

Renoir and the Apparatus: Cinematic Panopticism

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There is a precocious utilization of cinematic space at the moment in Jean Renoir's Le Crime de M. Lange (1935) where Charles, the bicycle courier, is delivering copies of the new edition of *Arizona Jim* to the newsstand in a Parisian boulevard. As children brazenly maul the newsstand in order to assure possession of a copy of the comic book, one young teen emerges out of the mass with his copy already in-hand. He makes space for himself within the frame, as much as within the crowd itself, and presents to the camera the cover to his copy of *Arizona Jim*. This direct address to the camera has two primary functions: it serves as introduction for a sort of entr'acte montage sequence while it also, and more importantly, shatters the previously hermetically-sealed relationship between the apparatus and the diegetic architecture that had determined the spatial logic for the film. The shot of direct address and montage sequence which follows it, introduce the first non-diegetic moments and places in M. Lange. The montage sequence features a short stop-motion animated sequence which juxtaposes copies of *Arizona Jim* into geometric configurations that connote flow and penetration. The animated sequence prognosticates for the audience that the latest comic book will be a hit with the public while, additionally, it functions as an ellipsis for the story.

M. Lange, up to the point of this entr'acte had carefully constructed a diegetic space under established principles of 'panopticism'. The apparatus had arranged its position as 'overseer' of the diegetic space, locating both a central pivot for inspection (the centre of the courtyard) as well as constructing the relationship between 'cells' and between the cells and this central pivot (rooms in the court). The rupture in spatial logic through the direct address may seem haphazard or confusing, but I would like to suggest that it is a testament to the

forward-thinking and highly-intuitive Jean Renoir as a stylistic master. In fact, the direct address is employed aptly in recognition of a critical limitation in Benthamite conceptions of panopticism – with elements of mobility present, the gazer must also become the gazed-upon in controlling and constructing the space. I will employ some of the key points from a discourse emerging in police studies around the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment in order to explain the function of the direct address in expanding panopticism from a one-way, fixed spatial logic to a two-way, mobile spatial logic. I will argue that Renoir understands the apparatus as a mobile agent of spatiotemporal construction demonstrated through the stylistic devices which he employs in M. Lange. Renoir defiantly and openly challenges a concept of panoptic space as fixed and in this regard astutely predicts revisions to Bentham’s work on the Panopticon as seen through police studies in the 1970s up to the present.

In a paper which aims to demonstrate M. Lange as a challenge to Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault’s conception of panopticism, it may be prudent to address some of the themes of the film and what the story of the film contributes to the discourse on Benthamite utilitarianism. In *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham writes, “community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is, what? – the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.” (ed. Engelmann, 113). For Bentham, the principle of utility directs that the right action is one which produces the greatest quantity of happiness. A.J. Ayer understands Benthamite utilitarianism as a recommendation on how to act – the principle of utility determines that one should always act to maximize the fulfillment of

wants and needs in a society (Schofield, 430). This principle of utility is omnipresent in the production of M. Lange – Amedee Lange murders Batale to serve the wants of the cooperative (diegetic), Renoir utilizes the apparatus to construct a space which maximizes the character's ability to see and be seen, in short to contribute to the plot and be useful (stylistic) and Renoir teamed with Jacques Prevert and the Groupe Octobre, a class-conscious proletarian theatre company, to produce a film which exemplified the principle of utility at the level of its production (industrial).

Le Crime de M. Lange was shot in twenty-eight days between October and November in 1935. Renoir's long-time assistant director, Jacques Becker, had hoped to direct M. Lange. Although Becker was bitter about Renoir agreeing to direct the film, the general feeling was that M. Lange was a Groupe Octobre project and thus marquee status for a director was antithetical to their aims as a Communist collective of film industry personnel (Bertin, 112-113). Prevert and Renoir worked on the script and dialogue together, but the film is mostly permeated by the tenets of the Popular Front - to cooperate and put doctrine aside - and Renoir was never doctrinaire in his politics while Prevert was deeply-rooted politically in Communism and artistically in surrealism (Bertin, 113). The collaboration was positive and the story was ironically pregnant with optimism. The production fostered an *equipe* mentality rife with Popular Front ideals and utilitarian goals. Leo Braudy has claimed that M. Lange constructs a utopian community which is 'intruded' upon three times – all of which are the occasions where the film frames action away from the court (Braudy, 116-117). For Braudy, these intrusions are understood as such because they are moments where the individuals of the

community are separated. I would argue that these intrusive moments are not disruptive of the spatial logic at the court. The most potent intrusion is through the direct address of the entr'acte that acts to rupture a spatial logic – one that had created a fixed framework by which characters can 'fit' into fixed loci. This fixity is arguably tenuous to begin with, which Renoir demonstrates when the direct address cues the audience to realize that the apparatus operates within a mobile spatial logic that requires the gazer to be gazed upon. Braudy explains that the self-sufficiency of the court space was "too utopian to last" (Braudy, 119). I might argue that the contingency of the space as constructed through the cinematic apparatus precludes a utopian realization. Braudy is correct, however, in asserting that the dynamics of architectural and character relationships creates ambiguous spatiotemporality throughout the film (Braudy, 120).

I have suggested that panopticism is the dominant of the spatial logic in M. Lange – mobile, and not fixed. 'Panopticism' as a concept derives from Bentham's *Panopticon, or, the Inspection-House*. For Bentham, the Panopticon was "a simple idea in architecture" with a purpose to provide an idealized surveillance for an inspector situated in the middle of the circular structure (*ed. Engelmann, 284-285*). The plan of the Panopticon was for a circular building to have 'apartments' or 'cells' occupying the circumference. The cells were to be partitioned with an 'inspector's lodge' at the centre. Each cell was to have a window for providing light, and therefore visibility for the inspector. The "intermediate or annular area" was the space between the cells and the lodge (*ed. Engelmann, 285-287*). This annular area reveals the fixity of the spatial logic in Bentham's Panopticon. This annular area is far from fixed

in cinema as the apparatus uses deep staging and deep space, mobile framing and tracking shots, high- and low-angle shots, and editing schemes to construct space in such a way that this annular area becomes spatially dynamic. Through the cinematic apparatus, a particular location in the annular area will become multiple and varied coordinates across shots in a sequence – which is the case either with mobile framing, long-takes (sequence shot) or with edited sequences (montage).

Bentham conceives of a space through the Panopticon that constitutes the “apparent omnipresence of the inspector” and “the extreme facility of [the inspector’s] *real* presence” (ed. Engelmann, 285-290). Michel Foucault begins the third chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, discussing the conditions that may have inspired Bentham’s Panopticon. Foucault examines the historical conditions of quarantine during outbreaks of the plague. In the 17th century, European towns coping with outbreaks would create, “segmented, immobile, frozen space,” where each townsman had a fixed place (Foucault, 197). For Foucault, this fixity provided the necessary conditions for the exercise of consolidated power. Foucault understands this power logic to have determined a spatial logic in the plague-ravished towns, as well as in Bentham’s concept of the Panopticon. Foucault writes, “the Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.” (Foucault, 201). For Foucault, the inspector is only ‘seen’ through the power structure and not through the fixed spatial logic of the Panopticon. The inspector’s fate is to be enclosed in the tower and bound to his role in the power structure – fixed in his location because of the fixity of the role (Foucault, 204). Foucault

makes it clear that 'panopticism' implies spatial fixity and a dissociated see/being seen dyad even when the inspector is mobile – i.e. the “faceless gaze” of the police on their beat (Foucault, 214). I would like to show through existing discourse in police studies that Foucault is 'off-the-mark' in theorizing panopticism as necessarily spatially fixed and that mobile panopticism requires an associated see/being seen dyad. The filmic example of Renoir's M. Lange can reveal much of the value for a challenge to Foucault and is mutually supportive of findings in police studies while also demonstrates the uniqueness of constructing space through the cinematic apparatus. A comprehensive formal analysis of M. Lange can elucidate on these claims.

Le Crime de M. Lange opens with a narrative frame set in the bucolic atmosphere of the French provinces. Valentine and Amedee Lange have fled the city to avoid the judicial repercussions of a murder committed by Lange. Valentine recounts the story to the innkeeper and barflies as a matter of persuasion in commandeering their support in Lange and Valentine's escape. Thus, the opening shot of the 'story' is back in the city and frames the length of a French street. A short pan reveals the entrance to a courtyard just off that street. The court's community is established as characters move to and fro within a static frame. Within the courtyard, deep space and deep staging reveal ongoing routine activities, even as Batale enters the frame only to then be accosted by an anxious creditor who had been blending into the mise-en-scene. In the opening sequences with dialogue, the shot scale is close and characters are framed tightly in two-shots. There is the utilization of short pans and tracking shots with little reliance on the renowned Renoirian long-take. Deep space is conveyed through open

doorways hinting at Renoir's intent to shoot with a great depth of field. Obstructions in the mise-en-scene are framed in the foreground of shots creating an unobtrusive camera consistent with Renoir's realist stylistics. The camera peers out a window over the courtyard and then pans to the left to reveal M. Lange also looking down upon the daily activities of the workers. In this respect, Renoir's unobtrusive camera establishes ambivalence with the construction of a panoptic spatial logic. There are certainly moments, places and objects hidden from the apparatus.

Renoir works with the mobility of the apparatus to begin establishing a panoptic space. The main street is re-established through a statically-framed shot. Short shots are edited together to frame different positions within the courtyard – shots from above, through doorways, from the alleyway that links the courtyard to the street. The courtyard becomes a central pivot for the overall space as it links the movements of characters through the space. The rooms in the court are like the cells of the Panopticon. The rooms have single windows looking out onto the central courtyard. The camera frames the rooms independently and the long-take, mobile-framing so familiar to Renoir's style is not utilized to link the rooms and situate them relative to each other in a clear spatial configuration. The camera sees all the rooms and because framing of the rooms is often achieved through their windows from the exterior it could be said that the central courtyard 'sees' all the rooms like the situation of the inspector's lodge in the Panopticon. The camera does not travel up the staircase to the second floor of the court – the camera pervasively does not link the 'cells' through contiguity editing or

the mobile framing, long take. However, a variety of high- and low-angle shots from both floors locate all these 'cells' relative to the centre of the courtyard.

Locations which are not physically proximate to the courtyard require transportation to access. That is to say, these locations (the boulevard, the train station, the countryside) are spatially independent from the court. The court is a heterotopic space with a hermetically-sealed spatial logic. Foucault, states that the heterotopia is a "counter-arrangement" – a real space that is localizable but separate and distinct from any spaces in that reality which would be considered contiguous to it (Foucault, *OoS...*). Lange and Valentine perform an official introduction in front of the arch to the alleyway. They stand side-by-side in the centre of the courtyard. The framing of the shot suggests the theatrical proscenium while also confirming their position as absolutely central to the court's space.

Some key scenes in M. Lange render the connections to Bentham's Panopticon quite obvious. The first of these scenes involves a 360 degree shot sweeping around the courtyard as a radio announces the train accident which is thought to have brought the timely demise of Batala. The radio announcement in combination with the mobile framing links the cells of the court's space as the electronic voice is carried by sound waves to all areas of that space. This sonic linking of space into a panoptic 'aural gaze' recalls Bentham's work on the Panopticon when he wrote that "to save the troublesome exertion of voice that might otherwise be necessary" a tin tube would be mounted between cells and the lodge (*ed.* Englemann, 285-290). A second scene when M. Lange removes a billboard that had been boarding up the

window to Charles's room recalls Foucault's chapter on panopticism. For Foucault, the Panopticon was fundamentally oppositional to the dungeon. Where the dungeon encloses, deprives of light and hides, panopticism encloses, but makes visible (Foucault, 200). Visibility becomes a trap. When Charles is made visible, his room (or cell) remains enclosed but is no longer hidden and is suddenly permeated by light from the open courtyard. Charles's room remains difficult to situate in relation to other rooms in the court, but it has a pinpoint position relative to the centre of the courtyard as evidenced by the deep space, deep staged shot from inside his room as the workers look across the courtyard and through the window onto Charles.

The sequence which follows Charles's moment of being made visible is that of the aforementioned direct address and entr'acte montage sequence. Renoir effectively constructed a panoptic space, but intuitively arranges a couple of scenes which could be described as 'off-kilter'. The photo shoot in the courtyard decentres the panoptic space as the spectacle of the set arranges new forms of seeing and being seen. The set for the photo shoot is placed near the entrance to the courtyard, but decidedly away from its centre. This choice in mise-en-scene fragments the space and skews its established logic. In a sense, the characters are now looking back at the apparatus (as happens pointedly in the direct address) reconstituting the panoptic gaze through the mobility of the apparatus and their agency to re-situate the centre of the space. Later, Batala returns and scoffs at the idea of this off-kilter mobility. He comments about the concept of a work cooperative, "everyone's the boss; even the bill-poster has his say. You need someone to take control... me!" It is an apt moment for the 'power that fixes' to reassert control on the spatial logic of the environment. Batala then corners Valentine, trying to position

her on the periphery from his more centralized alignment in the courtyard. Jacques Prevert's contribution is obvious in these moments near the end of the film – there is an open challenge to the selfishness of capitalism, an official hailing of the cooperation of communism, and most importantly, an appeal to the principle of utility.

Soon after these intense moments in the story pass, M. Lange fulfills Prevert's request as the camera follows Lange through the building, down the stairs and out the main door of the court. A second 360 degree mobile shot disorients the spectator. Through interplay with offscreen sounds of the partying cooperative workers, the camera continues sweeping around in a full circle. The offscreen sounds are muted and then the camera comes to a stop. There is a sense of point-of-view – could M. Lange's perspective now be represented by the apparatus? Identification effects undergo a kind of flattening. A moment later, M. Lange enters from the left of the frame, moves forward and shoots Batala in the stomach. That ambiguous moment ironically fulfills the utilitarian aims of the narrative while demolishing the fixity of panopticism in the stylistic system and construction of space. The ambiguity of this second 360 degree shot renders the spectator an 'accomplice' to the crime of M. Lange. What is M. Lange's culpability under these new circumstances? What is the culpability of the spectator? A beautifully crafted story and film demonstrates excellence in execution. Surely the supporters of the Popular Front would have been proud by what was achieved in M. Lange. The film is a clear call toward conscious critical engagement with the horrors of fascism that ravaged Europe in the 1930s. Katherine Golsan has made similar conclusions regarding the significance of this execution sequence (Golsan, 28-47). Perhaps, the most graceful touch in the film comes just prior to this

second 360 degree shot, when the old superintendent of the court has pulled a dustbin at the exact centre of the courtyard. This gesture suggests not only that Batale is garbage and something to be discarded, but that the power enacted of fixity in panopticism is equally condemnable if left in its place and allowed to exert power from its centralized agents.

The narrative of M. Lange draws obvious connections to Bentham's utilitarianism. On the whole, the murder is neat and loose ends are tied-up by virtue of M. Lange's successful escape across the French border. It would seem that Prevert and Renoir's script begs few questions regarding the sincerity of an appeal to the principle of utility. However, Renoir's stylistic system throughout the film is far more complex. Again, there is a Benthamite connection at play - can space be constructed by the apparatus to achieve panopticism? The mise-en-scene and cinematography begins ambivalent but settles into a fixed spatial logic after a few sequences. For the better part of the film, a Benthamite panoptic space is reproduced in the court and courtyard. However, Renoir disturbs this spatial logic through a direct address. I have suggested that this was no 'accident', but was an astute conveyance of an updated conception of panopticism through an understanding of the cinematic apparatus. For Renoir, the mobility of the apparatus implies a mobile panopticism as opposed to a fixed one. In such an instance, the see/being seen dyad must not dissociate – the gazer must be gazed upon by the objects of his/her gaze. This understanding and subsequent demonstration by Renoir may have gone unnoticed in 1935. However, by the 1970s police studies had independently been examining the nature of mobile panopticism through experiments in police patrol.

The report for The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment is often recognized as being authored by George Kelling, although he had many co-authors and contributors. The experiment was conducted with the goal of determining how better to organize police patrol efforts. Deterring crime, stopping crime, apprehending offenders and being visible to the community are often the main goals of police patrol (Kelling *et al.*, 1-5). The experiment set up three different beats – control, proactive, reactive. The control beat represented the regular patrol schedule for a given area of Kansas City, while the reactive beat only responded to calls for service (no patrol) and the proactive beat patrolled with double the number of police cruisers of the control beat (Kelling *et al.*, 6-10). The conclusions of the experiment were somewhat shocking. It seemed that there was no significant difference in fear of crime in the community or in level of crime based on the three different patrol styles. Initially, this revealed that heavy patrol was not necessary and that police resources could be used more effectively somewhere else (Kelling *et al.*, 40-41). Richard Larson reviewed the findings of the experiment and determined numerous methodological flaws with the experiment itself. Larson determined that the ‘visibility’ of the different patrol styles was very similar given that reactive patrols would show up when called for service in greater force than even proactive patrols (Larson, 272-274). Sherman & Weisburd used Larson’s work to formulate ‘patrol dosage’ as the determining factor in patrol effectiveness. Sherman & Weisburd went on to experiment with ‘hot spot’ patrol styles and concluded that increased visibility by the community equalled greater deterrence from committing crime (Sherman & Weisburd, 645-647). Braga and McGarrell *et al.* separately made similar findings in their own experiments with targeted preventive patrols (Braga, 118-122). If police patrol could be adequately explained as a mode of

mobile panopticism (not the aim of this paper, per se), then the findings in police studies match nicely with what Renoir demonstrates in cinema. A mobile panopticism requires a two-way visibility unlike the fixed panopticism formulated by Bentham and then explained by Foucault. The gazer must be gazed upon; the police officer must be seen by the criminal and the community, and the cinematic apparatus must become obtrusive in some manner. The direct address in M. Lange is extremely revealing as a device to this end, as it is extremely rare for Renoir's oeuvre. Renoir's realist style is characterized by an unobtrusive apparatus, but also by a non-panoptic spatial logic. Renoir is a humanist exemplified in the famous line he delivered as Octave in Rules of the Game – "the terrible thing is that everyone has their reasons". For Renoir, the cinematic apparatus is capable of constructing a panoptic space, but because the apparatus is inherently mobile through the cinema-specific properties of mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing this panopticism must be mobile and must be demonstrated through two-way visibility.

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