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### Panting in the Dark: The Ambivalence of Air in Cinema

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Darth Vader and Marilyn Monroe  
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### **Panting in the Dark: The Ambivalence of Air in Cinema**

Here is a strange riddle, almost the start of a bad joke: What do Darth Vader and Marilyn Monroe have in common? My answer: both are invaded by air, both are victims of insufflation, both are blustery representatives of the otherwise unseen problem that breath poses to cinema. One is an icon of evil, the other of sexuality, but in their best films, these two are swept by the same iconography of air. Some airy similarities between Marilyn in The Seven Year Itch (dir. Billy Wilder, US, 1955) and Vader in The Empire Strikes Back (dir. Irvin Kershner, US, 1980): Vader wears a swirling black cape, Marilyn a white windswept dress; Vader's voice is a wheezy machine-breathing, Marilyn's a breathy sex pant; evil Vader levitates objects high up in a place called Cloud City, sexy Marilyn nearly beans a man with a tomato plant from an open upper window; and in both cases their breath speaks of breeding: Marilyn tempts a boy's father, Vader reveals he is a boy's father. In the spirometry of cinema, Vader and Marilyn show us the two divergent directions in which air blows: towards sex and towards death. Should it surprise us that

even in such different narratives we have the usual paired suspects? But rather than be distracted by the clever similarities that link the oppositions of sex and death, I propose we concern ourselves with the more challenging task of examining how the invisible, ubiquitous element of air, transmuted by breathing into a legible cinematic sign, has been wholly ignored as a medium for conveying complex attitudes about gender, sexuality, ambivalence, representation, our bodies, and indeed every other airy thing that is present in its absence.

For instance, why is it that respiration in particular pushes air into two such different directions, from death threat to sexual grunt? Surveying breath in cinema, the examples fall into one of these two categories--there is either the madmen on the telephone breathing a threat of malevolence in scary movies; or there is the amorous lover breathing gently into a partner's ear, whispering sweet nothings in romances. Audible respiration in films must be a marker of something; inhalation is a routine, autonomic activity, but breath can continually be made to inflect meaning: the sucked teeth of disapproval, the sighing pshaw of disgust, the sharp gasp of surprise, the comforting puckered blow on an injury, the labored breathing of exhaustion. In and out of the mouth, soundless air is made to serve meaning. But consider such different uses this invisible medium is put to, from the frail menace of Vader's labored lungs to the wispy immaturity of Marilyn's breathless lisp. Is this ambivalence, simply put, in the sense that breath is meaningless to these characters' natures--that I am over-interpreting the accidents of an actor's performance and wasting time by spitting in the wind? Or is this not in fact the kind of ambivalence that leads us to the movement underlying Freud's uncanny, Derrida's pharmakon, Hegel's dialectic--the ambivalence wherein ideas contain at once a whiff of their opposition? In this essay I want to track the range of meaning found in cinematic breathing. I cannot see air as

an empty vessel of communication, a technology neutral of intent. Rather, air is an intimate medium, breathing life into our notions of embodiment and our relationships with others.

Challenging to read, air gains power because of its relative invisibility, and marks sites where otherwise imperceptible ideas are made liminal. For example, Rudolph Arnheim's landmark Film as Art repeatedly presented the problem and potential of cinema in plastic terms--cinema is about solid shapes, objects in three dimensions, the "projection of solids upon a plane surface." So, when Gilles Deleuze says of certain favored films that they "breathe," he pushes us to take a small step in the other direction, thinking of film not as just a two-dimensional flattening of the real world, but as something organic itself. Deleuze discusses the Western in particular, where "the principal quality of the image is breath, respiration"<sup>i</sup> although in the same breath he mentions respiration in reference to such diverse directors as Dovzhenko, Kurosawa, Ford, and Hawks. In addition to figurative descriptions of the effect of respiratory feelings in Western films, Deleuze also explicitly connects his concept of the action-image with breath. The action image, one of the three movement-images where viewers see how characters react to their surroundings, "seems to be endowed with respiration."<sup>ii</sup> It is in this "great respiration, the alternation of movements of contraction and expansion"<sup>iii</sup> where we can understand that cinema is more than just static, discrete images.

And yet air requires a real effort to be brought into filmic existence, defined as it is by what French philosopher Luce Irigaray calls "the hegemony of the look and of hearing, instruments of theory, tools of reason."<sup>iv</sup> Air has a materiality in film that is overlooked because it is a materiality with little visibility. Semioticians might argue that all instances of cinema, limited to two senses, work by association--that is not a real deep-sea diver, it is an actor; that is not a real space capsule, it is a set; that is not real "freedom," it is a prop balloon symbolizing

freedom. But air is unique in that it always requires allusive techniques. In the world, air can only be felt indirectly, as when a breeze blows against one's face or when a scent wafts in one's direction, and since film confines us to only two of our senses, the indirect revelation of air poses quite a problem. To "see" air in film is only ever to see wind operating on a sail, laundry, or someone's hair; or breath on candle flames, bubbles, dandelions; or to see air manifested in a particle cloud of cigarette smoke, dust motes, or a sandstorm; or in the temperature of air exhaled on a frosty morning. To "hear" air is only ever to hear the souging rustle of leaves or long grass pushing against itself, or the howling gap in an attic window's seal; or to hear an amplifying device, such as a telephone receiver or spacesuit helmet, intensify respiratory noise; or when someone plays with their mouth: hissing, puffing, sighing, panting, grunting, yawning, blowing raspberries. As with other invisible things--television airwaves, radio, radiation, pestilence, magic--the extra labor needed to make it visible and audible for the cinema requires air to be overdetermined. In short, despite its ubiquitous presence, air does not come cheap. There is no case of air accidentally wandering onto the set; air must be summoned up, cast, given a contract, pampered. For this reason, air is never wasted in a film--the effort alone makes it meaningful. This is true both for film genres with locations that revolve around air--submarines, space ships, airplanes, caves and tunnels--as well as the many other films where air seems to make only an incidental appearance.

### **The Forgetting of Air in Cinema**

What is air? What is wind? How can I feel something I cannot see? To try to answer the child's question of why air is invisible to the eyes I read about atmosphere, "pressure differentials," gas molecules, how the sun makes wind, the kinetic energy of air's mass. But the

problem of why air is invisible to our philosophy is even more vexing. Luce Irigaray gives us one strategy in her book The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger, a poetic and speculative reading of the German philosopher's critique of Western philosophy's "forgetting of Being." Irigaray begins with her own riddle: what is it that "remains invisible though it be the fundamental condition of the visible, [is] unable to be posed though it be the condition for all posing, [is not] produced, yet be the condition for all production, ha[s] no origin but be the originary itself"?<sup>v</sup> Her answer: air. Writing through Heidegger's essays, Irigaray turns repeatedly to this central issue: that in discussing the forgetting of Being, Heidegger himself has "forgotten" the element of air. Irigaray especially notices a privileging of earth in Heidegger's thought, which is a result of emphasizing the visual in thinking and the materiality of bodily existence. In the first section of her book, she writes that

metaphysics always supposes . . . a solid crust from which to raise a construction. Thus, a physics that gives privilege to, or at least that would have constituted, the solid plane.

Whether philosophers distance themselves from it or whether they modify it, the ground is always there. (2)

Irigaray's project is to "take the ground away" from Heidegger; in doing so she might be able to show how metaphysics' exclusion of the other three pre-Socratic elements--water, air, fire--has resulted in a missed opportunity. "Is not air the whole of our habitation as mortals," she asks rhetorically (8)? Answering her own question: "doubtless, no other element is as originally constitutive of the whole of the world, without this generativity ever coming to completion" (8). Not only has Heidegger forgotten air, but this overlooked element should have been placed at the heart of the very issues that his philosophy grappled with. Air in fact is what allows Being; "air could be this nothing of Being: the Being of Being. It could be this secret that Being keeps, could

be that in which earth and sky, mortals and divinities belong together” (74). But thinking perpetually of earth, one will never be able to uncover Being’s airy secret.

Thus to resuscitate the forgotten air is a severe project; “to recall that air is at the groundless foundation of metaphysics amounts to ruining metaphysics through and through.”<sup>vi</sup> Working to rescue Heidegger from his forgetting, Irigaray suggests that he may in fact have been wafting in this direction, particularly with his “strange attraction toward the clearing of the opening” (5), a privileged place in Heidegger’s philosophy where “unconcealment” might occur. The German word Heidegger uses is lichtung, which can translate as “clearing” and “lighting.” Heidegger calls to mind the filmic image of a clearing in the woods, light making its way through the trees. In words relevant to cinematography, Irigaray interposes air in this clearing, refusing to think of the clearing as an absence of earth, but instead as a presence of air: “it is not light that creates the clearing, but light comes about only in virtue of the transparent levity of air. Light presupposes air. No sun without air to welcome and transmit its rays. No speech without air to convey it. Day and night, voice and silence, appear and disappear in air” (166-67). Light, which in the cinema (if not the world) is thought to be the basic substance out of which experience can be processed and understood, is itself shown to be reliant on air in order to function. To name just two filmic examples that come to mind, both Billy Wilder’s Sunset Boulevard (US, 1950) and Fritz Lang’s Die Nibelungen: Siegfried (Germany, 1924) have key scenes where light is made legible by air: the former when a film projector’s beam, marked out by a cloud of cigarette smoke, spotlights faded Norma Desmond, the latter when Siegfried journeys through a forest, entering a misty clearing. These two scenes demonstrate Irigaray’s claim that light only comes about in air. To be reminded of air in these images is, as Irigaray said

of metaphysics, to ruin them; we know for instance that Desmond's past glory will not last if it is based solely on the projector's light, since only air can bring that light to fruition.

So why has air been overlooked, swept away? Is this intentional; a plot to entitle forms of presence over absence? Or sheerly accidental; a mistake perpetuated in successive revisions to Socratic metaphysics? Or is it, as Irigaray hints, that "this element, irreducibly constitutive of the whole, compels neither the faculty of perception nor that of knowledge to recognize it. Always there, it allows itself to be forgotten"?<sup>viii</sup> Perhaps air is this forgetting, is that which "allows itself to be forgotten" (14). In allowing itself to be forgotten, air keeps from being perceived as a "source." Irigaray clarifies this by making a comparison with the sun, which "keeps its distance; it does not give itself ceaselessly; it comes and goes" (43). The sun's coming and going suggests the possibility of a "mourning"; man "begins to go back and forth between absence and presence. He becomes entranced with the upsurge of presence in order to shroud absence" (44). For this reason, the sun is seen as a "source" which hides mourning. It goes away, but it comes back, and because it so consistently shifts between presence and absence it is happily greeted on each return. This enchantment, of course, does not describe our feelings toward air, since "that which give itself always and everywhere, without measure, is not thought of as source. For there to be a source, there must first be mourning. The source is that which hides a mourning" (44). Air is not perceived as a source since it never disappears, never prompts a mourning. Perhaps another way to think about my essay, then, is that I am calling for a mourning of air. This happens continually in the asphyxiating fantasy of space and submarine films that trap heroes without air--James Cameron's The Abyss (US, 1989), Wolfgang Peterson's Das Boot (West Germany, 1981), Paul Verhoeven's Total Recall (US, 1990), Byron Haskin's Robinson Crusoe on Mars (US, 1964)--but all of these daydreaming inventions betray the reality of our relationship with air.

Do not hold your breath for an easy answer; the reality of our relationship to air whirls first around our relationships to others--in particular our parents, who initially raise the question of “source” for us as children. Earth--literal dirt, ground, soil--particularly undergirds our understanding of the materiality of sex.<sup>viii</sup> We see this in sexual synonyms like “root” or “plow,” in ritualistic associations of reproduction with farming and fertility, and in autochthonous myths of earth-born figures like Erichthonous or the Spartoi. In contemporary film, we further see this preference for a self-created origin over the truth of bi-sexual reproduction. Is this not the simplest explanation for the popular zombie film? Or for big-budget 3D remakes of mythic, parentless narratives like Beowulf (dir. Robert Zemeckis, US, 2007) and Clash of the Titans (dir. Louis Leterrier, UK/US, 2010)?

But what a bag of wind! What a cop-out! What a shame that we have been tricked into seeking reassuring answers for the question of our sexual origins in the dirt. Content with what we can see in front of us, asking earthy questions diverts us from the challenge of thinking air. If earth holds the false promise of autochthonous origins, might air not stand in for the real truth of sexual matters? This question of air’s relationship to earth is really one between substitution and replacement: does the element of air work in our culture in the same way that earth does--as a foil to misdirect the riddle of nature? Or might air somehow be different, replacing earth as a key sexual element and advancing the dilemma of reproduction into more honest territory? Might our sexuality not walk on air, rather than poke in the dirt?

### **Panting in the Dark**

As stuck in the mud as our conception of sexuality seems, we might easily air out the bedroom. For one, the figurative presence of erotic breath is established in cinema: a

“breathtaking” figure, shouting love “at the top of one’s lungs,” an actor compared to “a breath of fresh air”; or the parodic sexuality of blowing hair, especially filmed in slow motion; or more obviously in melodramatic titles like Written on the Wind (dir. Douglas Sirk, US, 1956), Wild is the Wind (dir. George Cukor, US, 1957), and The Wind Cannot Read (dir. Ralph Thomas, UK, 1958, starring Dirk Bogarde).<sup>ix</sup> A more concrete (or should it be less concrete?) example is found in the cinematic cliché of the postcoital cigarette. In contemporary PG-13 films, the lovers puffing away is often a stand-in for the act itself (the resulting bad breath presumably no longer an obstacle to romance). This convention should be strange, and yet smoking and sexuality are so consistently associated that, to the psychoanalytic series oral-anal-genital, I am tempted to add the “pulmonary phase,” marking the recognition and use of the respiratory system--lungs, diaphragm, trachea, or windpipe--in erotic life. This idea has remained on the margins of sexuality (I am thinking of lurid tales of autoerotic asphyxiation whispered under one’s breath) but I argue this marginality is another result of air’s difficult visibility.

The lungs in particular come to work as a central organ of sexuality, gratifying libidinal drives and opening themselves to therapeutic analysis. The problem, of course, is that lungs are not quite “open” to analysis, both in terms of their organic invisibility within the human body and the relative invisibility of their product--breath. How to think about a sexuality of internal organs in a scopophilic medical system? That the originary techniques of psychoanalysis were focused on orifices--oral, anal, genital--points to the challenging urgency the clinician feels when making his or her way inside the patient’s body. Thus, film theory got wind of psychoanalysis since both are, very simply, about looking and hearing, and both necessitate special techniques to get at otherwise hidden (unheard and unseen) things. Just as the speaking of words is a way for the organ of the brain to give expression to its hidden products, so too is the breathing in and out

of air a means to give vent to the body's interiority. But if language speaks of the unconscious, what exactly does air convey? What inside of us is being vented by our breath?

Since respiratory erogeneity is so difficult to be made visible, film resorts to auditory clues. This is perhaps clearest with the soundtrack of pornographic films. The most cursory analysis of the pornographic film begins with its earthy, grounded materiality. This is especially apparent in considerations of its cinematography (the "money shot"), of the question of the "reality" of acting, of the putative misogynist consequences for viewers, or of making generic distinctions between hard-core, soft-core, "beaver films," "stag films," and others based on visual content. Emphatically directing our eyes to the visually material image, it is really only in the soundtrack that air might make itself felt. Strangely, though, we often find the pornographic soundtrack at odds with its visual image. In her pioneering work Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible," Linda Williams argues that the link between sound and image works differently here than it does in "dominant cinema":

when characters talk their lips often fail to match the sounds spoken, and in the sexual numbers a dubbed-over "disembodied" female voice (saying "ooh" and "aaah") may stand as the most prominent signifier of female pleasure in the absence of other, more visual assurances.<sup>x</sup>

The aural landscape of hard-core films, mainly feminine, serves to prove to the viewer that pleasure is occurring; more than just penetration, all these sighs, gasps, moans, groans and other breathed utterances indicate a performed sexuality on the part of actors.<sup>xi</sup> This is why, in contrast to the consuming, intaking nature of visual action in the pornographic film, diegetic sound in the pornographic film is primarily the sound of exhalation, breath, of the immaterial aspect of sexuality that is so difficult to show--pleasure.

So you do not feel I am pulling all of this out of thin air, recall that two impolite slang terms for fellatio, “blow-job” and “suck off” (from 1933 and 1928) point further to the immediacy of breath in the register of sexuality. A less rude version is found in smoldering Lauren Bacall’s famous line from Howard Hawks’s To Have and Have Not (US, 1944). Does Humphrey Bogart not know how to whistle? “You just put your lips together and blow.” Changes in breathing mark both the beginning and ending stages of sexual encounters--the incipient desire for another as well as the accomplishment of eros. Breath, then, floats over erogeneity, communicating the susurrus of desire equally with the spasm of discharge. The labored breath of orgasm comes to serve, in a retrograde action aimed at future encounters, as a signifier of further desire--even as that breath marks the completion of desire. In other words, the final “oh” of orgasm is in fact the origin of the muted foreplay “ooh” whispered earlier in a lover’s ear. In thinking about the register of reproduction, air has certainly not remained virginal.

### **Anemophobia**

Billy Wilder’s The Seven Year Itch is positively Aeolian in its exposition. Tom Ewell plays Richard Sherman, a publisher who remains in sweltering New York City while his wife and son vacation; Marilyn Monroe is The Girl, a model who moves in upstairs. From the beginning, apparatuses of air abound, setting off a series of meetings that circulate around wind. At the train station, Sherman’s son wears a space suit; Dad is “shutting off my oxygen” when Sherman tries to remove the helmet to say goodbye. Sherman instead ends up with his son’s paddle, which in the next scene he accidentally knocks against a ceiling fan in a local restaurant. Sherman then goes home to enjoy his air conditioning, fanning himself repeatedly with his hat. Once he is safely home his buzzer rings; The Girl has arrived, but she somehow gets stuck in the

hallway. Monroe's big entrance is muffed by a portable fan's trailing cord, which is caught in the door. She decides to trade in her puny fan for Sherman's large air conditioner. Later, at Sherman's office, we see multiple fans in nearly every shot, particularly pointing at him when the psychoanalytic doctor visits. Later, Monroe is seen blow-drying her hair after a shower, mixing the windblown glamour look from her TV toothpaste ads with the behind-the-scenes innocent captured in her boudoir. And of course, to cap off all these airy images, The Seven Year Itch gives us the most iconic image of the most iconic female film star: Marilyn standing over the subway grate in that white, white halter dress, getting blown up the skirt.

That is a rather graphic way of putting it, but I want to restore some of the sexuality that the film lost due to concessions made to the Hays Code. That most iconic image of Monroe in fact does not appear in full in the film, having been deemed too suggestive, although it was used in the film's poster and other publicity materials. Instead, Wilder had to cut The Girl into two parts, her lower half cleaved from her upper half. But in case we missed it, the film immediately



The Girl in the subway grate scene, split  
(copyright 1955, Twentieth Century-Fox Film)

replays the blowing scene when a second subway car comes underneath. Repetition, disavowal, repression: maybe what we are seeing in this blown-apart scene is not the Hays Code, but castration, at work? Repeating the quick scene of Monroe's blowing skirt is not merely for the sake of a viewer's pleasure; instead this repetition compensates for censorship, and is the means by which important things show their persistence in floating to the surface. In the titillation of seeing Monroe's bare legs, something viewers likely missed is what happens with The Girl's upper half. The lower shot of her legs emphasizes the action of air blowing up her dress, while the upper shot of her torso and head points attention to The Girl's verbal response. To Sherman, she coyly says, "Oh do you feel the breeze from the subway? Isn't that delicious!" The way Monroe speaks her lines of dialogue, here and throughout her career, counteract her voluptuous image, and signify her supposed naïve innocence. What she sounds like and what she looks like do not seem to agree. But in this film, the seemingly mismatched combination of look and voice are in fact united by the medium of air. While The Girl here is split into two by the editing, both halves are ultimately reconnected by that airy quality of hers. In cruder language, The Girl's two key orifices are both focused on air. Cutting her in half might disavow the connection between the "air down there" and the words that Monroe speaks above, yet Monroe's breathy response to the subway breeze in fact plays against the film's strictly visual denial of the coherent, whole female subject. In other words, this scene's editing only offers viewers a disconnected, incoherent vision of female sexuality, but considering the unexamined role of air allows us to reread the secret of this scene: that The Girl is a spirit of air, that regardless of the ways in which she is visually framed and bisected, there is the invisible, unread current of air that blows together her top and bottom halves.

Returning to The Girl's upper half helps demonstrate this integration. Her pleased response, "isn't that delicious?" is basically a question of taste. The idea that The Girl can "taste" the air blowing up her skirt echoes the film's other scene of consumption. The Seven Year Itch is very much an oral film, and so that readers do not think I am merely being lewd, I should point out the scene early on where Sherman has a sauerkraut juice on the rocks with his soya bean burger, soya fries, and soya sherbet at a wacky vegetarian restaurant; the constant reminders that Sherman's doctor wants him to monitor his intake of alcohol and tobacco; his secretary's criticism of his breakfast of "a peanut butter sandwich and two whiskey sours"; the post-coital breakfast he fantasizes The Girl making (and the reality of the obscenely burnt toast he prepares); and the memorably charming moment when Marilyn discovers how wonderful potato chips taste when dipped in champagne. All of this repeated intake is a threat that Sherman misreads, a deflection from the orifice that is really under consideration. A Sphinx in white, Monroe's mysterious Girl in fact betrays some rather primal fears. At the moment over the subway grate, when she seems to be the most revealing, open, and sexualized, she lets drop a disguised hint about her consuming nature. Tasting the air, and pronouncing it delicious, The Girl suggests that Sherman, and the viewers, cut her in half at their own peril.

The film's arrangement of a progressing series of windy devices--The Girl's weak fan, Sherman's more appealing AC, the subway's overwhelming gust--offers another clue to the subway sequence. We know from an earlier scene that The Girl keeps her "undies in the icebox," and that she laughably considers putting her fan in the fridge to boost its power. Between the image of The Girl's frozen undies and the later subway grate scene is one where The Girl first comes to Sherman's apartment to cool off. Sherman has strategized about ways to avoid the summer heat and stay away from temptation while his family is on vacation. His air conditioner,

however, compromises his two problems--it keeps him cool but it also brings The Girl into his home, where she lounges legs akimbo right in front of the air conditioner's fan. In The Seven Year Itch, air serves a cooling, desexualizing purpose, but at the same time it works as a stand-in for the sexual act. Wind blowing on The Girl's crotch provides a satisfaction that can be read in two very different ways--as chaste and innocent relief from the heat of a New York City summer, and as a sexual searching for the right size wind. Moving from The Girl's "miserable" \$3.95 fan to the "delicious" subway blast, The Seven Year Itch makes Sherman's only chance at sexual success dependent on the size of his AC. He's got it "in every room," and that may be his biggest problem. We can now better understand The Girl's first entrance. Why does she get stuck in the door? Is this a warning that Sherman overlooks in his lust? Or simply a sign that the fan The Girl carries is weak, defective, and in need of replacement? Clearly, we can see now that this is a trap--The Girl's weapon is the wind, her sign the fan.



The Girl enters, carrying her sign, a fan  
(copyright 1955, Twentieth Century-Fox Film)

### **Blowing Down the House**

Unlike the sign of sex which feminine air flashes in films like The Seven Year Itch, the association of air with masculine evil is dependent more on the regular, rhythmic aspects of

breathing--on the periodicity of respiration, whether this be an unconscious regularity, as with a body's natural inclination to uniform evenness, or a consciously imposed regularity, as with an individual's decision to "take a deep breath" and master him- or herself. Is it accidental then that cinematic villains, troubling in their behavior, are also often troubled in their breathing? Evoking seminal slasher characters like Mike Myers from Halloween (dir. John Carpenter, US, 1978) or Jason from Friday the 13th (dir. Sean S. Cunningham, US, 1980), the generic masked murderer of today's teen horror films poses a threat that audiences can easily identify by the soundtrack's muffled breath alone. There is a double purpose for this kind of monstrous, labored breathing: on the one hand breath gestures to the essence of life, a valuable commodity held back by the villain from the teens running from danger; and on the other hand monstrous breathing signals these villains' absence of language, and their resulting irrationality. Breath comes at the limits of speech. These monsters can breathe--a sign of organic life--and yet all they do is breathe--a sign of mute animality. Audible breath in the mouth of such characters overwhelms victims and viewers with a primal repetition; the irrepressible rhythm of the monster's breathing is the symbol of the boundary between life and death in slasher films. More than severed heads, spraying blood, virgin sexuality, hiding in closets--the monster's respiration is what gives the horror film its vitality; the monster's respiration is what is contested in the horror film.

Villains with marked respiration are not limited to the monsters of horror films. Cultural associations that mark ill or disabled individuals as being predisposed to evil contribute to, for example, portrayals of asthmatic villains in thriller and action films. In a recent James Bond film, Casino Royale (dir. Martin Campbell, US/UK/Germany/Czech Republic, 2006), Mads Mikkelsen's portrayal of the central Bond villain, Le Chiffre, has him turning to his inhaler at times of stress. His inhaler is both a clue to the reason why he behaves badly and an assurance to

the audience that our virile hero will be able to dispatch the weakling. Readers of Ian Fleming's source novel will tell us that the inhaler is actually filled with the stimulant Benzedrine, a detail the film omits. I argue, however, that it need not matter whether Le Chiffre is inhaling Benzedrine or albuterol; what matters is that he is addicted to inhalation. In Blake Edward's Experiment in Terror (US, 1962), Ross Martin plays a kidnapper (and rapist, thief, forger, and murderer) whose threatening phone calls are overlaid with asthmatic wheezing. Hidden in shadows, we do not know what the villain looks like, and so we can only tell who is not evil by their ability to speak normally. These asthmatic films present us with the opposite situation from the monstrous horror ones just discussed; here there is a problem with not breathing regularly. A shortness of breath hints at the unbalanced quality of these villain's inner lives; unlike the ominously driven monsters of slasher films, the asthmatic villain is calculating yet uncontrolled. Not coincidentally, both villains in Casino Royale and Experiment in Terror forge complicated, elaborate plots. The suggestion in both films is that a need to regulate breathing is a manifestation of excessive rationality. In trying to control and manipulate the world around them by fiendish logic, they have exceeded the natural order, and are punished by having also to look after the normally automatic processes of life.

The unreliable breathing of Mikkelsen's and Martin's characters is positively tame in comparison to the vivid and violent acts of inhalation on display in David Lynch's Blue Velvet (US, 1986). Dennis Hopper's portrayal of the sadistic Frank Booth is extremely disturbing; his character's first appearance, secretly witnessed by the film's hero Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan), has him performing all sorts of bizarre rituals as he engages in a violent sexual act with Isabella Rossellini's character Dorothy Vallens. The components of this ritual are the fetishistic meaning of Dorothy's blue velvet robe, the Oedipal roleplay, and Frank's use of a gas mask. The film

never specifies what substance Frank inhales--is it oxygen, amyl nitrate (a drug related to sexual pleasure), something entirely unreal?<sup>xii</sup> As with Casino Royale, trying to answer this question puts us on the wrong scent; it does not really matter what Frank inhales, it is the act of compulsive inhalation that is so significant. Frank always has his gas mask with him, the tank hidden inside his jacket, suggesting an addiction for which he needs constantly to be prepared. In the logic of Blue Velvet, meaning is unmoored from objects, which instead have significance for individuals based on private sexual mythologies. For instance, the titular example, blue velvet, becomes one substance that is passed around, put into people's mouths, transmuted from song lyric to actual fabric. Similarly, Frank's use of a gas mask has less to do with a particular inhalant than it does with inhalation as an act related to sexual sadism. I do not read, as Laura Mulvey does, Frank's inhalation as a simple act of drug use preparatory to his other deviances, but rather see the gas mask as a part of the fetishistic series of objects Frank feels he must manipulate.<sup>xiii</sup>

We see Frank use his mask three times: when he is first introduced raping Vallens, just



Huffing and puffing Frank Booth as the modern Big Bad Wolf  
(copyright 1986, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group)

before he beats up Jeffrey, and at the end, before he attempts to shoot Jeffrey but is shot instead. In his first scene, we hear an ominous hiss of air on the soundtrack as Frank puts the mask to his face.<sup>xiv</sup> Huffing and puffing, Frank inhales greedily; his inhalation is more than just a means to an end (to get “high”), and instead has significance as a devouring act, fitting alongside the other examples of parodic orality, such as his continually stuffing blue velvet into others’ mouths before acts of violence. One reading of the film, suggested by David Copenhafer in a recent issue of this journal,<sup>xv</sup> points up the homosexual disposition evident in both Frank and Jeffrey; so perhaps each time that we see Frank turn to his gas tank, we should read this as preparatory to a sexual act. Yet in light of the meaning of air to cinematic villains, a more direct reading is to see Frank’s compulsive inhalation, and his resulting profane excess, as just so much blowing of hot air. Frank initially seems to be a terrible threat, especially to the naïve and provincial Jeffrey, yet his airy nature proves him ultimately to be an insubstantial villain. Frank’s demise supports this reading. Mirroring his introductory scene, once again Jeffrey is hiding in the closet and Frank is inhaling his gas. Cutting back and forth between Jeffrey hidden with his gun drawn and a point-of-view shot of an approaching, inhaling Frank, the film heightens tension until Jeffrey pulls the trigger. There is a brief shot of Frank’s head in 3/4 profile with blood spurting from the back and a small hole in his forehead, and then a cut to a slowed-down shot of a prosthetic head exploding. The soundtrack helps explain the image for the view; a sound of rushing air gives the impression that Frank’s head is popping “like a balloon.” It is as if Frank was filled entirely with air, and Jeffrey has simply to “blow him away” with the gun. In the next scene, we discover that Jeffrey’s father has survived the stroke he suffered early in the film, and the careful viewer will thus recall the hospital scene where his father was unable to speak, hampered by the results of a tracheotomy--a new breathing hole in his neck. Blue Velvet, whose camera began by burrowing

into the ground to reveal beetles, dirt, an ear, ultimately overcomes the threat of air. As is common, the chthonic tug outweighs the lightness of air.

Lest breathy villains seem to us to be a particularly recent invention, we should turn to the prototypical villain of air: the Big Bad Wolf as he appears in the fairy tale of the Three Little Pigs. Francis Bacon reported in 1622 the common belief that hogs “can see the wind; and imagine it a frightful sight,”<sup>xvi</sup> and the various versions of “Three Little Pigs” literalize this frightful wind in the form of the proverbial wolf. Walt Disney’s 1933 animated Silly Symphony version is perhaps the most well known, in part because it diminishes the violence of the original by allowing the first two pigs to escape being eaten. Three Little Pigs was a great success for Disney, as was the featured song “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” which found new resonances in light of the Great Depression. The moral lesson seems obvious enough: Practical Pig, who labored to build his house of brick instead of playing music with Fifer Pig and Fiddler Pig, ultimately demonstrates how a strong work ethic and disciplined foresight trump indiscretion and play. As he puts it plainly, “work and play don’t mix.” The film’s psychoanalytic lesson is a little more buried, but a humorous clue is found hidden in the background of Practical Pig’s brick house. At one point, we see two photographs; one labeled “Mother” shows a sow with her brood, the other labeled “Father” shows a link of sausages.<sup>xvii</sup> On their walls, Fifer has pictures of what looks like two dancers in grass hoop skirts, and Fiddler has what appears to be two boxers. Practical Pig, then, seems to be the only one interested in family, but as we see, this is an interest informed more by a threat of castration than by sentimentality. The picture of Practical Pig’s Father, reduced to a link of penis symbols, should be extremely frightening to a young pig, but its pride of place on the wall indicates instead that it serves a more familial role.



The image of Father in Three Little Pigs  
(copyright 1933, Walt Disney Productions)

Practical Pig plays the Cassandra throughout, and while the bulk of the short film focuses on demonstrating the truth of his prophecy that “you’ll be sorry when the wolf comes through your door,” the real warning he makes can be read in the brick and stone material of his home. The film humorously plays with how well and thoroughly Practical Pig has constructed his house; we see that not only are the walls and chimney made of brick, but that he also has a brick piano and a brick bed. As with the sausage links, the overdetermined nature of the bricks in his home simultaneously cover over and express Practical Pig’s fear. If my father has become a link of sausages, Practical Pig seems to suggest, then that is a fate I must avoid at all costs, and so I will do everything that I do in the firmest manner possible. In this, Practical Pig’s obsession with building his house of brick and stone is less a mark of his maturity and more an expression of his

being marked by the threat of castration, sublimating this anxiety in a stony, hard edifice to earth against that threat.

And what of the Big Bad Wolf's huffing and puffing? If the warning of Practical Pig's father signals castration and death, then might the Wolf and his blowing represent the instrument of castration, a literal kind of "cutting wind"? There seems at first to be a confusion of symbols. In the world of fairy tales it is only natural to understand that wolves and pigs are in strict opposition. In the Walt Disney version, however, there are some curious things about the Wolf that make this truth less certain. For one, the Wolf is introduced wandering along a path with a carpetbag in his hand; viewers should realize after having watched three other characters build homes that the Wolf himself is, in effect, homeless. His clothing is tattered and patched, raising the issue of class. All that the Wolf really possesses, indeed, is his defining quality: not really his slavering teeth or lupine cunning, but his prodigious breath. When we recall that Fifer Pig, who built the weakest home of straw, plays a wind instrument, it becomes clearer that Three Little Pigs is placing all four characters in a series, with the wandering wind at one end and the sturdy home at the other. Fifer, indeed, is but a few breaths away from finding himself in the Wolf's shoes.

What does the Wolf want? To gain entry into a home: "open the door and let me in," he commands, highlighting domestic doors and passageways as the problem (after blowing upon the second house, only the door remains, and at the third house the Wolf tries to sneak down the chimney). In this narrative, to have a home is to repudiate air; to be homeless is likewise a failure to give up windy pleasures. In this sense, Three Little Pigs gives us a dilemma; which will win: the singular airy breath of the lone wolf, or the chthonic firmness of the community of pigs? The short film's happy conclusion seems to support the story of family and the virtues of the firm and

permanent, but as I have suggested, this comes at the cost of a disavowal: Practical Pig's success requires the constant reminder that he too might be made into sausage, a joking phallus to be sure, but a phallic symbol doubly threatening to a pig. For the Wolf's part, it is significant that he is disrobed at the end; he quite literally blows his own clothes off, losing a piece at a time until he is left with nothing on. After unsuccessfully sneaking down the chimney, he is blown through the sky, windmilling in the air for a moment. Airy nothing at last, stripped of his possessions, the Wolf is yet another representative of wind beaten off in favor of emphatic chthonicity.

To circulate back to Irigaray's critique of the forgetting of air, we might first get wind of her argument by taking some sentences from Heidegger's 1951 essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," starting with his introductory "we attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building."<sup>xviii</sup> Is this not what the story of the Three Little Pigs shows us--that life and home, dwelling and building, are inextricably linked? Later, Heidegger claims that "to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving."<sup>xix</sup> The fundamental character of dwelling is sparing and preserving--this is the concluding lesson of the Three Little Pigs, run however through a contradictory logic. The Three Little Pigs are safe in Practical Pig's building; his building spares and preserves them. But is the brick home he builds rightly a "dwelling" as Heidegger conceives it? Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations: these examples show that "not every building is a dwelling" (143). Has Practical Pig made a dwelling or a building? Heidegger writes of one of the fundamental characters of dwelling that "saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save really means to set something free into its own presencing" (148). The final image of Three Little Pigs has Practical Pig jokingly rap on his piano to imitate the Wolf's knock; his peers run to the bed, their tails corkscrewing in fright.

Certainly the pigs are not yet any closer to being saved, and we do not need sequels to know that the safety of earth and brick is only a temporary one; that our future freedom is in fact always up in the air without a proper dwelling.

Irigaray has an air of suspicion about Heidegger's notion of dwelling in the fourth chapter of The Forgetting of Air. She emphasizes a thread at the end of his essay, which she paraphrases: "what remains unthought is that dwelling is the fundamental trait of man's condition. It still remains unsaid, hidden in language. . . . As long as he does not think through homelessness, he does not recognize that what is of principal importance for him is the Being of dwelling."<sup>xx</sup> I am tempted to read the Wolf, and especially his airy nature, as an opportunity to think through homelessness; as a villain, the crisis he raises is the complacency of building. Irigaray continues: "nevertheless, abiding on earth as a mortal, he always already dwells. This he forgets. He forgets the framing of this home," which is to say that the habit of living leads man to a forgetting of the fact that "dwelling is the fundamental trait of Being" (67). Building should not serve merely as a way of dividing and bounding the world; rather, building should serve dwelling, the foundation of Being. Irigaray asks, "would dwelling--man's--be revealed, then, as the safekeeping of death? As enclosure by a boundary within which death is-is not to be found?" (69). Here is another philosophical description of the problem of Three Little Pigs. The brick house represents the immediate "safekeeping of death," both in terms of the familial reminders of dead parents and Practical Pig's comic reminder that the house is only safe because death is present. The house is only "safe" in proportion to the threat it fends off. But, Practical Pig's brick house is not dwelling. To subvert the moral intent of Three Little Pigs, then, I argue that the Wolf is the only player who confronts the ethics of living, dwelling, and being. In signifying "air," the Wolf is not an abject figure in his homelessness, but instead the closest thing we have to what Heidegger

identified as the real problem of dwelling--that it is not something done once and for all, but something that needs to be continually rethought and recalled, that we should “build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling” (159). No doubt Practical Pig thought about dwelling as he built his home, but the airy Wolf is the motivation behind this, the constant symbol of a constant need to “bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature” (159), and thus bring Being into clearer focus.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **Autoerotic Origins**

It is an ill wind that blows nobody good; a justification for airiness which certainly applies to The Three Little Pigs. Let me return to another villainous figure of air whose evil is also less than absolute: Darth Vader. The Star Wars series made a great impression on me as a child, particularly the complex family soap opera, where the two opposed forces from the first film are revealed to be related in the second, and then redeemed in the third. To my young eyes, the virtue of the Star Wars films was that they relied on invisible things and processes, both in terms of the secrets of the family plot and the semi-magical workings of this alternate world. For instance, one invisible force at work in the second and best film, The Empire Strikes Back, is temperature: the film’s opening sequences occur on an ice planet, the hero Luke Skywalker nearly freezes to death after being captured by a snow creature, and this is mirrored in the film’s conclusion where roguish Han Solo is forced to undergo a process called “carbon freezing.” Even casual viewers will remember the “Force” as the ur-sign of invisible activity in the Star Wars universe. In The Empire Strikes Back, the sage Yoda defines the Force as an “ally,” advising Luke that “you must feel the Force around you. Here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere. Yes, even between the land and the ship.” Is Yoda not describing air here?

The Force, like air, is what is “between”; it is like the bridge that Irigaray borrows from Heidegger, which does not simply connect spaces, but rather creates them. When we see the Force at work, as when Luke levitates stones or causes a lightsaber to fly into his hands, our attention is focused on the empty space between object and mover. We are looking at air, waiting expectantly if doubtfully, when at last something impossible happens. The “between” that we expect to be empty and dead instead gives conveyance to an object, as if by magic. The “hyperdrive” which allows ships to traverse great distances is another instance of how the Star Wars films are more interested in the quality of air than the extent of space. Characters put on breathing masks when they venture out of a spaceship, but these are small, transparent, and not very cumbersome. Unlike more realistic space films such as 2001: A Space Odyssey (dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/US, 1968), in Star Wars outer space is not all that different from anywhere else and does not necessitate bulky pressure suits or airtight helmets. It is instead familiar and easily traveled. One thing Luke learns in The Empire Strikes Back is how to take control over this immutable air, discovering the hidden essence “between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere.” But after all, what else should we expect from a character with a name like Skywalker?

The other thing Luke learns is that evil Darth Vader is also a Skywalker, and is his father. Vader is explicitly associated with air in his costuming: there is the flowing black cape, the machine breathing noise he continually makes, and the shiny black helmet he always wear. Viewers catch a brief glimpse of Vader’s head in The Empire Strikes Back; sitting inside an egg-shaped pod, a mechanical arm lowers the helmet down and secures it with a vacuum-sealed sound. Later, Vader is again shown in this pod, which closes around him with another noise of air. Hermetic, Darth Vader is closed off in his black uniform and his private quarters; this is in

contrast to the ease with which other characters get around. Devotees of the Star Wars films will point out that, according to early drafts of the screenplay, the reason Darth Vader wears this particular costume is because when he was introduced he had just traveled through outer space between two ships. The films quickly abandoned the need for this kind of logic, but Darth Vader's costume remained. Now, instead of needing to be protected from airless outer space like everyone else, Vader is made a particular victim of air; he must remain sealed inside of his suit. Vader's machine breathing is a marker of his own brand of dwelling, and like the Big Bad Wolf, he is homeless except for his airy surroundings.

Continuing the airy theme, the climax of The Empire Strikes Back takes place in Cloud City, which floats over a planet made of gas. "You certainly belong with us here in the clouds," says traitorous Lando Calrissian when Han Solo arrives. We should know that Lando is a villain because he has, like Vader, a fluttering, windblown cape. After capturing and freezing Han Solo into a large block, which floats no less, Vader prepares to do the same to his son. The metaphor of transformation--human into "carbonite," son into villain--is obvious, but the mechanics of this transmutation are intriguing. The carbon freezing process is intended to store and transport the planet's "tibanna gas" resources. Han Solo, then, is essentially being treated like gas, and the transformation into leaden, chthonic substance is a form of half-death. In his duel with Vader, Luke manages to escape the freezing chamber by springing high into the air, defying gravity's downward pull. In the ensuing fight, Vader uses the Force to send objects flying through the air at Luke. One bursts through a nearby window and creates a vacuum that Luke is pulled into. At last, Luke finds himself hanging from the bottom of Cloud City; the inverted landscape buffeting him with wind as he struggles to hang on. I began by posing the questions: does the element air work in our culture in the same way that earth does--as a foil to misdirect the riddle of nature? Or

is air somehow different, replacing earth as a key sexual element and advancing the dilemma of reproduction into more honest and truthful territory? Punning on the autochthonous fantasy at the heart of earthy conceptions of reproduction, I take the Greek word for air, “aer,” and try to imagine an “autoaerotic” fantasy of origins. The Empire Strikes Back would be a starting point, presenting an apparent orphan, training himself in the arts of air, who ultimately meets his father, an icon of air. Despite the film’s nods to archetypal chthonic tropes of castration and earthy environments, it is air at last that holds the family secret.

### **To Air is Human**

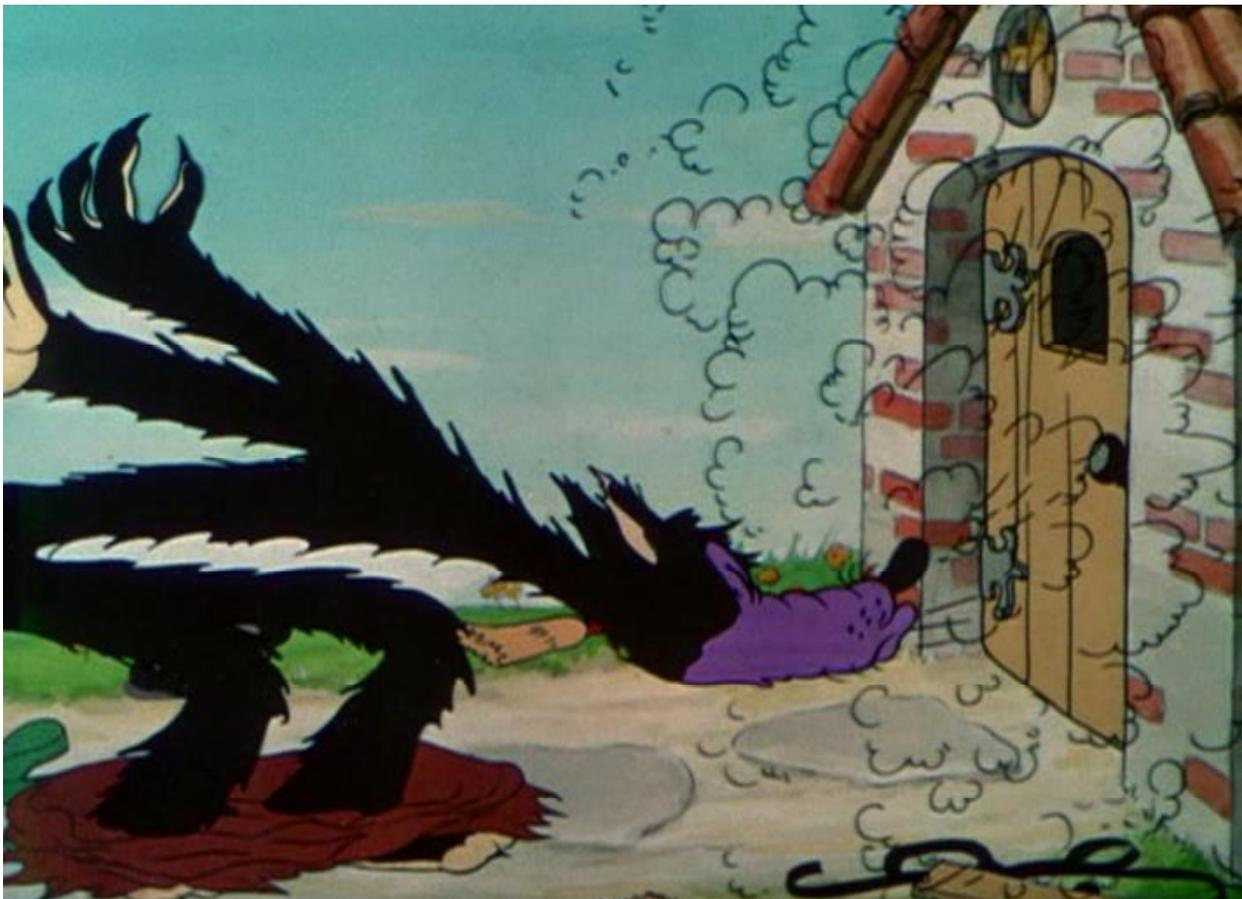
Is air simply “the new earth,” misdirecting the riddle of nature, or does air blow us towards a new direction in our cultural understanding and narrative negotiation of the problem of bi-sexual reproduction? What cultural Beaufort Scale or anemometer might we deploy? As I finish this article, I see an advance trailer for M. Night Shyamalan’s upcoming film, The Last Airbender. The trailer shows a young man performing martial arts moves in a circle of thousands of lit candles; with a gesture of his hands, he is able to push forcefully the air in front of him. Will the film show perhaps a heroic side to air, correcting in some way the emphasis on sexuality and death? In terms of the sexual politics underlying Irigaray’s challenge to remember air, the film does not look promising. But even if it becomes an example of Hollywood’s popularizing tendency to reach the lowest common denominator, it still might mark for us a helpful reminder of forgotten air, and perhaps signal evidence of an implicit shift towards a better understanding of what Irigaray called the “place of all presence and absence.”<sup>xxii</sup> Furthermore, despite the fantasy trappings of The Last Airbender, I imagine it might connect in viewer’s minds with something as prosaically technical as the recent switch to digital, wireless, and other immaterial

technologies of television, computer, and information transmission. The growth of such technology in America suggests a need for a renewed interest in air, the invisible medium by which invisible signals are borne.

This last complaint might blow like an ill West Wind, but sighs over air quality are no new thing. As scholar Carla Mazzio points out, there were “all manner of technologies and material instruments available in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries through which the ‘air’ might be understood or manipulated[: f]ans, bellows, windmills, guns, mines, sails, powder houses, and even dietary regimens for controlling the flow of air in and out of mouths, pores, bodies, and minds.”<sup>xxiii</sup> She makes special note of the curious fact that “in the toxic breathing environments of early modern England, smoking tobacco emerged as a form of cultural conversation and communal activity.”<sup>xxiv</sup> Pleasure and progress in the same breath; both associated with the same miasmatic, pestilential, vaporous atmosphere. I am reminded of Bazin’s qualified defense of the then-new technology of radio, which is for him explicitly a cultural issue: “radio has created an atmospheric culture that is as omnipresent as humidity in the air.”<sup>xxv</sup> Smoking Londoners, shaving Parisians: to paraphrase Bazin, culture is easy, and it is atmospheric. If some of the wind has been take out of our airy thinking since then--in our eagerness to create new, visibly earthy achievements--it nonetheless continually threatens to roar back. Consider how common are accounts of lung diseases: consumption, pneumonia, tuberculosis, asbestosis, silicosis, sarcoidosis. Or consider the digital technologies mentioned above. On the one hand is an interest in digital signals, “bars,” boosting reception, hands-free headsets, and “cloud computing.” On the other hand is a growing awareness of how our desire for such wireless connectivity is affecting our “environment”--a word increasingly concerned not

just with the Earth, but also with other elements like oily water and dirty air. Let us hope that this holistic concern with our environment remains in the air.

For this reason, I think, at heart, that the visual aspect of film is what abets the forgetting of air. We are so used to the misdirection of chthonic stories, which has led to scores of earth-birthed characters in science fiction, fantasy, and horror films, that invisible air is for us still an unexamined, dangerous reminder of sex, the origins of our life. We are like children in this respect, conducting confused sexual researches with just enough information to lead us astray. The villains and dangerous figures of the airy films I have discussed offer passage to entirely alternate myths of reproduction.<sup>xxvi</sup> Whether or not these stories are truer than earthy myths might not matter; we may not yet be ready for them regardless.



The Big Bad Wolf, blue in the face  
(copyright 1933, Walt Disney Productions)

## Notes

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I would like to thank Karen Weingarten and Lalitha Gopalan for their helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay.

<sup>i</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Cinema I: The Movement-Image, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 145-146.

<sup>ii</sup> Deleuze, 142.

<sup>iii</sup> Deleuze, 151.

<sup>iv</sup> Luce Irigaray, The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 161.

<sup>v</sup> Irigaray, 4.

<sup>vi</sup> Irigaray, 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Irigaray, 8.

<sup>viii</sup> In his analysis of Oedipus and the issue of autochthony versus bi-sexual reproduction, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss points out the many ways that earth grounds for us an alternate fantasy of non-sexual reproduction--he cites the recurrence of dragons, the Sphinx, and the “universal characteristic” of myths that chthonian beings are lame or have trouble walking, as is the case with those from the Pueblo, the Kwakiutl Indians, and with “swollen-footed” Oedipus himself. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” in Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobson (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

<sup>ix</sup> Some more answers to a game for long road trips: The Wind (dir. Victor Sjöström, US, 1928, with Lillian Gish), Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, US, 1939), Reap the Wild Wind (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, US, 1942), Inherit the Wind (dir. Stanley Kramer, US, 1960), The Wind

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and the Lion (dir. John Milius, US, 1975), A Mighty Wind (dir. Christopher Guest, US, 2003), and The Wind that Shakes the Barley (dir. Ken Loach, Ireland, 2006).

<sup>x</sup> Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 122-123.

<sup>xi</sup> Williams, 73.

<sup>xii</sup> Lynch and Hopper have both said that the script originally called for helium, which would have had a clearly recognizable effect on the character's voice. Lynch is glad Hopper talked him out of this, while Hopper regrets the decision, imagining how weirder his character would have been speaking in a high-pitched voice (David Lynch, Lynch on Lynch, ed. Chris Rodley [London: Faber and Faber: 1997], 142-44).

<sup>xiii</sup> Although, I do like that Mulvey stresses Frank's dependency on the tank, connecting the breathing of Frank with that of Mr. Beaumont. "He is as dependent on his amyl nitrate fix for potency as Mr. Beaumont is dependent on his oxygen apparatus for breathing" (Fetishism and Curiosity [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996], 143). The film, to be fair, is obliquely interested in a plot involving a drug deal.

<sup>xiv</sup> There are echoes of this in No Country for Old Men (dirs. Joel and Ethan Coen, US, 2007), whose villain's presence is likewise announced by the sound of a hissing air tank.

<sup>xv</sup> David Copenhafer, "Mourning and Music in Blue Velvet," Camera Obscura 23, no. 3 (2008): 136-157.

<sup>xvi</sup> Francis Bacon, "The History of Winds," in The Works of Francis Bacon (London: M. Jones, 1815), 112.

<sup>xvii</sup> Later, we see a second picture of Father that shows him to be a ham. "Uncle Otto" is also hanging on the wall; his picture is of a football, or "pigskin."

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<sup>xviii</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 143.

<sup>xix</sup> Heidegger, 147. How Irigaray paraphrases this: Being “is the house of man. To be and to dwell amount to the same thing” (67).

<sup>xx</sup> Irigaray, 67.

<sup>xxi</sup> I am reminded that the theme of dwelling arises in another tale where attitudes toward air separate humans and animals. In one of Aesop’s fables, a satyr invites a peasant into his home for shelter and food. The satyr is surprised when the man blows on his cold hands to warm them, and then blows on his hot soup to cool it. He makes the man leave at once, suspicious of someone who can “blow hot and cold with same breath.” In this story, as with Three Little Pigs, consistency is valued, and the inconsistency of the man’s vacillating breath betrays him.

<sup>xxii</sup> Irigaray, 8.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Carla Mazzio, “The History of Air: Hamlet and the Trouble with Instruments,” South Central Review 26, nos.1-2 (2009), 158. One of my favorite scenes in Hamlet has our hero winding up King Claudius and Polonius; referring to the theory that chameleons live on air, he tells them he is “faring” “excellent, i’faith, of the chameleon’s dish. I eat / the air, promise-crammed” (III.ii.87-88).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Mazzio, 188. Perhaps this communal breathing environment is in contrast to the thunderous disruption conveyed by the expression “to break wind”?

<sup>xxv</sup> André Bazin, “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest,” in Bazin at Work, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 44.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Future contributions to spirometric cinema might include: “External Lungs in The Big Lebowski and Three Kings,” “The Melodrama of Blowing Leaves in The Conformist and

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Written on the Wind,” “Floating Objects in Forrest Gump and American Beauty,” “Air as Soul in Ace in the Hole,” “Somnolent Yawns of Howl’s Moving Castle,” and “Chasing Wind in Twister.”