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Edgar G. Ulmer in the PRC period, *Detour* (1945) :
the journey as the schizophrenic voyage, the different reality that the
excessive screen process brings about

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要旨

エドガー・G・ウルマーのPRC期の映画『まわり道』(1945)を論じる。本論では、これまで論じられてこなかった、この映画において過剰なまでに使用されているリア・プロジェクションのもたらす特異な効果に着目する。それにより、この映画には、通常感じられるリアリティーは欠落することになるが、同時に別のリアリティーが生じることが明らかとされる。それは、この映画の製作における過酷な単純さにもかかわらず、結果的に見出されるフィルム・テクスチュアの大膽な繊細さの折り畳まれた一つの襞を見ることにもなる。第1節では、この映画におけるスクリーン・プロセスを使用したシーンを実際に取り上げる。第2節では、この映画におけるスクリーン・プロセスの過剰な使用がもたらす別のリアリティーを見る。第3節では、この映画の特異なスクリーン空間と旅の諸相を具体的に見る。

“His trips (...) the schizo-voyage, ‘on a few planks of wood that even bump against and submerge each other’” (Deleuze, Guattari).¹

“images dreamed up with a view to economy could have universal repercussions” (G. Deleuze).²

Introduction

Edgar Ulmer's perspective is understood through S. Grissemann's first monograph, published in 2003 Ulmer has long been known as “the king of the Bs,” but his various cinematographic journeys, which were known only fragmentarily, are now described in connection with his perspective. In other words, people other than cinéphiles now know that Ulmer produced minority films, including Yiddish films, as well as B movies. In this article,

we consider the movies produced by the B movie production company PRC, where films were produced when Ulmer was called “the king of the Bs.” Above all, we want to take up *Detour* (1945) in the PRC period. What are the possibilities for this film? *B Movies* by Don Miller was published in 1973, and he treated some B movie production companies and works comprehensively. The epoch-making anthology *Kings of the Bs* was published in 1975 by Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy and B movies and individual works were discussed in great detail. Furthermore, *The Big Book of B Movies, or How Low Was My Budget* by Robin Cross was published in 1981 and a clear outline was given for the B movie on the basis of past results. The book *Detour* that introduced the film *Detour* comprehensively, was published by Noah Isenberg in 2008, though the film *Detour* had been discussed with other movies and touched in the way of a review of short essays before. These will be examined in this article. We pay attention to the specific effect that the excessive use of rear projection in this film brings about with a full understanding of the historic statements regarding this film. As a result, we will see the bold delicacy of the filmic texture despite the severe simplicity in the production of this film. In section 1, we take up the scene using the screen process in the film. In section 2, we discuss the different reality that excessive use of the screen process in this film creates. In section 3, we examine the specific screen space of this film and the diverse aspects of the filmic journey.

1. The scene of the driver's seat using the screen process

A scene composed by using the screen process, that is, rear projection, is seen in the film *Detour* throughout the story. Rear projection means the “camera and projector are interlocked



fig. 1

so that the projector projects a frame at precisely the same time the camera takes one.” In addition, “the actors in the car mock-up in front of the screen are lit in such a way that the translucent screen behind them does not reflect; it only transmits the light from the projector” and “[the] springs which support the car mock-up in order to simulate movement.”

For example, “thousands

of Hollywood taxi rides were filmed this way by the aid of rear projection, introduced in 1932” (Monaco 1977 : 108). Prolonged scenes using such a screen process are seen in this film. For example, one of these long scenes is scene (a) with Roberts, the chief character, and Haskell, a companion who is dying. The scene is composed of the daytime scene



fig. 2

in the suburb where the grass is sparse and the land is barren (16 : 41, fig. 1) and the night scene (17 : 36, fig. 2) of the darkened area where the light of the neon and the streetlight are not jumped into. Furthermore, another long scene is scene (b) with Roberts, the chief character, and Vera, a woman who will die. The scene comprises the scene with a background harking back to a remote place distant from the center of the town (33 : 29, fig. 3) and the scene with



fig. 3

by using a screen process when we really take up the scene in the car in which the male chief character moves using a screen process? (Table. However, the scene of a car standing still does not count here. In addition, the scene of the car moving in a reminiscent dream is inserted for an instant, but it does not count here, either.)

a background of downtown Los Angeles (49 : 17, fig. 4). In addition, the setting of the background in this scene is from rear projection, and we are given an impression that it fills most of this short film.³ Thus, this film can be called a driver's seat film using the screen process.⁴

The sustained time of the film (this version) is 65 minutes. How long does it take in the scene shot



fig. 4

Table

start time - end time	scene	sustained time
1. 2 : 02 - 2 : 17	Movement by the taxi to a diner in Reno ⁵	(15s)
2. 14 : 23 -14 : 28	Hitchhike with the general public	(5s)
3. 14 : 31 -14 : 36	Hitchhike with the truck driver	(5s)
4. 15 : 36 -15 : 46	Hitchhike with Haskell 1	(10s)
5. 15 : 53 -20 : 04	Hitchhike with Haskell 2	(4m11s)
6. 21 : 20 -21 : 54	Hitchhike with Haskell 3	(34s)
7. 22 : 28 -22 : 56	Hitchhike with Haskell 4	(28s)
8. 26 : 48 -27 : 09	Traveling alone by car 1	(21s)
9. 27 : 58 -28 : 08	Traveling alone by car 2	(10s)
10. 31 : 27 -31 : 36	Traveling alone by car 3	(9s)
11. 32 : 43 -35 : 48	Journey with Vera 1	(3m5s)
12. 36 : 09 -39 : 44	Journey with Vera 2	(3m35s)
13. 49 : 15 -50 : 07	Movement with Vera 1	(52s)

We know that the scene of a moving car using the screen process lasts 14 minutes 28 seconds when we measure time. This surprises us because more time seems to be spent on the scene; the scene using the screen process steals the viewer's heart, but in fact it is not so. However, why does the screen process that is not used in physical time so deeply penetrate the viewer's mind? In the film *Detour*, produced in 1945, a screen process is used in this way, but we can suppose that it is possible to shoot without using the screen process. Actually, a location realism-like style begins to be seen in other films at this time, and it became epoch-making in film history (e.g., *The Naked City* (1948) by Jules Dassin). In the film produced in a style of location realism, the place pinpointed really is projected. In other words, some kind of reality that is usually felt occurs. However, on the other hand, that kind of reality becomes thin in a scene using a screen process. Then does reality become thin if a screen process is used? No, it doesn't. A certain reality may be lost in using a screen process, but heterogeneous reality will be born there.⁶ In using the front projection or the rear projection, time is not formed from a spatial change but "the film set is transformed" and "space is born from time."

2. The possibility of the front projection and the rear projection

Several decades after the film *Detour* was produced, Hans-Juergen Syberberg hypothesized that "for a long time people have begun from the presupposition which let it be understood that to talk about cinema was to talk about movement."⁷ Hearing this remark, Gilles Deleuze said that people have begun to talk about the "mobile image, mobile camera, and montage."⁸ One of the biggest visual factors of the film by Syberberg is its effective use of front projection and rear projection, as indicated in films such as *Hitler-ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977). For example, we can see the following experiment by Syberberg. The element constituting visual space is the image of the character and the image from using a front projection, but, though the character constitutes this visual space, the character is dissociated from the image by using a front projection. Syberberg investigated the alternative,⁹ saying that "it was forgotten that in the cradle of cinema there had also been something else, projection, transparency."¹⁰

By using the screen process, the scene in the film *Detour* can be said to be too flat. However, in addition to the above-mentioned point of view, if we read such a set as an allegory of Ulmer's journey, who went beyond some borders of biographical fact, and we read it as the thing which Ulmer himself lived, the aspect becomes different. As mentioned later, a fold is carved by reference variously in this film, including the scene by this screen process, and the

folded fold is repeated and adds to the thickness. The person accomplishing a reference is forced on a journey in (of) the film by putting himself mutually depending on the strength of the filmic text. This adds a new aspect to the journey. In other words, “the flattest of image is almost imperceptibly inflected, layered, with varying depths.”¹¹ As a result, the critic who adds a review to this film is forced to “travel with” the film and the journey ultimately becomes *〈supplementary〉* and “out of control.” If all other journeys come down to seeing what’s on TV, a film just becomes “the ultimate journey.”

We want to get back to the excessive use of the screen process in this film by Ulmer.¹² Even if we had no time to spare for developing the effect of the screen process in former times, when we look back from the present, we can think that Ulmer wrestled with the work to develop this effect experimentally and unintentionally. The transformation from the situation in which time is born from space to the situation in which space is born from time is seen here, and a different reality is born here. In the use of this screen process, the aspect of fate going from now on for the man and woman in the car progresses with ticks of an original weird rhythm. The original means the following: Though they remain in the same place in the seat of a convertible car fixed before a reflected screen, they live time in the film. In addition, if the rhythm is born from the style formed by clashing with limitation,¹³ the rhythm to be seen here is not gotten by imitating anything without the condition of severe limitation of low-budget. Therefore, this rhythm cannot be later imitated in a form such as the remake.

3. Specific screen space and a journey

3.1 Powerless and fate

The male chief character “embarks on a journey that destroys his identity and his will and that can only end in his death,” as if he agrees that a journey is his assassin (Belton 1983 : 162). The male chief character seems to desire death in some sense. In the middle of a journey, this man is hit by “a series of irrational experiences that cannot be understood and cannot be controlled,” and he reacts passively and rolls down as if he is a “powerless prisoner.”¹⁴ The male chief character seems to drift powerlessly, as if he is in a dream¹⁵ and “ubiquitous fate imposes on the hero’s will unexpected detours which will end up annihilating him” in this journey (Lourcelles 1999 : 401). This film is interpreted as “Ulmer’s genuflection to fate” from the powerlessness of the male chief character, and “a really Ulmerian sense of absurd” is found here. In addition, when this film creates such an emotion, the camera is changed to “the tool of accurate emotional display” and supports such an emotion space. The “screen space” is abstracted convulsively and the feeling is intensified by “investing it with particular gesture of light, shadow, form, and motion.”¹⁶

3.2 The abstract screen space

“The abstractness” here agrees with the extreme thinness of the concrete index about the place in this film. In other words, part of the journey in this film refuses “geographical specificity and a sense of purpose.” For example, in one scene, the camera pans westward over a succession of maps superimposed with shots of the male chief character’s feet walking (14 : 25, fig. 5). “There are no arrows or lines to indicate where he is.” The arrows which show the direction are not displayed. “Somewhere past Chicago, the maps cease to appear, eliminating even this abstract index of his spatial progression” and “the journey has taken him to an uncharted no-man’s land.”¹⁷



fig. 6

switchboard girls are working (13 : 02, fig. 8; this shot is the stock shot which is characteristic of B movies). For example, in the telephone exchanges with Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing up Baby* by Howard Hawks, in the normal classical Hollywood movie, his shot and her shot are shown in turn, and voices are covered over in each



fig. 8

shot. However, we don’t hear the conversation in *Detour*, but only the voice of the male chief character, and the figure of the lover can be seen, but we can’t hear her voice. We hear their conversation in this scene for the same quality with the voice-over of the male chief character. This sequence was considered to be a sequence of “lyricism like Truffaut” later (Combs 1982 : 146). The sequence is pitiful, too.¹⁸

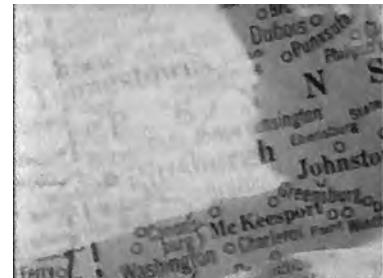


fig. 5



fig. 7

3.3 The allegorical reading of wanderings

How should we think about this strangeness that abstract screen space creates ? For example, it is possible to read this strange space as the wanderings that Ulmer really traced¹⁹ Ulmer with a real flesh-and-blood body went beyond the real borders of Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, the United States, and Italy. Of course, de-territorialization is not done necessarily for themselves because people survey the real geographic distance. In addition, de-territorialization is not done necessarily on the filmic text because it is performed at the level of the biographical fact. However, it is possible to read Ulmer's journey allegorically. How is the journey of the male chief character in this film accomplished ? Here, the weak points (conditions in the production involving severe low-budget) in the production of *Detour* are changed to an affirmative thing which maintains the film's strength. In other words, as mentioned above, the movement of the journey to be seen in this film is the movement of a journey that does not really move but seems to move on the seat of the convertible car fixed in front of the reflected screen in the film. The journey here is the "immobile voyage that stays in one place," enabled by a screen process, and "is only lives and is comprehensible as an intensity (to transgress the thresholds of intensity)." This links with the following sections.

3.4 The perverted road movie

Detour lets us feel the texture of a road movie. This is because we can see the image of the road, including the highway, behind the car, which the male chief character drives. However, the road which the male chief character travels in the scene depends almost exclusively on a screen process, although the scene in which the male chief character lets a woman ride with him in the neighborhood of the gas station is shot on location (32 : 32, fig. 9). Therefore, though this film lets us feel the road movie, as it is full of images of the road, the film presents extremely perverted aspects, such as the road movie where we cannot feel the road with the wind blowing and the sunlight glaring down.²⁰ (With regard to film history, the road movie appeared in the new American cinema period in the 1960s and has the characteristics of the anti-Hollywood classic period. *Easy Rider* (D. Hopper, 1969) is the landmark road movie. Therefore, though it is a little unreasonable to argue that *Detour* belongs to the Hollywood classic period as a road movie, we argue the film as a road movie in retrospect.) In addition, the scenery given by a screen process is located at the opposite pole of the thing which lets the viewer feel refreshed, and it is the "empty, immaterial wasteland" (Polan 2000:139) with the darkness and the "desert" (Bell 2000 : 224). This is consistent with "bleakness,"²¹ which is the imagined scenery of male



fig. 9

chief character²² and the general condition in this film.

3.5 The schizophrenic voyage

Things such as “sweat, a stubby beard, shyness, the anger” are seen in the expression of the male chief character as if he is suppressed by something big (Marcus 2006 : 133). The male chief character doesn’t hold the decided whereabouts as well as the other main characters (Britton 1993 : 182) and seems to be in the social minority. The man seems to be a person living in “the marginal world” (Naremore 1998 : 149). In addition, he is forced to live the other self of the man who has died accidentally and he continues the fluctuations in his own identity as if promoting that he lives in “the marginal world.” In other words, he continues having a gap of several folds in identity that he is himself.²³ Seen from here, the journey of this male chief character seems to be “the schizophrenic voyage (...) and ‘still clash each other, and be the voyage on’ the insignificant chip of wood between the waves pushing aside each other.”²⁴ This journey seems to be the journey of nowhere, that is, the world in which there is nothing and nobody. His journey is as if he is drifting in a nonsense world.²⁵ In other words, the journey will be to an anonymous place that is possible everywhere. The directional space of this film becomes the “passage” to tie a place and a place in the interval (Grissemann 2003 : 222). In such a strange space, the reality that is usually felt will surely fade. However, the touch of a different reality will be forced forth at the same time, and the excessive use of the screen process in the film as mentioned so far is right to enable the viewer to feel this touch.

However, such a screen process as seen in this film became outdated with the arrival of color film because color photography needed a great deal of light on the subject and because it tended to wash out the rear-projected image. Furthermore, the color image provides more visual information, which made it much more difficult to match foreground and background. Therefore, a technique to function as the rear projection was developed, and the screen process became outdated (Monaco 1977 : 108). In this way, the screen process is an extremely historic product, and such a screen process prescribed historically is used in this film.

Conclusion

At first glance, these scenes using rear projection look like a product of the too poor and childish machine parts and the unripe techniques. Seen from here, this film may hardly be able to be called a <work>. *Detour* has generally been mentioned with a negative evaluation because of the “poverty” surrounding this film, including production conditions. However, it reversely lets us feel that the work seems to be written only for one person, only for the person playing it, whenever we play it.²⁶ Therefore, the negative evaluation of this film must

be affirmatively reversed. Such severe <poverty> in production conditions can be made to transform into <the bold delicacy> of the filmic text. It is Jean-Luc Godard who thinks the film by Ulmer is not a work to be appreciated but a device to which we connect and an opportunity for our own transformation. Godard looked back on his own film *Alphaville* (1965) and said that the computer named "alpha 60" managing the function of the city called "Alphaville" in this film was not shot with a real super computer, but was shot with a small electric fan from Philips Corporation bought for \$3 by exposing illumination from under, and this was like a shabby papier-mache stage property. Such a posture is thought to succeed to Ulmer's B movie mind.²⁷ Certainly, the times catch up with the thing which was done under severe conditions before long, and the thing which is caught by the times becomes the technique; everybody can use it and it becomes the subject of appreciation. The shabby set and the technical mistakes that are seen in *Detour* are veiled and become the thing which is far from the harshness.²⁸

Furthermore, for example, as just mentioned, the driver's seat seen in the scene using the screen process in *Detour* seems to be mediocre at first glance. However, such <mediocrity> is the unavoidable gesture haunted to the rare posture of Ulmer, who produced many surprising films under severe conditions (this rare posture is the posture that can be called "the bachelor" (= le célibataire). He probably has ... the "weakness" ... "mediocrity (=la médiocrité)."²⁹

From the time when the woman the male chief character loves puts the plan to become a star in Hollywood into action, a gear begins to slip out of order in *Detour*. The story advances, emitting the creaking sound and turning, and this causes viewers to read this film allegorically. Indeed, Ulmer was in Hollywood at this time. However, he didn't belong to the big studio producing the gorgeous movie in which star actors appear. Ulmer produced the film in the B movie production company PRC in a place called Poverty Row, which is totally opposite of the big studio. He had produced a film in a big studio once at Universal, but it was a semi-major production and he had enough cinematographic ability to receive offers afterward. However, Ulmer said that he did not want to become "the Hollywood hash machine" and refused production in big studios. However, the desire, which may be said to be mediocre, to produce films in a big studio attacked him consistently. On the one hand, Ulmer didn't want to work in a big studio in Hollywood. However, on the other hand, Ulmer seems to be pleased by being able to work in a big studio.³⁰ Although such a posture seems to be contradictory at a glance, it is evidence of a rare position. It is a weak point that the rare position enabled him to continue producing film in an unbelievable way under unbelievable conditions and it is the mediocrity that should be congratulated.

Detour was released on November 30, 1945, in the United States, and in October 1946 in the U.K. The B movie production company PRC, which had supported his filmmaking in the middle period, was forced to change to the Eagle Lion Studio in December just after *Detour's*

release in the United States. *Her Sister's Secret* and *The Wife of Monte Cristo* were produced at PRC in 1945, but his PRC period ended with these two films.

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Notes

¹ Deleuze, Guattari 1975 : 129, dt.: 1976 : 98, : 1986 : 71.

² Deleuze 1983 : 223, dt.: 1989 : 220, : 1986 : 162.

³ In *Bringing up Baby* (1938) by Howard Hawks, a normal classic Hollywood movie, Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn (and her leopard) move by car. In this scene, the screen process is used as the standard. The movement by car (a screen process is used for a shot in the car) ⇒ car's collision ⇒ the movement by car (a screen process) ⇒ in the house to which they arrived ...

⁴ We cannot help remembering *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) by Jean-Luc Godard when we see the scene of this driver's seat using such a screen process in *Detour*. The car which Jean-Paul Belmondo drives runs into nighttime. The screen process used in the scene of this driver's seat is the screen process. In that the various colors go reflecting on the windshield, this color motion picture *Pierrot le Fou* departs from Ulmer's *Detour* and in Godard's film the scene of this driver's seat continues for a moment.

⁵ This scene isn't in the original script (Goldsmith 1997 : 134).

⁶ Deleuze said that front projection and rear projection will bring an intensive "time image" in substitution for a "movement image."

⁷ Syberberg 1980 : 86 zit., Deleuze 1985 : 345, dt.: 1991 : 427, : 1989 : 330.

⁸ Deleuze 1985 : 345, dt.: 1991 : 427, : 1989 : 330.

⁹ Deleuze assumes it as "other power." Deleuze 1985 : 345, dt.: 1991 : 338, : 1986 : 264. Deleuze said that the image includes "another type of image, implying 'slow, controllable movements' capable of bringing contradiction into the system of movement, or of Hitler-filmmaker." Deleuze 1985 : 345, dt.: 1991 : 427, : 1989 : 330.

¹⁰ Syberberg 1980 : 86 zit., Deleuze 1985 : 345, dt.: 1991 : 427, : 1989 : 330.

¹¹ Deleuze 1990 : 111, dt.: 1993 : 116-117, 1995 : 78f. In other words, this is "the beauty or the thought the image preserves." Why is "preservation" carried out? It is because both the beauty and the thought "exist only in the image, because the image has created them."

¹² For more about excessiveness in this film, see Kato 2010 : 57-97.

¹³ Godard 1980.

¹⁴ Belton 1983 : 141. For more about the discussion about masochism characteristics from the aspect of such a chief character, see Krutnik 1991 : 85, 127.

¹⁵ Belton 1983 : 164f. Also, see Humphries 2008 : 165-178.

¹⁶ Meisel 1975 : 148. According to Meisel, the "particular gesture of light, shadow, form and motion" to be referenced here defines his own director's soul. For more about an "abstract" world in this film, see Grissemann 2003 : 221.

¹⁷ Belton, Film Noir's Knights of the Road. in Polan 1986 : 271.

¹⁸ Therefore, about the communication of man and woman seen here, "the keenness of the communication" is mentioned.

¹⁹ For more about comparing the journey from New York to Los Angeles seen in this film to his biographical journey accomplished several years before this film was produced, see Tesson 1990 : 436.

²⁰ Wilson 1999 : 253.

²¹ Bleakness is the word used in various articles when this film is characterized. What makes this film true film noir is not things such as lighting, framing, the fog but this "bleak romantic sensitivity." For more about this, see Amini 1996 : 61. In addition, for more about the "minimalist bleakness" of the style of this film mirroring "its hopeless outlook," see Shadoian, 2003 : 25.

²² Therefore, for example, all in this film are interpreted as "a projection of hero's psychic disturbance"; see Manon 2008 : 114 ; Krutnik 1991 : 152-157.

²³ For more about the loss of everything, including "identity," see Buhle and Wagner 2002 : 331.

²⁴ Deleuze, Guattari 1975 : 129, dt.: 1976 : 98. For more about the nightmare that the male chief character dreams that has been characterized as "paranoid," see Selby 1984 : 29. "A psychopathological motive" in a genre of film noir is given to the character and it is some "evil" and is recognized as the thing that "the mental patient" has. For more about this, see Cowie 1993 : 126.

²⁵ Gallagher.

²⁶ Barthes 1982.

²⁷ Godard says that it is ideal to be able to work enough time with his own studio, but this has not been permitted. What was permitted was that Godard was "to be forced to work at the corner of his garage and the corner of workshop." Godard 1980.

²⁸ Benjamin 1977 : 683-701.

²⁹ Deleuze, Guattari 1975 : 129, dt.: 1976 : 98, 1986 : 70f.

³⁰ In the letter addressed to wife Shirley in New York from Hollywood dated July 1, 1941, Ulmer wrote that he was pleased with a contract with Paramount. Ulmer, Unpublished letter. zit., Grissemann 2003 : 157.

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