CHAPTER 12

The Changing Landscape and Rohmer's Temptation of Architecture

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Métamorphoses du paysage: l'ère industrielle (1964) invites us to turn our backs away from the highway, and guides us through a receding countryside and toward a beckoning windmill. A sudden low camera angle, blades against the sky, figures the windmill as a subject's point of view: "This is how [it] must have looked for the peasant who brought wheat to the mill." A cut to "another machine, another landscape," a digger's methodical motion focalized through a child leaning by a construction site, occasions a digression: it is "inhuman and at the same time human since it is made by man, in his image . . . It exists, in a way like a zoological species, it has amalgamated with its background and nature has adopted it." The film first detaches and then "returns" a man-made artifact to its "natural" environment, and this naturalization lesson, grounded on machines, as well as on surrogate observers, initiates Rohmer's excursion through the "difficult," paradoxical beauty of the industrial landscape. These sequences are also the prologue to the film's continued speculation on the inextricability of "natural" and constructed realities.

Hardly original, a denatured landscape is not an indifferent topic if under-stood as a channel for Rohmer's reiterated views on the interdependence of the old and the modern as well as on cinema's special role in organiz-ing nature's heterogeneous, mutating glory. Aimed as a pedagogic antidote to prejudices both "passé and modernist," *Métamorphoses* allows Rohmer to restate his credo that conservation ensures the need for the new.[1] He explains how, for this film, he forfeited a historical exposé with its parade of "beautiful but dead images" opting instead for "the living point of view of a movie cam-era that recorded, just for the occasion, images of the contemporary world, but of a world, France of the 1960s, that best displays signs of the recent

past, that does not yet shape the figure to come."[2] I pursue the significance of this yet unformed figure in Rohmer's aesthetics by looking at two of his pedagogic films on landscape—*Métamorphoses* and *Victor Hugo, Les Contemplations, livres V et VI* (1966). The "perpetual chaos and incompleteness" of an industrial landscape, the ongoing transformations of the French sixties cityscape, the buildings, ruins, and nature that Hugo's prose and drawings render disturbingly continuous are, because of these realities' posited plasticity, perfect topics for the "essay film," a mode that thrives on transient matter and fleeting associations.[3] I consider how these films enact the permeability of art and nature, pausing to discuss images of paintings in *Métamorphoses* and of stones in *Contemplations*.

Arguably *Métamorphoses* is Rohmer's most direct comment on the drastic change his generation witnessed once the coherent separation of city and country, with its regions singularized by characteristic habitats gives way to a postindustrial space in which "nature with a capital *N* no longer exists."[4] One of the central themes in postwar France was whether "nature was simply receding into the distance or [whether] its status vis-à-vis humanity [was] undergoing a mutation into a new kind of environment, one that erased the boundary between the technological, man-made world and untrammeled nature."[5] As Larry Busbea points out in *Topologies*, this dissolution of boundaries was a recurring topic of fascination in sixties spatial culture. Henri Van Lier's *Le nouvel âge* (1962), a classic on social convergence, predicts the inevitable panorama that would be generated by a totalizing network-reality: "At the limit there is no longer either nature or artifice, but an original and dynamic synthesis that we could speak of equally as artificial nature or natural artifice. If the urbanism of the future maintains 'quiet zones' and 'green belts' it will be to more fully incorporate nature into the network."[6] The increasing rationalization of various fields into a network led an inflation of communication theory, the need of a code to decipher a postindustrial reality pushing everything and anything to fit the logic of structures, grammar, and syntax.[7] The impasse of this postindustrial society for Busbea is the difficulty for an individual to render the abundance of things and experiences into a meaningful structure, a tension perfectly exemplified in Jean-Luc Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1966).[8]

Rohmer's programs for pedagogic television—on contemporary artists' views on cinema (*Le Celluloïd et le Marbre* [1965]), on new materials (*Le Béton dans la ville* [1969]), and on redevelopment plans (*Ville nouvelle* [1975])—issue from the same context that engendered allegorical visions such as Godard's *2 ou 3 choses*: an evolving landscape silhouetted by the high-rises and towers typical of the period's *urbanisme d'ensemble*,[9] coupled with semiotic-phenomenological analyses of a postindustrial society. And yet, in

clear contrast with Godard and the late-sixties *Cahiers du cinéma*'s structuralist bent, Rohmer's documentaries diverge from the prevailing rhetoric of semiotics, registering as well a criticism of architecture's functionalist vogue. In *Le Béton*, Paul Virilio and Claude Parent, proponents of an alternative architecture, discuss how the malleability of reinforced concrete best answers a new urban order based on flows and levels. They strongly denounce the functionality of high-rises and their geometric, transparent surfaces as false, aestheticized solutions for an urban dynamics they envision as organic and circulatory. Similarly, "Logement à la demande" (a section of *Ville nouvelle*) follows a couple as they design their future home with only a few coordinates predefined by the architect. Debunking the demagoguery of an open plan, Rohmer registers the clueless responses of husband and wife as they "play" with toy beds over a scale model in an evident compensation for the evacuation of a symbolic order in this functional system. In *Celluloïd*, an interview with Victor Vasarely, op-artist and member of the International Group of Prospective Architecture (GIAP), reveals a subtle but significant disaccord between Rohmer's thinking and the ruling theoretical discourse, concerning in this case the notion of "organizing nature." Vasarely sees cinema's main contribution as one of information, its "organization of nature" working anti-entropically.[10] In passing, Rohmer trades the theory-of-information context of the remark for an ontological view of cinema: cinema "organizes the real, a bit as a landscape garden in other times."

Throughout the fifties and sixties, Rohmer resisted the cultural pressure to find a common language that would allow cinema or the world to be decoded. Examining his essay films on mutating, animistic landscapes, I will argue that Rohmer mediated his ambivalent relation to modernity and to semiotics in two key ways. Firstly, architecture and landscape, arts of rearranging reality, became crucial paradigms in his claim for an analogous, ontological status for cinema. *L'Arbre, le Maire et la Médiathèque* (1992), a film that focuses, like *Métamorphoses*, on the urban encroachment into the countryside, makes that idea clear. It is rather the inclusion of real people and documentary moments—the extended vérité sequence in which a farmer, a church-bell worker, and other village citizens are interviewed about their environment's changing landscape, as well as the presence of an actual architect, Michel Jaouen, who explains the *médiathèque* project he designed expressly for the film—that ensure the filmmaker's stated interest in the question of the inseparability of artifice and nature.[11] Secondly I will suggest that the romantic transfigurations of a semiartificial landscape theorized in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim" and performed in Victor Hugo's condensed metaphors, grotesque drawings, and written architecture provide an alternate model for a textual synthesis between nature and art.[12]

A Temptation of Architecture

Métamorphoses inscribes La Défense, the new housing development in Paris, within a larger arc of history and temporal passage. Factories, "only fifty years old . . . have the melancholy of things that are doomed to disappear sooner or later . . . Sometimes, oh irony, the factory returns to the earth and, like this brickyard, is transformed into a cowshed . . . Where the sickly suburbs used to be, a new world—clean, neat, tidy—will rise. Our reasons for delight are stronger than our regrets and we hope that the future landscape of our lives will leave the way open to reverie."

When it came out, the film's antinostalgic sentiment surprised many as uncharacteristic of the conservative Rohmer. But to interpret the film as pro-modernity is to ignore the richer current traversing his notion of architecture expressed in "Architecture of Apocalypse."[13] Written in 1955 at the height of the postwar housing crisis, this essay attests both to the pressing role of architecture in contemporary consciousness and to its relevance as a model for Rohmer's vision of cinema as an art of reality. For him architecture's primary function—to answer a need—grants it a classicism that exempts it from the exclusive evaluation proper to contemporary arts.[14] He privileges architecture as a pre-aesthetic realm and has no use for a monument noticed in and of itself. What interests him is "the entire mass of functional objects that have left aesthetics behind."[15] Thus "the body of a car and the bend of a street," correspond better to his architectural rubric than "a commemorative column."[16] This "architecture" conforms of course to Rohmer's profilmic world, where natural and artificial elements coexist. If, for Rohmer, architecture is paramount among the arts, it is because "its productions are an integral part of the world, they are things among things."[17] Crucially the architect's power to intervene in the real world is similar to the filmmaker's as he constructs his fiction with reality itself. Distinct from "the painter who creates through a first-hand contact with matter," the filmmaker's work is exercised at a "second-degree remove," by organizing preexisting elements.[18] This ironic remove became Rohmer's modus operandi, as he filtered his stories through his talkative characters or, in his adaptations, through Kleist's novel, Grace Elliott's journal, and period paintings.[19]

The integration of natural and constructed worlds is at the basis of Rohmer's idiosyncratic modernity, of his allegiance to both an impure cinema and an inclusive theological view of creation. In "Architecture of Apocalypse," Rohmer restates his view that to create something out of nothing can only be misguided in cinema. He cannot however disguise his enthusiasm for a particular kind of transgression, that of painters who suffer from a demiurgic "temptation of architecture": "the Carpaccios, the Patinirs, the Lorrains and

the Poussins treat monuments as they would a landscape, and the landscape, a monument; they arrogate themselves of a prerogative exclusive to architecture."[20] In the same paragraph, Rohmer praises Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim" for offering us a "description of a semi-artificial landscape, organized in its minimum details to grant the highest delectation to the sight."[21] Rohmer's underscored fascination with a crystallized nature and with a formal convergence between landscape and architecture supports his project to integrate and equate artifact and nature, divine and human orders. And indeed after defending the art of landscape gardening as the poet's domain, Ellison, Poe's protagonist, articulates the benefits of trying to improve on nature: an artificial landscape may "convey the sentiment of spiritual interference" while securing "all the advantages of interest or design" and "relieving his work of the technicality of the worldly art."[22]

In her discussion of Poe's landscape tales, Catherine Rainwater notes Poe's appropriation of current notions of the picturesque, in particular the theories of Archibald Allison, who suggested that the acquired ability to recognize "compositions" in nature was "a step towards recognizing God's grand design in nature."[23] Rainwater mentions that for Allison, as for Edmund Burke, human art consists "in the recombinatory powers of the imagination and its ability to improve fallen nature by rearranging it."[24] Rohmer clearly identifies with these Allisonian ideas, stating that "the feeling of a perfect match between nature and human work is . . . perhaps the sole route to understanding the Divine order."[25]

In the second part of "Architecture of Apocalypse," Rohmer complains about the contemporary loss of community and the pitfalls of a new urbanism that proposes "the end of streets, vertical projects built in parks, or infinitely juxtaposed cottages."[26] This section matches the inconclusive take on new urban developments in *Métamorphoses*. But, in light of Rohmer's affinity for a romantic aesthetics of estrangement, we can also detect in the film's promise of a "neat, clean re-developed world," some of the disturbing qualities of the unearthly landscape that closes Poe's landscape tale, as the voyager searches for his landscape-garden location. There "the thought of nature still remained but her character seemed to have undergone modification . . . There was a weird symmetry, a thrilling uniformity, a wizard property in these her works. Not a dead branch—not a withered leaf—not a stray pebble—not a patch of the brown earth was anywhere visible."[27] Gradually the voyager/reader is brought to a strange limbo where organic forms are petrified in a textual semiartificial landscape.[28] Poe's narrative transforms Allisonian ideas into a bizarre domain suggesting the "frightening paradox" of artistic success in mediating between heaven and earth.[29] Rohmer states he knows of "no other text that focuses as closely the secret of an aesthetic feeling, that grasps

it, at its source. Here is a contemplation that nourishes of itself without the nostalgia of an impossible possession."[30] Below I discuss the reach of the Rohmerian "possession," the textual dynamic of his "reveries" in the two aptly named essay films *Métamorphoses* and *Contemplations*.

Métamorphoses

"There is not one hectare in France where the hydra of civilization of machines has not propelled one or more of its infinite ramifications." And there is not a shot in the film that is not at the service of a comparison. Rohmer's fluid, subjective *passe-partout* contrasts a medieval belfry and an antenna, a field and a silo, demonstrating their natural contiguity through long takes. Reframing pans and successive analytical shots form the basis of his visual rhetoric. A light camera movement starting on a postcard-like village with an ancient church follows a truck coming to rest on tractors by a warehouse yard. As the narration guides us through unnamed locations eaten away by craters, mounds of carbon, or piles of debris, we become aware of the inextricability of the landscape from a network of electrified lines, crossing of roads, and property fences. He admits it is a romantic sensibility that alerts one to a waning nature at the start of the industrial revolution.

Despite its pedagogic tone, the commentary calls for an enchantment of the world's realities. Much like the pans that join the bucolic to the industrial, frequent allusions to iconic figures—a peasant, a windmill, a train that "no longer terrorizes us like a dragon"—expand architecture from visible to imaginary constructs. Actual locations such as Wormhoudt, Dunkerque, and Bruay remain unnamed.[31] Instead a fictional imaginary supplements contemporary vistas: "It is no longer from the heights of Père Lachaise that we can admire, like Rastignac, the sight of prestigious Paris, but by stepping back to the hills of Argenteuil." A man sowing by a silo evokes a paradoxical Millet-like image, bolstering historically the contrast of the pastoral and the industrial. Similarly the peripheral boulevard construction site, a gaping hole animated with machines and labor, is projected as a city under "the shimmering light of a sunset," "an El Dorado of enchanted palaces (Figure 12.1)." Like the terrain fluidly submitting to engineering and architectural modification, the inchoate and banal landscapes and highways are reshaped through Rohmer's poetics.

Rohmer's intent is not merely to underline the mutually contaminating adjacency between industry and nature but to textually mesh the two realities. The text-image relation is central in the film's performance of what it states—that wherever one looks nature is intersected by industry and by art. Initially, the commentary's thematic consistency can distract one from the film's complex, varied exploration. At times the nexus of industry and nature
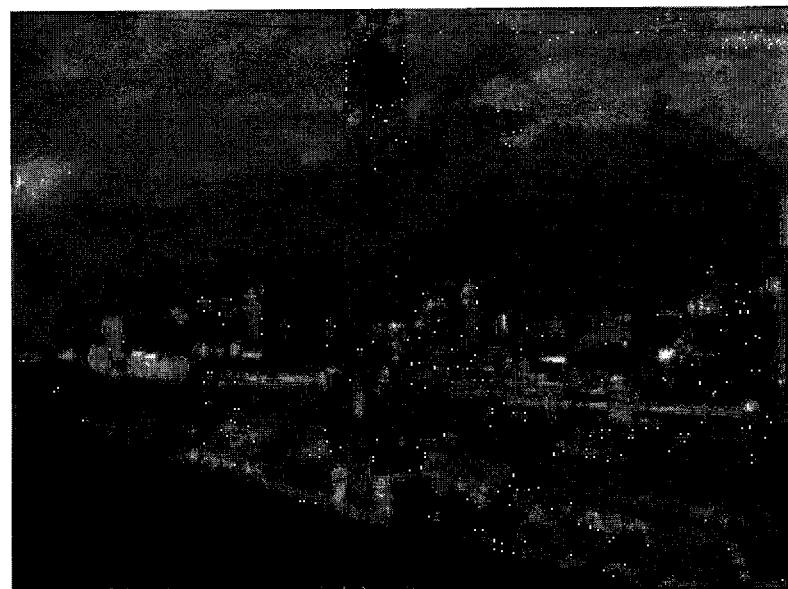
Figure 12.1   Peripheral Construction Site, El Dorado, in *Métamorphoses*

is "fog and coal dust," a seemingly straightforward description of a real and visible residue of human labor and mineral extraction. Alternately when Rohmer focuses on the similar morphologies of earth extrusions—the slag heaps "that emerge, like volcanoes from the belly of the earth, obeying the same laws of formation, and [retaining] their proportions, profile and bitter sterility"—his approach is more than formal. Ascribing agency to earth and to men, these similes approximate momentarily human and divine orders. They also activate the core instability associated with landscape, whether it names a given natural topographical site or instead its arrangement through the beholder's eye. In a single poetic association, landscape harkens back to its etymological roots, to shape the land.

A seascape sequence initiates a "painting module," a complex visual interplay between dense and transparent areas: silhouettes of cranes and shipyards, bases of pylon structures set against the foggy horizon, dark geometric patterns contrasted with a delicate lace-like web of lines. Rohmer's picturesque compositions, with sharply delineated foregrounds and indeterminate fugue points, are strategic in preparing for the unexpected shift from three- to two-dimensional renditions of industrial landscapes. An extensive catalogue of impressionist and contemporary paintings, shown and named one by one, materially expresses the fact that for the last 200 years, art has also been a part of the

intertwinement of industry and nature. By the series' end, the paintings are mostly abstract, featuring the decentralized spatiality of Klee, Vieira da Silva, and Nicolas De Staël. At this point, the film cuts back to real metal structures bordering huge industrial silos. The shift from the inward orientation of the pictures to the free sweep of the filmic frame constitutes a miniessay on the question of painting and cinema, fully articulating cinema's power to posit the continuum of reality, shaping it as a field of vision. This montage sequence on discarded materials is uncharacteristically expressive (Figure 12.2). With no narration and sliding across twisted scraps of metal, slabs of stone, piles of bricks, metal drums, and wiring, the film gains its momentum from these pro-filmic lines; or alternately it juxtaposes a series of shots to a crescendo of hammering sounds that imposes on the viewer a full awareness of the cinematic frame, of the mutually constitutive materiality of cinema and of reality. The viewer's perceptions are sensitized while Rohmer moves his referential ground from reality to the paintings' mediated reality and then to a painting-film, a hybrid of plastic art, film, and industrial discards.

Rohmer's painting sequence and his departure from his typical holistic compositions, recall Alain Resnais's move in *Van Gogh* (1948). In each film, the attempt to "enter" the reality behind the art leads to a new frame register,

Figure 12.2 *Métamorphoses*, industrial materials montage.

a new "aesthetic biology."[32] Resnais abandons the object-picture frame to equate Van Gogh's painted representation to a world that he then fragments and unifies through editing. Rohmer's action film turns to film the world itself, enlisting recognizable construction materials as referential prompts for a modern and visceral cinematic construction of space. This same interest in meshing distinct modes of plasticity, in having the film's referent (industrial parts or plastics) bear on one's poetics of shape, is evident in Resnais's *Le chant du Styrène* (1958), a film that strives to formally partake in the plasticity of the polystyrene processes it describes.

As we turn to Rohmer's Victor Hugo films, we may speculate whether the poet's breaches of a nature-art divide provide a relevant model to translate the period's concern with an artificial, synthetic reality. *Le chant du Styrène* opens with a quote by Victor Hugo: "Man bends blind matter to his will, he thinks, he searches, he creates. To his living breath the dispersed germs in the whole of nature tremble as a forest shivers in the wind." According to Georges Hugo's description of his grandfather's working methods, Hugo literally used his breath to "reach a depth on the whiteness of the paper where words are no longer enough."[33]

> He scattered the ink haphazardly . . . Then he sort of kneaded the black blot, which became a castle, a forest, a deep lake or a stormy sky; he delicately wet the barb of his pen with his lips and with it burst a cloud from which rain fell down onto the wet paper . . . Then he finished off with a wooden match . . . turning a tower into a ruin, and the match between his fingers became a burin.[34]

While we may speculate on the romantic roots of Resnais's and Rohmer's incipient auteurism,[35] the greater interest of Rohmer's appropriation of Hugo lies in the potential displacement of the sixties conceptualization of an entropic spatial culture onto the poet's fluid interpenetration of forms and categories. Rohmer continually calls attention to the poet's fascination for the adjacency of churches to charnels, for the proximate nature of caves, ruins, and buildings, and Hugo's advocacy of the grotesque in "Preface of Cromwell" is confirmed in each quoted statement and in each drawing in which the sublime verges on caricature. Not only is the beautiful inseparable from the ugly, the latter reveals a greater richness, attesting to a Christian integration of the low and high in nature, a view not unlike that of "Architecture of Apocalypse."[36] Hugo's role in bolstering Rohmer's ambivalent relation to the redevelopment of Paris in *Victor Hugo architecte* (1969) is also evident. There the poet's promotion of the Gothic cathedral, his antidemolition activism, echo Rohmer's reiterated views on the pairing of the old and

the new: "Paris is a city of the future. Why? Because it is the city of the past." Hugo's "Our parents had a Paris of stone, our children will have one of plaster," a comment from *Victor Hugo architecte,* qualifies the unconvincingly upbeat note at the end of *Métamorphoses.* That he chooses to make a film on the poet as architect casts his two 1969 programs on the subject of architecture as an extended conversation on revised notions of beauty. In *Le Béton dans la ville* (1969), architect Claude Parent fiercely rejects a journalist's platitudes on the ugliness and heavy feel of concrete, upholding the material for its plasticity, its potential to stretch "earth" into impossibly fluid structures.[37]

Contemplations

Stones, cliffs, and ruins serve for Hugo as a bridge between nature and art, and in his texts and drawings, they attain great fantastic and conceptual complexity. He writes in a century that tries to read human history from the crust of the earth, in *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) for instance: "Every wave of time superimposes its alluvium, every generation deposits its stratum on the monument. Beavers work like this, so do bees and human beings. The great symbol of architecture, the Tower of Babel, is a beehive."[38]

In *Contemplations,* Rohmer focuses on the spiritual and lowly dimensions of stones. I will argue that the filmmaker's simple and yet radical decision to film the island of Jersey, where Hugo wrote his poems, is his most forceful case for the ontological status of cinema.

We may start by asking, given Rohmer's aversion to poetic cinema, what are the possible correspondences between Hugo's broad cosmic thematic, between the symbolic sweep of his poetic language, and cinematic images subject to concrete particularities of light, time, celluloid? In his program notes, Rohmer admitted it was futile to think that the actual landscape may serve as an objective measure of the work of transfiguration accomplished by the poet. Addressing his key problematic in presenting literary texts in educational television, Rohmer reached a lapidary formulation: "It is not the landscape that *explains* Hugo, but Hugo the landscape."[39] But as he continues to refine what he meant, he introduces a significant new term— *listening:* "One cannot explain the text through the image . . . and yet the image can contribute . . . maybe not for an explanation but to the understanding of the text; maybe, finally not to the understanding but to the listening of the text . . . the image serves to better listen."[40]

Rohmer repeatedly used "reverie" to describe both Victor Hugo's artistic processes and his own: "To lead the student to a personal reflection is . . . to find in this metamorphosis the occasion for a meditation and a poetic reverie."[41] Halfway into the film, the inside of a grotto offers such an occasion

for reverie. Like the windmill or the digger scenes that open *Métamorphoses,* this subjective shot is associated with a tourist just seen standing by the cave's ogive-shaped entrance. And yet this unfocused shot of a rocky interior underlines Rohmer's presence—the contingency of being and filming in a location, he knows, can only fall short as referent to Hugo's poems. Nonetheless this loosely motivated point-of-view shot invites us to *listen* to the text, foregrounding the quality of event, the subjective entry procured by the essay film. It affirms in shared contemplation the converging copresence of film, speech, and spectator.

A longer sequence links three stone categories central to Hugo: the tombstone, the dolmen, and the seaside pebble.[42] The first is located in the St. Jean Cemetery and centers on "a flowering of naked stones, equality in death, exchange, interpenetration." Then "Les Pleurs de la nuit" starts: "From the pebble to God . . . let us not doubt and fill the expanse, Let us be the immense yes, our blindness should not be an obstacle." Rohmer avoids a line-by-line illustration, creating instead an autonomous sequence whose rhythm is as discrete as his reframing of the location. He starts from inside the cemetery, with its walls bisecting the screen with a church outside. If these tombstones, some vertical, others cube-shaped stones, from the eighteenth century are naturally immobile, the film shots maintain a quiet vibrancy, shadows moving with the afternoon. The banality of the initial images is deceptive for they soon accrue cumulative resonance. "Tombstones are also the dolmens," introduces the famous Jersey portal tombs, a second sequence with three or more upright stones supporting a horizontal capstone, a "table, which bridges the visible and the invisible." The importance that megalithic monuments take for Hugo has to do, Rohmer explains, not just with their form but with their matter, that of rock, because "it is hard, rich, complex, inalterable and alive, because of the granite that recovers it." As "'La Bouche d'ombre' (a central poem of Hugo's book 6) tells us, the rock represents the lowest degree of beings," and yet "Dolmen Rozer, all as you moan, all as I speak . . . listen well, All is full of soul." At this point of lowest being and highest soulfulness, Rohmer intervenes with a baffling, unreadable image of a stone (Figure 12.3). Taking the full screen and eliminating all perspective, we see only what looks like a fine-veined drawing, "art," which we finally discern as the granite's traces, its rugosity.[43]

This macro perspective, unusual for Rohmer, is, like the last shot in the series of paintings in *Métamorphoses,* a liminal image, meant to synthesize art and reality. Importantly this is not an aestheticizing shot, not even a close-up, per se, but rather a form of "revelation" of the deep imbrication of aesthetics in the world. After this paradigmatic shot, we descend to where, as Rohmer's voiceover narrator indicates, "stones, vegetation, and animals merge and
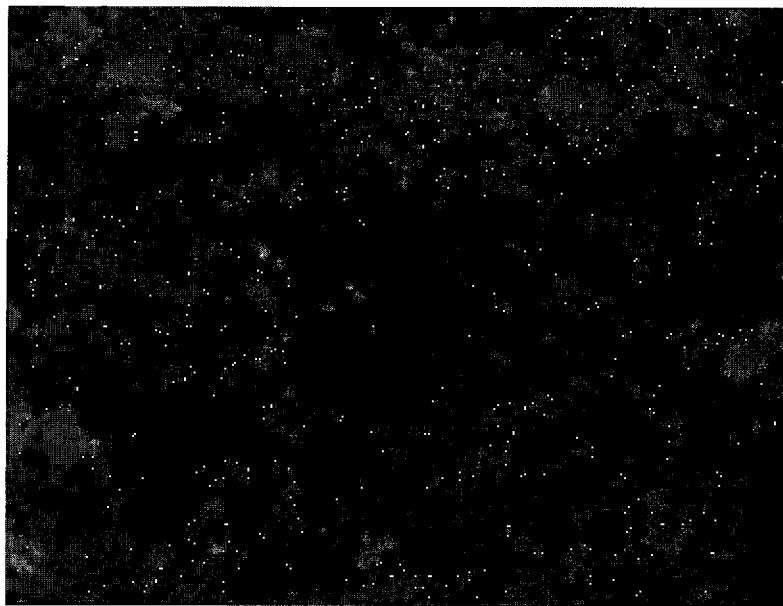
Figure 12.3 "The lowest degree of beings" in *Contemplations*.

couple their forms to a point we can barely distinguish them. Where earth and sea mix and dissolve, the craziest idea imposes itself with a kind of evidence. We can believe in a metempsychosis, the reincarnation of one body onto another." Isolated stones merge into the wet sand. Algae recovers one, while two big stones barely touch, forming a couple. Filmed separately they gain a contour and individuation that parallels that of the cemetery tombstones filmed in similar groupings. This formal association links the dead to a fluid cyclical nature.

During his exile Hugo's poetry became associated with a rhetorical figure in which two nouns from different semantic classes such as "shepherd" and "promontory" (in *le pâtre promontoire aux chapeaux nuées*) are apposed, forming a sole syntagma. Wendy Greenberg calls this figure a condensed metaphor so as to foreground the emotive intensity produced by the "disappearance of any lexical barrier between tenor and vehicle."[44] This paratactic construction, a verbal montage based on ellipsis, pervades most of the poems quoted by Rohmer over the craggy cliffs and ocean of Jersey. In "Such Vanity Is Painting" (1951), Rohmer had referred to this same metaphor as he impatiently denounced the pretensions of cinematic poems. "Why put two terms together that only the imperfection of language forces us to isolate?" he

asked. "Promontory-shepherd, humid suns . . . Modern poetry tried to shake the primitive inertia of the word; but now that we have the right to say anything about everything why continue? Long live the cinema which, attempting only to show, exempts us from the fraud of saying!"[45] When he revisits *Contemplations* 15 years later, it is through vibrant shots of inanimate matter that Rohmer will claim, in tension with the Hugolian cosmic ambitions and metaphors, the irreducible specificity of the cinematic image, its ability to say more *and* less than words. Both *Métamorphoses* and *Contemplations* acutely expose Rohmer's ambivalent relationship to modernity by testing cinema's special affinity for transience. The filmmaker ups the stakes of his challenge, boldly transmuting stones and paintings (and industrial debris) into cinema. Stones endowed with spirit, silent sentinels to the dead, artfully design their contours into signs threading into Rohmer's semiartificial landscape. And yet it is Rohmer's initial documentary move, to come with the camera to an actual location, that gives these stones new life.

Notes

1. Eric Rohmer, "The Critical Years: Interview," in *The Taste for Beauty*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 8.
2. Eric Rohmer, "Métamorphoses du Paysage (Vers l'unité du monde)," in *Bulletin de Radio et Television Scolaire* 8 (BRTS 18 mai, 1964). This program note was reprinted in the booklet accompanying the DVD box set *Éric Rohmer: Le Laboratoire d'Éric Rohmer, un cinéaste à la Télévision scolaire* (Scérén-CNDP-CRDP).
3. For a wonderful analysis of the essay film, its reflective and phenomenological reaches, see Timothy Corrigan's *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011).
4. Abraham Moles and Elisabeth Rohmer, *Psychologie de l'espace* (Paris: Casterman, 1972), 141. Cited in Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960–1970* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 21.
5. Busbea, 17.
6. Henri Van Lier, *Le nouvel âge* (Paris: Casterman, 1962): 68–69. Cited in Busbea, 20.
7. Busbea refers to Kristin Ross's formulation in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 191. See Busbea, 178.
8. Busbea, 13–14.
9. See Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878–1978* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 175.
10. See Busbea on Victor Vasarely's notion of *Plasti-cité*, 176.
11. See Jaouen, "Les villes ne sont pas des décors," in *Rohmer et les autres*, ed. Noël Herpe (Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 2007), 219–33.

12. Importantly the nineteenth-century paradigm allows Rohmer to reconcile his art and his avowed theology. See "Architecture d'Apocalypse," 69–72.

13. Eric Rohmer, "Architecture d'Apocalypse" in "Le Celluloïd et le Marbre, V," *Cahiers du cinéma* 53 (1955). Republished in *Le Celluloïd et le marbre* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2010), 69–80.

14. Ibid., 70.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 71.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Eric Rohmer, "Je voulais que la réalité devienne tableau," in *Cahiers du cinéma* (July/August, 2001): 50. See also Tom Gunning, "Eric Rohmer and the Legacy of Cinematic Realism," in this volume and in Herpe, *Rohmer et les autres*.

20. Rohmer, "Architecture," 72.

21. Ibid.

22. Edgar Allen Poe, "The Domain of Arnheim," *Complete Tales and Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 610.

23. Catherine Rainwater, "Poe's Landscape Tales and the Picturesque Tradition," *Southern Literary Journal* 16:29 (Spring 1984): 34.

24. Ibid.

25. Rohmer, "Architecture," 73.

26. Ibid., 77.

27. Poe, 612.

28. On the inspiration for Poe's landscape tales, see Jeffrey A. Hess, "Sources and Aesthetics of Poe's Landscape fictions," *American Quarterly* 22 (1970): 177–89.

29. Rainwater, 37.

30. Rohmer, "Architecture," 72.

31. These are identified in the integral text of *Métamorphoses*, included in the DVD set, *Le Laboratoire d'Éric Rohmer*.

32. André Bazin, "The Stylistics of Robert Bresson," in *What is Cinema?* vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Los Angeles: California UP, 1967), 142.

33. Florian Rodari, "Victor Hugo, a Precursor *a posteriori*," in *Shadows of a Hand: The Drawings of Victor Hugo*, Org. Ann Philbin and Florian Rodari (New York, London: The Drawing Center/Merrell Holberton, 1998), 25.

34. Ibid.

35. Pierre Léon, "Rohmer éducateur," *Cinéma 09* (Spring, 2005): 25. Léon notes Rohmer's fascination with Hugo's initials monumentalized in his drawings of towers and cliffs as a sign of his unabashed auteurism.

36. Victor Hugo, "Preface to *Oliver Cromwell*," trans. I. G. Burnham (Philadelphia: Rittenhouse Press, 1896): 24–25.

37. One is struck with the cave-like appearance of mid-fifties sculptural architecture by Parent and others. Although Rohmer's taste is clearly different, his interest in Parent's daring is quite evident since he appears in *Le Celluloïd et le marbre* (1965).

38. Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, trans. Catherine Liu (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 102.

39. Eric Rohmer, "Victor Hugo confronté avec son ile," *BRTS* 44 (May 1966): 9.

40. Eric Rohmer, "Confronter le texte avec le monde qu'il'a inspiré," *BRTS* 72 (May 1968): 19.

41. Rohmer, "Métamorphoses du Paysage," 43.

42. These three stone sequences do not segue seamlessly one from the other. They are linked by recurring themes and formal elements. Significantly Hugo's drawings—squiggly ones done during spiritism sessions—are shown along with written poems in between the dolmen and the granite image, conveying his animistic beliefs.

43. In *L'Arbre, le Maire et la Médiathèque*, a similar close-up of a stone wall is juxtaposed to a spirited discussion between the mayor and his girlfriend on whether to cover the *médiathèque* walls with the same stones as the ancient wall by the church is an artifice or a preservation of nature.

44. Wendy Greenberg, "Structure and Function of Hugo's Condensed Metaphor," *The French Review* 56:2 (Dec, 1982): 257–66.

45. Eric Rohmer, "Such Vanity Is Painting," in *Taste for Beauty*, 49.