



## **A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE** **The Media are Stepping on Our Toes**

**JACQUES COULARDEAU**  
*Université de Paris IX-Dauphine*

Since I am going to take into account three works, the play, the film adapted from the play and also the opera adapted from the play (music by André Previn and libretto by Philip Littell), I definitely have to consider the problem of the shift from one medium to another, hence the potentialities and limitations each medium carries and implies.

### ***Theoretical concepts and approach***

To understand such a field we have to go back to Marshall McLuhan because he is the man who best theorized on the subject and can provide us with the most enlightening starting points and concepts.

#### ***1. Hot versus cool***

Working on and comparing a play and its cinematographic or operatic adaptations forces us to take McLuhan's approach of what he calls "hot medium" into account.

A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, "high definition." A cartoon is "low definition" simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.<sup>1</sup>

So a play is speech—hence cool—and it requires a lot of intellectual and mental work from the audience to fill in the information that is not given visually, but that is only alluded to or evoked by the text itself. That is at least what happens when you read the play. Yet in a way it is hot because of the setting, the costumes and the acting that give a lot to swallow, that bombards the audience with a lot of information that narrows the interpretation. And yet a play has one setting, at the most (if the production is rich technically, two or three settings, that is to say places). And yet these

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London: Routledge, 1964, 22-23.

places have to be specified by the text. We know that in Shakespeare's time, when there was no real setting, the location was specified by a sign put on the stage. It is even more obvious with time. We cannot shift time. We can only recall the past and evoke the future. A stage production is thus limited by its technique and though modern technology applied to a stage production today can enable the shifts in time and place, this is limited and necessarily heavy to manage on the stage. A setting cannot be changed instantly and the stage production must provide some scene that hides the changing of the setting, or this changing of the setting is done under the eyes of the audience that must enter a suspension of credibility to accept the change. Yet time and place have to be specified by the text.

A film is different because it bombards the audience with images and the editing of the film enables the director to shift from one place to another, from one time to another, hence to visualize all verbal elements that refer to the past, or the future, and to visualize all places that are alluded to in the text. The high realism of such images can directly specify the changes for an audience that has some "culture" in this field. At worst the new setting includes some linguistic or symbolic element that specifies the new place and the new time. The best example we can give is *Back to the Future* I, II and III. Each shift to the past or the future is visually identified and needs no linguistic identification, except for the exact date. A film is hot because of this heavy loading of information in the visual images themselves, and also because the shift is done instantly, in "real time" as they say in informatics, that is to say by the use of a particular editing technique called cut editing. You thus shift from one frame in one time and place to another frame in another time and place without any transition. The development of new editing techniques, particularly special effects—and those have tremendously multiplied with video technology and virtual editing—has made it possible to have a transition from one time and place to another using fade-in and fade-out editing for example.

I would like to enclose a note here on McLuhan's choice of terms. High definition and low definition come from photography, hence the cinema. A film is high definition or low definition according to the number of "pixels," the fineness of the grain or the graininess of the picture. The finer the grain, the higher the number of "pixels," the higher the definition of the picture. We know that a film has a higher picture definition than a video because video technology necessarily limits the number of "pixels," though now we have high definition TV, still it cannot compare with the cinema. Stranger is the choice of "hot" and "cool." We could even expect the reverse. When the audience has little to do to receive a picture we could think it is cool, they are cool, they just relax and enjoy. Here McLuhan uses "hot" to mean that relaxed and enjoying stance of the audience, whereas "cool" means a heavily active audience that tries to inject into the data they are given a great lot of data that come from their knowledge, their emotions and their culture, because all that is not directly specified in the medium. "Hot" was only the opposite chosen by McLuhan, always with an older meaning. When one is bombarded with information, one can exclaim: "Cool it down, man, this is too hot for me!" Those terms can be found with these meanings in the 1960s with expressions like "cool it" (to relax, implying an intensive activity that has to be reduced), "cool your chops" (to shut your mouth, to stop

bombarding someone with verbal data) or “hot wax” (a very popular phonograph record, hence engulfing the audience in immediate pleasure and transporting the audience into a world in which they were literally drowned).

An opera is even more complex because it is limited by the stage and its setting that have limited possibilities as for change, just like a play. But the music and the singing can introduce two elements that translate the atmosphere and the emotional context into auditory elements. The media of music and singing are very special in the fact that they use another language than speech (even singing for which speech, or rather linguistic elements, are nothing but its raw material) and this other language has its rules and its potentialities. The use of voices is also very important and potentialities at this level are great: soprani versus tenors or basses or other voices; one soprano versus another soprano, one tenor versus another tenor since two voices have their own particular harmonics even if they are in the exact same musical range. Composers have widely used these possibilities. Bellini in *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* has Romeo and Giulietta sung by two soprani, and their duets become perfect union in contrast with the tenor Tebaldo who becomes in the scenes where the three meet the disrupter, the destroyer of love, the outsider. This of course requires a great capacity at feeling such things first, at understanding such things second (literacy), and also at putting such elements into perspective with some culture that can see what was done before, what was done in the same period and what was done after. Such an approach of such effects is cool because it requires a high level of emotional and mental work from the audience. That explains why such operas are not “popular,” at least not any more, though they might have been very popular, hence a lot hotter, in older times in Venice or Naples or even Rome.

We have the same problem with music, and yet somewhat more complex. Music is not a simple one-sided universe, I mean it can be for a popular audience or for an educated audience. Popular music is hot in many ways because it does not require any mental effort from the audience: it is pure pleasure. On the other side learned music is a lot cooler because it requires a lot more mental work. And yet, for any audience a particular music can become hot in the way that it does not require any mental work any more, whereas a new type of music is then cool in so far as it requires a lot of mental work to be accepted. In popular music there are some strange moments when a new form of music becomes nearly instantly popular because it responds to some deep feelings in the audience: frustrations and expectations. Jazz was such a music in the United States in the 1920s, though this rapid propagation was only possible thanks to the invention of the microphone and of radio transmission.

## *2. Pleasure vs. comfort*

The second idea—based on psychological considerations by McLuhan—that comes from his thinking is that a medium that goes beyond the limits of a previous one, henceforth creates a double feeling both in the artist and in the audience.

In the physical stress of superstimulation of various kinds, the central nervous system acts to protect itself by a strategy of amputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function. Thus the stimulus to new invention is the stress of acceleration of pace and increase of load... Such amplification is bearable by the nervous system only through numbness or blocking of perception. This is the sense of the Narcissus myth. The young man's image is a self-amputation or extension induced by irritating pressures. As counter-irritant, the image produces a generalized numbness or shock that declines recognition. Self-amputation forbids self-recognition [...]. Whereas pleasure is a counter-irritant, comfort is the removal of irritants. [42-43]

The first approach that this principle gives us is that anything new in the field of arts introduces a pleasurable trespassing of some limits. The total visualization of events and places or characters in a film provides the author with the pleasure of going beyond the limitations of language, and the audience with the pleasure of not having to invest a lot of mental work to understand what the language means. A film is thus a hot medium for the author because it frees him of all kinds of verbal elements to specify places and times and for the audience because it prevents him from having to mentally visualize what is provided on the screen. It is completely different with an opera. Musical language (music and singing) is the translation of what the text contains into another "abstract" language that necessitates a certain level of literacy in this field and a certain level of emotional and mental reaction to feel and thus interpret this language. It is thus a cool medium. Authors and audiences project their feelings into the music and the singing but these feelings are based on past experiences of music and singing, of notes, harmony and voices. They constantly work by finding echoes in the consciousness or unconscious of the author, composer and audience. To translate emotions and feelings into auditory elements is hard work for the author and composer and to receive it is hard work for the audience. It also refers to a language that constantly changes through time.

The musical translation of feelings is not the same in Scarlatti's time, in Mozart's time and in Previn's time. Musical language varies with historical periods, and also with social backgrounds. Popular music is there, through centuries, to remind us that simple people use and understand music differently from educated people. The *bourrée* was a popular joyful dance in villages in the seventeenth century and even before. Bach borrows it to express something rustic and agrarian, in a way uncouth, in his music for the educated people of his time. Mozart will transform it into a very light and joyful rhythm still for the educated people of his time. Johann Strauss will transform it into a very light dance in the nineteenth century, the waltz, for the educated people of his Viennese salons at first, a dance that will become very popular later on. This example shows how a popular invention and creation that only brought pleasure to the simple people of the villages where it was invented became something expressing a completely different feeling for the educated audience with an evolution of this feeling from Bach to Mozart and then to Strauss, and then became something else for the popular audience again. Pleasure is a counter-irritant because the novelty does not cause a rejection reflex in the psyche of the audience. But pleasure varies from one audience to another, from one century to another. If the novelty were captured as an irritant it would be removed, and it is felt to be

an irritant if it causes the feeling of a loss of something. In a way Bach was very careful not to provoke such a reaction in his audience.

The artist finds new means of expression in this new medium, hence a feeling of pleasure, but may feel amputated of the old means, hence a feeling of frustration. The audience finds the same limit that is trespassed by the new medium and the pleasure that goes along with it, the pleasure of a discovery. At the same time the audience may find a loss in the new medium, the loss of an older style of expression and thus experience a feeling of frustration. We can note that in our case the theater audience that goes to the cinema to see the cinematographic adaptation of a play they know, enters this definition, whereas the cinema audience that does not know the play because they are not theatergoers, for instance, will only find the pleasure of the film. In the same way the theatergoing audience that goes to the opera will both feel a frustration and a new pleasure, but the cinematographic audience that does not go to the theater will have, with the opera, the same problem as with the play if they went to the play, because they will have to enter a medium that they do not know and they may feel irritated by the codes and language that are new for them in the play or the opera.

### *3. The medium is the message*

But we have to go even further with McLuhan:

It was René Clair who pointed out that if two or three people were together on a stage, the dramatist must ceaselessly motivate or explain their being there at all. But the film audience [...] accepts mere sequence as rational. Whatever the camera turns to, the audience accepts. We are transported to another world. [McLuhan, 286]

This means that a play that is adapted to the screen does not work the same way because of the medium itself. We are going to see that Kazan, who produced both the play and the film, does not use the technique of cinema to the full. Details will come and we will have to answer the question why.

In our particular case, we shift from a play that was performed in New York for a theatergoing audience, hence a limited and cultured audience that knew the various expressive means of this medium and its standard "reading" procedures, to a film that necessarily in 1951 targeted the wide public of the cinema of the time before television. This wide public had no dramatic culture since they did not go to the theater but only to the movie-theater. They had a good practice of cinema hence they could accept its language and its technical means of expression. The theatergoing audience of the play could only be frustrated by the film on one hand (because it would normally be hotter than a play and it would normally guide the audience into a predigested interpretation), and pleased by the new medium and its new possibilities, provided they accepted to shift from one to the other. The movie audience that did not go to dramatic theaters could not feel that frustration but could only be attracted by the new possibilities of the cinema, particularly the extremely realistic rendering of life, even in black and white, and the possibility to constantly go from one time to another, forward and backward, and from one place to another,

including imaginary or fictional times and places. This may have caused a feeling of loss, of severance from the real world, but this feeling was only transient since the audience knew they could go back to reality at the end of the film. The operatic adaptation goes even further since we shift from a stage production to another stage production that uses music and voices to translate emotions and feelings into something that can be heard. Such an opera can only target a limited audience, the audience that goes to the opera, partly the same as the audience that goes to the theater. But we must also see that the film has become a video or a DVD and the opera has become a video and they reach a very wide international audience of film lovers and opera lovers. This confronts a work of art that was produced for one particular audience, be it small or large, to audiences in other countries, in other cultural contexts and thus the perception of these videos or DVDs will be different again and will go into a process of pleasure and comfort, of acceptance and refusal, of self-recognition and self-amputation.

McLuhan's theory of the "global village" leads us to ever wider situations as for the reception of a work of art, as for the medium and its value for various audiences in the world. Particularly today when the "global village" is becoming a reality, even if it is contradictory and heavily inhabited with conflicts. It is on this basis that I am going to consider the play, the film and the opera.

### *The play*

I am going to consider a few elements in the play and observe how they are informed by the medium.

#### *1. Blanche's arrival*

The first scene, Blanche's arrival, is limited by the stage. We have her arriving directly at Elysian Fields. Nothing before. Thus Blanche has to explain, to us as well as to the other characters, what she has done, where she is coming from: "they told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields" [15]. The actors who are on the stage have to justify their being on this stage. But this very sentence gives us a frame for the play: desire, cemeteries that is to say death, Elysian Fields that is to say the abode of the blessed after death. Hence Blanche justifies her own presence here but also gives us the place where we stand and opens up a metaphor that can be seen, has to be seen, since nothing should be gratuitous in a play, as what the play is all about: desire leading to death or seen as the escape from death, and paradise beyond this escape from death into desire, or beyond this death. It is all in our culture. Desire. Death. Paradise. In our culture Desire and Death are connected, Desire being the little death, and desire leads to the seventh heaven. Banal. And yet a metaphor of what we are going to see. Stella's desire leading to the death of her culture with Stanley and yet leading to pleasure and eventually the paradise of a woman in motherhood. Blanche's desire leading to her first wedding that ends in death, and then leading to a dissolute life that ends in rejection, escape,

insanity, another form of death, and then the dream of a paradise, of a paradisiac death on the ocean in the arms of a young doctor who has the eyes of her first husband, and her being buried in the ocean, the big mother of us all, the final solace of life, the return to the womb of death, the womb of the mother. This very sentence can only be read and understood if we inject our culture. Cool indeed.

Then the discovery of the apartment and the shock of Blanche in front of its squalor is only shown with words like "this horrible place" [19] and the contrast with the family mansion conveyed by the name "Belle Reve," the very opposite of the squalor of this place that becomes contradictory to its name, Elysian Fields. The beauty of Belle Reve is only conveyed with words: "the plantation [...] a great big place with white columns" [17]. This only speaks to us through the images we can provide in our mind's eye, though the squalor of the apartment can be seen since it is the setting.

We really have an illustration of what McLuhan says about the theater: it works with words that force us to bring mental pictures into them. And the play has to give those words for us to understand the situation that cannot be understood at all with the sole consideration of the setting. Stella has then to come back home to meet Blanche, and Eunice has had to go to the bowling alley to tell her that her sister had arrived. We only have one setting so the action that does not take place on the stage has to be specified by the dialogue.

The meeting of Blanche and Stella leads to a summary of the situation for us to understand the complexity of it. The situation in Laurel and the situation in New Orleans. Blanche has to explain she has lost Belle Reve and she also has to become aggressive in a way to show us, this time show and not say, her extreme mental disturbance that had been announced with a sentence like "I've got to keep hold of myself" [18]. At this moment we have another element that comes into the picture: the acting of the actresses. The acting is not contained in the text but is entirely added to the text. It is supposed to reflect the text and to amplify the text.

In other words, in this opening scene, or in the few elements of this opening scene, we can see that the play only works with words and the text has to be explicit on every detail, though a stage production can visualize the setting, hence the squalor of the place, and the emotions of the characters through the actors and actresses' acting. We thus have a double medium. On one side the text that works through words, metaphors, contrasts, etc. On the other side the setting and the acting that visualize the content of the text, but within one setting. So the visualization can only concern the feelings and emotions of the characters, the relations between characters and nothing else.

We can add to this that stage directions must generally specify these elements or lead the acting and the building of the setting towards a precise goal. In Tennessee Williams's case stage directions are important and precise. The director, if he follows them, has little freedom. It is a particularity of this play, of this author who wants to inform the show as much as he can.

## **2. *Stella's escape and return***

A second example is the end of the third scene. It is easy to show the action of the scene and the way Stanley is out of touch with the people around him—particularly the women—because he is engulfed in his game and his alcohol. But it is very difficult to show the turning point in the scene and to dramatize the shift of Stanley's emotions and feelings from violence to love frustration. This is shown by some symbolical actions: the shower, the going away of the other men, the running away of Stella and Blanche to Eunice's, and finally Stanley's running out and his calling for Stella. Stage directions are very precise to inform the play, but the setting is also a great limitation to the show. We cannot see the shower scene because the bathroom is off limits. We cannot see Eunice's apartment, and the women in it, because, once again, it is off limits. We have to make do with that and the author and actors have to make us believe in what we can't see. So, at this moment the limitations of the stage put a strong emphasis on the acting: Stanley getting rid of the men who have showered him to sober him down; Stanley waking up from his alcoholic stupor and discovering Stella is gone; and finally his progressive change of mind that leads him to a feeling of guilt, a feeling of loss, a third feeling of contrition and repentance (is it repentance for his violence or repentance guided by his loss of Stella?).

The text expresses this acting in the lengthening of the last syllable of Stella's name and the use of capital letters when Stanley calls for Stella. The acting has to use voice levels and voice intonations. At this moment the play requires some real visualization of the divided and conflicting feelings in Stanley. At this moment we have to experience a hot moment on the stage when nothing else can be added, has to be added. We must experience these feelings with no mental effort at all. At this moment the text is entirely informed by the stage production and the text is minimal because the acting is maximal. This is amplified by the two-tiered setting with an upstairs and a downstairs. We understand now why it is essential that Stella and Stanley live downstairs. Stella can escape from Stanley's lower world to a higher world which is a refuge. But even more, Stanley can cry to the sky, that is to say to the upper floor, to recuperate his Stella and Stella can come down in a very majestic and dominating attitude to the lamblike and crying baby that Stanley has become, but also to the object of her desire because she and Stanley are going to be alone in their apartment (Blanche will stay upstairs for the night) and because Stanley's desire will be boosted by his sense of guilt (to make up for his brutality) and Stella's desire will also be boosted by her dominant position at this moment and by the certainty that she will get the upper hand. Strangely enough, at this moment, all this is expressed by very few words (a literary expression of all this would take pages) but by a lot of action and acting. The dramatic medium makes this possible.

## **3. *Blanche's confession***

Now I am going to jump to scene six, Blanche's confession of her "crime." Since it is a stage production, the scene has to take place in the apartment in the absence of Stanley and Stella. This creates an ambiguous situation between Mitch and Blanche. It comes right after the ambiguous scene with



the newspaper collector, a scene in which Blanche had tried to coo and woo the young man, yet ending with the final slightly mysterious remark: "I've got to be good—and keep my hand off children" [84]. We have seen her at work in such a situation and we have had a hint that she has a problem with young men. In fact the young man should be rather young, under age actually, because paper-deliverers and paper-collectors are very young in America.

But now we have Blanche with a man who is of age and who would be seen as a "beau" in her language and culture. At once, Blanche makes the situation ambiguous but she resists the consequences of this ambiguity and explains that she has to resist: "You know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost" [87]. Yet she leads Mitch into the bedroom and she starts courting him, with no innuendo at all for us who understand French, but as an ununderstandable double entendre for Mitch: "Je suis la Dame aux Camellias [sic]! Vous êtes—Armand! ... Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah, quelle [sic] dommage!" [88]. And her subsequent remark in English is a perfect anticlimax to this direct proposal that was not understood: "—I mean it's a damn good thing..." [88]. Then we just have small talk up to the moment she tries to know what Stanley says about her and she calls him rude and offending, going as far as to say "he hates me" [93]. Then more small talk about her age and Mitch's mother, which reveals Mitch's attachment to his mother and leads to the subject of loneliness. And this triggers the confession.

This confession will be in three stages. First her marriage and the discovery of her young husband's homosexuality. Then the events at the Moon Lake Casino. And finally the real cause of these events. This is only possible because this confession is not abstract and intellectual, but deeply felt and emotional. Blanche reacts to the situation by "giving away" some of her past, following Mitch's reaction, in a way. It is also punctuated with music (polka) in the second part till the end, and this music is triggered out by the noise of a locomotive approaching in the distance, outside. A stage production, in those days, could use sound and music because the recording of sound and music was possible and the playing of this recording on an amplified system on the stage was also possible. The first moment of the confession that ends with the discovery of Blanche's husband's homosexuality is amplified by the noise of the locomotive as if some kind of strong train of thought was going through Blanche's head. That will trigger the polka music and the second and third part of the confession. We must understand that in this first stage of the confession the young husband is presented as having "something different ..., a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking ..." [95]. He is thus described as different, but different as a poet, someone who has a greater emotional aptitude than normal people. And the discovery of his homosexuality is both clear and surprising, though it had been prepared by the word "effeminate": "the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years" [95].

In such a situation we may expect to see signs of shock in Mitch. But to avoid showing Mitch's reaction, Williams uses the noise and even the

headlights of a locomotive. This is a simple way with which we can change the atmosphere of a scene on the stage without any words. It is dictated by the stage production, the medium. But it also shows that Williams prefers a hot means that closes the scene up in Blanche's psyche to a cool means that would unfocus the scene. So Blanche can go on speaking about the next stage of this *ménage à trois* that stems from her discovery. Here again Williams uses music to change the tone and introduce the dancing scene. But he goes beyond by only using the recorded music. He identifies the music as "*the Varsouviana*" [96]. It is the transition to the dance-floor situation. We are only speaking of a past event without getting back to the scene and time of that event. Williams only uses the means he can use on a stage at the time of his writing to accompany the shift, but the shift has to be identified with a few words and the situation described for the audience. This scene leads to the drama, without any explanation, the running away of the young husband and his suicide, the description of this suicide and the quotation of what people said at the time. Everything is an attempt to make the tale very dramatic and vivid. But it is only a tale. We have to provide the visualization.

At this moment again we would expect a reaction from Mitch. But there is none, except of course his behaving and acting on the stage. Stage directions do not specify what he is doing and the director is free to direct his actor the way he wants. Was there any shock in the acting of the original production? We cannot know really. The passing to the third stage of the confession, and of the crime, is only conveyed by Blanche swaying and covering her face, a sign that she is no longer herself, that she is no longer in the present situation, but that she has moved into her past and that she is contemplating that past from her present or at least subsequent consciousness. She is like a charmed snake swaying to the Varsouviana and seeing visions and ideas. But she has to express them in words for us because we cannot project these ideas and images on the stage. And that is the third stage in the confession, centering on "It was because—on the dance-floor—unable to stop myself—I'd suddenly said—I saw! I know! You disgust me" [96]. It is a crime. Her husband killed himself because of her bigotry. But this bigotry comes from a deeper layer of her self, the deeper layer of her education as a southern belle with all the bigotry this education contains. She is at this moment entirely manipulated by her education, "unable to stop myself," by her dead southern society which sees homosexuality as a major crime against nature, religion and society. And this final element of the confession determines a last change in the scene. "And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment had there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle ..." [96].

This searchlight, that reminds us of the headlights of the locomotive between the first and second parts of the confession, this searchlight of her memory that makes her speak now is turned off by Blanche who wants to forget but will never be able to, by society which considers she is totally justified in her attitude, rejecting this un-humanness of this young husband of hers, this animality in Stanley that Blanche has abundantly described. We do not know what this event has produced in Blanche's life. But at this moment Williams guides us into the acting, on the stage: "Mitch gets up

awkwardly and moves toward her a little. The polka music increases. Mitch stands beside her." [96]. The music is not heard by Mitch, only by us and, on the stage, by Blanche. This is a convention which is perfectly understandable in a stage production, at least for an audience that is used to such time transfers carried by sound or light elements. But Mitch's attitude is not clear and we feel Williams is not clear about it either. He should be shocked by the homosexuality of the young husband. He is not. He at most should pity Blanche and try to console her, but in order to get out of this situation because Blanche has been soiled by her experience, at least in standard southern, Christian education and culture ("This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate," as Stella puts it in scene seven [102]). And yet Mitch does not react like that. We then remember his special attachment to his mother and we come there to a theme that is common in Williams's plays. Mitch is attracted by the episode more than dismayed by it, if not horrified, which would probably be Stanley's reaction.

And Mitch proposes to Blanche, kisses her and it is only when the kiss is over that the *Varsouviana* stops. The music becomes then more than just the recollection of the past by Blanche. It becomes the unifying element that enables this epiphany that is so improbable. To describe the dilemma and the "change" that has to occur in Mitch at this moment, for him to shift from simple freewheeling courting to a deeper involvement, we would need many pages. But here in the theater, this dramatic medium enables us to do it in a few minutes, with some sound and music, with a little bit of light and some simple acting that both takes us to the past, then to a posterior past when Blanche can assess the first past event, and finally back to the present and a strange development, only guided by a couple of words. It is also limited by the stage technology of 1947. Sound could easily be used at the time since records and sound-amplification already existed. But the lights were very poor at the time and the light effects were very simple and reduced to little. Williams leads us into this strange scene that implies a shift in time and place and that contains a complete change in emotions and feelings in the two characters with very few means, the means the stage had at the time. Words are there to specify the events, and sounds, music and lights are there to specify the epiphanic nature of the scene.

#### 4. *The end of the play*

In this perspective the end of the play is nothing but the undoing of every single element that has built this epiphanic atmosphere. Further revelations (words) from Stanley about the dissolute life Blanche has been leading in Laurel for several years. A further stage in the confession that becomes a rebellious and vengeful negative attitude in Blanche, with the sequence (over three scenes in the last section of the play) of "canary-bird" (from Stanley speaking of Blanche singing in her bath [98]), "flamingo" (from Stanley speaking of a disreputable hotel in Laurel [99]) and "tarantula" (from Blanche turning aggressive and vengeful [118]). The music (the *Varsouviana*), when it comes again becomes a torture and no longer a soft shift to the past, a torture that is rejected by others like Mitch: "What music? ... Are you boxed out of your mind?" [114-115], forcing her to pen herself even more up into her torturing past. And this *Varsouviana* finds a strong

competition in the jazzy blues that comes from the next-door bar and that represents the victory of the atmosphere and situation of before Blanche's arrival over the atmosphere and situation Blanche created by her sole presence, the never really expressed opposition of the rustic genteel old south as opposed to urban rough industrial city life. Life goes back to normal. The protected lights are little by little gotten rid of to go back to a blaring naked light that hides nothing. Even the fan is turned off when Mitch requires it. Southern gentility is replaced by bestial brutality in Mitch who wants to get what he has been deprived of all summer, or Stanley who rapes Blanche. But we must see that in the play those changes are not the result of individual shortcomings or decisions but always the result of a social game that turned sour. This is the meaning of the last sentence of the play: "This game is seven-card stud" [142]. It has been nothing but a game of poker, of this particular type of poker we call seven-card stud poker where some cards are dealt face up, hence known by the others. And the whole play was such a game where some things that should never have been dealt face up were little by little turned over so that their faces were up and known by everyone. This reference to a game in which bluffing is essential, is the only strategy you can use, points out that the responsibility of the crime and denouement can only be found in a game, in a social game, in the clash between southern gentility and human reality, between culture and desire, between desire and death which is only the other side of desire.

This very last sentence is absolutely essential to bring together the whole play, because it is a summarizing metaphor. Blanche is the victim of her own society, of her own education and of the clash between this social education of hers and the reality of social life and its modern development. We have here a play about the impossibility for a man or a woman to develop any kind of genteel feeling or emotion in a society that is based on bigotry and brutality. Death is the only recourse and insanity is the surviving form of death. Blanche chooses this exit and the rest of society pushes her into this blind alley because it is their interest: "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going" [133] as Eunice puts it. Society has to discard the dead wood of those who cannot survive or go on living in the rules and conditions that are imposed by the game that social life is.

### *The film*

From the very start Kazan uses the cinema to travel from one place to another.

#### *1. The opening sequence*

The first scene is typical. It starts in New Orleans station, with Blanche arriving, asking for information from a young sailor, getting it, boarding the streetcar named *Desire*, it is written on the front. Kazan shows the arrival of a woman who is at a loss, emerging out of some steam, and yet she behaves like a lady with the young sailor whose help she gets without really asking for it, just using standard gallantry procedures. And we can see this famous streetcar. Then she arrives at Elysian Fields and meets Eunice. The house

looks quite like the one described in the play, with a downstairs and an upstairs and with an outside staircase. New Orleans's French Quarter style is perfectly present, and we think it is real because we see the street, the neon signs, the agitation in the street, the brawl in a bar, the cars and the bicycles, and above all, pervading it all, the typical music that is performed in all New Orleans bars in the French Quarter. And what is even more important is the fact that the camera can follow Blanche. We are moving along with her. The static eye of the audience in a theater has become, thanks to the camera, a moving eye.

In fact this moving eye of the camera projects us into the picture, or rather into the situation. We are at the station. We are climbing into the streetcar. We are going along in Elysian Fields with Blanche. In fact most of the time we are facing Blanche and walking backward in front of her, as it were, except at some moments when we are nothing but a bystander watching her stepping on the streetcar, helped by the young sailor, and we are standing some short distance away and becoming the witness of the action, the voyeur of the events. This moving camera eye transforms each member of the audience separately and individually, into a witness-voyeur who follows the tracks of the character, of Blanche who is no longer an actress, but is a real person in real life. The camera can show us anything, we will recognize the situation, some times, and we will always accept it. The camera is a way for us to enter the picture and to believe in what we are shown.

But Blanche does not go into the apartment. She runs to the bowling alley and meets her sister there. The cinema enables Kazan to just jump from the house to the bowling alley. Standard change of scenery and place in the simple shift from one image to the next: cut editing. We understand, as it is standard in a film, that what comes second happens later in time. We provide the editing with the necessary mental movement that follows the action and follows time. The missing elements are not even really imagined because they are unmeaningful, they are useless for the meaning to emerge. Once again we follow the camera, but this time in time, and we take the film as describing events in their normal subsequence. This bowling alley scene and the meeting of Blanche and Stella there are a lot more spectacular than in the play and Blanche can have a look, from afar, at Stanley in the process of creating some animated rumpus on the bowling alley.

Then, once again, we shift to the apartment and the rest of the scene goes along as in the play. But there is a difference. The camera is not still and it can move. There are also probably two or three cameras and editing can paste together sections from any different camera, giving another characteristic of a film: the point of view is always changing in a way: focusing is different, distance is different, and angle is different. In this scene we have two women and the camera is most of the time showing a close-up of their faces. It follows them in the apartment. For instance, when Blanche says "I can't be alone," both women are sitting on the collapsible bed and the camera is centered on the top sections of their bodies. But Blanche then turns her head away from Stella, away from the camera, away from us, in a sign of shyness, fear and maybe some kind of guilt. Then she gets up and closes the shutters and we follow her in this movement, showing that she is

rejecting at this moment the outside world associated with a hotel that she has just rejected for her stay in New Orleans. Camera movement is definitely the essential meaning carrier.

Then when Stella has explained how she gets berserk when Stanley is traveling, Blanche stands up and moves away and says "I guess that is what is meant by being in love..." Kazan has three changes at once: a close-up view of her face, a change in tone and expression of her voice and a different music that has nothing to do with New Orleans Jazz. We know that the word that triggered these three changes is the word "love." We know Blanche must have a terrible secret. But Kazan is again going to use the camera to move us away from this terrible secret that has to do with love. The camera moves along with Blanche who goes back to Stella to tell her from very close a terrible piece of news and the camera closes up on Blanche's face with the back of Stella's head in the left foreground.

Then when Blanche announces that Belle Reve is lost, Stella is surprised: "How did it go?" Blanche repeats this and it becomes a strong protest and accusation from her: "You're a fine one to ask me how it went!" She stands up and runs out, the camera following. This enables Kazan to add a crushing train sound at this moment. The news is a crushing piece of news just because of this precipitous run to the yard and of the noise of the train going by.

From the very start then we experience the superiority of cinema to project us into the picture and the situation and to transform us into voyeurs and witnesses of events and feelings that can be easily identified and concentrated upon by simple camera movements. This dimension of the cinema is essential to understand the frustration of a theatergoing audience: no more distancing and we are so submerged by the images that we cannot think and one reading is imposed on us. But we understand the phenomenal success of this medium with the general public. Just play the game and follow the camera and you will know it all. Thrilled, the audience become voyeurs more than witnesses and this is achieved essentially thanks to the moving camera. This was not identified by McLuhan, but we have to add this essential element to his approach. The camera is our eye and through it we are taken along into a situation from which we cannot escape, till the end of the film. And the audience loves this total escape from the real world, especially in that case because it is the real world, it is real life, just embellished and made a little bit more pungent and less boring. That is also where the secret of this hot medium lies. It is hot. We are bombarded with data. And since we are following the camera, we are witnesses and we know because we were there and saw. This medium totally negates our mental power: we are only becoming a camera objective. We understand what McLuhan means when he says the camera is the extension of the eye. But it is a lot more than that. It is the extension of the eye and it negates the existence of the brain behind this eye.

## *2. The fight after the card game*

Kazan still uses the camera the way we have described before, following the characters, using close-ups and so on. But at the very end, after Stella is hit

by Stanley, outside and out of our view, the scene tells us something that only the cinema can do. First we do have the shower scene and Stanley is actually put under the water and we can see the change on his face. Then the three men are kicked out of the bathroom. We only see them coming out backward and hitting the door. Then the camera moves in a very creative way. It wants to show Stanley's sudden realization that he is alone, that the apartment is empty. This is done with the camera taking a long shot on the whole apartment, and Stanley crossing it. He looks lost in this vast space, lost, small and confused. He repetitively calls for Stella, finally moves to the phone, right in front of the camera, takes it and dials Eunice's number. It rings and there the cinema enables Kazan to move to the upstairs apartment where the three women are preparing for the night.

A scene has to be added here because Eunice has to answer the phone. The simple change from the downstairs apartment with Stanley dialing to the upstairs apartment with Eunice answering the phone tells us the person Stanley calls. Immediate understanding. But then Stanley moves out into the yard and the camera can focus on him and he calls for Stella. Eunice comes on the balcony and is captured from a low angle. She tells Stanley to go away. He does not. We move again into the upstairs apartment and the camera captures Stella who moves as in a dream, slowly, without a word, and her face radiant and nearly beaming with certainty. She moves to the door and we know what she is going to do. But this famous staircase scene is absolutely amazing. The camera and its movements are the only really expressive, directly expressive means used by Kazan. Low angle shot on Stella at the top of the stairs. Then he alternates high angle shots on Stanley and low angle shots on Stella. Stella is thus descending the stairs slowly and we see her going down in small successive episodes, in fact exactly four low angle shots on her from the top to the bottom of the stairs. The three high angle shots on Stanley see him little by little falling on his knees. The low angle shots give Stella a dominant position. She is the queen of the scene. On the other hand the high angle shots on Stanley make him appear small, crushed, reduced to a lamblike crying penitent and the meeting of Stella and Stanley, at the bottom of the stairs, Stanley on his knees, Stella on the last step, still dominating Stanley, with a low angle shot that increases Stella's domination and Stanley's penitence, becomes an extremely expressive scene in which no words are uttered.

If we follow our idea that we are made voyeurs and witnesses by the camera, we have to wonder here on which side we stand. Do we stand with Stanley and his lamblike penitence or do we stand with Stella and her final victory and domination? In fact the low angle shot and the movement of Stella, who bends over Stanley and caresses his naked back in a sensuous way, makes this sequence very ambiguous as for voyeurism. Who would we like to be? The repentant man who is totally dominated by the woman? Or the dominant woman who is sensuously answering Stanley, sensuously for herself because she is going to get what she wants, he is going to make up for his brutality, sensuously for him too because she is giving him what he wants, what is the very basis of his passion for her, but what is also the very basis of her passion for him. The image is nothing but an image but it is so much more powerful than all the words we can have.

Let's note though that the low angle shot is the vision a theater audience has of the stage production. In this scene Stanley would always be seen from the back. In other words with a stage production and its sole low angle vision, we can only project into Stanley and we have to identify with him, his remorse and his penitence. Stella appears as dominating and taking advantage of the situation. Completely different is the same scene on the screen because the alternating of low angle shots centered on Stella and high angle shots centered on Stanley enables us to see Stanley from the top of the stairs but facing the camera, facing us. We then have a different vision, a more human and sensual vision of Stanley and his guilty repentance. We can see his tremendous acting, expressing deep feelings of guilt and remorse. We can better identify with him because he looks so human in a way. But we can also identify with Stella because she also looks so sensual when she gets down the stairs with only one idea in her head: can I turn his repentance into some real deep love, can I use all the charm that is mine to bring him back into the steps I want him to follow, away from his macho violence, beer drinking and poker playing, though is it really realistic to ask a man to drop all that? We can in this cinema scene both identify the power of the woman after the violent outbreak, and the deep humanity that resides in a violent man and comes out after his violent outbreak. That explains very well why Eunice, and she knows a lot about life, stops Blanche who wants to prevent Stella from going downstairs to join Stanley.

This also highlights the "innocuity" of Blanche running down the stairs, in one single low angle shot, to check where Stella went. Her descent of the stairs has nothing spectacular and the spectacularity of Stella's descent was only achieved by the alternating low angle and high angle shots. The power of the camera is enormous at this moment. And the low angle vision of the theater audience appears as a tremendous loss in meaning and expressivity. It is scenes like that one that explain why the cinema is so powerful and why the theater will never be as popular as the cinema. I believe cinema is raw emotions with no distanciation between these emotions and the audience. I believe theater is necessary distanciation and reconstruction that require a lot of mental work. Cinema is hot. Theater is cool.

### *3. Blanche's confession*

This scene is essential. The setting moves to a bar with a band and Blanche and Mitch dancing. Then they get out on the terrace overlooking the river. But this scene is very different from the play. The first transformation of note is the cutting out of the second part of the French repartee: "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah, quelle dommage!" The scene not taking place in the bedroom and this sentence being cut off give a different image of Blanche. More romantic for sure, softer. She does not appear in any way as a forward lady. The small talk is less pregnant with meaning, with innuendo. The long criticism of Stanley is also cut off. It is practically reduced to "He hates me." Once again this change softens the play tremendously and the foretelling value of the play at this moment is erased nearly entirely. When the small talk turns to Mitch's mother, Mitch becomes mute and answers with nods. In other words Kazan



uses the possibilities of the close-up on the two faces. Let's note that Mitch from now on will stay on the left of the screen and mostly at a certain distance in the background. The camera in the first part of the confession gives a close-up shot on the two characters' top bodies and faces. The acting is then essential. Blanche's eyes are going up to the sky, where she had found the Seven Sisters some time before, those seven sisters who were hunted by Orion and finally transformed into stars to escape him. Her eyes close, move down, then up, then down, then turn to Mitch, close again, open. Her head turns right and looks into the distance, then back to Mitch, turns half away from him, then back and then look straight ahead.

The first part of the confession is totally transformed. No allusion whatsoever to any homosexuality in her husband: "There was something about the boy, a nervousness, a kindness, an uncertainty," and that is all. Then she explains he was weak, he could not keep a job, he was not able to take care of her. Hence he was the victim of himself, of his lack of social desire to integrate some money-making activity. He was in a way a-social. The responsibility, direct or indirect, of society is completely erased.

The camera moves at this moment and takes the two characters moving Mitch more into the background, behind Blanche. And Mitch does say something: "I don't understand." The camera moves back to the previous shot, Blanche gets up and moves away from Mitch, the camera only concentrating on her and only showing her back while she is crying, and Blanche finally answers: "I killed him," emphasizing thus her personal responsibility in the situation. The camera remains on her. She moves sideways, about three quarter back and starts telling about the Moon Lake Casino. She tells how she and her husband had been dancing. She turns around then, looks at the sky. And this short episode of the husband running away is concluded with a shot. She casts her eyes down and moves forward. Close-up on a silent Mitch. Back TO her. She looks to the right. Close-up on a silent Mitch. Back to her. She looks to the left (where Mitch is standing though unseen) on the word "because." She then moves back toward Mitch when she says the searchlight was "turned off again." She goes on moving and the camera shows new light for her concluding sentence about the episode.

Mitch has been in the back during this final stage of the confession. He gets up, comes up to her, hesitates and takes her shoulder, from the back, in his hands. "You need somebody. And I need somebody too." He turns her around so that she can face him and he adds, "Could it be you and me, Blanche?" He kisses her on her forehead, she says "oh," then he kisses her on her lips, and she says "oh," and she utters the last sentence in his arms, her head on his shoulder: 'sometimes—there's God—so quickly.' During this whole scene on the terrace the music was no longer the jazz music in the bar but some romantic music.

What can we do with this scene? First it completely transforms Blanche's personality. She is considerate, kind, soft and yet careful. She wants love, she kindles love in Mitch, and she recalls the past. But this past is sentimental more than anything else. She was young. Her husband was young. He was professionally unstable, unprepared. In fact they discovered love too early. She was not able to cope with this immature young husband

of hers and she makes a mistake that causes the suicide and the drama. At the time of the confession she accuses herself, showing how repentant she is and how sorry she feels. But it is too late. No social responsibility, no responsibility on the side of culture and education. Just immature lovers who make mistakes and cannot cope with the stress of life and the responsibilities it pours onto individuals. Suicide is a drama, not a tragedy. It is a tragedy in the play because it comes from society and hence is inescapable. Here it is a drama because it comes from individuals and it can be repaired, at least made up for.

But this scene, as it is, does not satisfy our frustration. In the play this confession is essential for the tragic dimension of Blanche's fate. It is a full story, in another place, in another time, and with an intensity that is both long in time and particularly gruesome in details. We are expecting a flashback that would give to this scene the inescapable value and strength needed to sustain the meaning of the play: individuals are the victims of society through their education, culture, bigotry and through society's rules that make life into a card-game. Here no bigotry, no wrong education, no moral or ethical pressure from society, no social dimension. It is not a game any more. It is just an incident, hardly an accident. Nearly nothing to mention.

The decision not to use a flashback goes along with the reduction of the scene to a sentimental episode, maybe even a "sentimentalese" episode. It has to trigger pity and interest in Mitch, but definitely not moral rejection. The scene in the play downplays Mitch's reaction, which is definitely underestimated. Mitch should have reacted more strongly. Here he reacts as a gentleman who tries to console Blanche for her unhappiness. Then we have to concentrate on Blanche's acting and on Mitch's reactions, including this essential remark of his that is added in this scene: "I don't understand." A flashback would concentrate on Blanche, her husband, his lover and the bigotry of society that gets the upper hand. The absence of a flashback concentrates on the sentimental exchange between Mitch and Blanche, provided the scene is cleaned up, and it is.

This approach leads us to the idea that the meaning of the play has been changed. We can of course wonder why. The cinema is a popular art in 1951, before television. It has to target a wide audience. Hence it has to avoid any difficult issue, and homosexuality is one of these. The scene has to be cleaned up. So the young husband cannot be "a degenerate." We are in the midst of a strong campaign in the USA and in Hollywood at the time, a campaign that will lead to McCarthyism. Any criticism of society is at once associated with communism and is rejected. This scene has to be cleaned up of this social criticism that is clearly stated in the play in the form of the rejection of bigotry as a lethal attitude able to cause the death of one of its victims. To give a testimony of the atmosphere of the time let me quote what Hillary Rodham Clinton says about President Truman:

President Truman took up the cause of universal health care coverage as part of his Fair Deal and included it in his campaign platform in the 1948 election. He, too, was thwarted by well-financed and well-organized opposition from the AMA, the US Chamber of Commerce

and others who opposed national health insurance on ideological grounds, suggesting it was linked to socialism and communism.<sup>2</sup>

Here, it is clearly cut that the medium is the message, that the medium, in its technology and in its targeted audience, dictates the content of the message. The film reflects this dependence of any message in US society on ideological as well as technological criteria. Here the technological possibility of a flashback is rejected because of the targeted meaning that has to correspond to the targeted audience and to the censors in society that look after the necessity in their thinking for the American people not to be in any way exposed to and under the influence of anything that could question the fundamental ethical and social principles of American society. We are dealing here with preventive ideological struggle, in other words, the Cold War.

#### 4. *The end of the play*

Right after the previous scene the film adds a short but apparently insignificant scene, and yet it is essential. It is a fight between Mitch and Stanley on their factory floor, with all the men around, about Blanche. Nothing is clear and nothing has to be clear about this scene. But the mediatic function of it and the mediatic effect of it is to reduce the last part of the play to a fight between two men for one woman. Stanley is trying to break her mask and Mitch is still trying to retain this mask. This added scene puts the next scenes into perspective, particularly the birthday party before which the troubled period in Blanche's life is brutally revealed: a dissolute period of several years. Stella resists this knowledge, though she knows but she sticks to her sister and defends her.

After this failed birthday party Blanche is confronted to the arrival of Mitch who does not try to apologize for his not having answered her invitation, but is aggressive and tries to get what he has been deprived of all summer long. She gets rid of him by shouting in the street. Later on she has to confront Stanley who is back from the hospital. He is obviously slightly soused and Blanche is daydreaming, at least, if not clearly ranting and raving, about a cruise on the sea and an apologetic visit of Mitch. Stanley easily sees through this stance and Blanche tries to escape, to run from the apartment and her great fear and aggressivity towards Stanley more or less leads Stanley into becoming aggressive. This will lead to her being raped by Stanley. Blanche's fate is then sealed: she has to go, she has to be institutionalized. She lives in a dream. This quick summary is there to show how the play is reduced to this fight between these two men.

This leads us to the very last scene, to Blanche leaving Elysian Fields. Stella and Eunice have made her believe that Shep Huntleigh is coming to take her on a Caribbean cruise. In fact a doctor and a nurse arrive to take her to the state hospital.

This last scene reveals what I am inclined to consider as merely a sign of sloppiness. Blanche asks for her seahorse brooch and fake violets. Stella

---

<sup>2</sup> Hillary Rodham CLINTON, *Living History*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003, 145.

gets them but Blanche does not put them on. It is incredible that she does not put on these jewels to go on her Caribbean cruise with Shep Huntleigh. And nothing in the shots is done about this detail. Thus it is insignificant for the story. It is only significant about the directing. Is it a mistake of the director or is it a mistake of the script-girl? We will not know, except that this detail is there to be seen and it reduces, in a way, the at least neurotic crisis Blanche is going through. In such a crisis such details become essential for the person who is going through the straits of mental disorder.

She goes out and meets the doctor. Kazan indulges in a close-up shot of her face emphasizing her eyes and her face expression when she says: "You are not the gentleman I was expecting." And Kazan uses an echo for the first time, getting into Blanche's mind seen as a vast empty echoing hall. She runs back into the bedroom and the echo is going on for the next sentences said by Stanley ("Forgot something Blanche?"), by the nurse ("Hello Blanche"), by Stanley ("she said she forgot something"), by the nurse ("That's all right"), by Stanley ("What did you forget Blanche?") and by the nurse ("It doesn't matter"). This echo tries to make us enter Blanche's mind and see the scene from Blanche's point of view. It also tries to imply, heavily, that Blanche is out of her mind, that she has become insane.

At this moment Stanley grabs a Chinese lantern in the bedroom and says: "Do you want the lantern?" holding it out to Blanche. She grabs it and the nurse grabs her and the fight begins. Mitch tries to intervene but he is stopped by the others. And the camera focuses and literally freezes on Stanley and his two buddies, Steve Hubbell and Pablo Gonzales, staring at him in a look that definitely seems angry, even maybe hostile. The camera shifts at this moment onto the doctor and Blanche on the floor strongly held by the nurse. The doctor is calm, peaceful and extremely polite. He rejects the straight-jacket and he has Blanche released after addressing her by name. Then, and the camera focuses on all these small moments with a high-angle shot that makes Blanche appear as helpless under the power of the doctor who dominates her in the picture, the doctor holds out his hand to Blanche, helps her up back on her feet, takes off his hat to greet her, gives her his arm for her to hold on their way out and she grabs it genteelly saying: "Whoever you are, I've always depended on the kindness of strangers." And then they go out.

All that is quite similar to the play. But the film is a lot more powerful because of the way the cameras are used: close-up shots, high angle shots, etc. The picture can become so intimate, so close that we are literally inside this picture. Instead of the constant low-angle vision of a member of the audience in a theater, the camera can bring us right into the situation. The meaning of all this is of course what we have said before: Blanche is insane and has to be institutionalized, society is not concerned at all because it is a conflict between people, especially a conflict between two men concerning one woman. But this meaning is emphasized by the last sequence of the film in which something is subtracted and something is added.

The last sentence uttered by Stanley in the play, "*The game is seven-card stud,*" is cut off. No mention of a game, no mention of rules which would imply that there is a social convention behind, at least some social organization among some people who have to accept the rules for the game

to work. There are no rules any more, there is no game any more. We are living in a wild society where individuals follow their own courses and have only one objective, survival, and one method, violence. But the film adds an essential sequence. Stanley tries to grab Stella by the waist at this moment. Stella rejects him and says, fronting the camera, hence making Stanley secondary in the picture: "You touch me! Don't you ever touch me again!" We move to a street scene. We hear a baby crying. Stella goes to the perambulator in the yard and picks the baby. At this moment, and that reminds us of the end of the third scene of the play, we hear Stanley in the apartment calling for Stella: "Stella! Come on Stella!" Stella mutters something essential: "I am not going back again. Not this time!" and runs upstairs to Eunice's, while Stanley calls for her two more times. She runs upstairs in a low angle shot, and that reminds us of the very careful and long sequence when she had come down the stairs when called for by Stanley at the end of scene three. A completely antinomic vision.

This last scene is only possible due to the editing and the swift movements of the cameras and their focusing on one element rather than another. This is only meaningful for the audience because the audience is transported into the picture by the cameras and always put in one position: that of the two buddies staring at Stanley, that of Blanche crushed down on the floor, that of Blanche going out grandiosely with the doctor, that of Stella grabbed by Stanley and rejecting him, that of the baby and his mother, that of Stella running away upstairs.

This ending multiplies and magnifies the importance of the change in meaning of the film as compared to the play. This last scene concentrates entirely on individuals, but opens some hope in a situation that looks absolutely hopeless. The hope that appears here is that Stella was convinced by Blanche's ordeal that she had to do something to change her situation, that she had to put her foot down for her no longer to be this man's slave. Society is pervaded with violence but the only way out is individual. Society itself is not at stake, only the individuals in that society. And only personal and individual efforts can change things. No one can expect anything from anyone in society. Everyone is alone and if one cannot fight back, then one will be crushed by the more powerful ones. The only rule that appears here is not a rule but a fact: we are living in a jungle and the strongest animal always has the last bite. Yet there is a gleam of hope in some women who can learn how to resist the call of the jungle when they have a baby, when they reach the state of motherhood.

All the facts and elements I have considered in this chapter show how the medium and its targeted audience in a particular historical period and context inform the message, impose onto the message some limits and some shape. The cinema is a gregarious medium and the viewers becoming voyeurs are able to identify with the situation, and are unable to distanciate themselves from what they see. The cinema thus becomes very manipulative in such a context. A manipulation that makes some ideas obvious because you have been projected into situations that convey these ideas, but also a manipulation that makes navigating in these images as a voyeur extremely pleasurable, hence the general public do not feel any frustration, any amputation in front of a film like this one, but sheer pleasure. "Whereas

pleasure is a counter-irritant, comfort is the removal of irritants." When we go to such a film we do not need any comfort because there cannot be any irritant due to the extremely high level of pleasure of voyeurism. We can also see that the theatergoing audience who are expecting some distancing and some reflection on social facts or cultural facts will be highly frustrated with this film. They will not be able to counterbalance their frustration with their pleasure (brought by the cinematographic technology). So they will have to look for comfort. The simplest comfort will be to say that a play and a film are not the same things and that a play is better than a film. This is pure intellectual comfort but it does work with many theatergoing people who rarely go to the cinema. Another attitude will be the same with a different conclusion: the cinema brings a voyeuristic pleasure and the theater brings a distancing reflection and more intellectual pleasure.

### *The opera*

I haven't seen the opera in San Francisco. So I have no experience of receiving the show from a low angle. I only know the show through the video production of it, which means through various camera movements and effects that can be very similar to those in a normal film. But what is captured by the camera is a stage production. We thus have an ambiguous medium: the raw material is a stage production and the shooting and editing are typical of video art or the cinema. I will concentrate on what we can consider as typical of the opera, with eventually some elements typical of video art. I am interested in showing how the opera medium modifies and informs the play itself. The first element we must take into account is that the music is composed on the basis of a libretto and this libretto takes some liberties with the play itself, though remarkably few, altogether.

#### *1. The arrival*

The musical Overture is played while the video gives the credits and while the camera is moving around on the set, concentrating particularly on the staircase. The camera is trying to be the eye of the audience, to look at the stage like a member of the audience. At the same time we have to say that this video targets the international audience of opera lovers. The result is that the text is given all through the opera as subtitles to enable anyone to follow the singing.

The opening scene gives us the characteristics of the opera as a stage production in 1998. An opera stage is more imposing than a simple theater stage. In this case the building with the two apartments and the staircase can rotate on the stage. At the beginning it has been rotated back to the left. On the right another housefront appears like a skeleton-looking facade and this gives us a central opening going to the back of the stage, a rather misty space all pervaded with blue light. It is in a way a vision of the street. We must understand at this moment that in 1998 all lights were computerized and could be changed in a few nanoseconds. We could have tens and even hundreds of lights, some motorized to change their direction when

necessary, and one light effect could be changed into another light effect in real time, that is to say practically instantly.

Through this opening in the center of the stage, Blanche arrives, all dressed in blue, and she sings. The libretto is very close to the play at this moment. Blanche moves to the front of the stage and behind her the house rotates back in place, facing the audience, closing the central opening and hiding the other silhouetted housefront, the downstairs apartment opening to the audience, the front wall missing but this is a convention and the audience accepts this invisible wall that will not be crossed, except in some special occasions. We will see that later.

Another change of course is the fact that this video is in color. Colors are very symbolical of personalities and atmospheres and are calculated to be so. Another convention in this opera is that all unnecessary actors are cut out. An opera is so expensive that, except in superproductions, we only have the singing characters. This has the effect of concentrating the show on these characters, with no walk-on parts to deconcentrate our attention.

In this opening scene, when Eunice has left, Blanche looks at herself in a mirror and the libretto adds an important sentence: "I look so old! I look so old!" This at once gives us a detail that was not really emphasized, at least so early in the play: Blanche's age. We also discover a convention in an opera. To emphasize a sentence or a word the music can either repeat it, or detach it from the rest of the text, or use some singing technique that looks for a note that catches our ears by being long, or modulated, or for an interval that has the same effect. If we believe Alain Daniélou, intervals are the source of our emotions, not notes. Here the libretto writer adds another element. This repeated sentence opens onto "Keep hold ... keep hold of yourself ... Keep hold." The play had: "I've got to keep hold of myself!" We can see the variations: the threefold repetition of "keep hold," the embracing first and third instances, the shift from first person to second person. She is talking to herself in the mirror, she distanciates herself from herself. This repetitive device is used extensively in the opera. Later on in the same scene Blanche will say: "I can't be alone. I have to be with somebody. I can't be alone." The reason of this embracing repetition is the same as before.

We must here qualify André Previn's music. It is modern. He uses a lot of high rises and high dives, as we say in phonetics, making his singers go up or down, to their top notes or their bottom notes with rather big intervals. He does not hesitate to use minor intervals when he jumps or dives to an extreme note to emphasize the effect, the surprise, the emphasis this interval represents. It brings out some words, generally at the end of a sentence or a period. At the same time he does not use the classical Italian technique of having a lot of variations on one syllable, on one vowel. He works on words and sentences and not on individual vowels (only vowels enable rich variations, consonants used that way give a stuttering effect that has been used by Purcell in *King Arthur* for example to evoke frost and shivering. We also have to say that the libretto is in prose. There is no obvious linguistic rhythm or rhyming patterns. Some may be artificially created here and there with a repetition, but the language is not that of a song. The music hence has to follow the prose of the libretto. This makes for a surprising sort of music at times, certainly no easy arias.

Yet Previn can use some variations on a vowel from time to time. In this opening scene he uses it when Stella speaks of Stanley's absences. She says: "I cra-a-awl up on hi-i-is lap." This is rather exceptional and it is always expressive: it expresses here the feeling of loss during the absence and the feeling of resuscitation she experiences when Stanley comes back.

At this moment a strong change in the music introduces the story about the loss of Belle Reve. And here again some changes are introduced to fit the music, or a musical production. The tale is shortened. It probably isn't that important after all. But let's look at some changes. When Blanche speaks of Margaret the play says: "Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in the coffin: But had to be burned like rubbish!" The libretto says: "Margaret, so big with it, she could not fit in her coffin. She had to be burned like rubbish." We note the use of feminine personal pronouns and possessive adjectives instead of "it." The sentence hence flows better. But a strong emphasis is put on "like rubbish" that contrasts very much with the feminine third person. The music becomes more dramatic with the use of percussions and the singing dives as low as possible for the singer, as if her voice were coming from deep in her body, or maybe from deep in a grave. Then some dying relatives say in the play "Hold me!" This is emphasized by being tripled in the opera: "Hold me! Hold me! Hold me!" Further on Blanche says in the play: "thinking I let the place go! I let the place go?" We have in the opera: "that I that I let the place go." The emphasis in the play is a strong stress on the second "I" and a change of intonation from exclamative to interrogative. This cannot be used in an opera. So the emphasis is put on "I" by repeating it but not alone so that we have the repetition of the beginning of the clause. And the libretto writer adds something in the text to conclude this evocation: "The Old Grim Reaper put up his tent on our doorstep. Belle Reve was his own headquarters."

This whole scene was concentrated on the apartment thanks to the lights on the stage and the camera angles in the video. At this moment the lights come up outside the apartment, enough for us to see men coming to the house from behind, like silhouettes through the transparent backwall, and then the four men appear in the yard and the lights are on them. An opera, like a play, uses the lights to concentrate the attention and the eye of the audience on the important element. In this small sequence of the yard, another emphasizing element is introduced by Previn. He will rarely, though always effectively, use it in the opera: Steve Hubbell answers Eunice not singing but only speaking: "Goddam it Eunice. Do you want it in the newspaper?" and he is going up the stairs, thus underlining what he has just said by his movement.

A last remark on this scene is necessary. When Stanley "makes himself comfortable" by changing his T-shirt, the opera makes that scene a lot more provocative to Blanche than the play, though the camera cuts part of it off the video. Stanley takes off his grey T-shirt parading in a way in front of Blanche, and Blanche is obviously interested. Then he moves into the bedroom to get a new T-shirt, as red, as bright and as tight as possible, using both the color and the tightness to emphasize Stanley's physique and his exhibitionism. Then he comes back into the kitchen and to tuck his T-shirt into his pants, facing the audience, and Blanche discretely observing,



he opens his pants wide, tucks his T-shirt in deep and then slowly closes his pants and zipper. This part of the show, of what we see is there to emphasize the ambiguity that is going to emerge from Blanche's staying in their apartment. The play had been lighter at this moment, the film too. The stage directions in the play are reduced to "He starts to remove his shirt." Then the rest is open to the director's imagination. It is true that Williams had presented Stanley extensively in this carnal pride just before in some of his stage directions: "Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes..." the word "implicit" is a little bit surprising. Williams probably meant that it was always visible. So the opera director makes it "explicit."

The last words of this scene are Blanche's when singing about her husband: "He died," in a low voice, nearly a cappella, without any music, nearly in the silence of her mind, and then the music starts again for an intermezzo before the second scene. At this moment the camera concentrates on Previn conducting the orchestra, while, we can guess, the stage is being prepared for the next scene.

We can see here how stage technology in 1998 is improving a lot of things in the show with better and richer lights, with motorized pieces of the setting, etc. This gives the show a more attractive and entertaining look and feel. But this particular adaptation reveals that the music can be used to emphasize the text or some situations, along with the acting and the singing. But all together this scene does not bring a lot of new elements, but the elements I have picked out show how the medium is used to enrich the text with three languages: body language, musical language and sung language, i.e. acting, music and singing. The last two require some literacy in the field because, even if you may experience strong emotions, and normally you should, it is not quite enough to see and understand what is guided into your consciousness. Emotions are subliminal, whereas meaning has to be constructed in consciousness. The text also has to be adapted to the singers' physique. The allusion to Stella being plump and Blanche not having gained a single ounce in ten years is erased from the libretto because Stella is skinny and Blanche plump on the stage. We could also note that Stanley has to have pumped a lot of iron to have his beefed up physique (even more than Marlon Brando's) that he parades in this first scene. Here the singer has to fit the role he is supposed to play.

## *2. After the poker game*

At this moment of the opera we are rather surprised by the simplification the opera brings to the text and by the mostly visual treatment of the situation. The radio incident is reduced to one: the radio is thrown away, through the main door, directly on the first attempt. Stella is slapped in the kitchen in front of the men and audience. Then the three other men take over, take him to the bathroom where he is given a shower, off limits for the audience. This scene is extremely rapid. They bring him out. Steve Hubbell throws him on the bed and then Mitch takes over and pushes the men out of the apartment through the front door. At this moment the house starts turning for the rest of the scene to be played on the stairs, at the foot of

the stairs and with lights only on these stairs. Stanley leaves the bedroom directly through the invisible front wall and walks to the foot of the stairs. The light is some kind of grayish blue, very weak in a way though with some extra light on the characters.

Eunice comes down halfway and refuses his demand for Stella to come down. She has very strong words and finishes with "You stinker." Stanley calls for Stella, still singing, and then he just yells "Stella! Come on!" And this is the beginning of the staircase descent. Stella appears at the top and comes down slowly. The music changes and becomes more romantic, sexier. It creates a different atmosphere which means to be sensual. Stanley kneels down and Stella finishes her descent. She leans over Stanley, two steps higher than him, actually the two steps that put the yard and the apartment higher than the stage, so just after the end of the banister. The position is exactly the same as in the film, though Stanley is dressed more decently and the couple is captured sideways. They embrace and Stella always dominates. The camera gets the picture from a low angle and the only impression we have is that of Stella's domination. Stanley says at this moment "Stella! Don't you ever leave me baby!" and he carries her into the apartment in the traditional way a newlywed husband is supposed to carry his wife over the threshold. But the end is a complete blackout. So we do not see at all what is happening on the stage after Stanley has lifted Stella up. The music is also different and powerful with the timpani and a trumpet. There is an attempt to show Stella's victory more than Stanley's. She is the one who brought him back to normalcy through her sensuousness exciting his desire. That's probably why this scene has been tremendously shortened and simplified with considerably fewer words because the meaning is essentially carried by the staircase, Stella's descent and Stanley's submission to her power, even if he is the stronger one who carries her home. This final music continues directly into the intermezzo that will open onto the last scene of the first act, the morning after.

This shortened scene is a lot more effective than the long discourse in the play because here again there are few words, but simple situations and simple acting to express a complex meaning. Blanche's discourse is reduced to a chain of words dramatically emphasized by the music, but with Stanley standing in the kitchen and listening to it all, his shirt widely open on his chest: "Bestial! Subhuman! Animal! Ape! ... King of the jungle! ... A party of apes!". Then we have a short musical transition with the cello, just like a call for Stella to wake up, and she discovers Stanley. She has been singing a wordless song all along and she goes on, in spite of her visible surprise, and moves to him and starts caressing him and then embracing him. During that time Blanche who is sitting on the bed, her back to the kitchen summarizes her discourse in a simple sentence: "Stella, there are other kinds of people." She will repeat, kind of absentmindedly, "other kinds ... other kinds," and she turns her head and sees Stanley. She is surprised but he is not. He just looks at her with the face of a righteous person who knows his tremendous power: desire. He has turned over the situation at the end of the staircase scene: he controls Stella with her desire for him, obviously shown as being a desire for his body, his animality. And Stanley grins at Blanche broadly, to let her know he does not care what she thinks.

This moment in the opera shows how strong the medium is: music and visualness enable the composer and director to show things instead of explaining them in words. The music and the singing create an atmosphere and here depict a conflict between Blanche's ideas about men who have to be civilized by women, to be educated by society into some gallantry and Stella and Stanley's lifestyle in which desire is more important than any abstract ideas. Desire is a complete world in itself that excludes all other considerations. The music gives this feeling of totality to such emotions, such concepts that are felt, first of all, as emotions. Music is an inescapable medium. If you enter it you are absolutely imprisoned in it and you have to follow its logic. When this music is associated with acting, and eventually words, that specify the atmosphere and the emotions, hence the meaning, the artistic medium closes itself onto the audience who are supposed to entirely withdraw in it.

We saw that the cinema uses the camera to project the audience into the film as voyeurs or witnesses. Here the music attracts us into a complete set of feelings and emotions that pen us up completely. There is no possible return from this trip, whereas with the cinema there is an end, the end of the film, the word THE END on the screen. You can carry the music away with you, because anyone is able to remember some music and even sing it, or hum it. It is an emotional experience that you can revive easily in your memory. This of course implies that the audience is composed of people who have the ability of feeling emotions coming from music and remembering music long enough to take it away with them, in their heads. And I insist on the originality of remembered music: it lives in your head, you can hum it and sing it, you can reproduce it yourself, you can even—if you are a musician—play it, on a piano for example. You can never do that with images. The musical medium is an actively lasting medium.

### 3. *Blanche's confession*

Though in most of the scenes we have seen the libretto is shorter than the play, this second act offers some important added material. First Blanche, before the visit of the newspaper-collector, sings an aria on her mood at the moment. "soft people have got to shimmer and glow soft colors, the colors of the wings of butterflies and the rainbow. And the light may be softened by the placing of a paper lantern. But soft is not enough, soft is not enough. Attractive and soft turns the trick. I am fading ... fading away little by little, day by day by day by day."

This aria is thus situated between her revelation to Stella that she wants Mitch and her revelation to us that she knows how to go about conquering a man—the newspaper-collector—with a few words. She demonstrates to us what she means by "attractive and soft" and we understand that she is "fading" because she is deprived of love. Then the scene of the confession arrives. It takes place in the apartment, even in the bedroom. The situation is thus very ambiguous and the small talk between Mitch and Blanche becomes very serious. Blanche starts her confession with the sentence "And I lost the person I loved." We must note here how the original sentence, "and the person I loved I lost," is transformed so that the

construction is different: the word “the person” is embraced by the two verbs “I lost” and “I loved.” This is dictated by the phonetic echo present in those two verbs, all the more because they are semantically antagonistic, but also by the music that requires some balance in sounds, some rhyming elements to support the notes themselves and the rhythm.

But the confession is interrupted here by a rather long, and very serious, aria by Mitch about “love, true love.” He appears very intense in his belief that love is something pure and that you have to follow it without hesitating in any way. This aria prepares the real confession that is to come.

This confession is divided into three parts, as in the play. The first part is the wedding and her discovery of the homosexuality of her husband. The description of the boy is also changed slightly, in the order of the words, to fit the music better: “There was something different about the boy, a nervousness although he was not the least bit effeminate looking. Still the thing was there, tenderness. That thing was there.” She was sitting on the bed during Mitch’s aria, and she gets up at this moment and she moves forward to the audience, then she goes through the invisible wall and goes down the two steps to the front section of the stage for the rest of the scene. When she comes to the end of the first part of her aria, to the phrase “his friend for years,” the music stops and this phrase is sung *a cappella*.

Then for the second part of the confession ending with the suicide, Blanche moves to the left of the stage still in the front section. Mitch follows her in the apartment and finally sits at the kitchen table. We cannot see this on the video because the camera is focused on only Blanche for this second part. We rediscover Mitch, sitting at the kitchen table when she sings the word “a shot.” The dramatic intensity of this section is present in the music that underlines this dramatic moment with cimbali and other powerful instruments. When Mitch gets up, he starts moving forward and stops at the top of the two steps. The last sentence of the second section of the confession, “the back of his head had been blown away” is once again sung without any music, *a cappella*.

She starts with the third part of the confession, with what she told her husband on the dancehall. It becomes “I know! I saw! You disgust me” instead of “I saw! I know! You disgust me!” The change is insignificant musically but it is very significant as for the meaning of the words. “I know!” is entirely contained in her. “I saw!” is turned towards the outside world, towards her husband whom she can see. “You disgust me!” is the result of this outward movement: the accusation, the rejection she throws at him. This sequence is more expressive of something coming from inside and being thrown at the husband. This is emphasized by the acting and the singing of Blanche at this moment which is extremely emotional and she uses her arms very effectively pointing at the imaginary husband she has in front of her, moving fast on the proscenium, and holding her head with both arms as if she were becoming crazy, as if the whole drama were happening in her head. Mitch intervenes with a remark (“Blanche you need somebody and I need somebody too. Could it be you and me?”, Blanche turning around to look at him and then back to face the audience) that enables him to enter the end of the aria by going down the two steps, one at a time and slowly, the first one when Blanche sings “had been turned on” and the

second when she sings “was turned off again,” speaking of the “searchlight” that represents the brilliant vision she had at the time due to her love for her first husband. His descent corresponds to the dramatic meaning of the metaphor Blanche uses. Then he embraces her from behind and he sings along with her during the very last section of the aria. And we have a complete blackout on the very last word.

We can note the last sentence of this scene in the play or the film, “sometimes—there’s God—so quickly!” is dropped. This is dictated by the opera itself. This sentence would have sounded like a wink at the audience. It would have been curt and difficult to repeat or amplify. And this would have also destroyed the absolutely beautiful and powerful increasing tension of the whole confession ending with the physical and visual union of the two characters, a union that can only be perfect, thanks to the memory we have of the small aria Mitch has sung at the beginning about “true love.”

The result of the dropping of this sentence is a certain shift in emphasis from a Blanche who is trying to lure Mitch into loving her, as she had explained to her sister Stella some time before, to a Blanche who is really repentant about this bigotry of hers, who is really falling in love in her turn and again, and who meets Mitch’s “true love.” It is a moment of absolute and perfect union entirely contained in the small duet that ends the scene.

At this moment, at the end of this second part of the opera we reach the climax of the love between Mitch and Blanche and everything seems to have come to a happy ending now. It is a remarkable love story. But we must stress the fact that the text is modified to bring about this meaning which is magnified by the music that gives us a deep felt emotion and the dark passage of the confession is completely regenerated by this small duet at the end. I have shown how this meaning is dependent on the music and on the atmosphere it creates. Our emotions are essential to assess the action and the feelings of the characters and these emotions come essentially, or are essentially constructed from the music.

#### *4. Blanche's departure*

The last scene is essential to finally understand what the meaning of the opera can be. It starts with the outline of the house with grey light in the back and Eunice crossing her upstairs apartment to go to the stairs. Then lights come up in the kitchen and bedroom in a wide shot that narrows straight away and alternates shots on the kitchen with a poker game going on, shots on the bedroom with Stella packing up and shots on the staircase with Eunice coming down. Eunice crosses the kitchen and shows her superiority over the men, sitting at the table and playing cards, by her passing through, hence standing, carrying a bowl of fruit, and looking down upon the men. Her final statement shows her stance: “making pigs of yourself.” We know this same, or nearly same sentence had caused a violent fit in Stanley at the birthday party. The men don’t even react. They are in their poker game and nothing can touch them.

We'll skip what comes next, Eunice's advice to Stella not to believe anything about the rape. Blanche finally comes out of the bathroom, she puts on her silk coat and the seahorse brooch with the artificial violets. The libretto goes back to the play and gives us Blanche's aria on her future death. Blanche is sitting on the bed and she sings:

I can smell the sea air. Ah, the sea! The blessedest thing that God created in the seven [think of the seven sisters] days. The rest of my days I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die I'm going to die there on the sea, that sea. One day, out on the ocean, I will die. I will die, with my hand in the hand of some good-looking nice ship's doctor with a small blond moustache. And he'll have a silver watch and he'll look at me. And he'll look at his silver watch and sadly say: "Poor lady." I'll be buried at sea, dropped overboard sewn up in a clean white shroud.

She gets up and moves forward slightly. "At the stroke of noon in the blaze of summer into an ocean as blue as my first love's eyes."

This aria is somewhat different from the play and the differences, plus the very sweet and harmonious music, get rid of all the roughness of the same monologue in the play. The best example we can give is the transformation of "sewn up in a clean white sack" into "sewn up in a clean white shroud." This gives nobility and some transparency to the vision. Blanche is depicting a dream of hers, whereas in the play she was depicting a dream that was verging onto a nightmare. She is institutionalized not because she is dangerous but because that is for her the only exit and she accepts it. She has moved from an animal wounded by society in the play, by the game whose rules are social, to a woman who has been cornered by some men, mostly because of her own irresponsibility in dealing with men, a woman who has been made insane by her irresponsible life, a woman who accepts her defeat and decides to go away, not in a dream but in a spirit of resignation in front of her defeat. The social dimension is completely erased in her fate and the opera cuts her a role of beauty and sacrifice. Where love is impossible, mostly because of her lies and her dissolute life, mostly because of her suicidal stand, there is only one dignified exit possible: go to the execution block and get yourself put to sleep.

The rest of the scene is nothing but the capture of the beast by those who are here to put her on the road. And her going away is embellished by the stage production tremendously. She gets her dignity back from the doctor who helps her up with both hands, gives her his arm to accompany her out, and delivers her to the road, that has reopened when the house has turned again. The road is the same as at the beginning, misty and blue, and she steps into it, in her blue outfit, with her sea horse and artificial violets, walking alone and disappearing in the dusk, the doctor looking at her from afar, Stella and Stanley embraced in a hug on the staircase and the others staring from the kitchen. She has been liberated of this world and she can move on to the next that she has just described, to that sea, that mother-womb into which she can disappear and die. It's a final scene of freedom recaptured beyond a spoiled life, spoiled essentially by her mistakes and the selfishness of men and women alike, as Eunice has put it: "Don't you ever believe. You just got to. We all got to keep on going." After her departure everything will come back to normal. Note the baby has disappeared too: it

would no longer serve any purpose. And this exit is accompanied by a marvelous solo from Blanche: "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers, ... whoever your are, ... whoever your are, ... whoever your are!" And the music of that last repeated phrase concludes the opera, after her disappearing in the dusk, fading out, with that very same musical sentence. The light fades out in its turn and it is a final and complete blackout.

We are then completely filled with this burden, pun intended, "whoever you are..." and we think of the fundamental social rule that all Americans know by heart: Don't speak to strangers. And the final blackout is necessary for the audience to swallow the beauty of this ending and the strength of the moral lesson that comes from it: if you do not submit to social rules, you will be destroyed. And Blanche was eventually. This last moment of darkness is necessary for the audience to keep up with this communion in beauty and fate, before they can release themselves of the tension by applauding the performance, the singers and musicians, and throwing their bouquets on the stage to the artists. This ceremonial is part of this medium and is some kind of etiquette. Its function is to release the tension and to embed in the audience's consciousness the beauty of the show. After this final act, the audience can go out and mingle again in this society that has, after all, produced this drama.

### *Conclusion*

We have seen, and I hope demonstrated, how each medium forces its own pattern onto the work of art, conveying with this pattern a change in meaning, at times due to the change in the text, or at other times due to the association of another medium like music or singing to the text. We have also seen that the targeted audience of a work of art is necessarily to be taken into account if we want to really understand why the change has been performed and carried out. We have also seen how the audience, as well as the author, can feel in front of such mediatic performances and waver between pleasure and comfort, a pleasure that implies that the audience accepts the message conveyed by the medium, a comfort that implies that the audience does not accept this message or this medium and feels frustrated in front of it. Pleasure leads to acceptance and comfort is required to counterbalance refusal. Pleasure implies the work of art is seen as a non-irritant, whereas comfort implies that it is seen as an irritant. On the one hand the artistic consciousness of the audience is enriched. On the other hand they reject that which irritates them. But these attitudes are contradictory. Pleasure can be achieved through a new medium that cuts off some meaning of the original work, and comfort might be necessary because the medium has not cut off that original meaning. It is quite obvious that most of the viewers of the film at the time would have been shocked by the homosexuality of Blanche's husband. Not to displease this targeted audience, the homosexuality was cut off, hence reducing the meaning of the film. The author accepted to frustrate himself by cutting out some essential part of the play to fit the medium of the cinema. On the other hand the medium of the opera could keep those sections but transformed them

completely with the music, the singing and the acting, thus erasing the deeper meaning of the play.

We must understand that a play shares with a novel the fact that there must be a certain distancing to understand the meaning, this distancing being contained in the low angle static vision the audience has in a theater. These two media lead to a deeper meaning, a more ideological meaning. The cinema may have the tendency, particularly if it targets a wide audience, to use the voyeur-making dimension of the camera to erase any distancing and hence to convey a meaning that will not in any way shock or hurt any section of the audience, a meaning that will only bring immediate pleasure. The opera is slightly different because of the low angle vision the audience has, a low angle vision similar to that of the theater audience, but the music and the singing lift the audience up to a certain communion with some abstract but extremely pleasurable beauty which destroys any distancing from the message, and thus creates an artificial consensual consciousness among the audience that sets aside some of the meaning that the words or even situations could convey.

In other words, willy-nilly, with the agreement of the author or not, "the medium is the message." The question then is how we can make the message stronger than the medium or how can we use the medium to make the message stronger. Too often a hot medium (the cinema, music and singing) has a tendency to reduce the message from what it would be in a cool medium. I find a hot medium implies a complete projection of the audience into the medium, whereas a cool medium implies the audience keep their heads clear and sharp on their shoulders thanks to a safe distancing.

## REFERENCES

- CLINTON, Hillary Rodham. *Living History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- DALZELL, Tom. *Flappers 2 Rappers, American Youth Slang*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996.
- DANIÉLOU, Alain. *Sémantique musicale*. Paris: Hermann, 1967.
- KAZAN, Elia. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Original Director's Version. Los Angeles, CA: Warner Bros, 1993.
- MCLUHAN, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge, 1964.
- PREVIN, André & Philip LITTELL. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. World Première Performance, San Francisco Opera, Kultur, West Long Beach, NJ, 1983.
- WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 1947. New York: Signet, 1951.