

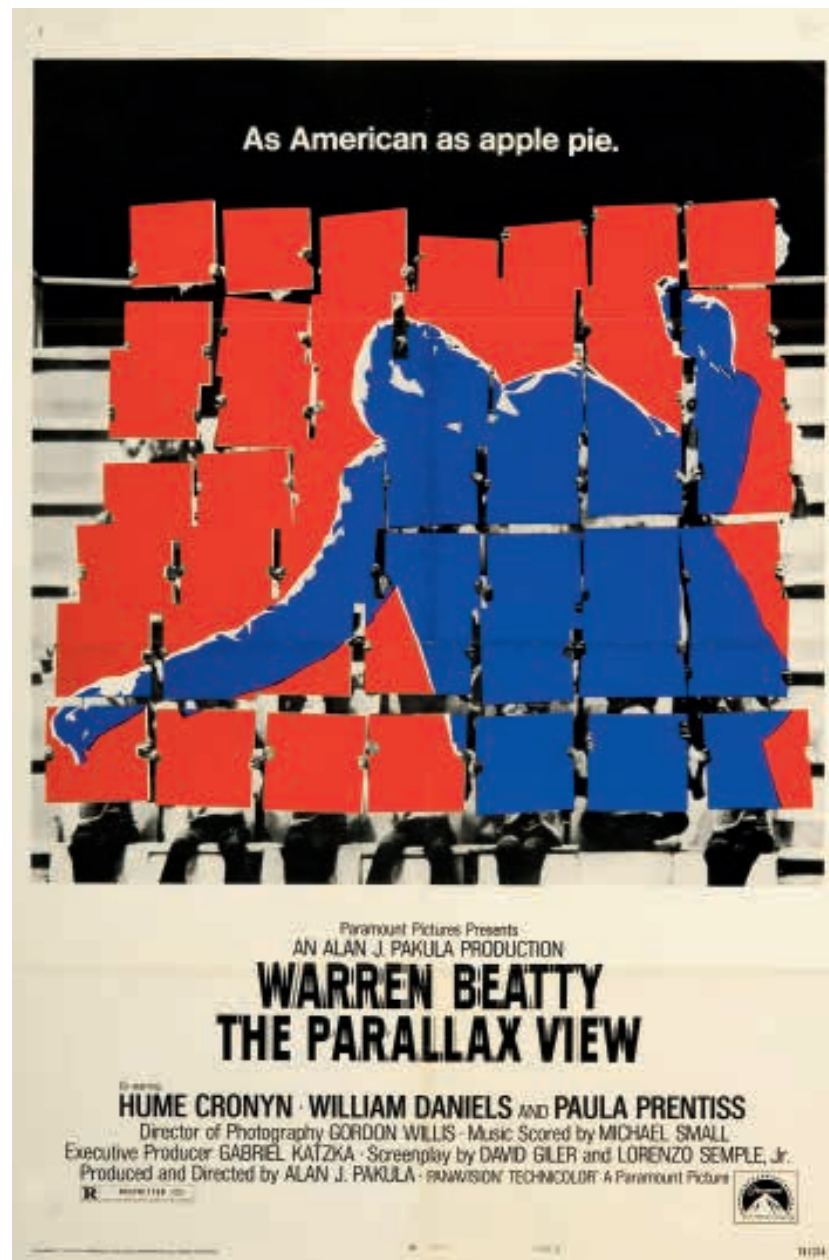
THE SIGHT OF BLOOD DOES NOT  
MAKE ME SICK OR AFRAID

David Levine

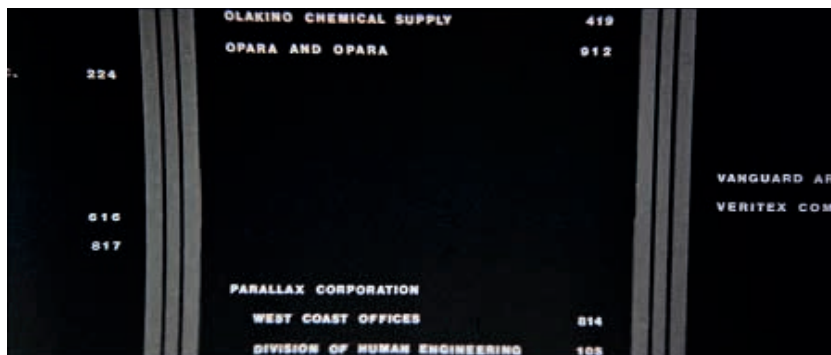
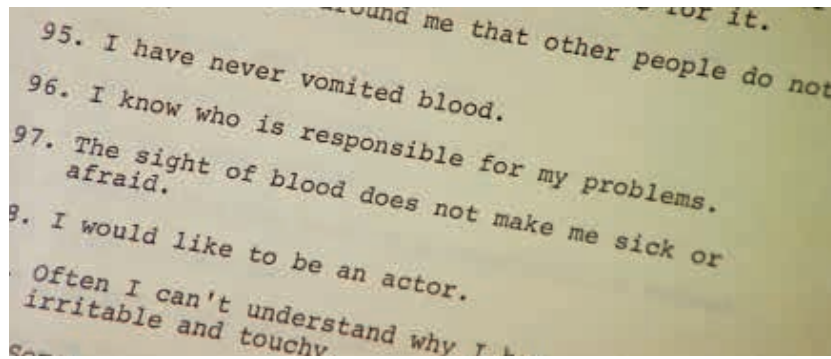
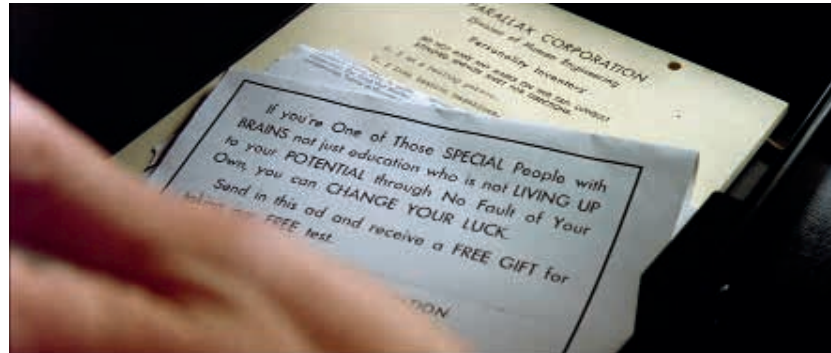
Much of the discourse around human rights and the image concerns the demands that images make of us (to respond, or to witness, or to become better witnesses), and what might constitute an adequate response to this summons. One of the difficulties propelling this discourse is that it is difficult to gauge what an adequate response to the demands of images would be.

My contribution to the conference “The Flood of Rights” was a lecture about the measurement of moral spectatorship. My starting point was the unlikely coincidence of “test-screen” scenes in two films from the early 1970s – Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Alan Pakula’s *The Parallax View* (1974). In both, the protagonist is made to watch images of atrocity, and his response to the images is measured biometrically – using electroencephalography in *A Clockwork Orange*, and galvanic skin response testing in *The Parallax View*. Unsurprisingly, both films involved themselves in debates about contemporary psychology and ethics–behaviorism in *A Clockwork Orange* and personality assessment in *The Parallax View*.

Alongside these films, I discussed the history of audience-response testing – the use of surveys or handheld devices to assess viewer experience – and the parallel development of projective personality testing, which analyzes a person’s makeup based on his or her response to a “scene” or question. Early audience-response testing and personality assessment both suffered from inaccuracies introduced by self-reporting, and advances in both



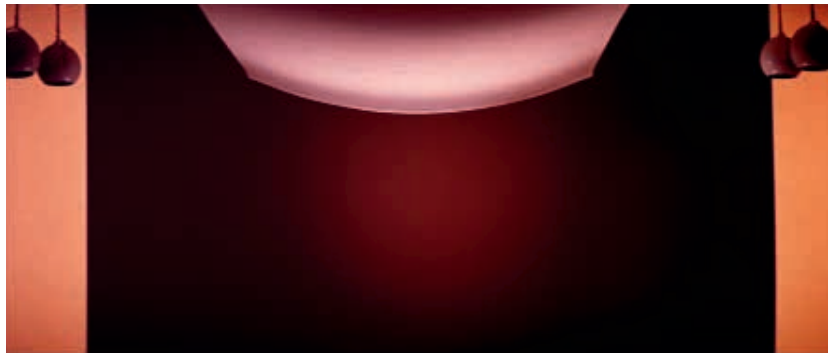
Poster for *The Parallax View*, 1974

Stills from *The Parallax View*, 1974

fields were generally spurred by the examiner's desire for a more involuntary, and so presumably unmediated, means of response. Thus the development of the autonomic diagnostic tools used in the films: galvanic skin response measures agitation by means of skin conductance; electroencephalography does so through brain waves. Your response to images of atrocity – agitated? aroused? unmoved? – tells us what kind of person you are, although it's hard to tell what response would be most damning. This is why vomit is such a useful heuristic. From the Book of Revelation to Joshua Oppenheimer's 2013 *The Act of Killing*, vomiting has always been the *ne plus ultra* of unambiguous ethical response. It demonstrates one's involuntary uprightness in both body *and* soul, and, because it functions as a *baseline* ethical response, it allows us to measure the severity of the atrocity being witnessed.

Moving on from the 1970s, I discussed other cinematic attempts to model ethical response to the image, from *The Game* (1997) to *The Matrix* (1999) and, finally, Douglas Gordon's *Domestic (as long as it lasts)* (2002), in which the victim of atrocity is the camera itself, and we are forced to sympathize with this inanimate object through our own internalization of fictional/cinematic codes.

For this volume, I opted to examine *The Parallax View*'s "test-screening" scene more closely – specifically the montage at its center. What follows is an overview of the sequence and its intertexts, an image-by-image breakdown, and a sourced and annotated selection of images. The montage provides a key to the visual imaginary of mid-century America, and insofar as its profusion of images makes a profusion of claims, it allows us to measure an early crest in the flood of rights.



Stills from *The Parallax View*, 1974

## II

### We Hope You Find the Test a Pleasant Experience

*00:00–00:10 / 1974*

Alan Pakula's 1974 film, *The Parallax View*, adapted from a 1970 novel by Loren Singer, concerns a journalist who, in the course of investigating a political assassination, stumbles upon an organization called "The Bureau of Social Structure." This bureau – renamed "The Parallax Corporation" for the film – seems to be in the business of recruiting, training, and subcontracting assassins. Working undercover, the journalist, renamed Joe Frady for the movie, infiltrates Parallax as a would-be employee, filling out a questionnaire and undergoing a preliminary interview. He guesses, correctly, that both the questionnaire and the interview are designed to screen for sociopathic tendencies, and he tailors his responses well enough that he's invited to corporate headquarters in Los Angeles for a second round.

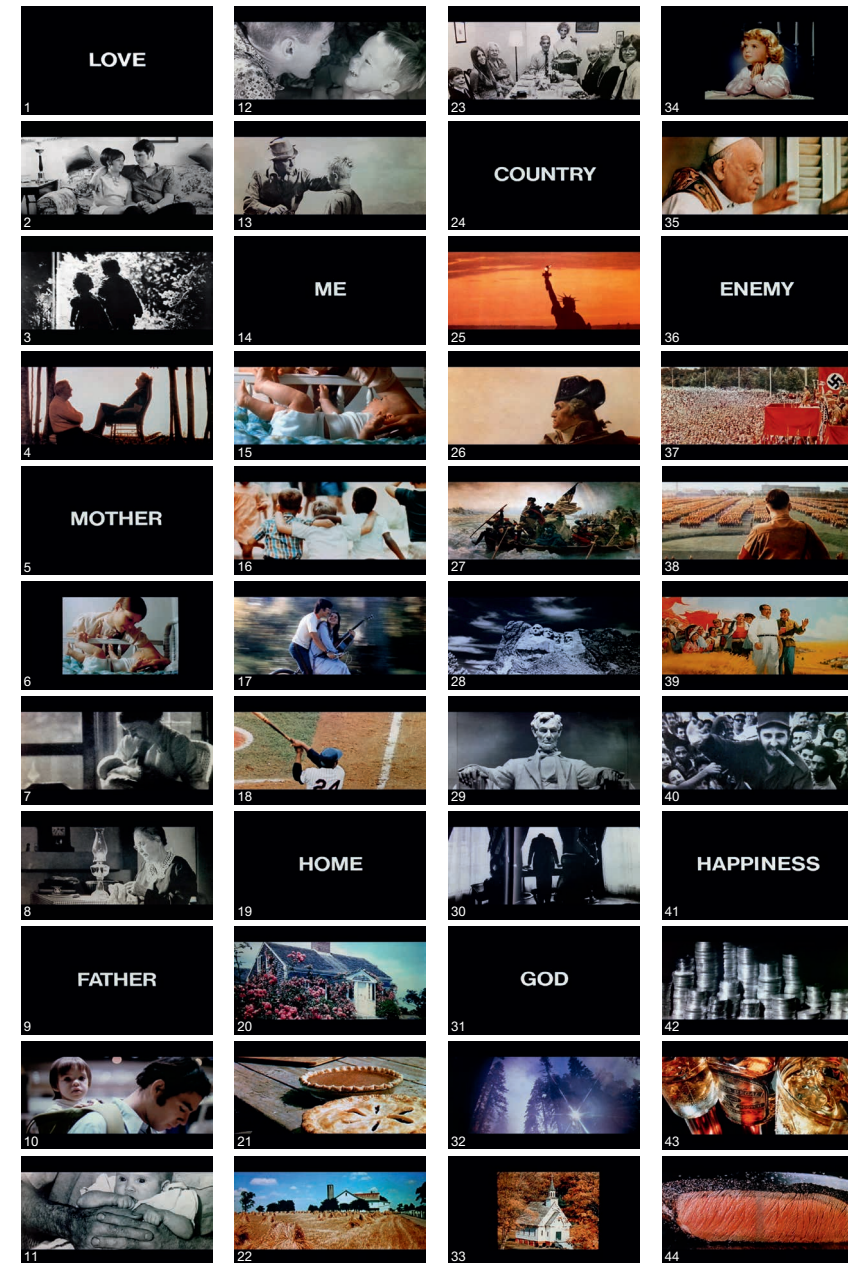
This round begins with Frady, played by Warren Beatty, entering a darkened screening room, and being instructed by a gentle, disembodied male voice to sit in the room's only chair. "Welcome to the testing room of the Parallax Corporation's Division of Human Engineering," says the voice. "Make yourself comfortable ... Be sure to place each one of your hands on the box on either side of the chair, making sure that each one of your fingers is on one of the white rectangles." (These are galvanic skin-response sensors, presumably – the same technology one

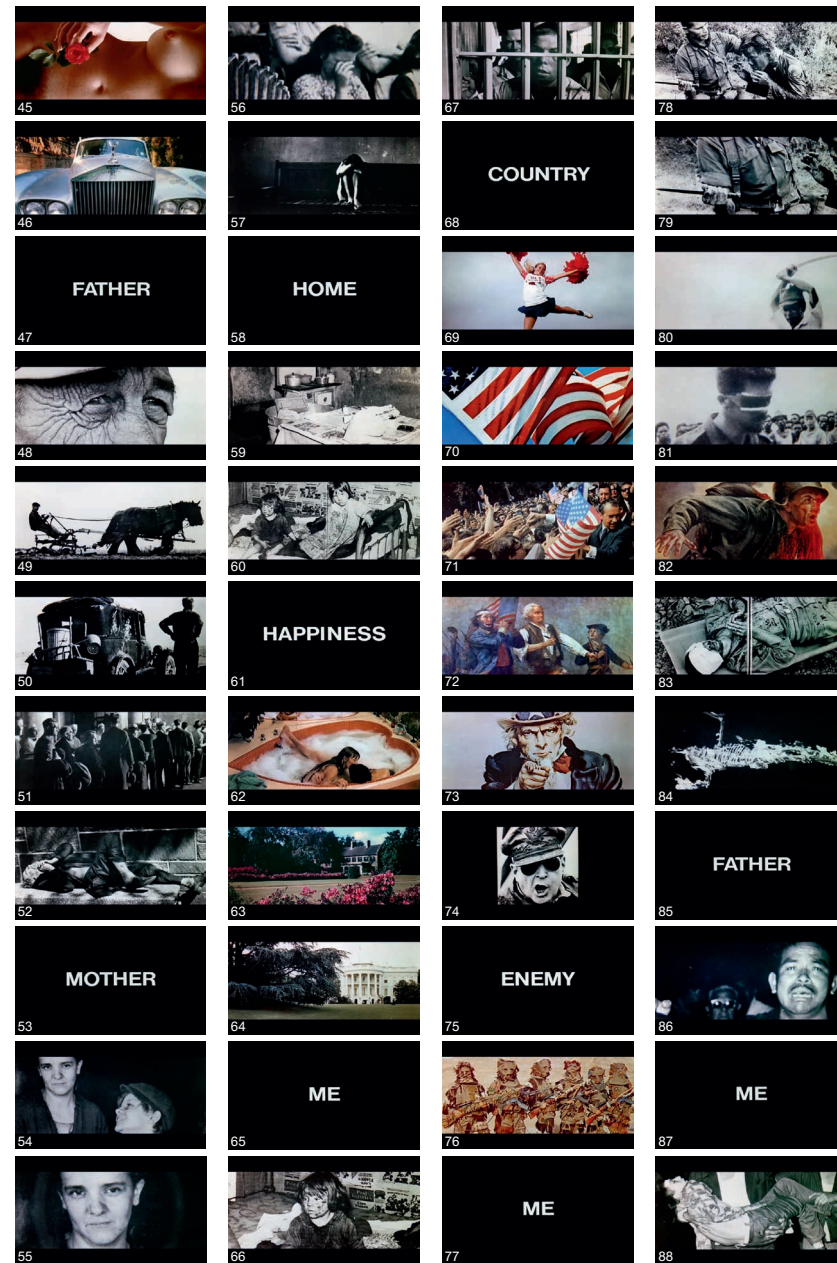
finds in lie-detector tests.) “Just sit back,” the voice intones as a projector descends slowly from the ceiling. “Nothing is required of you, except to observe the visual materials that are presented to you. Be sure to keep your fingers on the box at all times.” For a moment, Frady is harshly front-lit, as though by white light bouncing off a movie screen, and then, as both screen and room darken, we hear, “We hope you find the test a pleasant experience.”

The theater goes dark. An oboe plays a motif over a classical guitar figure, and the word **LOVE** appears in white, sans-serif caps against a black background. It’s followed by a black-and-white image of a young couple holding hands on a couch; then a black-and-white image of a boy and a girl in silhouette, venturing out into a garden; and then a color image of an elderly man and woman sitting on rocking chairs outdoors. Each image stays on-screen for about two seconds, as the oboe and guitar repeat their down-home melody. A new word appears – **MOTHER** – and one of the weirdest moments of postwar Hollywood cinema is underway.

A primary factor in the weirdness is that not once during the following four minutes does Pakula cut back to Beatty’s face for a reaction shot to these “visual materials.” Since these images take up our entire screen, and since there are no reaction shots interleaving them into the larger story, the sequence effectively becomes an art-house interruption; an experimental film splitting the mainstream movie in half; a movie that interrupts the movie.

The visual material that Frady observes is a four-minute-and-thirty-seven-second montage, made up of 342 frames derived from 108 still images and 9 title cards, set to a sweeping, kitsch-Americana score by *Parallax View* composer Michael Small. The title cards – **LOVE**,





MOTHER, FATHER, ME, GOD, COUNTRY, HOME, ENEMY, HAPPINESS – and the images, which are drawn from film, news, art, porn, advertising, comics, stock imagery, Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography, *LIFE* magazine, and the Museum of Modern Art's 1955 "Family of Man" exhibition,<sup>1</sup> appear in increasingly rapid and unpredictable combinations, as Small's gentle musical theme metastasizes into equally unpredictable variations, from corporate Aaron Copland to hail-to-the-chief horns to acid guitar.

The objective seems to be to overwhelm. The visual illustrations of each term, so clear and predictable at the outset, are drastically rearranged by the end of the montage. But what's not clear is the aim: Is the Parallax Corporation testing Frady's physiological response to these images via those "white rectangles" on the arms of the chair? Or are they attempting to indoctrinate, hypnotize, or brainwash him via a barrage of text and imagery?

*00:10–00:34 / Frames 5–18: Stock Images*

The word MOTHER is followed by a contemporary color photo of a young woman gazing tenderly at an infant in its crib; then an older black-and-white image of a mother nursing; then an even older image – a daguerreotype? – of a grandmotherly woman in profile, doing needlepoint by candlelight.

As the word FATHER appears on a title card, the oboe-and-guitar motif, which has been repeated twice so

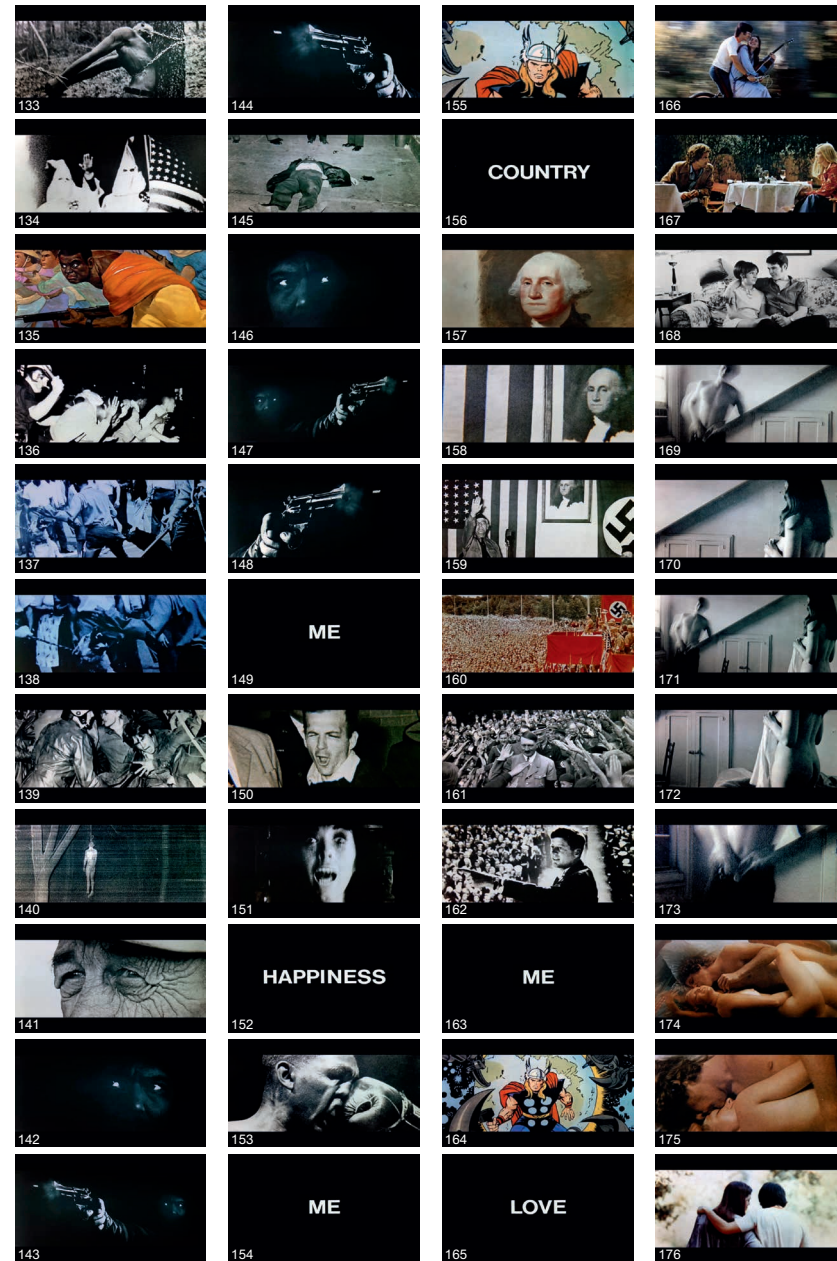
1 These images were researched by title designer Don Record and Pakula's assistant Jon Boorstin, after the film had completed shooting. Pakula, Boorstin, and editor John Wheeler then worked on the sequencing for four months over a specially commissioned score from Small, and the completed montage was inserted into the film.

far, concludes its third iteration by descending rather than ascending. This kicks off a short musical transition, over which we see a color image of an urban dad with a toddler in a baby-carrier backpack, followed by an older-looking black-and-white image of an infant looking out over interlaced, adult-male fingers. As we cut to a black-and-white image from the 1950s of a young father's face pressed up close to his laughing son's, violins sweep in and we see a black-and-white still from a western: a grownup cowboy giving instruction to a young boy. The oboe, now supported by strings *and* guitar, plays the sentimental refrain just as the word ME appears on a title card.

Keeping to a rhythm of about two seconds per image, ME starts out as a recognizable crop of the baby from the first of the “mother” images; then ME is a color photo of three young boys, two white, one black, walking down a city street in summer with their backs to us, arms around each other's shoulders; ME is then a young, hippie-ish couple on a bike (she's carrying a guitar), whizzing by a background of greenery; finally, ME is a color image of a professional baseball player, cropped from a magazine, knocking one out of the park. Most of these images feel contemporary.

“Contemporary to whom?” is another question. The color images feel of our era, if not of our time, while the black-and-white images seem to come from a lost period we just call “the past.” But we have to assume that viewers in 1974 had the same relationship to images as we do. Just as, for us, Janet Jackson's “wardrobe malfunction” connotes a different era than Kurt Cobain's cardigan, which connotes a different moment than Max Headroom on TV, so too, for *The Parallax View's* 1974 audience, would those “prehistoric” images have conjured distinct





cultural moments. That very first black-and-white image (from Bill Owens's *Suburbia*), for instance, which feels so palpably early '60s today, was actually shot in 1972, and we can only assume that it would have been recognized as contemporary by its audience. Their image culture was still saturated with black-and-white photography; they would have read, in the man's sideburns, the woman's dress, the upholstery on the couch, a million details that made the image resonate in ways unfathomable to us today.

Or that cowboy. To us, it's simply a still from a western. But to an American viewer in 1974, it was clearly a still from *Shane*, a film as iconic for baby boomer and Greatest Generation audiences as *Star Wars* is today. George Stevens's 1954 western is a movie about weak fathers: the mysterious gunfighter Shane drifts into town, rights all the wrongs Joey's real dad can't fix, and then, having stolen the affections of both mother and son, and having initiated young Joey into the mysteries of salvational violence, vanishes into the sunset, leaving the boy to utter the heartbroken cry: "Shane, come back!" So, while a 2016 viewer sees this movie frame as a deft way of implicating the previous images of fatherhood as commercial abstractions, a 1974 viewer sees this and more: using an image from *Shane* suggests that the father you're *taught to want* kills. The father you're *taught to want* always leaves.

But who is this message addressed to? Pakula said in an interview that the montage "was designed to whip you into a kind of frenzy of rage if you are one of the people who feels left out of society, one of the unwanted, one of the unsuccessful."<sup>2</sup> But who is *you* in this formulation? Joe

2 American Film Institute Seminar with Alan Pakula, November 20, 1974, cited in Jared Brown, *Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life* (New York: Back Stage Books: 2005), 132.

Frady? Or a moviegoer watching *The Parallax View*?

Just as the aims of the montage remain unclear (are they trying to whip subjects into a frenzy, or test *whether* subjects get whipped into a frenzy?), Pakula's account does nothing to clarify who the victim of the montage is supposed to be: characters in the diegetic world of *The Parallax View*? Or the extra-diegetic moviegoers at a screening of *The Parallax View*? And if we don't know who the addressee is, by extension we don't know who sent the message: Are we to read the montage as an invention of the Parallax Corporation? Or are we to read it as an intervention by Alan Pakula?

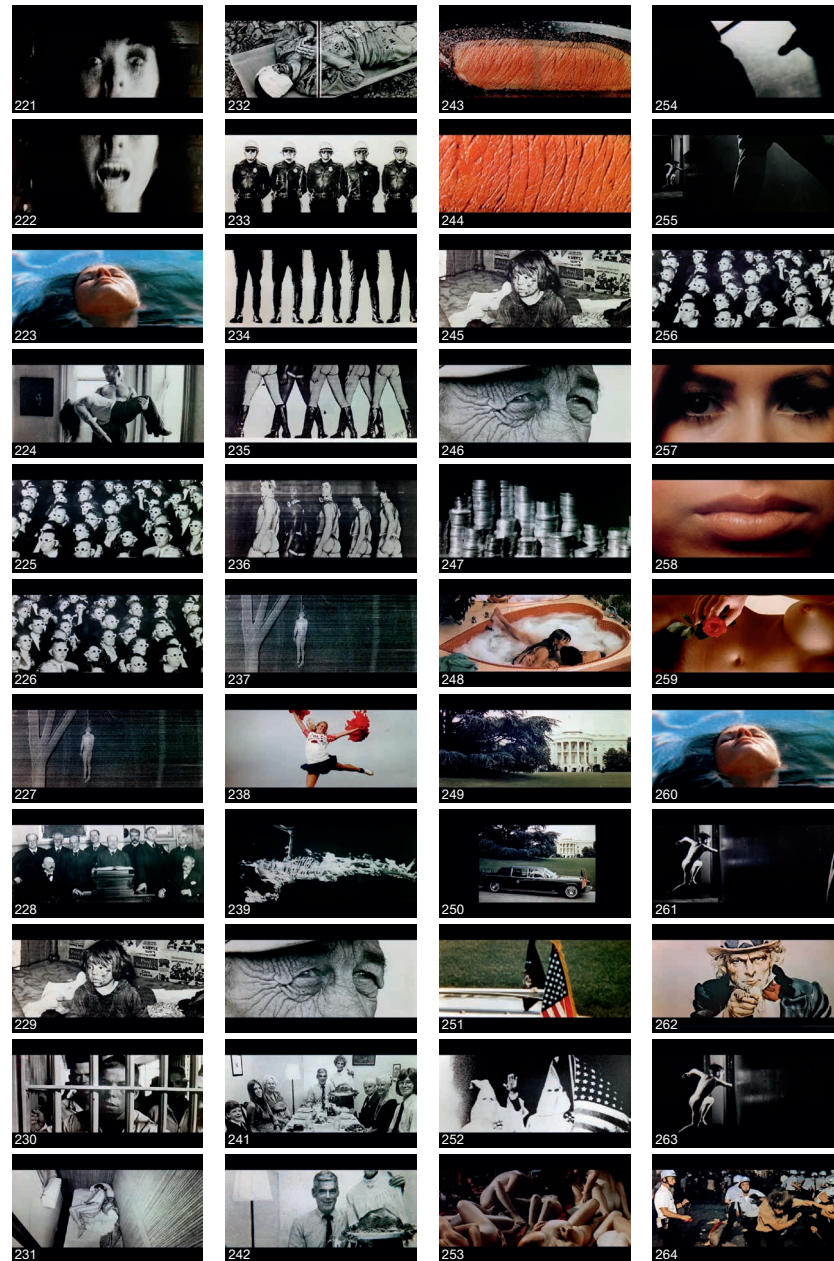
All of this has everything to do with the absence of reaction shots. A cut to Betty's face halfway through the montage would suffice to bind the sequence within the diegetic world of the film. As it is, we're stuck in an uneasy equivalence to Betty's character. There aren't any white rectangles on our armrests, but we still don't know how we're supposed to react.

*00:35–01:10 / Frames 19–46: Stock Images (b)*

The refrain wraps up and the musical phrase repeats, this time augmented by the strings. The word HOME appears onscreen, illustrated by contemporary-looking images of a shingle-style home, pies on a picnic table, a farmstead, and a Thanksgiving dinner. A rugged male voice hums softly over the oboe, guitar, and strings, as though this Americana were too good to resist. Brimful with regard for the images and the music, the humming lets us know we're watching an ad for America or its values, or the images of America's values.







The motif, and the appreciative humming, repeats over images of COUNTRY (twilit Statue of Liberty seen from the sky; painting of Washington crossing the Delaware; stock images of Mount Rushmore and the Lincoln Memorial; John F. Kennedy in the Oval Office), and then GOD (a pine forest pierced by sunlight; a country church in autumn; a child from the Truman era praying before bed; Pope John Paul II). When we reach the refrain – still humming – the rubric ENEMY appears, and the villains (Hitler, Mao, Castro) are as reassuringly predictable as everything else. The illustrations for HAPPINESS are perhaps a little coarse – advertising images for Chivas Regal and Rolls Royce, stock images of money, steak, and breasts – but they feel, as the *Shane* image did, like blunt commentary. Again, there’s the question of addressee: Is the equation of luxury goods with happiness a critique of the American dream that’s supposed to go over the character’s head? A wink from Pakula to us? Or is it precisely this equation that’s supposed to drive job seekers at the Parallax Corporation into a “frenzy of rage”?

The musical refrain winds down just as the image of steak appears, and, after a beat, horns enter and play a solemn, ceremonial counter-theme. The instrumentation changes the mood so jarringly that one doesn’t realize this melody is just a variation on the first. And then the rubric FATHER appears for a second time, accompanied by a new image, and it’s clear we’ve moved on to “part two.”

*01:10–01:42 / Frames 47–67: American Depression*

Pakula had this to say about the first two rounds of the montage: “The first word [of the montage] is Love – and all these happy, bourgeois images, all the wonderful,

ideal fathers we've been told we're supposed to have, and country, and motherhood, and everything is all as it should be. And then father becomes a Depression figure, an 'Okie' who's been hurt by society, who's worked hard and has obviously been destroyed in some way. And MOTHER becomes a kind of broken figure."<sup>3</sup> What follows is, indeed, a parade of images from the Great Depression, from urban breadlines to FSA photos. And such images comprise the visual vocabulary by which each rubric is now defined. After FATHER (2) and MOTHER (2), HOME (2) is reconfigured as a squalid, Depression-era kitchen, and then as a tarpaper shack populated by two filthy kids. All the while the score, reminiscent of Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man," implies a nobility in this pageant of suffering, as though we were watching a PBS documentary on "Our Nation's Progress."

HAPPINESS (2) yanks us into color, and therefore the present day: a naked couple making out in a heart-shaped tub; a mansion seen from across a lawn over a hedge of roses; the White House seen from across a lawn (happiness is *the White House?*). The flow of images accelerates to one-per-second and, over the martial rattle of a snare drum, ME (2) appears in black-and-white: no longer a son beloved by mother, father, friends, and fans, ME is one of those filthy kids from the FSA image; and then ME is a grown-up convict, staring out at us from behind bars (an image from Danny Lyon's 1971 *Conversations with the Dead*).

But only from the point of view of 2016 do these images address a *generalized* viewer. To an adult watching the montage in 1974, diegetic or extra-diegetic, that hard-bitten "Okie" Dad could have been your dad; that

3 Ibid.

long-suffering Mom could have been your mom. The squalid, dangerous childhood might have been familiar to you. That convict, photographed in a Texas prison (ca. 1969), is about your age.

*01:36–1:42 / Frames 68–73: America in Transition*

As the horns modulate out of the fanfare and into a different key, the rubric COUNTRY (2) appears, and we're back to prosperity, as indicated by color photography and present-tense images of a blonde cheerleader in mid-leap, American flags waving against a blue sky, and American flags waving at a Nixon rally. An American flag lurks in the background of Archibald Willard's 1912 painting *Spirit of '76*, and from there it's an easy pivot, through medium and subject matter, to James Montgomery Flagg's painting of Uncle Sam, enjoining us to join the US military. We go from Uncle Sam pointing at us to General MacArthur barking at us, and just like that we're pulled out of the Great Depression, thanks to a militant patriotism. Here, for the first time, we see images within a rubric ordered according to a sequential logic (starting with Revolutionary war and marching forward in time to the Korean War), as well as images grouped together by visual homology (e.g., flags, or people staring at you intensely), rather than strictly on the basis of subject matter (as was the case, for instance, with the Depression-era images of mothers and fathers).

Of course there are other factors as well. MacArthur was viewed by postwar liberals as a warmonger, famously relieved of command by President Truman in 1951. And President Nixon was under investigation even as the montage was being compiled (he would resign two months after the film's release). Beatty and Pakula were vehement anti-Nixonites but, as the film critic Andrew

Hultkrans has pointed out,<sup>4</sup> the reference to Nixon isn't just a sardonic aside. The entire montage bears a great resemblance to Eugene Jones's TV ads for Nixon's 1968 campaign, particularly the spots entitled "Crime," "Unite," "A Child's Face," "Vietnam," and "The First Civil Right." Jones's Nixon ads were a pioneering fusion of found images and music for propaganda purposes, and they were designed, depending on the ad, to whip you into a frenzy of patriotism or a frenzy of loathing. By alternating images of Vietnam with "iconic" images of American children, images of campus protest with a blue-collar melting pot of hardworking Americans, and by avoiding images of Nixon himself, Jones's ads took on a quasi-journalistic objectivity. Like *The Parallax View* montage, Jones's campaign ads were "designed to whip you into a [...] frenzy of rage if you are one of the people who feels left out of society"<sup>5</sup> – a member of Nixon's "silent majority." Pakula, in a sense, created a Nixon ad on steroids, implying that the entire campaign – and Nixon himself – could only appeal to sociopaths in the first place.

*01:42–2:10 / Frames 74–119: American Violence*

It's under the image of MacArthur that the main theme returns, now augmented by snare drum, the humming, an electric guitar, and an electric organ. If the martial brass has been retired, the martial imagery has only just begun. War photography now replaces Depression-era photography as the visual material by which each term is defined.

The pace ratchets up to roughly two images per second and we see the card ENEMY (2) illustrated by

<sup>4</sup> In a conversation with the author.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *Alan J. Pakula*, 132.

the first outright disturbing picture of the montage: six hooded snipers in sand-colored ghillie suits posed against a dusty background. No more cartoonish images of Mao or Hitler; before we can even register what that was, we cut to ME (3): a black-and-white photo of a Vietnamese soldier brutalizing a peasant; then a close-up of his knife; then a middle-aged Japanese man raising a katana over his head; then his soon-to-be victim, a blindfolded soldier kneeling; then a color painting of a crazed World War II infantryman covered in gore; then a photo of a blinded GI lying face up on a stretcher, praying. Then a similarly supine skeleton, also black-and-white, in flames.

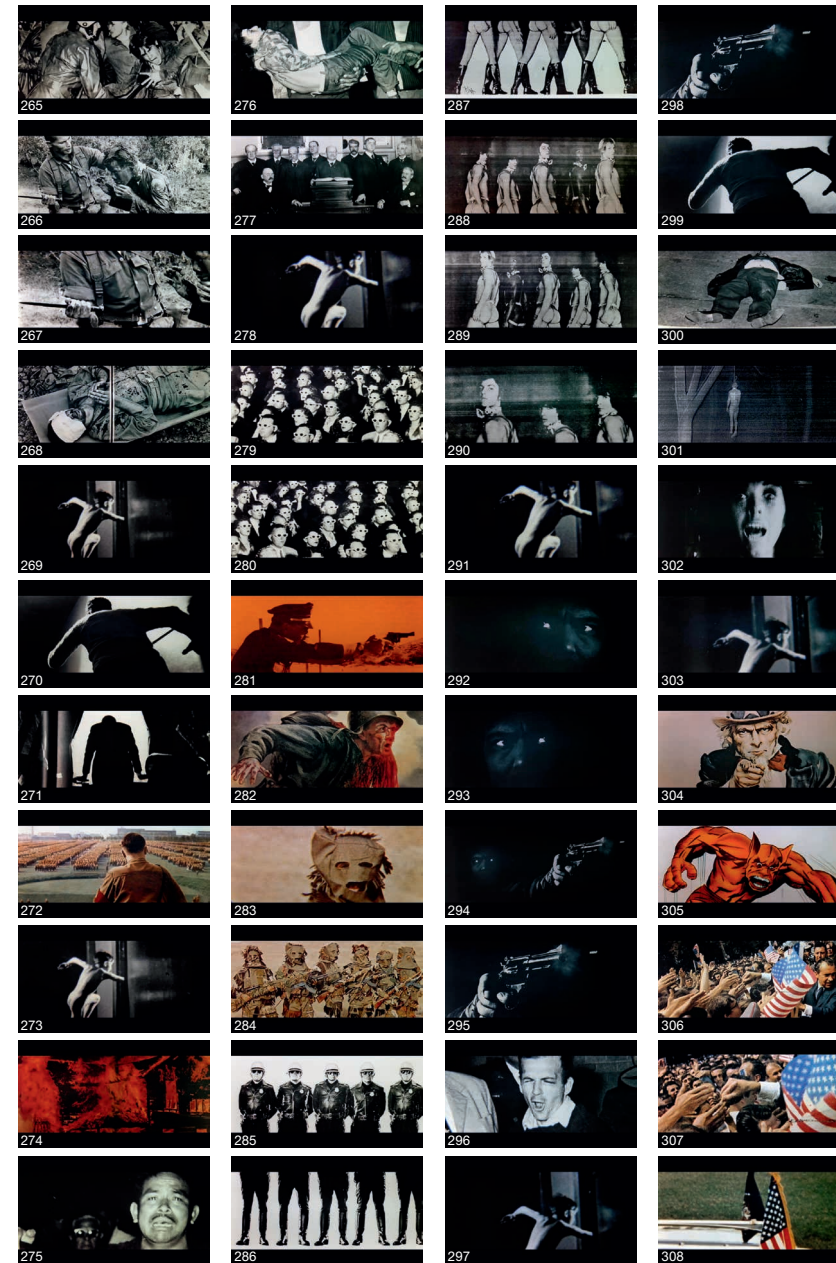
FATHER (3) yanks us back into the present tense with a news photo of an anguished Latino man; ME (3) is the lifeless boy he seems to be carrying. COUNTRY (3) is Nixon again, but also surfer girls, an orgy, the White House (again), and the famously zombified audience at the premiere of the 1952 3-D spectacle *Bwana Devil*. ENEMY appears for a third time, but, thanks to an increasingly crazed and associative logic, it's now the cheerleader, followed by MacArthur, followed by Nixon.

This unpleasant reshuffling of imagery, which feels like the natural outcome of the previous ten seconds, is sometimes used to illustrate what is called the "Kuleshov Effect," an interaction of imagery, editing, and context first noted by the Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov. Kuleshov performed a series of experiments demonstrating that audiences read the same image differently depending on the imagery that surrounds it – that is, what you're cutting from and what you're cutting to: a cheerleader after the word COUNTRY is one thing; a cheerleader after executions, orgies, and the word ENEMY feels like another. And because this montage has, in only two

minutes, built up a “bank” of images to refer back to, recontextualization becomes another tool in its rhetoric. As does reference: we only see a crop of Nixon’s fist this time around; only a crop of MacArthur’s sunglasses and mouth. But the details are enough to conjure the entire image. Conversely, sequential crops from previously *unseen* images (weeping father/unconscious son, executioner/victim) appear for the first time as well.

HAPPINESS (3) succeeds ENEMY (3), beginning with Ed Clark’s famous photo of Kennedy playing peek-a-boo with his infant daughter Caroline.<sup>6</sup> HAPPINESS then draws in some earlier images of companionship, from the young couple to the old couple to the Thanksgiving dinner, with a tiny bit of soft-core porn thrown in for good measure. But as the refrain arrives and the military horns reappear beneath it, images of companionship give way to an indelible new image of ME: a grainy black-and-white overhead view of a lone man in solitary confinement, curled in the fetal position on the bed in his painfully narrow room. Pakula stays with this image for a full two seconds – long enough for it to stand out – and then, as the horns come to the fore and shift to a new key, COUNTRY (4) kicks in at three images per second: small-town aldermen, John Paul II again, Nixon again, and then riot after riot after riot – Chicago (1968), Harlem (1964), a unidentified melee between protestors and cops, and then, out of nowhere, duotone stills from trashy movies: a cop shooting, a woman screaming, and a house going up in flames. Garish in orange and black, they look like silkscreens from Warhol’s “Death and Disaster” series.

6 Kennedy shows up a lot in this montage, sometimes as hero, sometimes as villain, always, implicitly, as victim.



*2:10–2:38 / Frames 120–95: Race*

The anthemic countermelody on horns returns in a more ominous variation, as COUNTRY continues with the weeping Latino man again, his dead child again, the row of aldermen again, and a paper-doll row of fascist-looking biker cops from a film poster for *Electra Glide in Blue* (1973). From the row of cops we move to a row of chairs behind the bench of an empty and cavernous-looking congressional chamber, and then, weirdly, to the cheerleader, whose cheerfulness seems by now to be almost a taunt.

But she, it turns out, is just a lead-in to the return of GOD. This rubric, absent since the beginning of the montage, is illustrated first by a close-up of Martin Luther King Jr. preaching, and then by a burning cross surrounded by Ku Klux Klansmen. Again, the time frame matters. For Americans of 2016, King is a secular saint; a metonym for racial progress in America. For Americans of 1974, he was the very human victim of an assassination perpetrated just six years earlier (the year of Nixon's election).

The visual language for this round is race, and it suffuses every rubric: as horns and kettle drums roar, COUNTRY (5) is illustrated by a KKK march in Washington; a lynching; the Harlem riots again; police dogs attacking civil-rights protesters in Birmingham; another riot; a 1937 image of black man lashed, burned with a blowtorch, and chained to a tree; and then the crinkled, wise old eyes of our white Okie Dad again, gazing into the distance, either witness or perpetrator. But these eyes are replaced very quickly by the eyes of a black man, staring alertly in the same direction. This proves to be only a crop. We see the full image – the black man is firing a revolver – and then a close-up of the revolver, bullet emerging from its barrel.

By now the cuts are coming swiftly enough that these precise crops from a single image – close-up of the eyes, long shot of the body, close-up of the gun firing – create a filmic sense of narrative sequence. And sure enough, the next image is a white shooting victim, lying face up on a street corner. The black shooter's eyes appear again facing the opposite direction; followed again by his full body, again by his firing revolver, all facing the other way. This time, the victim is ME (5): Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who shot President Kennedy. The woman from the duo-tone film still screams in a reaction shot, and the race war has commenced.

HAPPINESS (4) is a black boxer getting punched in the face. ME returns as Marvel Comics' Nordic hero Thor. As the horns build to a climax, COUNTRY (6) appears as a color image of Gilbert Stuart's unfinished painting of George Washington, followed by a cropped newspaper reproduction of that same painting, followed by the full, *uncropped* newspaper image: a New Jersey rally of the German-American Bund featuring an American citizen giving the Hitler salute beside American and Nazi flags. We proceed to Hitler giving his salute, as he moves through a party rally whose composition mimics the Nixon image, and finally to Kennedy giving the Hitler salute (a very clever crop of him pointing to something at his inauguration). As Pakula described it: "Suddenly, you look at swastikas, suddenly there's George Washington with a swastika at a Nazi Party rally, and there's Kennedy. It whips you out of the unfairness of this world where everybody has everything, steak and meat and gold and fame and sex and love – and why have I been left out? But you can be Superman and break out and destroy and make the world well again by destroying."<sup>7</sup>

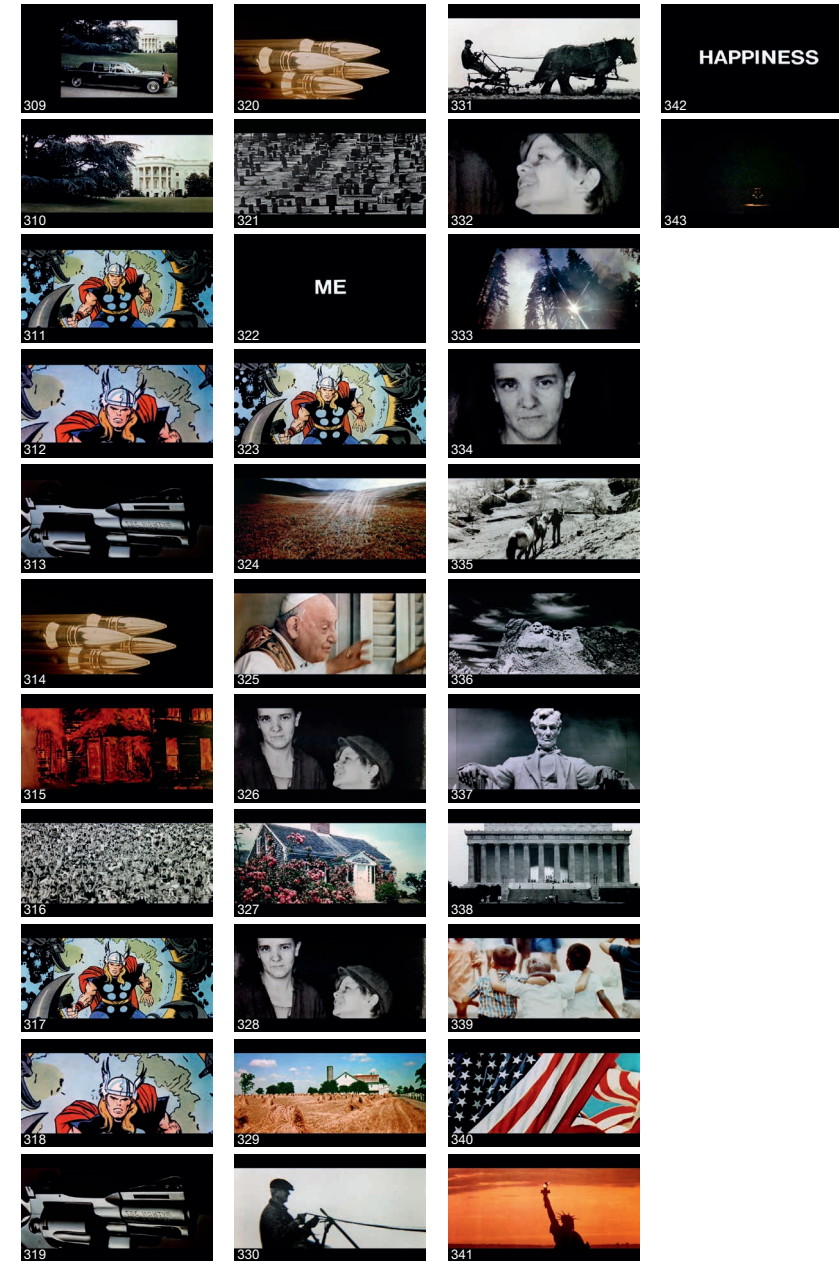
<sup>7</sup> Brown, *Alan J. Pakula*, 132.

We linger for a second or two on the uncropped image of Thor, armed with his mighty hammer, defending planet Earth from aliens, as the horns recede and the main theme returns. The next title card is LOVE.

*02:38–4:03 / Frames 165–321: Family Romance*

Over a leisurely variation on the main theme, played now with full orchestration and a toy piano, LOVE – which we haven't seen since the beginning – starts by arranging old and new images of courtship into a rough sequence. The hippies on a bike lead to a young, fashionable couple in a restaurant; the young, fashionable couple in the restaurant leads to that black-and-white image of the young, unfashionable couple on the couch; the couple on the couch leads to a Duane Michals image of a man unzipping his fly, which is followed by a naked woman, seemingly from the same photo, looking in his direction; this is followed by the full image, which does indeed contain them both, followed by a close-up of her naked ass, followed by a close-up of his open fly, followed by the soft-core porn image from earlier – the same couple from the dinner date – followed by a close-up of that couple kissing as they have sex. We end with the hippies walking away from us, her hand in his back pocket, bathed by the Kuleshov effect in a post-coital glow.

It's difficult to describe what happens next. Although the music remains leisurely and cheerful, ME returns as that traumatized black-and-white figure in solitary. MOTHER reappears as that stoic but tender Mom with her loving son from the FSA photo. Then a close-up of her face. Then the open fly. Then the son's face. Then the open fly. Then the woman's ass again; then the couple having sex again; then the woman screaming; then a naked woman weeping (from MOTHER, earlier). Then FATHER (4), from Ralph



Crane's *A Boy's Escape* (1943), vengefully chasing a naked boy down a hallway. This last is dramatized in a series of crops, which ends with the father's penis seemingly casting a shadow on the wall. Per Pakula: "There's a whole kind of Oedipal thing where there's a picture of mother, and suddenly there's a picture of a boy who looks like he's opening his trousers. It's sort of like he's exposing himself to his mother. And using all the love images. And then suddenly the castrating father figure [...] running after the little boy to destroy him, to punish him."

What follows over the next minute, over two more brass variations and one acid-guitar variation on the main theme, is an epic mindfuck of porn, psychopathology, and violence. Images old and new flash by, sometimes at a rate of four per second, obsessively cropped, re-cropped, and re-sequenced under a barrage of alternating titles. This sequence is so compressed, its visual logic so chaotic and so condensed, that an account would be impossible. Pakula's description will have to do: "You get the [...] confusion of fathers and authority, and authority being father, and if you kill authority, you kill father. And sexual confusion, and the confusion of sex and violence. You go from the couple making love happily – and it winds up in shooting."<sup>8</sup> In the very last images of this sequence, we go from a Weegee photo of a crowded beach to what seems to be a photo of a mass grave.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4:03–4:36 / Frames 322–343: HAPPINESS

We're finally back to a "simple" version of the main theme again. The man is humming again. Everything calms

<sup>8</sup> Alan Pakula, cited in Brown, *Alan J. Pakula*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> It's actually New York's Calvary cemetery, cropped from a photo that shows the Manhattan skyline behind it.

down, and ME is followed, at the patient rate of two seconds per image, by the most placid images of melting-pot Americana, all culled from the initial image sequence. This is the Whitmanian ME, who contains multitudes, the multiracial American ME represented in Eugene Jones's ads for Nixon. The last frame of the montage is the title card HAPPINESS, which vanishes as the music fades out.

A single spotlight slowly fades up over Frady's chair, downlighting him. A voice intones, "Please proceed to our offices. Thank you for your cooperation."

And the film goes back to being a thriller about assassinations starring Warren Beatty.

#### 4:36 / 2016

If this breakdown makes it sound like *The Parallax View* montage tells a coherent story – the "war" section, followed by the "race" section, followed by the "oedipal" section and then the "death" section – I don't want to give you the wrong idea. Although the structure of the montage, and of each section within the montage, is surprisingly schematic – "themed" units synced to musical variations – it all goes by much too fast for any organizational principle to register. One could argue, of course, that the organization registers *subliminally* – that this is what gives the montage its power. But that seems like wishful thinking. The structure one registers on first viewing is simply an acceleration of pace, volume, and violence – and the filmmakers could have accomplished that without worrying about whether Thor comes before the black man or after the bullets. In the end, we're not driven into a "frenzy of rage" by the montage, but emerge from it as bewildered as Frady, unsure what it was intended to provoke, what it was intended to measure, or, indeed, why it was even shown to us.

*The Parallax View* did not do particularly well at the box office, and it's remembered, when at all, as a cult item, a classic of the "paranoid" genre, alongside thrillers like *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Three Days of the Condor* (1975). Fredric Jameson discussed the film at length in his chapter on "Cognitive Mapping" in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992). Slavoj Žižek nicked the title *The Parallax View* for his own book, but has very little to say about the film itself.

So the Parallax test winds up being a cult film *within* a cult film, occasionally cited to illustrate principles of *montage*, occasionally posted by film buffs to YouTube, and very, very occasionally referenced in other films and videos. Director Gerald Casale subjected Chris Cornell to a variation of the test in his video for Soundgarden's "Blow Up the Outside World" (1996). Director David Fincher did the same to Michael Douglas early in his film *The Game* (1997). Both filmmakers combined their homages to the Parallax test with references to parallel scenes in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), which seems entirely reasonable. But at no point does either director place their montage front and center; they give their stars plenty of reaction shots, and the montages themselves are made up of live-action sequences rather than stills. In other words, the images these versions use – some violent, some not – make no demands on us as spectators. We worry about Michael Douglas's reactions, not our own.

The genius of *The Parallax View*, it turns out, is to offer us a less-conventional means of identifying with a protagonist. Rather than showing us Frady's face to suggest what he is experiencing, it simply casts us into his position: we know we're being tested, but we don't know what for; we know we're being tested, but we don't know

who's testing us; we know we're supposed to react, but don't know how much; we know we're being indoctrinated, but we can't read the message. This was then, and is now, the situation of every person amid a flood of "urgent" images. This is the situation of every person facing a flood of rights.



Still from *The Parallax View*, 1974

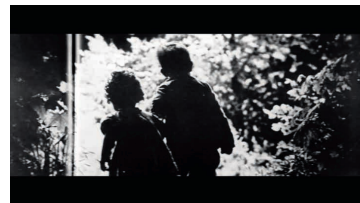
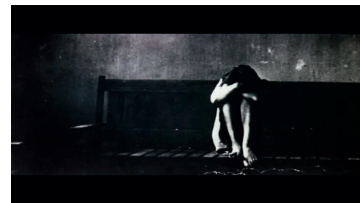


# The Family of Man



Jerry Cooke  
*Barefoot female mental patient suffering, 1955*

*The Parallax View* montage used images from film, news, painting, graphics, porn, art photography, advertising, stock photography, comics, Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography, *LIFE* magazine, and the Museum of Modern Art's photography exhibition "The Family of Man"; all told, a set of images dating from 1796 (Gilbert Stuart's unfinished painting of George Washington [frame 158]) to late 1973 (images from *VIVA* magazine's "Bess and Ben" pictorial [frame 167, ill. p. 209]).



Although many of these images are unfamiliar to us today, some were iconic at the time of the film's release. They often became so through repeated iteration: W. Eugene Smith's *Walk to Paradise Garden*, for example, which first appeared in *LIFE* magazine in 1946, proved immensely popular, and then reappeared in "The Family of Man" in 1955. Conceived by curator Edward Steichen as "a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world,"<sup>1</sup> and containing 503 images by 273 photographers of scenes from 69 countries, the exhibition proved enormously influential on the history and practice of documentary photography. The exhibition catalogue, which is still in print, has reportedly sold more than four million copies.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Steichen, introduction to *The Family of Man* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 4.



W. Eugene Smith  
*The Walk to Paradise Garden, 1946*

# Farm Security Administration



John Vachon  
*Wife and two children of George Blizzard, striking coal miner, Kempton, West Virginia, 1939*



Dorothea Lange  
*Southern California desert. Migrant from Chickasaw, Oklahoma, stalled on the desert ... with no money. He and his ten children are facing future in California, 1937*

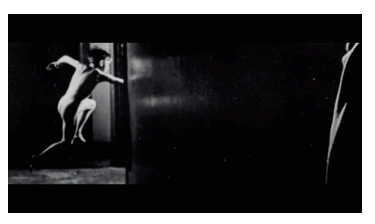


Marion Post Wolcott  
*Children in bedroom of their home, Charleston, West Virginia. Their mother has TB. Father works on WPA (Works Progress Administration), 1938*

Among the images included in "The Family of Man" were photos commissioned by the United States' Farm Security Administration (FSA), which was created in 1935 as a "New Deal" program to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression on impoverished farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers through financing, resettlement, and reeducation. The FSA is best remembered today as the source of roughly 77,000 images, taken by a team of photographers (among them Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and

Gordon Parks) to document the plight of the rural poor; the images were then circulated to the American press. They became metonyms for American life during the Great Depression, and although *The Parallax View's* montage doesn't use "famous" ones (e.g., Lange's 1936 photo of Florence Owens Thompson, included in "The Family of Man," the visual tropes of FSA photography – dirty children, dusty landscapes, high-contrast tone – are instantly recognizable.

# LIFE Magazine



Ralph Crane  
*Re-enactment of a disturbed boy's escape from a children's home, 1947*

Many of the FSA images, in turn, appeared in *LIFE* magazine, founded by Henry Luce in 1936 “to see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud.” By emphasizing the importance of photography over text, which appeared only as brief captions, *LIFE* pioneered the “photo-essay,” a genre that Steichen’s “Family of Man” exhibition would eventually expand into three dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

But *LIFE*’s photo-essays were not entirely, or not exclusively, documentary. Here, for

instance, photographer Ralph Crane has collaborated with a thirteen-year-old – named “Butch” for this story – to “reenact his case history” in a boys’ home.<sup>3</sup>

- 2 According to Alise Tifentale, 111 of the 503 photos in the exhibition – roughly 20 percent – first appeared in *LIFE*. As noted in Šelda Puķīte, ed. *Edward Steichen: Fotografija/Photography* (Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art in collaboration with Neputns Publishing House, 2015).
- 3 Ralph Crane, “Bad Boy’s Story,” *LIFE*, May 12, 1947, 107–14.

# Narrative Cropping



Like many of the images in *The Parallax View* montage, the Crane photo at left is initially introduced through a severe crop (frame 191). By intercutting different parts of the Crane image with different parts of the FSA “family” image reproduced above, and intercutting both with crops of a Duane Michals photo of a couple undressing (shown in full only at frame 215), and

then tossing in a film still and an image from the November 1973 issue of the “feminist” porn rag *VIVA*, Pakula and his assistants are able to carve an oedipal narrative out of unrelated images. This technique is used frequently in the second half of the montage, for instance, in frames 143–52, which “create” an assassination, and frames 210–24, which create a seduction that ends in death.

# Nixon Campaign Commercials

Still from *The Parallax View* montage sequence (center) and stills from Nixon campaign commercials, 1968



It's exactly such "filmic" approaches to still imagery that led critic Andrew Hultkrans to point out the hitherto unremarked similarities between the *Parallax View* montage and filmmaker Eugene Jones's groundbreaking ad campaign for Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential bid. *The Selling of the President* describes Jones's process as follows: "He would spread a hundred or so pictures on the floor [...] select the most appropriate of the pictures and then arrange and rearrange, as in

a game of solitaire [...] 'The secret is in juxtaposition,' Jones said. 'The relationships, the arrangement.' [...] When [Nixon's] words were coupled with quickly flashing colored pictures of criminals, of policemen patrolling deserted streets, of bars on storefront windows, of disorder on a college campus, of peace demonstrators being led bleeding into a police van, then the words became something more than what they actually were."<sup>4</sup>

*The Parallax View* was shot during the Watergate scandal (the subject of Pakula's next movie, *All the President's Men*, 1976) and released right after Nixon's resignation, so Nixon's appearance in the montage,<sup>5</sup> and the subsequent treatment of his image (see next page), suggests that the Parallax test can be considered both a Nixon '68 ad on steroids – an indoctrination as maddening as it is meaningless – and a critique of the very techniques that make it effective.

4 Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), 87–88.

5 The source of this image is unknown, but it seems, to judge by the visible seam across the right-hand side, to come from a magazine, and it seems, to judge by Nixon's haircut, to come from his 1972 reelection campaign.

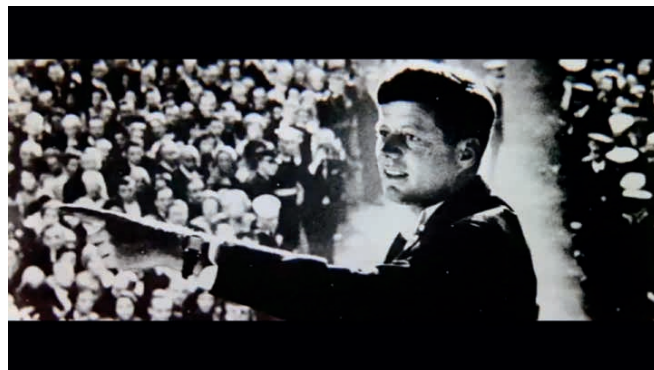
# Correlative Cropping



Adolf Hitler walking among the crowd of partisans in front of his country house in Obersalzberg, Bavaria, Weimar Republic, 1938



Paul Schutzer  
Pres-elect John Kennedy pointing to his left as he stands next to his wife Jacqueline who is seated in the Presidential box overlooking the crowd attending his Inaugural Ball, 1961



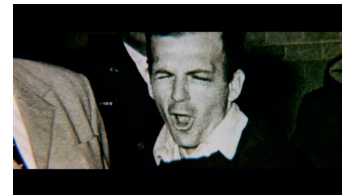
By carefully cropping images to create visual homologies – another technique used again and again in Nixon’s ad campaign, Pakula – or the Parallax corporation – is able to propose similarities between very different subjects (e.g.,

between motorcycle cops, male strippers, and Fedayeen snipers [frames 284–89]; between Kennedy and Hitler again [frames 271–72]; or between a penis-shaped shadow and a gun [frames 218–20]).

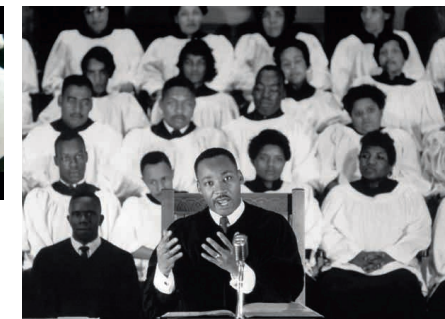
# Assassinations



George Tames  
*The Loneliest Job in the World: A Day with President John F. Kennedy*, 1961



Bob Jackson  
*Jack Ruby shoots Lee Harvey Oswald*, 1963



Donald Uhrbrock  
*Civil rights activist Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. standing at pulpit delivering his sermon as a white-robed choir listens in the background at Ebenezer Baptist Church*, 1960

Any image of Kennedy (the montage uses three) or Martin Luther King Jr. is bound to evoke their deaths as much as their lives, especially in a movie about political assassination. But as with allusions to Nixon’s TV campaign, it’s difficult to tell whether the presence of such imagery means we’re to view the montage as an incitement to political violence, or as a critique thereof. As with the equation of Hitler, Nixon, and Kennedy on the previous page, introducing the shooting death

of Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald results in a moral “leveling” effect. (It should be noted that the montage is studded with images alluding to presidential death, from an unrecognizable crop of Ed Clark’s famous image of a bugler at Roosevelt’s funeral [frame 56], to numerous crops of Evelyn Hofer’s 1965 *The President’s Car* [frame 64ff.], to the Lincoln Memorial [frames 29, 337–38])

# Commercial Images



Still from *Shane*, 1953

In addition to lifting from journalistic, documentary, and art photography, Pakula and his team drew from comics (Marvel's *Thor*, issues 131 and 135 from 1966 [frames 164 and 305]), advertising (Chivas Regal [frame 43] and Rolls Royce [frame 46]), film stills (frames 116–19ff., unsourced), and film posters (frame 123ff., from *Electra Glide in Blue*, 1973). In many cases, as in this crop from a publicity still for the 1953

film *Shane*, the images are modified to make them “blend in” better. Two black-and-white documentary images of fathers and sons are followed by a black-and-white version of the still from *Shane*. Although no one would mistake this image for anything but a movie still, its transformation into the black-and-white idiom of documentary photography has the effect of degrading the ideological “neutrality” of the preceding images.

# Scenographic Cropping



Arthur Tress, *Cemetery View, Queens, New York*, 1969

But such transformations are liberally applied to the “documentary” images as well. Frame 321 is the culmination of the montage’s most chaotic sequence, invoking riots, shootings, infernos, and mass death. The image – grainy, dirty, overexposed, slightly sepia-toned – suggests either an FSA image or a news photograph of a mass grave (ca. 1930). But in fact it’s a crop from Arthur Tress’s 1969 photo of New York’s Calvary

Cemetery, filtered and contrast-enhanced to make it look older and “dirtier.” Such transformations, some quiet, some highly visible, occur constantly in the montage – from the horizontal reversal of Dorothea Lange’s original FSA image in frame 50 (ill. p. 207) to the periodic transformation of the cop, “screaming woman,” and “inferno” stills from black-and-white to a garish black-and-orange.