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Unmastered Subjects: Identity as Fabrication in Joseph Strick's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*

Maria Pramaggiore

This paper argues that Joseph Strick's film adaptations of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* address a central issue within Joyce's *oeuvre*: the relation between aesthetics and the fabrication of identity. Joyce pits aesthetic discourses of 19th century realism and 20th century modernism against one another and reveals that language can construct identity only through and as fabrication. Strick translates this tension into the visual system of his films, juxtaposing images of documentary realism and avant garde subjectivity to suggest the fabricated and unstable nature of the visual image.

* * *

The relationship between literary source text and film adaptation is an object of critical debate. And nowhere is the nexus of questions surrounding adaptation more troubled than in relation to James Joyce and his work. The linguistic dimensions of Joyce's writing, together with his complex authorial identity as an Irish writer in Europe, give critics sufficient justification to carefully scrutinize film adaptations of his work. Films, of necessity, rely upon visual rather than verbal images, and the process of translation from the literary to visual text threatens Joyce's distinctly language-based aesthetic. In this essay, however, I argue to the contrary. I consider Joseph Strick's adaptations of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1976) and *Ulysses* (1967) to be films that address a central issue within Joyce's *oeuvre*: the relation between aesthetics and the fabrication of identity. Fabrication – the act and product of artifice—

mediates polarized fields of identity in Joyce's writing: language, nationality, religion, class, and sexuality. Fabrication refers to the way art makes meaning; the artifice of language is central to the problem of identity in Joyce's polyvocal, colonial Irish context. Declan Kiberd reminds us that for most of his life, Joyce was a "migrant intellectual," who had "no great faith that his meaning would be understood."¹ The *Portrait* and *Ulysses* films provide evidence Strick well understood Joyce's meaning with respect to fabricating identity as he translated literature into visual form.

Joyce's work foregrounds the process of fabrication because it sutures together conflicting aesthetic discourses, namely realism and abstraction, modes that are associated with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. One "task" assigned to realism, according to Jean-Francois Lyotard, is "to preserve various consciousnesses from doubt."² Realism has the capacity to stabilize the referent and arrange it "according to a point of view that endows it with a recognizable meaning."³ In *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, however, realist techniques are unable to fix concepts of national and religious identity that depend upon stable referents and a consistent point of view structure. Instead, Joyce overloads realism with a frenzy of aural detail and modernist narration: language play multiplies realist detail literally beyond all sense, and narrative fragmentation counters interior monologues to produce an inconsistent point of view structure.

Joyce's experiments with language reveal the way language both fabricates and mediates differences between Ireland and England, Ireland and Europe, and Catholic repression and artistic expression. Like contemporary Revival writers Synge and Yeats, Joyce sought an aesthetic that could reconcile Irish customs and language, Roman Catholicism, and Celtic mythology with an English-speaking, modern European state. For

1 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), p. 328.

2 Jean Francois Lyotard., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennin ton and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984), p. 74.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

each of these writers, the clash of language systems is both a metaphor for and material fact of Ireland's conflicted national psyche: Joyce's tundish/funnel; Synge's "Hiberno-English"; and Yeats's recuperation of Celtic sagas. Language is the substance of both realist representation and abstraction, detailed history and heroic myth, "truth" and "artifice." Joyce creates a powerful sense of psychological interiority for Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, yet peppers his novels with clues that reveal these characters to be both banal and heroic, the victims of a narrator toying with realist techniques in a modernist cosmos. Joyce recasts the dualism embedded in contemporary Irish notions of nation and religion with a dual approach on the level of form, resulting in an aesthetic that juxtaposes but does not resolve the polarities of authenticity and fabrication, subjectivity and objectivity, and self and other.

In his two Joyce films, Joseph Strick addresses the issue of fabrication by deploying the formal strategies available to a visual artist. Like Joyce, he juxtaposes realism and abstraction. He produces a visual counterpart to the language-induced instability of subjectivity that permeates Joyce's insular, self-consciously colonial Dublin of the early twentieth century.⁴

Despite the fact that Joyce himself thought *Ulysses* would be better translated into film than into another language, previous critical examination of Strick's work has been hampered by comparisons between novel and film that neglect the peculiar characteristics of each art form (*JIII*, p. 561). In the only extant scholarly essay on Strick's *Ulysses*, for example, Rudolph Von Abele outlines ten ways in which the film "interprets" the novel, each of them eventually revealed to be a weakness. Von Abele's essay declares that "the film *Ulysses* is monostylistic where the novel is polystylistic,"⁵ an assertion I revisit later in this essay. James MacKillop, another scholar of Irish literature and film, considers only two recent Joyce film adaptations to be worthy of note: Fionnula Flanagan's *James Joyce's Women* (1983) and John Huston's *The Dead* (1987).⁶

4 "Translating Tradition" is the title of the Summer Seminar Declan Kiberd led that I attended at West Virginia University in June, 1999.

5 Rudolph Von Abele, "Film as Interpretation: A Case Study of *Ulysses*." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Fall 1973): 494.

6 James MacKillop, *Contemporary Irish Cinema: From The Quiet*

Joyce adaptations have earned critical acclaim when their adaptors possess Irish affiliation and when the films can be interpreted within a literary critical framework. Critics lend primacy to the written text, evidenced in the frequent attribution of *James Joyce's Women* to Irish actress and screenwriter Fionnula Flanagan rather than to the film's director, Michael Pearce II. Moreover, Huston and Flanagan both are associated with Ireland by birth or heritage. Journalist Michael Walsh described Huston as "a Joyce aficionado who lived in Ireland for 25 years and still holds an Irish passport."⁷ Furthermore, to many, Huston's final film represents a poignant, double farewell: the story is Joyce's "sad, angry farewell to the Irish" according to Moylan C. Mills, and the film is Huston's professional swan song.⁸

Examining Joyce adaptations in terms of formal elements may prove to be a more productive approach. Joyce's experimental technique often is likened to cinema: Fritz Senn writes that "Joyce, just like the new film makers, was fascinated by how movement evolves in time, how we come to perceive it, and how in artificial recreations we can manipulate it."⁹ Kevin Hagopian connects earliest cinema to the fragmentation of literary modernism: "the language of the movies validated even the most provocative of the modernists' claims about language and the disjunctions of every day life."¹⁰ Von Abele dubs Joyce's *Ulysses* polystylistic because

Man to Dancing at Lughnasa (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1999), p. vii.

⁷ Michael Walsh, "John Huston Raises The Dead," *Time* vol. 29 (March 16, 1987), p. 92.

⁸ Moylan C. Mills, "Bringing The Dead to the Screen," In *Contemporary Irish Cinema*, pp. 120-127.

⁹ Fritz Senn, "Sequential Close-Ups in Joyce's *Ulysses*," in *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce*, ed. Christine O'Neill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), p. 109.

¹⁰ Kevin Hagopian, "Film Notes: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," New York State Writers Institute. !HYPERLINK <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/fns99n4.html>

it manipulates language and subjectivity in time. Multiple discourses and produce both “parody and obfuscation,” ultimately make the novel’s world abstract and “difficult to see.”¹¹ What I argue in this essay argues is that the polystylistic character of both *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* is preserved in Strick’s films, but that the polyglot essence of the novel’s linguistic fabrications is by necessity translated into visual style.

Strick produces film worlds which are “difficult to see” because vision, like Joyce’s language, is a constructive rather than transparent medium.

Like Joyce, Strick creates tension between discourses of realism and abstraction, but does so primarily by using a wide-angle lens (in *Ulysses*), associative editing patterns, and a sound design that undermine logic and continuity. That tension explicitly questions the authenticity of screen images, and, by extension, any character or point of view constructed or fabricated through such artifice. Neither realism nor modernist abstraction triumphs; both are shown as compromised systems of representation. Moreover, Strick subverts standard tropes of the camera’s authorial objectivity by juxtaposing scenes of heightened subjectivity with a documentary-inflected impartiality. Tim Dean contends that Joyce’s writing is rarely consistent at establishing a central authorial presence: “This question of authority--whether authorial, narratorial, or cultural--surfaces consistently in Joyce criticism, owing to the difficulty of locating in his work a unifying consciousness conventionally understood to be the author’s.”¹² Strick similarly refuses a unifying authorial consciousness in his Joyce films.

Strick’s work is intimately tied to the disruptive experimentation of post-Hollywood American cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, as Joyce’s was to literary modernism. Strick’s two Joyce films are case studies in nudging film art beyond traditional paradigms of cinema. By fusing the realism codes of documentary realism and avant garde abstraction, Strick’s films defy the presumption that cinema is a realist medium, reject film’s dependence upon narrative, and privilege the fabricated nature of the

11 Von Abele, p. 494.

12 Tim Dean, “Paring His Fingernails: Homosexuality and Joyce’s Impersonalist Aesthetic,” in *Quare Joyce*, ed. Joseph Valente (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998), p. 245.

cinematic signifier: the image. If this mixture of actuality and artifice--realism and experimentation --sounds familiar, it is indeed the case that my readings of Strick's *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* are intended to reveal the most "Joycean" qualities of the films: Joyce's interest in fabrication, identity, and self-consciousness at the level of the linguistic signifier. Strick's films explore in visual terms what Joyce explored in language: a "nonmimetic realism," in Tim Dean's words: a modernist "commitment to represent contemporary history . . . indirectly and allusively."¹³

Mark Osteen's comments on abstraction in literary modernism are useful for my readings of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* as texts that pit transparency against the constructedness of images: "If realism offers an allegedly transparent language in which words refer specifically to things or concepts rather than to themselves, the language of Modernism reminds readers that fictions are not simply windows on the world, but prismatic reflections of sign systems."¹⁴ Strick conjoins the ("transparent") language of documentary realist images to the ("prismatic") self-reflexivity of the avant garde. In *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, realist cinematography clashes with associative editing, to frustrate conventional narrative flow and the legibility of the image. These techniques reveal the fabricated nature of film images and suggest the instability of identity of the characters or narrators who ought to control the point of view of the film.

According to Hugh Kenner's well-known essay, Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is cubist self-portraiture, a traversing of self in space and time: a work "without a static subject or viewpoint," "a becoming which the title tells us to apprehend as a being."¹⁵ Fragmentation,

¹³ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁴ Mark Osteen, "The treasure-house of language: managing symbolic economies in Joyce's Portrait," *Studies in the Novel*, Summer 1995 v27 n2: p. 156.

¹⁵ Hugh Kenner, "The Cubist Portrait," in *Approaches to Joyce's "Portrait,"* ed. Thomas F. Staley and Bernard Benstock (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1976), p. 171-172.

non-linearity, and interior monologues –all formal innovations in confounding subjective and objective perspectives -- can be linked to the historical particularities of colonial and post-colonial Ireland. Joyce's characters, and Steven Dedalus in particular, see themselves through the prism of a language that constructs them more than it reflect them, and that itself is shaped according to the legacy of the British colonial imaginary, the Catholic religion, and the environment of working and middle-class Dublin.

In *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, the would-be artificer, confronts a world composed of words whose meanings are prismatic rather than transparent. His development as an artist parallels his awareness that language fashions identities; both threaten the security Stephen might have derived from his Irish Catholic identity. As a child, Stephen attempts to fix his location in a geography book within the concentric domains of "Ireland, Europe, The World, The Universe" (*P*, 15).

When he wonders about what geographic entity contains the universe, he is in fact questioning the illusion of cosmic permanence and completeness.

When he turns to God as the answer, he immediately focuses upon God as linguistic fabrication. He believes that God will know that those who address him as *Dieu* in their prayers are French but concludes, nevertheless, that "God" is God's "real name" (*P*, 16). Stephen has it both ways. God's true name is the signifier Stephen has learned from his own linguistic and cultural tradition, but God's universal nature encompasses linguistic difference. His Aunt Dante recognizes the crucial link between words, religion, and nation when she points out at the Christmas gathering that Stephen will remember "the *language* he heard against God and religion and priests in his own home" (*P*, 33; author emphasis).

As a young adult, Stephen often traces the connections between the particular and the general and finds that they are anything but linear or logical. For example, Stephen's journal entry documenting religious discussions with classmates Cranly and Ghezzi suggests that the Roman Catholic faith is an invention, and, as such cannot secure Stephen's identity, even in his adolescent rebellion. "Crossing Stephen's, that is, my green, remembered that his countrymen and not mine had invented what Cranly the other night called our religion" (*P*, 249). The pronoun slippage from "my green" to "his countrymen" and "our religion," and the omission of a narrating "I" are symptomatic of Stephen's displacement from national, religious, and linguistic certitude. The sentence begins by describing "his" geographic alter ego—a plot of land in Dublin--but then routes Stephen

through Italy to finally connect with a Catholicism that Ghezzi, Dedalus, and Cranly now share.

Stephen's religion may have been fabricated by and inherited from European others, yet he manages to assert his superiority over the "little roundhead rogue's eye Ghezzi" by denigrating the latter's "pidgin English." In this midst of his ridicule, however, Stephen notes Ghezzi's seductive pronunciations with envy. Ghezzi "pronounces a soft o [and] protrudes his full carnal lips as if he kissed the vowel" (P, 249). Ghezzi gains access to and possesses Stephen's chosen language in a sexual manner. The foreign (pronunciation) may seem superior to the familiar at this moment.

Stephen's obsession with language thwarts any possibility of a national or religious tradition he might fully embrace. He repeatedly suspends himself between the particular and the general, the subjective and the objective, curious about their status as mutual fabrications. Stephen already has recognized that his language, English, is a shameful legacy of conquest but refuses to speak Irish. When he meets with the dean of studies, Stephen's "soul frets in the shadow of his language." (P, 189). Years later, Stephen returns to the conversation with the dean; he learns his definition of "tundish" was correct. Such moments underscore the way that language conforms Stephen's identity as an Irishman and show Stephen that language cannot be trusted to secure any identity; the English dean was uninformed about "his own" language.

Stephen is acutely aware of the artifice of identity, particular those identities defined by dualism. He seeks to transcend the confining nets of nationality and religion, but is never fully free of their influence, never establishes an identity fully outside Irishness or Catholicism. Stephen's growth in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is conditioned by an oscillation between his specific history, location, and language and the identity as an artist he seeks to fabricate. But the familiar is always intermingled with the foreign in Stephen's language and identity.

Strick translates this sensibility to cinema in the *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* film. Just as Joyce uses language as an unreliable medium—Stephen can never fix meaning as either particular or universal—Strick juxtaposes cinematic modes of particularity and truth (documentary realism) with those of artifice and dissimulation (avant garde editing and sound design). These devices create an unmastered subjectivity as both narrating presence and object of contemplation.

A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man explicates the uncertainty of the

first person subject perspective—its fabrication, its artifice. Joseph Valente calls the novel an “unstable differential equation between Stephen and Joyce” and offers further insight: “the novel’s peculiarly claustrophobic *style indirect libre*. . . . persistently confounds without wholly conflating the perspectives of narrator and protagonist.”¹⁶

Strick’s *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is most successful when it evokes this claustrophobia of the free indirect discourse. Throughout this episodic film, free indirect discourse is emblemized through sound devices that compete with images to provide fractured frames of reference for the story. For example, the opening scenes provide textual information about Ireland in 1881 and 1891—a silent narrating technique. In the film’s opening sequence, the soundtrack produces the rhymes of Stephen’s childhood by his own adult voice—suggesting that “unstable differential equation” between the pre-verbal Stephen and the adult narrating Stephen. The soundtrack reproduces Stephen’s childhood as an adult memory; the images, however, depict that childhood as it unfolds. The layering of sound and image compromises the scene’s reality effect. After leaving Clongowes, Stephen’s internal discourse—the film’s voice over—develops as a product of his experience of the world, not as a future adult voice revisiting the flow of childhood sensations. The lack of vocal sequencing—the fact that Stephen’s adult voice is heard over images of Stephen as a child—hints at the persistently doubled point of view. Furthermore, the adult narrator, like the child, also becomes the subject of narration.

Two aspects of the film’s visual system are critical for establishing the oscillation between Stephen the character (object) and Stephen the narrator (subject). One is the repeated use of tightly framed, frontally-composed sequences. The best example of this technique is the Dedalus Christmas dinner prior to Dante’s departure. The political fissures among the characters are signaled by an editing procedure that fragments the dinner table conversation so that each character seems to occupy a private space.

When Simon offends Dante, for example, frontal compositions establish their confrontation; however, because of asymmetrical angles and varying

16 Joseph Valente, “Thrilled by His Touch: The Aestheticizing of Homosexual Panic in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,” in *Quare Joyce*, p. 67.

distances between the camera and each character, no sense of direct contact is evoked by the film's visual system. Thus, characters talk around one another, make their speeches, but do not truly interact with the other dinner guests. The heated languages of nationalism (Dedalus) and faith (Dante) are ineffectual, and the visual language of the scene confirms this fact.

No single character commands the attention of the camera, once the political discussion has begun. Stephen is no exception, despite the fact that he is the putative narrator. Frequently, he is shown alone in the frame responding to his father or Dante's comments, that is, suspended between his pious Aunt and truculent Father, but yet alone in the frame. Later, in the scenes where Stephen accompanies Simon Dedalus to the auction in Cork, he is framed in two-shots with his father, signifying his growing attachment to his father. Despite the fact that this is Stephen's story, his control over its visual rendering—his point of view, his subjectivity, is repeatedly refused.

The second important visual effect that links and destabilizes Stephen as character/narrator is the motif of Stephen's glasses. Strick employs the eyeglasses, and arguably, Stephen's changing vision of the world and of his position in it, as devices of both continuity and dislocation. For example, when Dante leaves the Dedalus home, she asks Stephen to pray with her.

As she murmurs prayers of Christian selflessness and turning the other cheek, Stephen looks slyly at her over his glasses, whereupon the camera cuts to a scene in which Stephen has broken his glasses at Clongowes. Father Dolan flogs him for that offense. The scenes are not organized chronologically: Stephen appears to reject the "turn the other cheek" philosophy before experiencing Father Dolan's injustice. The glasses indicate Stephen's awareness of the workings of the world and his desire to see beyond restrictive religious codes; that desire is linked to the insensitivity of the priest, although the link is elliptical rather than complete.

Later, Stephen's development from child to adolescent will be signaled through a match cut of his taking off his glasses (as a child) and then donning them as an adult.

The glasses are a false symbol of continuity, however. Stephen's vision of religion changes throughout the novel and film. He begins to frequent prostitutes (after several scenes indicate his voyeuristic pleasure at nude postcards) but is wracked with guilt and remorse during the rector's speech.

In this moment, Strick employs associative editing—flashbacks and flashforwards-- to indicate Stephen's revulsion at his own degradation. In

a different context, film scholar James Morrison argues that this kind of associative editing signifies both lack and excess; it fractures a film's locus of subjectivity. Narration becomes unreliable and the narrative apparatus itself unstable: "the form of the flashback itself works to yield a vision of unmastered memory, of subjectivity-in-crisis, rather than the simple bourgeois subjectivity [of] the standard Hollywood flashback."¹⁷

The visual effects during the rector's speech fragment Stephen and his response to religious salvation in time and space. Rather than providing a chronological montage of images that lead to an epiphany, Strick shows Stephen's ongoing and circular struggle with religious indoctrination. No narrative of conversion is guaranteed. During the speech, scenes are not chronological, nor are they entirely indicative of Stephen's interiority. Stephen envisions his face, first bleeding from the scalp, then covered in excrement, and finally crawling with bugs. Significant to the motif of eyeglasses and vision is the fact that his eyes are closed in this sequence of shots and that the bugs crawl out of his eye. His internal vision—which the series of shots presupposes—has been disabled.

Strick relies upon sound to translate the novel's treatment of Stephen as both a character and narrator, as an evolving consciousness and fabrication unfolding in time. In the closing scenes of the film, Stephen's voice-over is paired with vignettes of actions previously represented according to the camera's third person omniscience. For example, a series of discussions between Stephen and Davin assumes a conventionally omniscient shot/reverse-shot structure with its associated fragmented space. However, Stephen, in a diary-like voice-over, narrates the events that Davin has "already" narrated to him. Stephen's language seeks to control the narration, but cannot do so simply by voice-over—the images resist recuperation by Stephen's point of view. In a scene very near the film's conclusion, images of Stephen's narration of Davin's trip to the west of Ireland are matched visually with shots of the elderly pub men that Davin tells Stephen about and Stephen admits he fears. These scenes represent moments when Stephen's consciousness—and his vision—attempt to overtake the film's narration but fail.

17 James Morrison, *Passport to Hollywood: Hollywood Films, European Directors* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1998), p. 186.

Given Stephen's struggle to assert his perspective through the film apparatus itself, it is fitting that the final shot--romanticized with violin accompaniment--depicts Stephen's boat ride away from Ireland, and, specifically, frames a small rocky island off the north coast near Dublin called "Ireland's Eye." Stephen's consciousness is associated visually with the "I" of Ireland, despite, of course, his repeated pronouncements rejecting the limitations of a national identity. This "I," surely a linguistic pun, signifies Stephen's yearning for a subjectivity freed from constraints of nation, culture, and religion. Visually, he is moving away from that Eye/I. His exile may not provide the freedom he demands; his water-borne escape may result in his written "I" becoming more closely associated with Ireland than he could imagine. At any rate, he is suspended within the specific and universal identities he shirks and embraces, respectively.

The developing portrait, the "I" which encompasses the self-portraiture of the earlier sections of the film, is no longer simply a product of internal discourse and visualization. As David Lomas writes, "self-portraiture . . . is the outcome of a dialectic of self and other . . . The subject is neither identical with itself nor with the portrait that each of us paints of ourselves, that consoling fiction of an autonomous ego . . ."18 For Stephen, the dialectic between self and other (as former or future self) is emblemized in that final image of Ireland's Eye. He moves farther from that symbol of sedimentation and isolation, the careworn, territorial, and parochial eye, in order to pursue his vision of the aesthetic I. The film uses sound, associative editing, and motifs to document the subjectivity that both traverses and narrates that process.

Strick's method of unsettling narration perspective, and identities in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* recalls what Andreas Huyssen has called "the disturbance of vision" in modernism.19 Vision is disturbed in Strick's Joyce films--as language is disturbed in the novels--because the point of view structure refuses to conform to any one mode.

18 David Lomas, "Inscribing Alterity: Transactions of Self and Other in Miro Self-Portraits," in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*. Ed. Joanna Woodhall (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), p. 167.

19 Andreas Huyssen, "The Disturbance of Vision in *Vienna Modernism*," *Modernism/Modernity* 5.3 (1998): 33.

Documentary transparency, or the omniscient camera-eye clashes with the wholly subjective, sensate experience of avant garde formalism. The brutal combination—more apparent in *Ulysses* than in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*-- cannot underwrite character identification and plot coherence. The fabricated nature of identity in general is readily apparent in *Ulysses* at the level of form: my comments therefore focus on the way in which the visual system undermines the stability of memory, the idea of character identification, and any recognizable point of view.

Strick approaches the aesthetic fabrication of identities in *Ulysses* by orchestrating a tension between the image recorded by the camera and the editing pattern that combines those images. Strick's cinematography is characterized by a wide-screen frame, crisp black and white photography, and heavy reliance upon a wide-angle lens. His frequent use of straight cuts, however, and the spatial organization of that wide black and white canvas are indicative of a commitment to cinematic expressionism, not documentary or narrative cinema. Framing and editing choices together produce a conflicted point of view structure, undercutting the possibility of stable identities for the characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom.

In the opening scenes at the Sandycove Martello Tower, Strick's visual rhetoric dispenses with classical point of view, wherein the camera alternates between objective and subjective shots, all of which are clearly motivated by the narrative's first and third person oscillation. Instead, Strick's figure placement emphasizes the dramatically horizontal frame; he drapes the figures of Stephen Dedalus, Buck Mulligan, and Haines across the wide expanse repeatedly in frontal, theatrical tableaux. However, partly because of the wide purview and partly because of camera placement in relation to characters, editing cuts rarely signal point of view shifts, as they typically do in classical Hollywood cinema. For example, over the shoulder shots—which align spectators with one character and perspective at a time—come nowhere near their mark. During the conversation between Buck and Stephen on the roof, straight cuts to close ups of these characters (which typically are precursors to eyeline matches that reveal what the character is looking at) are not matched in the traditional sense. The camera is never exactly aligned with either character, but it cannot be described as wholly omniscient because of the frequent close ups. At the conclusion of the opening scene, Buck takes the plunge and the camera abruptly cuts to scenes of Leopold Bloom; here the camera cannot be associated with a single spatial perspective either.

In these opening moments of the film, Strick inaugurates an expressionistic treatment of character that associates vast space with Stephen. Stephen is framed against the empty sky or an overexposed brick wall. Often there are gaps opening up behind him that lead into the screen's depth, suggesting escape routes: two notable instances of this composition occur when Stephen returns from the beach to the sidewalk and when he encounters his sister. This motif contrasts nicely with Strick's treatment of Bloom, who invariably is framed by bars, vertical structures or patterns: signs of enclosure and entrapment.

Stephen's access to space is retracted as soon as it is given, however: the alternating use of longer lenses to capture close-ups, the proximity of the camera to Stephen (mainly medium close-ups where Stephen dominates the foreground), and the bleached quality of Stephen's backdrops all compress the frame's depth. This depth compression works directly against the primary reason for using a wide angle lens: the wide angle lens permits many planes of depth to be in focus at the same time. The extreme width of the frame only serves to compartmentalize the figures within it from side to side when there is no space behind the figures; the depth and the freedom typically associated with wide-angle cinematography are absent. Stephen's ability to control space is thus illusory; he neither controls the camera's gaze, nor does he master the space it constructs around him. He--along with Buck and Haines--appears to loom in the foreground of a relatively empty and static backdrop whose rules of perspective are uncertain.

Strick uses straight cuts not only to suggest (and then withdraw) character introspection and subjectivity, but also to fragment the narrative. Straight cuts emphasize the disorienting, kinetic aspects of film art championed by the avant garde--as opposed to using slower, more deliberate fades and dissolves to attenuate space-time shifts. As Stephen wanders along the strand in *Proteus*, his dark image is cast against a bleached background and accompanied by an interior monologue/voice over. When Stephen's voice says "shut your eyes and see," the screen cuts to black twice for about eight seconds each: the full-screen darkness is interrupted by a shot of Stephen on the strand. This sequence produces a fairly shocking scenario: for the first time, the film delves into extreme subjectivity in terms of sound and image (the camera shares Stephen's perspective as he covers his eyes) but refuses to provide us with a visual image. At the moment of its most extreme subjectivity, the film shows us nothing. The fabrication of identity is shown to depend upon the aesthetic

devices available to the film medium: sound, visual images, and point of view. When they are withdrawn, no characterization is possible.

Throughout the film, Strick exploits direct cuts within and across scenes rather than more conventional narrative devices indicating the passage of time or the movement of the action to a new location. As Rudolph Von Abele notes,

Cutting and cross-cutting are the stock-in-trade of the cameramen, and all relatively retarding techniques, fade-in, fadeout, dissolve, are notably absent. The film moves not only abruptly, it moves jerkily By and large, however, it cuts: from face to face, from scene to scene, from long shot to close-up, from low-level to tilt back and so on. Omissions from the novel are achieved by cutting just as movement is achieved by cutting.²⁰

Strick's editing subtracts events and time from the narrative flow while it adds spatial momentum and precludes the spectator's identification with characters. This use of cutting is consistent with Strick's interest in exposing the way identities are fabricated through visual and aural means.

The oscillation between static compositions and frequent rapid-fire editing disrupts spectators' identification with the camera itself, undermining its centralizing, narrative authority. Just as Hitchcock's disjunctive editing in *Psycho*'s shower scene is hailed as a cinematic counterpart to Norman Bates slashing of Marion Crane's body, the violent possibility of leaving something out in the telling of a story, the remembering of live events, is, I would argue, Strick's point here.

The inevitability of identities as racked with loss rather than blessed with plenitude and certainty is made more evident in the rapid, associative editing that surrounds the characters and seems to reveal their interior visions. These "flashbacks," however, are not always associated with past events, though they are largely motivated by memory. In fact, they to film theorist Christian Metz's "bracket syntagma": "a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation

20 Von Abele, pp. 491-492.

to each other . . .”²¹ Such apparent “flashbacks” only suggest greater deficits in the characters’ capacity for vision and self-consciousness.

The flashbacks specifically associated with Leopold Bloom, for example, are of his dead son Rudy. For Bloom, memories relating to absence are more visually salient than memories of presence, signified by the funeral carriage scene in Hades, where Bloom’s present tense is invaded by seven shots of Rudy. The shots vary from a photograph of Rudy as a baby to scenes of an older child with Bloom and Molly. When Bloom’s voice is heard to sigh “if only he had lived,” the subjunctive mood suggests Bloom’s visual memory is both commemorative and constructive: it conflates what was and what might have been. It does not refer to the reality in the present tense, where Bloom is located. Time moves forward and backward, and perhaps, into the nonexistent yet visible “might have been” within Bloom’s memory and fantasy.

Ironically, Bloom’s non-mimetic interior visions are contextualized by a mirror motif: Bloom himself, in the “real narrative time,” appears before a mirror in the hansom cab. His legibility to himself is called into question as he performs the act of seeing through memory. Bloom’s point of view of the world is constantly undermined in moments like these; Bloom both sees and does not see. Strick has already undermined any sense of a distinct and omniscient point of view in an earlier scene where Molly reads Blazes Boylan’s letter; he inserts a scene of Molly and Blazes romping in flashback/flashforward (it is impossible to tell). Because the inserted shots cannot be attributed to either Molly or Leopold’s point of view, it remains unclear which character’s view of the world is more perspicacious. What is clear, however, is that the scene emanates from some character’s subjectivity, whether it be Molly’s experience or Leopold’s imagination.

Furthermore, the non-mastery of any individual subject of/in the film is evident in the unfolding of individual sequences, most prominently in the Proteus and the “Nighttown” sections. In these segments, a “stream-of-consciousness” form of associative editing ostensibly provides a window into a character’s frame of reference: as, say, Bloom’s memory of Rudy. However, traditional signifiers of “internal vision”—the eyeline

21 Christian Metz, “From Film Language,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th edition, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 82.

match, the dissolve--are missing. Stephen's monologue in *Proteus* for example, is explicitly undermined by the lack of relationship established between the associative editing sequences and his point of view. The rapid deployment of internal visions--of rounded egg shapes, statues of women, a white tent, a wedding picture, and so on--are not linked to Stephen's viewing sensibility. In this manner, the flashbacks and flashforwards function not as images that fill the gaps in character subjectivity. Instead, the fact that many (but not all) of these inserted images are unanchored in terms of time, space, or subject position denies any sense of plenitude, depth of character, or transparent vision of characters or spectators. These a-chronological images unsettle character and narrational logic. They reveal the gaps, the losses, and the impossibility of realist portraiture, despite the access to consciousness provided by subjective point of view, and despite the lucid black and white cinematography, the *sine qua non* of documentary realism.

The "Nighttown" sequence is most evocative of the artifice underlying identity, perhaps because the scene is explicitly a product of sexual fantasy—certainly one of the most unmasterable components of any identity. Earlier, the film establishes Stephen and Bloom in individual, fragmented spaces; here the combination of the two multiplies spatial and temporal instability rather than resolving the tension. The rendering of fantasy states does not proceed according to clearly demarcated fantasy and reality (say fantasy framed by reality), nor does it offer a clear recognition of past/present/future. Time is non-chronological; space is confined to the frontal and theatrical. The paradoxical use of tableaux--a non-sequential visual grammar that organizes a number of moments of static performativity--is matched by the verbal gymnastics of Bloom's voice-over fantasy and nonsense narration. The film builds to a frenzied sense of dislocation in time and space, that dislocation produce by the clash of a rapid editing pace that organizes a set of grotesque and static images. Nearly every shot of Bloom and Stephen in absurd poses and circus-like composition is static in terms of activity within the frame. The sexual release of the "Nighttown" sequence is thus re-temporized as a gallery of portraits whose relation to one another--for example, whose fantasy they represent--is not at all clear.

Von Abele argues that the *Ulysses* film is monostylistic, that it cannot

achieve the abstraction of the novel.²² I would argue to the contrary that the tension between the black and white, photo-realist image and its manipulation and articulation in space and through time-- which questions its legibility--offers a visualization of the fragmented, cubist portrait of the city of Dublin that renders character and point of view complex in the novel. Regarding the conclusion of *Ulysses*, Von Abele maintains that:

Where parody produces ambiguity and human, interposed language play produces a growing nebulosity, a heightening of abstractness about the fictive world, which is timed to culminate together with the narrative, it becomes steadily harder to see, to know where one is; the sensory richness, even the wealth of dialogue fades; the impersonal anonymous third person engulfs the universe; and Mr. Bloom, in bed at last, becomes nothing but a black dot on the page. What is the filmmaker to do . . . to find ways of transmuting these stylistic shifts and their effects into the "language" of the eye?²³

The problems of fabricating an identity in visual terms—through aural and visual points of reference--are never absent from the film's textual system; they are rendered through the language of the eye. That language presents a portrait of the character—Stephen or Leopold Bloom—in the rhetoric of realism, then reveals its status as fabrication by manipulating the temporal, spatial, and aural coordinates that normally construct the dualisms of self/other, and objective and subjective in cinema.

The environmental plenitude of the deep-focus cinematography--a device that emphasizes the ability to interpret characters through spatial relationships -- is radically challenged in *Ulysses*. The wide screen/deep focus/associative editing nexus makes vision itself a problem-- characters and the visions associated with them co-exist in an space whose interior/exterior and past/present/future are ineffectively delineated.

Joyce's novel's fragmented surface and point of view structure confound external and internal--words are both thoughts and actions, for example--

22 Von Abele, p. 494.

23 Ibid., p. 494, author's emphasis.

and provide Strick with an opportunity to explore realist codes and their undoing in his film version of *Ulysses*. Neither Stephen nor Bloom is able to fix himself through a stable relation to vision, space, or time, despite the fact that the external environment appears controllable because of its transparent photo-realism.

These readings of Strick's *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* address the critical neglect of these works. They offer a way of reading between the lines demarcated by literature and film. Joseph Strick's films are products of his aesthetic milieu, post-Hollywood independent cinema, yet are informed by a profound understanding of the experiments in form Joyce carried out. Using the language of cinema, Strick, like Joyce, managed to unsettle the premises of much literary and film art: that realism produces transparent characters and that the self-conscious narrator and/or character is master of her or his own subjectivity. Both Joyce and Strick revel in experiments with realism and abstraction by emphasizing the formal materials that fabricate identities: language and literary construction, and vision and cinema art.

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