ready loaded with many crates and carboys. Cut: to Close-up; of Abbot's face cheering. Cut: to Medium-shot; of cheering crowd. Cut: to POV; of vessels from the crowd.

EXT: Medium-shot; of the Navigator standing on the sculling platform of 623, slowly guiding the vessel (and the towed barge) away from the land, the children wave continuously. Cut.

Crossfade; to overexposed film with a faint image of the conning tower of US navy submarine 623 cutting through the waves to gradually submerge. Fade to black.

EXT: Medium-shot; of the two heavily laden vessels moving towards the jetty at the ornamental lake in Lhasa. A large group lines the shore chanting. Cut; to Medium-shot of the crew stepping ashore smiling and waving. Cut; to Medium-shot of novices unloading the vessels and stacking the crates.

INT: Medium close-up; the cutting table with long strips of film. Dissolve to; Kong silhouetted as she holds the film up to a light-box.

Dissolve to; film racing through the spools of the editing bench.
Insert shot: the circular pan sequence of the Yab-Yum statue. Cut.

INT: Medium close-up; at the BioScope the seventeenth Dali Lama sits cross-legged in an audience with the children they pass around film canisters and posters as they discuss the BioScope film programme. Crossfade; Medium-shot; of the Dali Lama sitting alone in the exact centre of the BioScope auditorium with the light of the projector sparking above him. Cut.

INTER-TITLE: an image of the Potola Palace with the word FIN.

The house lights come up and the children direct their gaze towards No.17 who sits immobile in the centre seat of the front row. Minutes pass, then more minutes, and the room is bound by silence. Finally, No.17 stands and turns towards the audience who scramble to their feet. He surveys the children with a curiously expressionless face but cannot keep up the pretence any longer — he breaks into a huge grin and exclaims:

*Oh the best was the Yab-Yum in the cave
Oh, Father, Mother
Oh, Wisdom and Compassion.*

The audience takes this as a cue for a general celebration and spills out into the forecourt where a small army of grandmothers have prepared a feast for the premiere.

The morning after the premiere of *The Girl with the Movie Camera* news arrives that two bedraggled men claiming to be soldiers from the Peoples Liberation Army of the Celestial Empire have been arrested by the guards at Potola Palace. During interrogation, they both claim to have been born some 147 years previously and had been stationed for several years in Tsetang after they had taken part in the occupation of Lhasa during the 1950s. After speaking with the men No.17 concludes that they are genuine and sends them away to work on a palace farm in the upland pastures. He also requests that the children film them for the record. The farmhands ask the two

revenants many questions about Lhasa in the time of the Fourteenth Dali Lama and begin to call them the *Celestial young-old-men*.

That same morning the children skip their normal exercise routine to enjoy a well earned late breakfast, taking the time to reflect upon their work to discuss the enthusiastic reception of the previous evening. Their call to the kitchen for more sweet pancakes and tea is answered not by one of the hobbling grandmothers but by a tall stranger carrying a large tray which he sets down in their midst. As he sits the strangeness lifts from him and the Gypsy looks about at the children with a broad grin and says that he liked the Yab-Yum sequence too!

The Gypsy unfolds a large sheet of blue paper, another map, with two curving blue tracks and explains that the northernmost leads all the way back to the Old Town, marked by a tiny rendering of the *Orpheum*. The other track curves southwards towards the farmlands that they are due to visit in two months to help with the harvest. But first, the Gypsy suggests that they should visit the three old Greeks and show them their splendid film, for after all it was made on the camera that the Projectionist gifted to them — besides who knows what the old fellows have been getting up to in their retirement?

The following morning the guesthouse is once again full of half-packed rucksacks and travel cases jammed with camera equipment; tightly sealed canisters of freshly coated film and a jumble of tripods. The packing has temporarily been abandoned as the group is deeply immersed in the continuation of their game of snakes and ladders. Ellen rolls the dice, her film frame climbs hand over hand up the rungs of the final ladder to reach the centre of the upper layer. She moves Madame N. Poltavseva's blood-streaked face next to the naive expression of Patricia who is thinking about her dead boyfriend the petty criminal Michel. Next to her the mighty but vanquished King-Kong who is about to plunge to his death rubs shoulders with a disgruntled Russian Marine who is preparing to fight the bourgeois oppressors. On the other side of the board, the TinMan has just been joined by the Wicked Witch and the wild King



Figure 34. The Pequod.

who bristles with arrows — the three laid out in the rigid grid of a necropolis — to await an unknown fate.

The game continues until supper time, the mosaic of images moving outward from the centre like the tendrils of a creeper; characters forming strange new acquaintances, mixing up their lines and stage directions. Klatu throws a double six and pushes an image of Ahab, a feverish look in his eyes, through the lower portal, another roll of the dice and Ahab immediately scales a ladder to the second level — Klatu can hear him shout above the roar of the sea:

*From hell's heart, I stab at thee; for hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee.
Ye damned whale.*

Klatu sees a whaleboat fly through the spume, the harpoon line looped around the king-post; water-drenched to cool its burning coils. Snake-like it winds around Ahab's leg, biting deep to pluck him from the frail boat and lash him to the flank of the enraged whale. Ahab stares out but his ship, the *Pequod* is nowhere to be seen, vanished, as has the crew of his whaleboat, all that remains is an endless blue-grey horizon. Then before him, the head and shoulders of a man entirely made of metal appear at the top of a ship's ladder set in what can only be the deck of some vast cargo-hold. The metal creature is enormous and has no face — it towers over Ahab and slowly raises a hand in salute as it walks

mechanically past him, between the tails and open mouths of what appears to be a shoal of sea monsters that span from deck to deck. Ahab cries out again:

*By heavens man, we are turned round and round in this world,
like yonder windlass, and fate is the handspike.*

Someone is gently tapping his shoulder; Klatu turns to see Ellen holding out the cup and dice, he shakes the cup and rolls the dice — Ahab climbs yet another ships-ladder to reach daylight on the main deck.



Reel No.45. The Homecoming.

MGM has a premonition of disaster en route to the Old Town.

623 is fully laden and her crew at their positions, the shore is lined with the smiling faces of the monks who have come to farewell the children and to once again witness the strange phenomenon of dematerialisation when their vessel lifts its dripping keel just above the surface of the lake and then nothing — leaving behind only air laced with birdsong and the scent of blossoms. Today is double-special as immediately after the children have departed the Gypsy quietly steps aboard his sleek punt, turns to the assembled monks with a slight bow and slowly poles his craft out into the lake — one moment he looks back over his right shoulder with a grin; the next he is nowhere to be seen. The novices look at one another with expressions of delight, each a witness to the inexplicable.

Measured in tea cups or by the dance of the polished steel dividers across the endlessly blue pages of the Navigator's Atlas the voyage to the Old Town is daunting but for the crew of 623 the compact of velocity distance and time has no value — their trajectory is measured in dreams and visions.

Scene 1. The Farm.

MGM walks onto the set, a tin-plated megaphone in her right hand and a clipboard in her left. The cameraman is already in position on his dolly, ready for the tracking shot that will move through a scene of devastation. The lighting technicians are at their stations with assistants steadying the large silvered reflector panels and the sound recordist is preparing his equipment to record atmosphere.

The set is bleak; all around the Golden Lady's farm the land lays deserted; the fields are black and withered, the orchards bare and the buildings dilapidated; the scene glowers under a dark brooding sky. At a command from MGM the lights come up and *Action* — the camera rolls forwards on the track and ahead, in its field of vision, a

seismic explosion blossoms, wracks of smoke issue skywards from the fractured earth.

Into the viewfinder of a second, static camera, the terrifying form of Hades, King of the Underworld, emerges through the fissure in the ground and drags the beautiful grain maiden Persephone from the remains of her shattered clay silo and downward into the bowels of the earth — in close-up; grain cascades into the abyss following her cries.

The rushes are just in, MGM sits anxiously in the small theatrette as the first reel lights up the screen — but almost immediately the film breaks spewing streamers of acetate across the floor of the projection room. MGM turns in her seat to look up at the Projectionist and suddenly understands that it is Hades who occupies the bio-box. The King of the Underworld strikes a Lucifer and puts a flame to the film writhing on the floor which instantly flares and shrivels.

MGM sees the blades of a projector shutter slowly rotating before her, alternating light and dark; white and black — that is how Persephone and her mother live; in a world of light, of growth and fecundity, embracing the spring and the summer — but they are also fated to exist in that other world in the grip of autumn and winter; of darkness, dormancy and decay. The projector shutter spins — light then dark; movement then stillness!

Daylight breaks to expel darkness and MGM is roused by the commotion onboard; her friends are heaving equipment boxes and supplies ashore. 623 is beached in the boat graveyard alongside the decrepit hulk of the *Syracuse* — *they have returned*. Once unloaded the children board the decayed ship, still harbouring a fantasy that the Poet might suddenly appear — they decide to set up camp on its deck that evening.

The ship is just as the Poet had left it and they use his fishing gear to haul in plenty of fish for supper, grilled over the brazier that he had set up adjacent to his hammock under the awning. That night the town's only other electric light show delivers a gala performance —

the *Aurora Borealis* shimmers in arcs above then, curtains of green velvet are drawn across the firmament. Gort cannot sleep, distracted by the distant strains of song that haunt the *Syracuse* — but by morning the Poet has still not made an appearance and Gort is too embarrassed to mention the nocturnal serenade.

They slip along the lakeside path towards their old dacha, almost walking straight past it by mistake as it had been utterly transformed in their absence. Where now is the entrance? Even the pitch of the roof is softened beyond recognition by a mass of strangler vine. Perhaps their Dacha no longer exists, other than as a trellis-work of thorny creepers that trace its external form. No longer the pale light of the mouldy salon with its worm-eaten mahogany table, gone the hand-painted wall coverings — all have been digested by an army of living green — agents of the Golden Lady. They walk on, peering into the marshy ponds en route to the upper town, but nothing hangs in the morning vapours that hover above the still waters, no images torn from dreams or nightmares.

To their surprise the three old Greeks are nowhere to be seen in the *Café des Poètes* but considering that now they are themselves, travellers, the children decide to stop for a while and order coffee like regular patrons. The Greeks will turn up sooner or later and sure enough, within an hour the three old fellows lumber across from the arcade entrance. The children exchange knowing glances, the old men are obviously still up to something in the *Orpheum*.

The three old men puff and wheeze as they pull up chairs to an adjacent table, all smiles and pleasantries as the waiter sets down their usual combination of strong black coffee and herbal liquor. The Projectionist surveys the children with curiosity as he absentmindedly stirs honey in his chipped cup with its well worn gilt rim. Dorothy announces that they have come to show them *A Girl with a Movie Camera* their first feature film and that with their permission they also wish to film a documentary about the Orpheum and the Old Town. The three men are affable and agree to both a screening and to be players in the documentary. The conversation is light, Gort enquires after the Poet but the old men

just smile in response and avoid any mention of the Usher or the Gypsy. All the children can glean is that whilst the three are hard at work in the *Orpheum* for a few hours each day the cinema is no longer open to the public and that there have been no screenings since the children left.

A private screening is arranged for the children's film, at noon on the following day — there will be refreshments the Janitor mentions with a sweeping gesture of largesse. They say their farewells leaving the old men to soak up the evening sun.

The night is warm, perhaps too warm for the fire Belmondo has kindled in the brazier but it serves as a hypnotic focal point for the crew who sit gazing into the coals as they weave a plan of action. The children decide that they will film their screening; Dorothy and Klatu are assigned to take some exterior footage of the *Orpheum*; whilst King and Kong will record the interior and especially the operations of the projection room. As a supplement to the inter-titles Ellen is elected to narrate the footage of *Girl with a Movie Camera* and MGM will provide an accompaniment on the cinema's piano.

They are set up well before noon and roll the camera as soon as the three Greeks, dressed in their Sunday best, enter the arcade from the town square and slowly walk towards the cinema. Being old hands they disregard the camera and proceed to open up the *Orpheum*, only to find camera No.2 positioned in the foyer. Camera No.1 now follows the Projectionist up to the projection room and films his normal routine; lacing up the first reel on *Der Rot Czar* and the second reel on *Die Dicke Berthe*.

The children, the Janitor and the Box-office man take their seats; Dorothy clears her throat and MGM adjusts the piano stool, a quick trill on the keys and Dorothy describes the locations that will appear in the film, their base at the BioScope in Lhasa and the year of production — 2081 or 2625 in Lhasa time. The Janitor and the Box-office man exchange knowing glances, dates and time are foreign to them. For them time is one of life's paradoxes pinioned on the tip of Zeno's arrow; an arrow that flies from the bow to occupy an infinite

series of positions frozen in an infinite series of instants — exactly as in a film; a static image etched into each serial frame. But the Greeks know that as an instant has no duration then the arrow can have no motion; it can never move from one instant, or one position to the next and so can never fly from the bow to its target — like the 35 mm frame stuttering through the projector gate to form an illusion — movement is composed of immobilities.

This is what runs through their thoughts as the house lights dim to the faint ratchet sounds of the projector. The screen announces:

Girl with a Movie Camera

*An Orpheum Production
in cooperation with the
Lhasa Film Institute
and the BioScope*

~

The BioScope Lhasa

MGM trills on the piano keyboard as the scene opens on the forecourt of the BioScope, a small cinema — the doors open and the camera moves into the interior its lens taking in the Box-office and its smiling attendant. The scene fades to black and Dorothy announces:

The film crew.

The next scene fills the screen with a close-up of a camera lens; the iris opens to reveal a vignette of the children seated for breakfast at their guest-house, they smile and wave at the camera, holding aloft cups of tea and pastries — apparently by accident, an old lady enters the frame from the right and bows to the camera, waves and exits the frame as soon as she can.

Dorothy waxes lyrical and MGM interjects with either lyrical or passionate piano passages as the film rolls onto its conclusion. The three Greeks are quietly impressed by the quality of the children's work and by their intelligent and ironic reprise of Vertov's original.

After the lights have come up and the Greeks have applauded long and loud, the Janitor ushers the children from the auditorium — a long table has been set in the cinema foyer laid out with a lunch provided by the patron of the *Café des Poètes*. As they eat the three old men quiz the children about the operation of the BioScope and the ambitions of the Lhasa Film Institute. They want to know all about their adventures in the Asian mountain settlements and the abandoned film facilities from which they successfully supplied their film projects. Moreover, the Projectionist seems extremely interested in the boy No.17 whom the children claim to be a reincarnation of the sixteen previous Dali Lamas. Where the Projectionist wants to know, does he go in between his incarnations and what does he recall of his former existences? What of everyone else, do they all reincarnate, as people, or in other forms, do they perhaps undergo metamorphoses into other species?

Ellen is about to attempt a complicated explanation of the wheel of Dharma when the twins, whose eyes are riveted on the Projectionist, blurt out a question:

How old are you?

Taken by surprise the Projectionist clears his throat, pauses and then quotes his old acquaintance Metrodorus on the perilous condition all beings must face:

*Facing all other dangers we can gain safety for ourselves,
but so far as death is concerned, we all live in a city without walls.*

But, he continues, that until quite recently he has not applied this sentiment either to himself or to his two compatriots. They are indeed, as perhaps the children may have long suspected, very, very old; in fact as old in fact as the world itself. Their kind gain

sustenance from a unique food, *Ambrosia* that fills their immortal veins with the substance *Ichor* that flows in the place of blood. Recently their *Ichor* was stolen from them whilst they slept by the demon Nosferatu sending them limping down the path that all mortals tread — and what of the Vampire? He has mysteriously disappeared, taking their future along with him.

He continues explaining that in the short time he and his companions have left, they must work tirelessly collecting all the dead souls they can find in order to send them to their rightful home. The Projectionist explains that the soul is immortal, as claimed in Plato's *Phaedo*. It all rests upon the dialogue of opposites — a tussle between hot and cold if you like. Hot comes to be from a state of coldness and coldness, must, in turn, come to be from a state of heat; if it were not so life would proceed in only one direction. So too with the cycle of life and death, the living meet their end in death but death inevitably provides the sustenance for life. As he speaks the Projectionist imagines his two heat engines pouring light through their gates and lenses, revivifying the past, reincarnating those who are now dust. He concludes:

I will show you how.

King's camera is mounted in a corner of the Projection room, down below in the boiler house a second camera is focussed upon the Janitor who is stoking the old paddle-steamer boiler to a roaring heat with dry mangrove wood. The needles in the dials point to red, the pressure valves hiss and jet steam and an unnatural purring radiates from the squat blue Westinghouse creature. Up above the Box-office man sits at a small table drawing strips of film from calico bags and scrutinising the images against a lightbox; his shears snapping deftly as reptile jaws, excising sets of twenty-four single images, one-second of life at a time.

He stands next to the Projectionist passing the frames one by one, as his friend clips them into the apertures located around the large spinning disc, that to the children, resembles the Wheel of Fortune that the Scavengers set up each year in the town square for the

winter solstice fair. The two men step back and the Projectionist transforms himself into a carnival monster with a giant leather head, set with shining jet black eyes. Instead of hands he dons grasping leather paws and as if from an abattoir, a loose leather apron tattooed with stains and burns. The camera winds on hungrily.

The Projectionist grasps the wooden handle at the centre of the machine and violently begins to crank — he lets out an animal cry. At this signal the Box-office man throws up a lever on the wall behind the projectors and the room is flooded with a blinding light pulsating through the rapidly spinning images. King spins the aperture of the lens to its smallest setting and hopes for the best as the Projectionist whirls the crank handle faster and faster; the light is now a swirling blaze — an orbiting comet — incandescent debris flies from the edge of the whirling disc, a roaring galaxy slicing the room in two. Then suddenly the Projectionist is flung backwards and the air fills with the pungent smell of burnt celluloid — a haze of smoke glows a sulphurous yellow at the rim of the hurtling wheel. The Box-office man cuts the energy to the lamp; the Projectionist steadies himself and slowly transforms back into a man. The children exchange glances, and the Navigator stops taking notes.

After a short rest, the process is repeated, the two men will enact this soul-saving operation until they are exhausted and only then will they stumble over to the café to relax. King and the Navigator stay on for two more iterations to ensure they have adequate filmed material then they leave the old Greeks to their labours.

Fruit bats noisily stream out of their forest roosts as evening falls and the children assemble on the deck of the *Syracuse* for their evening meal. They are haunted by the spectacle of the old Greeks and their obsessive programme tending to the souls of long-departed actors and actresses. But where do they all end up? Gort pipes up that certainly they are all drinking coffee at the *Café des Poètes* as featured in Cocteau's film *Orphée*, which to his dismay earns laughs all around.

The group decide that priority one is to develop the recent footage shot in the Old Town and at the *Orpheum* so that the rushes can be shown to the three old Greeks before their return journey to Lhasa, this way they can also give No.17 an instant film show as soon as they arrive home — they all know that he is burning with curiosity about the *Orpheum*.

Klatu and Belmondo gingerly haul a couple of travel cases down the companionway stairs into the hold of the *Syracuse* — cavernous and suitably dark. For the next few hours, they work, setting up a level bench, and mixing containers of chemicals to develop and fix the black and white reversal stock. Red gel filters are wrapped around the vessel's old spirit lamps and the black drums of the Lomo UPB-1 hand developing tanks are cleaned and dried. The spirit lamps are extinguished and the boys grope about like two moles checking the hold for light leaking in from the deck above. Satisfied that they are in profound darkness they fumble their way back to the makeshift bench and open the canisters of film and slowly load the reels into the developing drums. They feel around the table to make sure all the material is loaded and only then do they cast about for a box of Lucifer matches. Klatu strikes but the first stick snaps in two, its red head flaring like a miniature comet onto the deck where it is instantly extinguished; he is more careful with the second Lucifer and shrouds the newborn flame carefully between his cupped hands as he moves towards the spirit lamps. The hold glows in soft red light as the two boys once again read through the checklist, reciting the procedure and chemicals out aloud to one another, touching the glass flasks as they go.

Belmondo starts with the flask labelled *Developer* in looping blue handwriting, followed by a list of ingredients:

Metol 2gm
Sodium Sulphite 90gm
Hydroquinone 8gm
Sodium Carbonate 52gm
Potassium Bromide 5gm
Water 1.5 lt.

They carefully pour the liquid through a funnel into each of the three Lomo drums; noting the position of the big hand on Dorothy's pocket watch that they have borrowed for this operation. Eight minutes exactly, read the instructions in the notebook, and at every thirty-seconds, the knob on top of the drum must be turned ninety degrees and jiggled. The two work the three tanks together and when eight minutes have elapsed they decant the liquid back into the big glass bottle. Next comes clean water, flushed into the drum and poured out into a zinc bucket, three times over — then very carefully they pick up the second big flask marked:

POISON

Bleach Fix

~

Sulphuric Acid 48% 70 ml

Potassium Dichromate 15gm

Water 1500 ml

Making sure not a drop is spilt they fill the three tanks, noting that this phase lasts for seven minutes and that they must agitate as often as possible. Again they take a delicate glass funnel and return the corrosive mixture to the flask, stoppering it immediately.

More rinsing with freshwater, three times for each drum and then comes the cleaning bath, a solution of anhydrous Sodium Sulphite which takes only two minutes but which must be accompanied by constant agitation of the spindle.

The two tick off each stage in the notebook and then it is back to the developer for a second time, slightly shorter at five minutes, followed by another session with the fixing agent, this time for only four minutes but again with plenty of agitation. A five-minute rinse with fresh water and finally an immersion in a wetting agent that they have made from plant soap and glycerine diluted in plenty of water. The two consult the notebook once more, moving their fingers down the list, conferring with one another and nodding — yes all is in order.

They now unscrew the lids of the developing tanks one by one and draw out the glistening streamers of film; Klatu walks to one end of the hold and taking a wooden clothes peg secures the film to a line that they have strung across the beam of the ship. Belmondo unwinds the remainder of the reel, passing it over a small hook set into the bulkhead at the opposite end of the hold and then walks back towards Klatu where they attach the remaining end to the line with a second peg. They repeat this three times and then mount the companionway stairs to join the others on deck, leaving the film to dry overnight.

Early next morning King and Dorothy open the hatch to the hold and wind the film onto spools and bring it up to the deckhouse where they have set up a portable splicing block. As there is no artificial lighting onboard they have draped a white cloth over the wheelhouse window that faces the sun. They squint at the images, smiling at the perfectly developed results. They quickly set about splicing the principal sequences in a running order, storing the out-takes onto a spare spool. After the noon meal, they set out for the Old Town, lugging a portable 16 mm projector — hoping that the Westinghouse beetle supplies the same current as they use in the BioScope.

The children sit in the well worn red velvet seats forming an entourage around the three old men — the small projector, perched on a makeshift stand between the behemoths of *Der Rot Czar and Die Dicke Bertha*, purrs into action and the old men lean forward in delight — it is, of course, the first time they have witnessed themselves on screen — portrayed countless times on vases, murals and as statues carved in the finest white marble but as the protagonists of a film; never!

They sit entranced, the Projectionist relishing his role as the Minotaur in command of the burning wheel of fate — King's camerawork rendering the pyrotechnics in a tough grainy halo of fire and smoke. The tail leader rattles through the gate and the lights come up, revealing the three old men with broad smiles — *wonderful, wonderful* they chant in unison before easing themselves

from their seats. They make their apologies and say their farewells before retiring to the café, leaving the children to close up the decrepit cinema.



Reel No.46. The Journey East, part 1.

The Navigator has a vision causing the children to turn back to the Old Town and make a drastic change to the course of history.

They rewind the rushes and fold down the spool arms of the 16 mm projector but before they quit the building the Navigator places two grey film canisters marked *The Girl with a Movie Camera* on the worn mahogany surface of the Box-office counter, a small memento of their visit.

623 is loaded and ready for the journey back to Lhasa; the children take their places; MGM casts off and the Navigator eases the craft away from its berth alongside the hulk of the *Syracuse* — King trains her lens on its rotting waterline as they slide away, then pans out across the placid waters to the distant horizon. In another hundred paces, the scene dissolves in a small shudder and wave of vertigo as 623 floats upward from the glassy surface.

Jump-cut; The Navigator is awakened by a scream; her own scream, she jolts upright but the vision continues to roll before her eyes.

The Minotaur dances wildly behind his arc of fire, spinning faster and faster he grunts, snorts and finally screams in ecstasy as the disc ignites in an incandescent shower. The Minotaur falls on his rump rocking his deformed head back and forth, then he looks through his black glassy eyes directly into the Navigator's being — she is pinioned like a beetle in a museum tray.

She tears her gaze away just as her boat clumsily scrapes against the remains of a landing stage in the familiar lake. But there is no welcoming party, no birdsong, no blossom. She rouses the crew who look about in dismay; a stench of rotting fish rises from the fetid water, the three islands stand naked, each of the palaces tumbled down and charred and the once elegant bridges fallen. The only living thing in sight is a White Swan that glides serenely over the oily water, a delicate golden crown encircling its neck.

They hurriedly tie 623 to the wharf and make toward Potola Palace. Their path takes them past the familiar BioScope — but this too is transformed into a simple facade, propped from behind with rough-sawn timbers, its features a thin veneer of stucco peeling from its plywood backing, the poorly painted details a mere illusion. Next to the facade, the shell of a mobile editing suite, the door hanging from one hinge revealing a chaos of damaged equipment.

Potola Palace is deserted save for a few goats, its roof caved in and the rich fabric trappings now revealed as a gaudily painted canvas flats. Abandoned studio lights lay fallen and rusting in the main halls and anti-Tibetan graffiti in Chinese is daubed on the walls throughout. *Red Victory* cigarette butts form a carpet around the Dali Lama's Dias.

A day's walk to the East and the group arrive at the farm where they once filmed the two revenant *Old-Young Men* as the locals dubbed the Chinese troopers who had mysteriously appeared — they find them still working the abandoned farm. The two *Old-Young Men* manage to convey that when the filming had ended the entire Lhasa set was either dismantled, burnt or abandoned — the crew and actors had all left for the next big production — No.17 was offered a leading role in a crime thriller — one of the men pulls out a crumpled flyer that shows the young Tibetan dressed in a sharp suit, posing with an automatic pistol. The exiled soldiers had decided to stay on at the farm as they had nowhere else to go, had no work nor travel permits — no one had visited the farm since then! Cut.

A surge of nausea mounts in the pit of the Navigator's stomach and she realises that 623 is stalled and has begun to settle back onto the surface of the water. She sits upright trying to collect her thoughts as the crew lie in deep sleep. Panic spreads like dry ice through her body as she realises what she has done, her gift of *The Girl with a Movie Camera* has put them all — the crew, No.17, the whole of Lhasa, in grave danger at the hands of the Minotaur.

The crew are awake and disoriented — afloat in a featureless void, the water blending imperceptibly with the hazy sky — a world of no

time and no place. All eyes are fixed on the Navigator her complexion drained pale and her breathing heavy. She recounts her vision and offers a *Mea Culpa*.

As if struck by lightning MGM relives her vision of The King of the Underworld dragging the Grain Maiden into the maw of the earth amidst the desolation of her mother's farmlands. A cold sweat surges through MGM who blurts out the story — the crew listen in horror as the two scenarios unfold and intertwine. After an uneasy silence, they all agree that there is no option but to return to the Old Town and perform a *coup de grace*, settling the inevitable fate of the three old Greeks, before they do likewise; there can be no other solution.

The vessel once again slides into the soft mud ooze alongside the *Syracuse*, they rapidly disembark and head for the café where they find the three lazing at their customary table. It is with relief that the children realise there is no need for an explanation as the Greeks simply assume the children are still preparing for their departure. The late afternoon is pleasantly cool for once and the children ply the three old cronies with the best and strongest honey schnapps, regaling them with ever more intriguing stories of distant mountain settlements and strange customs. They conjure Tibetan shamans talking to the dead before they slice them to pieces with long razor-sharp swords, throwing the flesh to flocks of quarrelling vultures, messengers from the life beyond. Gradually three pairs of eyelids begin to droop, three chins approach the chest and eventually a chord of deep tones plays out over the town square. The children smile and nod to the patron of the café as they leave the Greeks deep in slumber and make their way to the *Orpheum*.

Up in the Projection room King and Kong sit side by side at the editing bench, King spooling the Old Town rushes from its canister and Kong scanning the images, a wax crayon in her hand marking out suitable sequence for excision. Being the tallest and strongest, Gort is assigned to operate the Electrotachyscope which has been unveiled and dragged into the centre of the room. Ellen and Dorothy drill Gort in the operation, making sure that he has the

sequence well lodged in his mind. The leather helmet is lowered over his head — he shudders as the stench of sweat and sulphur engulfs him. The gauntlets are pulled up his arms and his hands are guided onto the crank; he is tutored in the task and grilled by the two girls until they are confident that he is ready for the task.

King and a Kong layout before them three sets of twenty-four images on the light-box, one for the Projectionist, one for the Box-office man and another for the Janitor. The first set is passed over to Belmondo and Queequeg who are carefully clipping the frames one by one into the carbon encrusted apertures of the disc.

Fire is crackling in the steam boiler down below as Mosfilm and MGM stoke the boiler and spin the Westinghouse into its purring state — the show is nearly ready! Now that Gort is happy in his important role, his tutors, Dorothy and Ellen make haste down to the swampy ponds by the lakeside to observe the results — they position themselves in a central vantage point and wait patiently as the evening light fades. A multitude of unseen frogs begin their evening chorus marking out the reedy fringes of each pond as the two girls slowly scan about them — then a startling halo of light arcs across the tips of the reeds, fragments of fire illuminating the evening sky like fireflies. That is the Projectionist on his way whispers Ellen as they watch the monochrome rainbow slowly fade into darkness.

They wait quietly entranced by the rhythmic ratcheting of the frogs — then the circular maw of the steam furnace is composed over the pond, fire-belching from the belly of the monster — the Janitor is vaporised.

Gort is feeling weak and dizzy, the Navigator steadies him and sits him on a bench like a prizefighter between rounds as Queequeg clips the final set of images into the still smoking apertures of the wheel. Round three, Gort lurches towards the crank grasping it in both leather-clad hands, King stands by the switch and when the Minotaur nods his monstrous head she lifts the insulated handle upward to make contact — for the third time the room is saturated

in harsh white light and the pitch of the wheel climbs higher and higher; small molten particles begin to detach from the whirling rim until it blossoms into a fire-flower of electric acid-green.

A small phantom child stares out across the pond at the two girls, proffering a delicate crab shell in her right hand, the trace of a hopeful smile on her lips — ah, the scene from the Box-office murmurs Ellen, so all three are gone! The two girls walk along the lakeside path past the remains of the old Dacha, toward the *Syracuse* where they kindle a fire in the deck brazier and prepare supper.

The next morning the children walk up from their camp on the *Syracuse* to take breakfast in the café — they wait anxiously for signs of the three old men finding it hard to believe in the magic that they had performed the evening prior but nothing, the old men do not appear. They rattle the doors of the *Orpheum* but they are locked tight, then they saunter past the Seminary, the doors are open so they enter the building to discover that it too is deserted — the rooms of the three Greeks are empty, their beds tidy and unslept in. One final task remains — for the last time they enter the Orpheum, taking the rear stairway to the Projection booth. Dorothy collects the reels of *The Girl with a Movie Camera* that are laying open on the editing bench and seals them in their canisters whilst the others begin to dismantle the Electrotachyscope. MGM and Queequeg decouple the carbon smudged wheel from its axis and roll it away along the corridor, they hear it bumping down the stairway. Moments later a curl of smoke rises from the yard as the bone dry timber disc flames for the last time. Ellen cradles the, now inert, Geissler Discharge tube in her arms, streamers of copper wire trailing from its smooth glass body — a body that will soon be lost in the vastness of the ocean. The portal is now closed and they are free to return to Lhasa.



Reel No.47. The Journey East, part 2.

*En route to Lhasa Gort dreams of the Café des Poètes in the afterlife,
when they arrive at Potola Palace they discover that the
Dali Lama has vanished.*

Once again 623 is loaded and ready for the journey back to Lhasa. As they pole out into deeper water the children look back at the shoreline and rising above it, almost submerged in the tangle of forest, the Old Town, which they instinctively know they will never see again. The Navigator consults her compass, asks the crew to prepare themselves and without a sound, a sense of weightlessness washes over the vessel and they are gone.

Gort is overwhelmed by a surge of vertigo amplified by the sudden appearance of an arc of green light rotating clockwise at an indescribable speed, his leaden arms ache and his fingers are curled like the claws of a bird of prey — above all he is enveloped by sulphurous vapours that make him retch. He is drenched in sweat, it trickles into his eyes blurring his vision — he rubs and rubs at his eyes with the back of his hands which stink of rotten leather and burnt celluloid.

Gort is standing in a crowded room, laughter and loud conversations fly all around him, glasses clatter and scrape across tabletops and somewhere an old and poorly tuned piano is crashing out a catchy tune that scratches at his memory. A man starts to sing in a fluid golden voice and instantly Gort is fully awake, fully lucid — across the room, leaning on the battered upright piano is *Orphée*.

Gort is rooted to the spot — when the song is over and the applause and catcalls from the crowd subside he watches *Orphée* weave his way back to his table to resume his conversation with a glamorous woman. *Orphée* appears trapped by her aura, fascinated by her long jet-black hair and milk-white skin — she stares deeply into his eyes as she deconstructs one of his recent poems — she has a sharp intellect and *Orphée* is beginning to bristle at the rigour of her critique.

She stops mid-sentence, distracted by the arrival of three old men who shuffle into the café, looking like they could all do with a strong black coffee. *Orphée* follows her gaze and his jaw drops; he stands and beckons them over to the table — Hades, the King of the UnderWorld pulls up a seat, Charon the ferryman sits to one side and Hephaestus the blacksmith god on the other. For some inexplicable reason, they appear to be reduced to a trio of tired old fellows, more suited to the role of doting grandparents than awe-inspiring deities. They order hard liquor and black coffee from the small Asian waiter and ask *Orphée* who runs the joint, but he stalls them, thinking it wiser not to answer just now.

Gort is feeling well out of his depth and looks around for his friends; the Navigator or King who would know exactly how to deal with this situation, but he is alone in this strange place. He is unsettled even more when he catches sight of a mean faced old woman dressed in a flowing black robe sitting across from an equally old gentleman with a peg leg. They are drinking absinthe and Gort distinctly hears her asking the nautical gentleman if he knows the whereabouts of the red shoes?

Red, red Ma'am? Chimney's Afire is all I know about red!

Hades drains his glass, beckons the young Asian garçon, twirling his fingers aloft indicating another round and once again asks the Poet, who is in charge? *Orphée* looks the old King of the Underworld in the eye but in turn, responds with a question — of this café, or of this realm?

Sirens wail outside followed by the roar of engines as a large black limousine, flanked by two police outriders pulls up. The café door slowly swings open and the soundtrack in the room fades to zero. At first a dense black shadow moves across the floor then gradually creeps up the wall; then a clutch of bony fingers extends into the space, and the tip of a beak-sharp nose is followed by an emaciated figure wrapped in an impenetrable black outfit. The Poet finally responds to Hades, that he, or rather it, is the ruler of this afterlife —

Hades involuntarily reaches for his neck, as does Hephaestus the blacksmith and Charon the boatman.

Everything falls into place for the three old men, they understand everything — but simultaneously understand nothing — certainly, this is their afterlife, the afterlife they have created and have been working so hard to populate since the watery demise of their old-world Hades. But why and how have they been transported here? As if on cue, all three swivel in their seats and clamp accusing eyes on Gort but just as the boy begins to tremble, a shadow falls across the face of Hades and a bony talon clamps around his shoulder. The Count drags the new arrival to his feet and pushes his beak-shaped nose into the big man's face then licks his lips. The Count turns his attention to the other two and with an upward curl of his talons beckons them to stand. As if entranced, they rise to their feet and allow themselves to be herded out of the café like sheep, straight into the gauntleted hands of the outriders who roughly push them into the black limousine. Gort watches on with a puzzled expression as the vehicle disappears in a pall of dust.

He turns to the Poet who takes his hand and leads him over to the piano — nodding to the pianist the Poet begins to sing with his honied voice, he smiles and nods to Gort who also bursts into song with a voice like nectar — the room falls under their spell and slowly fades from view.

The song continues as Gort gradually awakes to a choir of young monks greeting them as they 623 nudges against the shore of the high mountain lake. The trees are in blossom and the small birds are twittering in the branches.

The children are delighted to be back in their adopted home, smiling as they walk past the BioScope which once again is solid and looking spic and span in its recent coat of paint, ready to re-open its doors to the weekly cinema screenings and embark on new film productions. They warmly greet the old ladies that cook and clean at the guesthouse and chatter excitedly as they unpack and settle back into their rooms as they await supper.

The next morning they observe their accustomed breathing and meditation practice; breakfast, then hurry along to meet with No.17 at the Potola Palace, taking with them the recent documentary film of the Old Town as well as a host of stories to fire the young man's active imagination.

The Palace guards smile broadly upon their approach, bowing and offering the respectful *Anjali Mudra* gesture; the children follow suit, placing their hands together, fingertips just below their lowered chins. A sense of peace and sanctuary envelops the party as they move through the Palace towards the Dali Lama's reception hall with its familiar raised Dias. As usual, the Dali Lama beams down upon their approach and they take their places, sitting cross-legged on the rich woollen carpet set before the Dias. However, as they look up towards his holiness, something appears to be out of place. The same thought runs through the mind of every child — his holiness has shrunk and appears to be much younger than before, he is now perhaps only three years old, time it seems has been running in reverse. The Navigator speaks up, greeting the Dali Lama, who grins and giggles but does not respond directly; it is the Regent, standing squarely behind the child, who speaks on his behalf to the returned voyagers, welcoming them home and introducing them to the eighteenth incarnation of the Dali Lama. After a brief pause the Navigator thanks the Regent and asks, with all due respect, as to the whereabouts of their hallowed friend the seventeenth Dali Lama, the small boy giggles once more. The Regent appears ruffled by such a direct question but eventually decides to answer in plain terms.

Vanished into thin air one day whilst you were away travelling, vanished without a trace.

A worm of terror begins to well up inside Gort, he is standing in the *Café des Poètes*, all about him the crowd shouts and the glasses clash together, everyone is calling out to the barman for more drinks. He is watching a youth skilfully balancing a silver tray loaded with tall straight glasses of beer and wine glasses brimming with ruby liquid. He holds the tray just above his right shoulder on fingers spread like the branches of a tree whilst his trunk and feet bend to dodge the

tables and the gesticulating arms of drunken customers. The youth glances at Gort and grins broadly, he waves briefly with his free left hand. Gort faints backwards onto the carpet — No.18 giggles in delight.

He is in his bed at the Guesthouse, the fog in the room slowly resolves to reveal a ring of concerned faces that peer down at him — they begin to coax the story out of him. He has two visions to share and he takes them on a journey to the *Café des Poètes* where he assures his friends that the Projectionist, the Janitor and the Box-office man are now, somewhat reluctantly, in the care of Count Orlok. It is finally clear to Gort that the Projectionist is indeed Hades, the King of the UnderWorld, that the Janitor is Hephaestus, the God of the Forge and that the Box-office man is Charon the ferryman, the creature shown on the vase stolen from the Old Town Museum — he is one and the same.

He smiles weakly as he tells of his duet with *Orphée* but finally grimaces as he describes the young garçon who runs at the beck and call of everyone in the building — it is him, No.17 and it must have been our fault leaving a copy of a *Girl with a Movie Camera* at the *Orpheum*.

That evening the screen of the BioScope lights up and they are glued to every image, every edit, notebooks in hand pencils poised. In the final two minutes of the film, it becomes obvious where the Projectionist found his target. The house lights come up and the Navigator reads from her notes:

INTERNAL SHOT: Medium close-up; at the BioScope the seventeenth Dali Lama sits cross-legged in an audience with the children who pass around film canisters and posters as they discuss the BioScope film programme.

Crossfade; Medium-shot; of the Dali Lama sitting alone in the exact centre of the BioScope auditorium with the light of the projector sparking above him. Cut.

INTER-TITLE: an image of the Potola Palace with the word FIN.

The last shot before the end titles 64 frames for No.17 a perfect shot for the Electrotachyscope — it appears that there is even competition in the trade of dead souls.



Reel No.48. The Jailbreak.

The Navigator and the Gypsy voyage to the afterlife in order to rescue the Dali Lama No.17 from the clutches of Count Orlok.

The Navigator shuts herself up in her room, her work-bench entirely occupied by the open pages of the Atlas, night after night she pores over the expanses of blue, broken here and there by isolated islands of green; her finger following the tracery of thin blue lines, searching for a hidden route. The candle burns low and then splutters out as the Navigator's head sags forward to nestle into the blue paper expanses.

She stands erect in the stern of the sleek blue 623, lazily sculling the craft on a softly undulating milky surface, the horizon melts into the white vapours of the sky. There is no sound apart from the rhythmic gurgle of the scull as it sweeps to and fro across the transom accompanied by the minute squeak of the leather collar against the two wooden pegs that form the rowlock. Her mind is completely emptied of thought and full of gentle movement and corresponding balance. This reverie is eventually broken by the sight of a singular dark vertical line that pushes up into this horizontal world. Far away on the horizon a minuscule cypher, the numeral 1 draws attention to itself. The Navigator corrects her bearing, moving unhurriedly towards this singularity — she assumes that the cypher is doing the same.

In minutes, or is it perhaps several hours, her craft is riding alongside a black punt, a tall figure stands immobile in the stern; clad in a full-length dark oil skin, his face obscured by a battered broad-rimmed hat. She has no need to see his face to know that this is the Gypsy and that they are here to make a plan, they are obliged to set things aright.

No words are exchanged, the two vessels simply lie alongside one another like conjugating fish and then the Gypsy casually flicks his scull and a small wave ripples from the stern of his black punt as it slips ahead. The Navigator feels the timber of the scull drawing her

arms toward her shoulder, her wrists twisting the blade for the outward thrust, then twist again and back — 623 slides quietly forward and the two vessels gradually lose sight of one another. The next morning the Navigator lifts her head from the pages of the Atlas, her back and neck stiff. She sits for a moment trying to recoup her dream and then looks down at the blue spread of the Atlas. Where her cheek had been resting an image has formed, an image of an ancient Greek urn and painted on its polished earthenware surface is a dense black drawing of a rowing boat touching the shore. A bearded man stands on the prow wearing a rough tunic and pointed hat, in one hand he brandishes an oar. He is receiving a female passenger, bought to him by the psychopomp Hermes — the ferryman is no doubt waiting to extract the Oblos that is concealed under the tongue of the beautiful shade. The course of action is now clear.

The following morning the Navigator is absent from breakfast and by noon still, no-one has seen her. As usual, the big Atlas is open on her work-bench and she has drawn a new picture of a vase — a doodle in the middle of a blue nowhere. The faithful Bolex camera is missing from its case, which sits open in the corner, so the Navigator must be off filming. Klatu and Kong are dispatched to the Lake via the BioScope but the Cinema is shut and when they arrive at the Lake, 623 is nowhere to be seen.

The Navigator sits in the centre of 623 letting it drift through the water lilies on the far side of the Palace Lake. She waits patiently listening to the chatter of birds and the occasional splash of a golden carp as it gulps down a fly. It is so peaceful that time seems to stand still, or flow backwards, or even sideways. The Navigator senses a slight tremor run through the vessel and looks up from her reverie to see a familiar figure, adopting a familiar pose. Standing at the stern of the vessel is Haros in his scruffy boat-man garb, a conical red hat pulled down over his greasy locks — in the crook of his arm he cradles the greek vase that he stole from the Old Town Museum pointing repeatedly to the female shade who is waiting to step aboard for her final journey across the River Styx.

The Navigator lifts the camera, squints through the eyepiece and starts to film the apparition. Eventually, she lowers the camera and stares long and hard at the being, then imperceptibly nods at Haros, who stows the precious vase under the thwart and takes up the pole, steering the vessel toward a dark vortex of water that is forming in the centre of the lake, twisting spirals downward into darkness. The Navigator clutches the camera with one hand and the thwart with the other as her vessel is drawn into the maelstrom to be engulfed in a blackness even deeper than the velvet drapes of the *Orpheum*.

As the rush of vertigo settles, she is aware of indistinct voices to her left and the outlines of pale figures huddled in the sooty light of oil lamps that ill-define a shoreline. Across the black mirror of water, the diffuse green glow of what she instinctively recognises as a fungal phosphorescence — the glow of decay. She clamps her eyes closed in dismay but working the scull furiously Haros steers clear of either shore — they leave the voices and the dull light far behind to enter a silent void.

The boat is bumping against the grimy stone walls of an industrial cutting, the air above is tinted a pale orange and wracks of smoke drift across the slot of the sky that forms the Navigator's view. She sits upright, turning to look directly into the face of the Gypsy whose craft is rafted alongside. Haros is nowhere to be seen — all that remains in his place is the ancient Greek urn, slowly rolling to and fro in the bilge of the boat.

The Navigator lifts it from the floorboards and slowly rotates the smooth glazed surface in her hands. She is surprised by its weight and the murmur of metallic voices that issue from the mouth of the urn. Tipping the vessel forward a cascade of tiny silver and bronze coins rattle onto the deck. Looking up at her, the wages of a ferryman form a miniature world. As if in a trance the Navigator holds each small piece before her gaze then drops it back into the dark interior, each one striking a different note as it returns to its hiding place. An entire cosmos passes before her eyes — an owl; a crab; a labyrinth; a sphinx; an amphora; a helmeted warrior; a lion; a

bull; a portrait of Helios; a rose; a pomegranate; an incuse square with a cross; a Spartan shield; a portrait of Athena; a Pegasus; a honey bee; a stag; a portrait of Apollo; an eagle; an octopus; an ear of wheat; a turtle; a dolphin; a horseman; a charioteer; a swan; a lyre; a rostrum; and a youth throwing a javelin. When the final coin jingles into the darkness she looks up to find the Gypsy smiling sadly — lost in a world, that is lost.

They leave the urn and its miniature world. Grasping the rusted iron rungs they climb the canal wall to emerge in a wharfage lined with semi-derelict stone and brick warehouses, soot streaked slate roofs and massive timber doors bound by riveted iron strapping. Grey cranes set upon rail lines perch along the length of the wharf masquerading as giant predators waiting to snatch prey from the waters — there is not a living soul in sight.

The two slip down a side alley and work their way through a maze of deserted cobbled lanes to emerge in a small square — from the far side comes the sounds of revelry and an illuminated sign— the *Café des Poètes*.

As in a perfectly managed production, right on cue, two motorcycle outriders roar to a halt outside the cafe; seconds later a huge black limousine glides to a standstill behind them. The Navigator and the Gypsy hang back as the chauffeur steps from his compartment and opens the rear door. A dense dark form unfolds itself and creeps towards the entrance of the café. The creature elevates its left arm and the doors obediently open. The Navigator and the Gypsy stroll past the two outriders who have hung their helmets on the handlebars of their mounts, thrown off their long leather gauntlets, and are casually kicking at the dirt with their boots as they light up their *Gitanes*.

The pair slip inside unnoticed and squeeze past the Count who sits alone at a large circular table, a row of three *Bloody Marys* lined up before him. A make-up girl is attempting to dab talc on his forehead but he is in no mood for it and flicks her away with his prosthetic talons. To their left, seated at the table next to the old upright piano

is the poet *Orphée*; accompanied, to his right by a very attentive blonde woman, who has latched onto his arm, and to his left a strikingly pale woman with scarlet lips and jet-black hair who is visibly irritated by the Poet's other companion. *Orphée* appears oblivious to the tension that crackles across the table and welcomes the Gypsy and the Navigator as old friends from another time, another life.

They pull up seats and come straight to the point — they have but a single reason to be here; one way or another the new garçon will be leaving with them before nightfall. Whilst it appears that Count Orlock has all in his thrall, they also know that he, the Poet, has exceptional powers of persuasion in these nether regions. All they ask is for him to lend his golden tongue and silken voice to their mission — as the young fellow who is now serving drinks needs a reprieve from this realm.

They can see that there is not much time — the lighting technicians are testing the lamps and the camera crew are easing the dolly back into position, it is now or never. The Gypsy and the Poet approach the Count and politely ask if they might join him — Orlock eyes them with suspicion but nods a consent. The Gypsy proposes a drink and signals to the boy to attend to their table. He orders, three more *Bloody Marys* for the count and Absinthe for himself and his companion — but before the garçon can take their command to the bar the Gypsy reaches out and grabs the boy's sleeve. Fixing the Count squarely in his penetrating eyes he asks quite directly to allow the boy to be released from his duties so that he may accompany the Gypsy on his travels. The Count curls his upper lip in a sneer of contempt — prompting a flow of cloying words to gush from the Poet; entreaties, endearments, encouragements — but all in vain; useless verbiage as far as the Count is concerned — his impassive facade dissolves into impatience.

The lights come up, silence on set and the clapper board snaps in front of the lens. The Count draws himself up to his full height, his eyes fill with a red glow as his vision burns down upon the Gypsy the Poet and the garçon. The creature's talons begin to open and

close rhythmically and suddenly two leathery wings unfold and supported by very fine wires, begin to beat furiously back and forth blowing detritus across the room. Off-camera the winch man lifts the Count into mid-air where he shrieks and curses at the Gypsy and *Orphée*.

On cue the occupants of the café scatter away from this spectacle, gaining a safe distance from whatever is next to come — which is not long in materialising. Craning her neck, the Navigator witnesses a magical transformation for the second time. The Gypsy rises from the table with complete calm, his eyes fixed on the enraged creature thrashing the air above him. Suddenly the sinewy Gypsy is transformed — his grey curls and unshaven jaw, his customary worn but well-tailored black suit and collarless white cotton shirt, are no more — in his stead a muscular but slender youth, with tresses of black hair and an oiled beard, dressed in a short flaxen tunic worn under a heavy woollen cloak which is adorned with coloured panels and pinned at his right shoulder by a golden clasp. His figure emits a powerful glow, which flows over his contours and flares around the small but exquisite golden wings that sprout from his sandalled feet and helmet. In his left hand, he holds a winged staff entwined by two snakes glowing the brightest of all — the vision rises to hover level with the Count.

At first, the glowing aura appears to gradually migrate towards the Count, sucked into the vacuum of his dense black form but as in a vessel quickly filled, the aura begins to overflow and spread over the Count's harsh features, slowing the beating wings until they cease. The Count sinks to the floor and slumps into his chair. The film-crew stand with their mouths open, as rigid as statues — the camera rolls on regardless.

The Gypsy regains his preferred worldly appearance and quietly sits down. He grins at the Count who is breathing unsteadily and suggests that he drink up and go home to feed on the three Old Greeks who may, or may not, still have some elixir running through their, once immortal veins. The Count hisses, tearing at his harness and cumbersome wings, flinging them to the floor as he storms

outside — the sound of two motorcycles and the purr of a twelve-cylinder engine fade into the distance.

Orphée stands on his chair, quipping to the crowd that the show is over — the Gypsy calls the garçon whom he invites to sit in the Count's chair — they beam at one another. The Navigator joins them and places a small cardboard box before the young waiter — for you, she explains.

The young man grins as he unties the string and removes the lid from the box to reveal a pair of shiny patent leather red shoes.

The Navigator faces him and nods:

*You know the drill; put them on, close your eyes,
click your heels three times and repeat these words:
There's no place like home!*



Reel No.49. Return to Potola Palace.

*In which the Dali Lama No.17 is reconciled with his new incarnation,
the Dali Lama No.18.*

Holding the shoes delicately between his thumb and index finger he rests them on his lap and using his waiter's service-cloth gently buffs the gleaming red surface holding them at eye level to marvel at the light dancing over the glossy leather. He pushes his chair back and casually kicks off his worn flat-soled work shoes, then bends forward to slip his feet into the smooth interior of the magic shoes, using his index and middle fingers as a shoe-horn. Grasping the edge of the table to steady himself, the young man stands, tensing his ankles to maintain his balance above the stiletto heels. The Navigator and the Gypsy catch the look of ecstasy that lights up his face as he closes his eyes — three sharp taps in quick succession and all that remains of him is his discarded footwear.

As the Navigator and the Gypsy stand to leave, the Costume-girl rushes up, clipboard in hand and insists that Properties need the red shoes back, as well as the complete waiter's costume, she looks first at the Gypsy and then at the Navigator for an explanation — the Navigator reaches beneath the table and hands her the scruffy waiter's shoes, shrugs her shoulders, turns and walks to the door — behind her trails a plaintive cry of:

But you have to sign for them!

By the time they have threaded their way through the cobbled alleys and arrived at the derelict quayside, dusk is falling. Clambering down the rusted iron ladder they regain their vessels that lay immobile on the oily surface of the canal. As soon as the Navigator boards she notices that the ancient urn is missing but upon moving closer to the steering position she catches the glint of a small silver coin resting on the thwart — it would seem even Haros pays a fee to travel to the afterlife. Holding the coin in the moonlight she makes out the image of a bat — involuntarily she slips the token under her

tongue, running its tip over the surface of the coin; memorising the form of its winged image.

She turns to look at the Gypsy whom, she realises, is watching her every movement — he stoops to untie his mooring line and gently pushes his craft out into the centre of the industrial channel, silently sculling into the low bank of mist that is settling between the damp stone walls — within seconds he is enveloped and lost from sight. The Navigator looks heavenward, through the skeletal silhouette of a crane-jib, at the half-moon which is turning the bed of mist into a milky way. She casts off and poles 623 out into the centre of the waterway, its bow slipping under the soft blanket of vapour. She strokes the image of the bat with the tip of her tongue and rhythmically works the scull into the whiteness of moonshine.

Eventually, the mist thins and ahead the Navigator can make out a channel marker. As 623 glides closer the post transforms into the tall figure of the Gypsy whom she realises is standing on the wooden jetty in the familiar lake. He catches her line and secures the vessel alongside. Even the birds still have their song tucked under their wings as the pair walk through the deserted garden in the early dawn, above them the last stars dissolve into the pale grey-blue sky.

They pass the BioScope but its windows and doors are heavily boarded up and the forecourt is littered with torn posters and photographic stills from the Box-office display — two ravens scavenge through the debris. When they arrive at the Guesthouse all are still asleep save for the old cook who is coaxing spills of timber to ignite in the kitchen range, she smiles a strange sad smile and bids them to sit at the long scrubbed wooden table, serving them bowls of milk, still warm with the heat of animal bodies.

The morning bell rings and gradually the partially awake stumble to the table to greet the returned travellers. Last to arrive and announced by a loud yawn, is young No.17 who is still dressed in his waiter's costume but barefoot, he slumps onto a bench facing the Gypsy and the Navigator, grins and asks:

What took you so long?

The cook and her two assistants bustle with hot chi and mountain pancakes but the mood is subdued — the Navigator broods on the two ravens plucking at the torn images, then looks directly at No.17 who suddenly blurts out a question — addressed to no one in particular:

Do I get a second wish?

The low buzz of conversation stops immediately as all eyes settle on the young man. Dorothy who is sitting beside him turns, takes his hand in hers and slowly shakes her head. No.17 bites his lower lip and looks down at the pale scrubbed timber of the table as if it were the only solid object in the universe — he searches for an answer written in the patterns of the wood grain swirling around the knots. Still transfixed by the illusion of solid matter he mumbles that they must all visit the eighteenth incarnation of the Dali Lama.

No.18 is perched atop his large red cushion at the summit of the Dias and surveys his visitors with a grin, he appears genuinely happy to be in the company of the children and their mysterious shape-shifting companion. This is in sharp contrast to the austere countenance of the Regent who stands behind the boy his hands clasped before him in the Dhyana Mudrā posture. No.18 catches the eye of his previous incarnation and gives a little wave — for this informal gesture he receives an inconspicuous but sharp jab in the kidneys from the Regent's foot — No.18 grimaces.

Once again the Regent speaks for the boy — his voice a low rumble of mountain gravel, his hands now forming an arched cage that rocks rhythmically in a mesmerising dance about his solar plexus. As the children listen to the sound of gravel cascading through the sieve of his fingers they see the young Dali Lama sobbing, he is locked away in a darkened room, the walls around him damp and stained. The shutters hang askew from broken hinges, no longer able to obscure a view of the abandoned landscape below. The boy

looks out at the timber scaffolding that supports the painted facade of Potola Palace; at a rusting lighting bar and its shattered theatre lamps hanging in rigor mortis. Two scrawny horses lick the starch glue from tattered placards announcing the day's filming schedule; a small child with a large stick ignores his charges as he forages through a buckled metal truck that contains soiled costumes. He pulls out a russet-coloured monks attire, but immediately discards it in the dust, his preference is for a Chinese military forage cap and combat jacket, trimmed with red stars. He pulls the outfit on and lifts the stick to his shoulder threatening the two horses.

The avalanche of gravel finally grinds to a standstill, the cage of fingers returns to the peaceful Dhyana Mudrā posture — the small boy on the fat red cushion is quietly crying — echoed, in their midst, by a young man dressed in the shabby attire of a waiter, a sad waiter, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Between No.17 and No.18 a sub-audible pulse of energy — The small boy is now firmly fixed at the centre of an infinite spinning disc, he has no velocity; he is the hub about which the wheel rotates. The young man in waiters garb has drifted toward the racing circumference — he finally releases his grip and flies free, looking back at No.18 fixed at the centre of a gently revolving cosmos. No.18 looks out to see a speck of light describing a spiral as it fades into infinity.

No.17 wipes his tears away with his shirt sleeves, stands and gracefully bows to his successor. With his head still lowered and hands in the Namaskara Mudrā the young man slowly shuffles backward to exit the sala — he will never return. When they regroup for supper in the guesthouse the young man speaks:

Item No.1 — From henceforth he wishes to be known simply as the

The Waiter.

ཐཱེས་

Item No.2 — He has divined the inner thoughts of the Regent and that of his doppelgänger and now understands the imminent dangers of the simultaneous coexistence of two incarnations and the mutually assured annihilation of the fusion of matter and anti-matter.

Item No.3 — The Regent is fearful that the BioScope and the Lhasa Film Institute open a portal to an alternative afterlife; one that breaks the cycle of Karma and intentionally confuses appearance with essence — this is why he has closed the last cinema palace in the world and this is why he, the Waiter, must leave now and leave forever; so that this world and this afterlife can continue.

The Gypsy is sitting in the Guesthouse garden in the shade of an ancient Tibetan Cypress when the group come to take the air after supper — they are pensive and anxious for the future. They realise that the young man has finally been released from a heavy responsibility — he has been granted emptiness — *tak ché dang dralwa*.

*To whomever emptiness is possible,
All things are possible.*

But for the children everything else is also empty — they are left empty-handed; they are homeless orphans yet again — why then is the Waiter so blissfully happy. The Gypsy shakes his head slowly and then claps his hands sharply — they all look up with a start.

Because he is finally free!

Confusion lingers even as the children say goodnight to one another and drift off to sleep. At precisely 21h14 as the Milky way rises to form a star-cloud tiara that spreads from horizon to horizon above the mountain peaks, a vision begins to form, flowing into the collective vacuum.



Reel No.50 Game Over.

The children take fate into their hands as they play the final game of Snakes and Ladders.

Each child stands in a ring around the gaming table, a bag of profoundly black velvet in each hand — from within the rustle of hundreds of film frames — images that hold the microscopic crystal memories of light, time and implied motion.

The Gypsy and the Waiter hold out cupped hands into which the children pour showers of alter egos, phantoms and fellow travellers — the currency of divination. MGM holds two dice out to the Waiter; he is a newcomer to the Game so must take the first turn — he throws a double-six and so passes immediately through the portal bringing with him Vital, the tough Parisian Detective from *À Bout de Souffle* — who knows, he might be a useful companion in the new life. The Waiter and Vital, who still holds the warm Beretta pistol in his right hand, land at the foot of a polished metal ladder, the summit of which passes through a circular aperture in the ceiling above them. As they climb the Waiter looks over his shoulder at his companion and wants to know why Vital shot young Michel in the back. The answer is simple — by all accounts, he was a nice guy but Vital was obliged to follow the script so that Michel could deliver the punchline to his naive American girlfriend:

C'est vraiment dégueulasse!

The Waiter clammers out onto the floor above, followed by Vital who, acting like a bodyguard, scans around with his pistol but this floor is identical to that below — no sign of life. As far as the eye can see, a maze of pathways curve between gleaming ladders with handrails — rather like those found on steamships — indispersed with viridian-green serpentine columns, that likewise terminate in apertures in both floor and ceiling. This pattern is repeated endlessly in all directions. The Waiter jiggles the two dice in his hand — obviously, he has been rewarded for his lucky double-six with a second throw. He cups his hands, rattles the two ivory cubes and



Figure 35. Inspector Vital.

rolls them on the glazed tiles — another double-six. He and Vital count out twelve large squares on the meandering pathway and again land at the foot of a stairway — up they go, towards the perfume of apricot blossom and the sparkle of sunlight. They emerge in a well-kept fruit orchard, ahead of them a single dusty pathway leading to a whitewashed farm-house — the dice have vanished from the Waiter's palm, he realises that the game is now over — Vital slides the Beretta into his shoulder holster, he knows that he will never use it again.

Next to roll is MGM; no sixes, no start — she hands the dice onto Klatu who soon enters the portal hand in hand with the Tin-man, who scrapes and squeals, as he turns around and around to take in the infinite vista. Klatu imagines scanning the world through the slot of his polished metal visor and making giant ground-trembling steps. His gleaming Titanium gauntlet cradles the poorly made sheet metal hand of the Tinman; a lost soul who still lacks his clockwork heart. The metallic friends climb the first ladder but then stand on a red square in the pathway, patiently awaiting their turn.

Queequeg is the next to throw a magic double six — gaining him entry to the game. Tagging along with him a bearded man clad in an intricate protective costume, formed from hundreds of interlocking lacquered scales. His eyes are wild and angry and Queequeg assumes this is due to the arrows that pierce his body, especially the one that passes, shoulder to shoulder through his neck. But Queequeg is not shy of razor-sharp lances and blades, after all, they

have been his stock in trade for decades in the Whaling grounds. The giant tattooed islander and the wild-eyed warrior ascend the first stairway and Queequeg casts the dice for a second time, a five and a two. They advance seven squares along the pathway and suddenly the two are tumbling headlong, unable to secure a grip on the scaly green surface of the twisted column. Laying in the dust the warrior groans — several of his arrows have been pushed even further into his body during the fall — Queenqueg dusts himself down and pulls the grimacing warrior to his feet; they head towards a dull light on the distant industrial skyline.

Dorothy emerges on the second floor accompanied by a snarling Moon-man, all scales and jagged edges — and an even more jagged energy. They progress three squares to stand near Klatu and the Tin-man, who naively attempts to shake hands with the agitated creature in vain. In the far distance, King and Kino pop their heads into the second floor, trailed by Anne Darrow and Madame N. Poltavseva respectively — they too stand immobile and slightly apart until King and Anne Darrow disappear downwards and Kino and her new Russian friend appear to move aimlessly about until they eventually climb a ladder to the upper level.

Standing at the entrance to the main farm building the Waiter is greeted by two women who share almost identical features, although one appears to be slightly older than the other — both radiate a golden aura; they appear familiar but he cannot place them exactly. The younger of the pair beams at the Waiter and then turns to the world-weary Vital welcoming him but at the same time, she lets him know that she is surprised to greet him here. Vital nods knowingly and mumbles:

Oh well, you know the story — Good Cop; Bad Cop — Good Cop!

The Navigator bides her time until all have entered the portal of the game, save for the Gypsy. He selects a single film frame holding it up to the light streaming through the small window — a dapper uniformed man, clean-shaven and sporting a peaked cap; he is gazing out from what appears to be a metal tower. The Gypsy rolls

the dice and like his friend the Waiter he is fated to only throw double sixes, guaranteeing a speedy journey to sit alongside his beloved. As the Gypsy and the Captain of the USS Swordfish step over the threshold of the game he looks over his shoulder at the Navigator and asks:

The Farm?

She smiles and murmurs;

Perhaps one day!

The Navigator stands alone in the room listening to the fading footsteps of the two men followed by the faint metallic ring of feet clambering up a steel stairway. From outside she catches fragments of song as the old ladies prepare supper for the company — a supper which no one will enjoy and which will go cold and congeal on the long, scrubbed, wooden table.

She carefully replaces the two ivory cubes into the small leather cup, then begins to gently prise apart the three levels of the cardboard structure, removing the bamboo and twine ladders and pieces of twisted creeper that serve as snakes, harvested so long ago from the shores of the Old Town. Folding each of the three chequered boards in half the Navigator slips the game into its jute bag and secures it with twine — whatever fate the dice have delivered is now irreversibly sealed.

She casts around the empty room and collects the twelve velvet pouches, still rustling with hundreds of film frames — she quits the room and walks across the courtyard to the blackened clay stove of the out-door kitchen, sets a flame in its sooty maw and slowly feeds the characters into the fire — they hiss and crackle as if alive. When they are consumed she lowers the velvet pouches onto the coals — they scorch and writhe, producing a thick smoke, as dark as midnight.

Unencumbered the Navigator packs her belongings, the steel dividers, the compass and the Atlas and walks slowly through the Palace grounds. Keeping her mind empty she barely glances at the defunct BioScope as she passes and enters the Palace gardens, which are as usual, ablaze with blossoms and ringing with birdsong.

The Navigator steps aboard 623 which is rafted alongside the Gypsy's sleek black boat. Taking up her position at the stern she fits the long polished sweep and stoops to cast off. She is mesmerised by the trail of small vortexes that swirl away behind her, each stroke of the scull forming a miniature maelstrom, which alternates clockwise and anti-clockwise as they fan out to form a triangular universe of turbulence in the still waters. The Navigator lifts her gaze to the mirror surface of the lake ahead where the glazed roof tiles of the three island palaces shimmer, capsized in the water, between them the blue of the heavens — the only movement on the polished meniscus is the dance of tiny flies; weightless entities who inhabit another world.

Her reverie is punctured by a commotion in the centre of the lake — ahead the water is upwelling in a hiss of bubbles which tumble outwards as a stark metallic blade erupts from the surface, rising to a height of a two-storey building — on its flank the numerals 623. Once again the lake settles into tranquillity — the Navigator stands stock still focused on the metal tower — nothing moves but then the head of a man appears, he holds a small device to his eyes and begins to scan the surroundings, his gaze finally coming to rest on the Navigator. He waves briefly and then is gone; moments later the water around the blade is a cauldron of boiling bubbles and the featureless tower slides from view.

The Navigator stands at her sculling position as her vessel 623 is gently rocked by the agitated waters, which slowly return to perfect stillness again. She consults the dome of the sky and then pulls on her scull sending ripples crisscrossing the lake as she heads for the exact centre between the three islands.

She looks ahead and there in the middle distance, two finger widths below the vast grey horizon, is the steel blade cutting through the waves — to her port-side a long low coastline of what she assumes is a huge island. She peers landward and makes out a lonely woman standing in the windswept dunes looking longingly out to sea — for a fleeting moment she senses a stale exhalation filling the sails of the *Empusa*, propelling the ship inexorably towards Wismar. Further inland she can make out a city and a small knot of people standing on the steps of an otherwise deserted neo-classical building. They are all wearing dark uniforms and sing a mournful song accompanied by the solemn music of a straggling brass band. They hold aloft placards — she looks harder and can just make out the hand-written script:

There is still time brother.

The Navigator turns her gaze seaward to locate the metallic blade — she follows its North Easterly course out to sea.



Reel No.51. The Home Farm.

With a roll of the dice, some children arrive in the perpetual summer of Demeter's farm, whilst others descend to the film set in the afterlife.

Over the next few hours a stream of familiar faces, some only met in dreams, take the dusty sunlit path toward the farmhouse. From a good distance, they hear the reverberant footsteps of Klatu and the squeaking limbs of the tin-man, whose condition will shortly be rectified in a bath of virgin olive oil.

A long trestle table is set for supper under a spreading ancient olive tree in the farm courtyard — the Gypsy and the Usher sit side by side, from now on they will be inseparable. The Gypsy has shed his austere travelling garb, reverting to his youthful appearance with jet black curly locks and an oiled and perfumed beard. He and the grain maiden exude a gentle golden aura. At the head of the table, the Grain Goddess Demeter beams at her guests but has to keep reminding the young Waiter to relax and that he no longer needs to serve the dishes. Demeter tells him that he has to find a new direction in life and that in fact she is considering one herself as she appraises the mild-mannered gentleman in the naval uniform who is sitting to her right — Demeter's radiant glow is already seeping towards him.

As they are about to begin their meal, Klatu calls out to a group approaching from the orchard. The diminutive twins King and Kong walk hand in hand singing as loud as they can. Behind them, the glamorous figure of Anne Darrow, no worse for wear after her ordeal at the summit of the Empire State building, is assisting the limping form of Madame N. Poltavseva, who needs serious medical attention and may well have lost the sight of her right eye.

Hermes quietly rises from the table and helps the injured woman to a banquette under the eaves of the farm. He delves into his cloak retrieving the *caduceus*, his winged staff entwined with twin serpents — three times he passes it over the woman's shattered face. Moments later a rather sprightly Madame N. Poltavseva is sitting at

the table ordering the serving girls about and commenting on the climate which she still finds too warm for her liking, even though her costume was designed to cope with a muggy Russian day in June 1905. Anne Darrow who appears to be very fond of red wine and soon launches into an incoherent narrative, claiming that she was able to see the mountains of Skull Island from the roof of the Empire State building and that in reality King Kong was simply protecting her from an attack of a hostile enemy airforce. Prompted by a distant roaring Miss Darrow enquires of her hosts if the King will be attending the supper shortly?

The roaring gains in strength echoed by a second call, one more feeble and less intimidating. The diners crane their necks to see who will appear next. The ill-matched duet continues until rounding the final corner of the track through the apricot grove appears the diminutive MGM hand-in-paw with the shambling form of Leo the Lion. On sighting the dinner party MGM lets out a final terrifying roar echoed by a shy meow from the ever timid Leo. The Tin-man is happy to see his companion and MGM amazes her host with her lion sized appetite.

Ellen is no gambler for good reason, her capacity to attract bad luck is well known to the others which explains why she has spent so long climbing ladders only to be thrown down to the lower level time and time again. She has, however, drawn an exact match from her velvet bag — the ill-fated Hutter — and it is only by a miracle that the pair did not tumble onto the dirty cobbles of the netherworld. The sun is setting as they find themselves surrounded by the voices of crickets in a sweet-scented orchard; the evening air is beginning to cool and the moisture has settled the dust on the pathway as they walk away from the small cave in which the final stairway had emerged.

Hutter can see from the vegetation that this is neither his hometown of Wisborg nor the wilds of Transylvania — Ellen can see that this is neither the mountains of Lhasa nor the shores of the Old Town, but there is something familiar all the same.

Hutter walks a pace behind the young woman inadvertently scratching at the small wounds on his neck. Ellen suddenly stops, wheels around on Hutter and with a scowl brushes his hand away. Hutter grimaces but obediently sinks both hands deep into the pockets of his Frock-coat where he finds a small silver locket on a chain. As he walks he fingers the engraved case and dreams of his beautiful wife who is also Ellen — all the while staring at the young woman's neck, unblemished by the twin wounds that speak of an infatuation with the Dark Count — again he inadvertently touches the puncture marks concealed beneath the collar of his coat.

As they walk on through the twilight Hutter looks long and hard at the young woman and then opens the case of the silver locket to reveal the portrait of his wife — the tries to match their profiles but struggles to recall his wife's features. He blurts out an endearment in German but this elicits no response from the young woman — it is quite obvious that she does not speak that language!

The latecomers are greeted warmly and a place is made for them at the table. Hutter is stupefied — he is seated opposite a creature that resembles a Teutonic knight of old, clad in full armour but lacking a crest or a plumed helmet — as if a country bumpkin had created an elaborate carnival costume to poke fun at his feudal lord and master. Hutter stares wide-eyed at the genial metal fool who now and then dips his elbows into a bowl of olive oil, an action that sends a shiver of delight through his metallic body.

Hutter again pulls out the locket and holds the portrait before him, simultaneously regarding Ellen who is talking with a youthful couple enveloped in a scintillating golden glow. The image of his Ellen and the Ellen before him begin to coalesce — he has travelled too far, lost his bearings and abandoned his memories. He smiles inwardly, she is Ellen and he is Hutter and *Gott in Himmel*, the Count is nowhere to be seen.



Reel No.52 The Netherworld.

*In which Dorothy is given a chance to change her
fate and travel to another world.*

Dorothy rattles the dice in her cupped hands and kisses them for luck but as she rolls the excitable Moonman accidentally tumbles into her and the dice spill out sideways — a one and a three. The pair advance four squares along the path and without warning hurtle downward, tumbling into a dirty cobbled yard that stinks of fermenting hops. Dorothy looks around her, motioning the Moonman to be still for a moment — next to them rise orderly stacks of metal banded wooden barrels and several large dray wagons. The Moonman quickly leaps out of the way as a team of draught horses take the strain and with a crack of a whip, one of the heavily laden wagons rumbles past — for want of a better plan they follow it through a maze of narrow alleys flanked on each side by towering brick-faced warehouse buildings, with a strong double door on each floor and each gable equipped with a wooden gantry and hoist.

The dray rumbles to a halt outside a bar in a shabby square and there sitting at a pavement table, young Belmondo is quaffing a tall glass of ale and making eyes at a slender woman with short-cropped blonde hair. Dorothy is taken aback — Belmondo is by nature an introvert, prone to blush for the slightest reason — but the blonde, who appears to be infatuated by him has precipitated a complete transformation. The Moonman bounds up to the couple but Belmondo good-naturedly waves him off — he is too engrossed in Patricia's smile to even notice Dorothy.

But someone is calling her name; she turns and striding across the square is the tall bronzed figure of Queequeg leading a wild-man, armour rattling and arrows bristling — together they make a dramatic entrance to the *Café des Poètes*. A shout:

Cut!

The Director scowls at the four intruders who have ruined the take. There at a table, Mosfilm is arm wrestling a Russian sailor — both are dressed in standard-issue striped tee-shirts, naval caps with fluttering gold-lettered ribbons and baggy canvas pants — they look the part and take no notice of the director's instructions but continue their vodka fuelled combat.



Figure 36. *Orphée*.

Mosfilm triumphantly slams his opponent's arm to the table, roars and downs another shot, the two sailors throw the table over in a shower of broken glass and embrace. Turning his beaming face towards the four newcomers Mosfilm lets out a whoop and rushes to hug his friends, even the sharp spike-covered Moonman has the breath almost crushed from his body — the director is waving his hands around and yelling above the din to his crew to wind-up the take and prepare for the next.

Amidst the commotion, the piano strikes up a beautiful melody from the rear of the bar and a male duet soars above the crowd — Dorothy recognises both voices — for a moment the walls of the café dissolve and *Orphée* and Gort are now as two angels; one Baritone and the other Countertenor, their voices reverberating in the dome of an ancient Basilica. Her reverie is punctured by the sharp crack of the clapper board as it snaps its jaws at the camera. The director points to the head barman — and action. The barman saunters to the end of his well-polished zinc counter and turns the dials of an oversized radio set — skipping past a flurry of voices and snatches

of opera music, the radio finally latches onto a hiss of static, punctuated by a male voice reading out numerals:

Trente-huit, Trente-neuf, Quarante, je répète; Trente-huit, Trente-neuf, Quarante.

The Barman stands impassively next to the radio looking back at the large mirror behind the bar which, right on cue, begins to shimmer and warp as if it was liquifying. A series of small black protrusions appear on the surface gradually elongating into an array of six large hands. The forearms follow and finally three fully formed men push through the mirror surface to stand behind the bar. Behind them, the silvered surface becomes still, smooth and self-effacing once more.

The men pull off their long rubber gauntlets, rake their fingers through what hair they still have and slowly survey the room, which now is completely silent. The crowd look on speechless as the barman turns to the three newcomers, taps at his wristwatch in mock anger and sets the three old Greeks to work. The Janitor is to clear and wipe down the tables; the Box-office man is to work the beer pumps and the Projectionist is to take orders and collect the payments. As they go about their assigned duties Dorothy remarks on their pale translucent skin and painfully slow movements; the three are like sleepwalkers suspended in some cloying fluid — on his rounds the Projectionist passes directly by her but displays not the slightest glimmer of recognition — Dorothy, however, recognises the scars on the old man's neck which are still fresh and pink.

The bright lights die and the café appears even darker than it should; *Orphée* beckons his old friends toward the piano as the door bursts open and two leather-clad motorcyclists round up the three old Greeks and bundle them into the back of a large sleek limousine parked in the square.

Orphée quips that it is feeding time and looking around at the small band — Dorothy, Gort, Queequeg, Belmondo and Mosfilm suggests that some people are best avoided at all costs and that although it may seem an attractive prospect, none of them should ever sign-on



Figure 37. Dorothy's Flying House.

as an extra in the production — there are catches in the invisible small print. He continues with a set of guidelines:

*Never, ever, sign on as an extra.
Never, ever get into the limo.
To make a film is okay, but never be filmed.
Do not drink any form of red liquid.
Never stare into the mirror, especially the ones in the Café des Poètes.
Avoid the two motorcycle outriders.
Do not speak to the Count.*

Orphée finally declares that they are all invited to lodge with him at his villa and must bring along their companions — Klatu; The Warrior King; Patricia and the proletarian Marine. They must also realise that they are obliged to spend each day here, on-set in the *Café des Poètes* — and to remember the rules!

Dorothy looks quizzically at *Orphée* as she has not been mentioned in the list of guests. *Orphée* nods imperceptibly at Dorothy and walks over to the bar, slipping behind the counter he retrieves a

small cardboard box and returns to the table — he indicates that she should open it.

Lifting the lid she finds a pair of red patent leather shoes — *Orphée* grins and tells her that they are a second pair from the properties wardrobe and that by now she should know what the drill is.

Dorothy looks uncertainly around the table at her friends not knowing where this will lead her but the offer is clear. She slips off her worn-out walking shoes and wriggles her feet into the brand-new high heels then stands to face her comrades. She bites her lip, grins foolishly and then without thinking, clicks her heels three times in rapid succession and utters

There's no place like home.

One moment she is there; the next she is gone and with her, the Moonman. Dorothy clutches her head — she is trapped inside a small wooden box spinning at incredible speed; an invisible force flattens her body, overcome by powerful vertigo. The rush and roar of wind deafen her as she hurtles through storm clouds that flash past the tiny glazed window. A series of shocks, the tearing of branches — then all is still — it is over.

Dorothy comes to; awakened by the Moonman who is crashing around somewhere — she can hear breaking crockery and splintering furniture in what must be a kitchen — the screen door slams. Dorothy peers out of the cabin window to see the Moonman leaping through the familiar mangroves that line the lakeside of the Old Town. If her judgement is correct he is heading along the track towards the site of the wreck of the *Syracuse*.

The tempestuous ride and the violent landing have unnerved the Moonman — leaping through the undergrowth he bursts into the clearing where the *Syracuse* lies. He clambers up the coir rope netting in a trice and dives headlong through the open hatch into the hold of the ship, knocking over a large glass carboy that shatters, spraying a clear pungent liquid across the lower deck. Delighted by

the crash and splinter of glass the Moonman grasps another bottle, dashing it to the floor — in an instant, he is engulfed in a spectacular explosion and as is the fate of his species, the Moonman vanishes in a puff of smoke.

The sun-cracked timbers of the long-stranded vessel are as dry as tinder and by the time Dorothy arrives in the little bay the *Syracuse* is a crackling wall of flame. Aghast Dorothy falls back on a fallen log and can do no more than look on as the *Syracuse* burns down to the waterline. A pall of dark grey smoke drifts out across the lake, dispersing only as the embers meet the extinguishing waters that froth and hiss around the charred skeleton.

Unnerved, Dorothy walks up through the wooded hillside towards the Old Town — nothing appears to have changed during her travels. As usual, her mother is standing on the doorstep to greet her but there is a note of annoyance in her voice as she asks where the girl has left the zinc insect canister and net. Still dazed, Dorothy is short of an excuse and flushes. Her mother however is a kind spirit and quickly relents, suggesting that Dorothy is perhaps missing her school friends and she even apologises for not sending her along on the excursion with the other children, promising that she can attend the next one. Dorothy searches through the fog clouding her memory but recalls nothing — neither the insect canister, net, nor the school excursion — she smiles unconvincingly at her mother.

The two drink a herbal tisane together, a tonic her mother says, who then gives her two small silver coins, one for the cinema ticket price and another for the dried salted plums that the nice young lady usher sells during the intermission.

Dorothy is glad to escape the claustrophobia of the house and her well-meaning mother and walks distractedly towards the old cinema that is situated at the end of the arcade that runs off the Old Town Square. The evening session is about to begin and she hands over one of her silver pieces to a balding Chinese man who grins at her through the glass of the Box office. He hands her a blue ticket and a session programme — ninety minutes of the latest cartoons;

Flash Gordon; The Invisible Man; Heckle and Jeckle as well as some period pieces *Felix the Cat* and *Popeye*. The young Usher shows Dorothy to her seat and obligingly sells her a paper bag full of salty dried plums, marked in red stencil ink:

旅行梅

The pigtailed girl also grins and says:

Huà méi, the best, made by my mum, please enjoy the show.

Dorothy hears the fanfare as the titles roll down the screen — *Space Soldiers* presented by Universal, she wracks her brains but realises that she has not encountered *Flash Gordon* before — she swivels in her chair and looks quizzically up at the bio-box and the dancing cone of light that carries silver flying rocket-ships and white-coated astronomers who peer into gigantic telescopes at the stars — *Die Dicke Berthe* has never imagined these scenes before. Dorothy pinches her forearm to make sure she is not dreaming but she finds herself still nestled into a shabby red velvet seat, sucking on a salted plum watching a helter-skelter of scenes peopled with unfamiliar characters — as if *Die Dicke Bertha* and *Der Rot Czar* had been hiding something from her and her friends for all this time.

False memories perhaps — but who's? All Dorothy can recall is Gort and Klatu and their flying disc with its powers to magically silence the city and bring the dead back to life — this is real for certain and she is living proof — flying home in her cabin through violent tornadoes. Dorothy decides to slip out of the auditorium during a session of the *Invisible Man*, a story she finds confusing with the main character who is impossible to see on the screen — she waves at the friendly Chinese Box-office man and the young usher who stands, hands folded over her tray of confectionary and quits the cinema. Her attention is drawn to the well-stocked shops that line the glass-roofed arcade; colourful clothing draped over mannequins, a toy and bon-bon store, leather goods and an Asian emporium exuding delicate aromas. Dorothy screws up her nose shuts her eyes tight and then suddenly opens them wide in an attempt to surprise

her surroundings — but they refuse to play along and remain unchanged and very solid.

Bluewater beetles skim across the meniscus of the chain of swampy ponds that lie parallel to the waterfront, and there propped against a tussock of reeds rests a familiar cylindrical zinc container and a bamboo pole topped by a gossamer net. Dorothy stoops to retrieve her beetling kit and continues to her cabin.

As she assumed, the kitchen is a scene of utter devastation, the Moonman, driven crazy by vertigo and the terrible roaring of the winds as they hurtled through the atmosphere has crashed and bounced about the room breaking crockery, smashing chairs, even embedding one of his armoured spikes in the timber wall. However, beyond this the cabin is undamaged and sits fair and square on level ground in a small clearing with a fine view of the blue waters of the vast lake. She walks around the cabin, rapping her knuckles on the doors, walls and floor — everything is substantial and strong, nothing is shimmering, flickering or sliding in and out of focus — from now on this must be her real home; a halfway home perhaps, but an anchor.

Dorothy visits her mother every day, bringing her a supply of iridescent blue insects — and each day her mother suggests that she must be missing her school friends who still appear to be away on their annual excursion. Dorothy reassures her, pats her hand and smiles as they drink Chinese tea from the delicate ceramic bowls that Dorothy has purchased from the Chinese Emporium with the small silver coins her mother keeps giving her for the cinema. Dorothy has accumulated a substantial coin collection as she is determined to avoid the cinema with its disturbing flow of disconnected memories.

Later that evening, as Dorothy reclines in the old wooden rocking chair her eye is caught by a small hatch fitted into the timber panelled ceiling of the cabin. Curious, she positions the dining table beneath it and on top of this a chair. Steadying herself she clambers up — pushing the hatch upward on creaking hinges and in the

process covering herself in a cloud of dust and spider silk. When Dorothy has finished sneezing she wriggles into the small attic room which is illuminated by two extremely small windows set opposite one another in each gable end. The dusty attic is completely bare, save for a single leather-bound volume lying on the rough floorboards.

Dorothy cannot stand full height in the attic and so proceeds on all fours toward the tiny window that faces west — but instead of a view of the familiar lakeshore all she can see is a sun-drenched landscape full of fruit orchards and in the distance a large white-washed farm set in rolling hills. Dorothy rubs her eyes and looks again — orchards! She licks her lips, relishing the distinct smell of freshly baked bread soaked in pungent olive oil — is she hearing the to and fro of table chatter and the clink of wine glasses? But then it is gone and the sun glitters on the blue lake.

She turns and shuffles across the floorboards to the window set in the opposite wall. Where endless mangroves should be there appears a small town square and a brightly lit bar. In the foreground a gaunt creature, cowled in black, sits alone drinking Bloody-Marys, he is flanked by two leather-clad henchmen. In the mid-ground familiar voices accompany a slightly out of tune upright piano and next to it is a table with an opened cardboard box — on the floor is a pair of abandoned shoes. Dorothy feels her feet wriggle down into the stiff patent leather stilettos and can almost hear the sharp click as she brings her heels sharply together. The room spins in a blur and she swoons to the floor — it is dark when Dorothy comes to. Her feet wave uncertainly above the chair until finally her toes make contact and she gingerly lowers herself through the hatch, precipitating another avalanche of dust. Last to pass through the opening into the gloom of the kitchen is the heavy leather-bound tome which she manoeuvres onto the table.

She rummages through the kitchen drawers eventually finding candles and a box of Lucifers — in the soft yellow light she wipes the grime and cobwebs from her face and carefully lifts the worn leather cover to reveal the frontispiece:

Quelle est votre plus grand ambition dans la vie?
Devenir immortel et puis mourir.

FiN



Dramatis Personae.

The Children.

Belmondo.

Dorothy.

Ellen.

Gort.

King (Katrina).

Kino.

Klatu.

Kong (Katja).

MGM.

Mosfilm.

Queequeg.

The Navigator.

The Greeks

The Box-office Man (Charon).

The Golden Woman (Demeter).

The Gypsy (Hermes).

The Gypsy's father (Zeus).

The Janitor (Hephaestus).

The Muse (the Poet's wife).

The Poet (Orpheus).

The Projectionist (Hades).

The Seaweed King (Poseidon).

The Sun Charioteer (Helios).

The Usher (Persephone).

The Greeks mentioned in passim.

Algea.

Aporia.

Boreas.

Chronos.

Curae.

Eris.

Eurus.

Gaudia.
Geras.
Hypnos.
Limos.
Nosoi.
Notus.
Pan.
Penthos.
Phobos.
Polemos.
Thanatos.
Zephyrus.

Named Characters.

Anne Darrow (*King Kong*).
Captain Ahab (*Moby Dick*).
Count Orlok (*Nosferatu*).
Der Dicke Berthe.
Der Rot Czar.
Dorothy (*The Wizard of Oz*).
Eisenstein.
Ellen Hutter (*Nosferatu*).
Herr Knock (*Nosferatu*).
Ishmael (*Moby Dick*).
King Kong (*King Kong*).
Klatu (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*).
Leo (*The Wizard of Oz*).
Madame N. Poltavseva (*Battleship Potemkin*).
Michel Poiccard (*À Bout de Souffle*).
Ovid.
Patricia Franchini (*À Bout de Souffle*).
Queequeg (*Moby Dick*).
The Dali Lama No.14.
The Dali Lama No.17.
The Dali Lama No.18.
The dark-haired woman (*Orphée*).
The King (*Throne of Blood*).

Thomas Hutter (*Nosferatu*).
The Straw Man (*The Wizard of Oz*).
The Tin Man (*The Wizard of Oz*).
The Wicked Witch of the West (*The Wizard of Oz*).

Characters named in passim.

Alexander Selkirk.
Basil Gould.
Captain Dampier.
Chumping (Charlie Chaplin).
Comrade Lenin.
Comrade Trotsky.
Daniel Defoe.
Dr Bulwer (*Nosferatu*).
Dr Moreau.
Edward Parker.
Gregory Peck.
Guo Wei.
Heinrich Harrer.
Irena (baby carriage).
Julie Garland.
Ottomar Anschütz.
Ovid.
The Moonman.
The Regent.
Vital (*À Bout de Souffle*).



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The Films.

À Bout de Souffle (Goddard 1960).

Battleship Potemkin (Eisenstein 1925).

Deluge (Northern Film Unit 1928 ~ 1958).

King Kong (Cooper 1933).

Le Voyage dans la Lune (Méliès 1902).

Moby Dick (Huston 1956).

Nosferatu (Murnau 1922).

On the Beach (Kramer 1959).

Orphée (Cocteau 1950).

The Day the Earth Stood Still (Blaustein 1951).

The Island of Lost Souls (Kenton 1932).

The Man with a Movie Camera (Vertov 1929).

The Old Town (Anon 1913).

The Wizard of Oz (Fleming 1939).

Throne of Blood/Kumonosu-jō/Spider Web Castle (Akira Kurosawa 1957).



About the Author



Dr Nigel Helyer (a.k.a. DrSonique) — is an internationally prominent sculptor, and sound artist with an interdisciplinary practice that combines art and science to embrace our social, cultural and physical environments. He brings these concerns together in creative projects that prompt the community to engage with their cultural histories, identity and sense of place; inviting us to examine the abstract conditions of our world and our complex relationships to it.

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