

# Aaron Dowdy

## The Form of Affinity: Line and Landscape in *Four Shadows*

abstract This essay considers the ways in which lines are integral to how the concept of affinity is formalized in Larry Gottheim's structuralist film *Four Shadows* (1978). The film presents a number of landscapes, references to nineteenth-century Romanticism, and a rigid formal structure shaped as a grid. This essay explores how these facets interrelate and asks whether the structural grid

functions to enclose the visual landscapes, or whether the role of the grid is emphasized so that these various parts, along with the film's sonic and formal operations, instead work to open it up. Against a purely Romantic reading, this essay offers an analysis of how the film employs lines to account for this balance between confinement and opening, which, this paper argues, is the definition of affinity.

### I. Introduction

AFFINITY is the affect or sensation of connection or forming a connection (“Affinity, n”). It is a force of attraction between two entities, mutually imbricating them and creating a common ground on which they are drawn together. At the same time, the word’s root is in the Latin *finis*, or *ad finis*: to border. The concept then not only refers to the force of connection between two entities, but also the overcoming of a boundary that separates the two entities. This boundary is necessary for the entities to be understood as separate, but its suspension or opening

is necessary for the common ground between them to be formed. For affinity to occur, its force of attraction must traverse an enclosure, a border — whatever it may be — in order to connect.

Larry Gottheim’s 1978 structuralist film *Four Shadows* engages with this definition of affinity in its rigorous formal structure. This is to say that the film both structures itself as an enclosure and formalizes connections and interrelations that open it up, making it less rigid. In this way, affinity is not something represented in the film, but the principle of its formal logic.

In the tradition of structuralist films, where structure takes critical precedence over content, *Four Shadows* presents its content in service of rendering its structural shape evident. *Four Shadows*’ shape is a grid or quadrant, evinced through repetitive imagery and measured sequencings. In one sense, this suggests that its structure is meant to enclose or bound its content. In another sense, the film arguably foregrounds its structural grid in order to be opened or suspended by either its content or by the film’s own processes. This is what is at stake in considering affinity in this film.

While this argument is what this essay explores, nothing within the film’s content signals that it is about affinity, or really that it is about anything specific at all. It has no narrative, no characters, and no clear motivating premise. It is an hour-long film consisting entirely of

documentary imagery of various landscapes presented as personally shot, often handheld 16mm footage. Further, it features neither a title card nor credit text, making it appear closer to a home movie than a feature film. With largely unmotivated imagery, the repetition of imagery becomes the guiding signal that it is this film's structuring shape that motivates it.

What draws this analysis specifically to the concept of affinity is the film's subtitle: "Elective Affinities," a reference to Goethe's 1809 Romantic novel of the same name. In the novel, a couple is narrated as having their marital bonds overturned and transformed by the introduction of new characters that bring with them a different set of passions and thus bring forth new affinities in the couple that they did not have with each other. Literary theorist J. Hillis Miller suggests that the logic of *elective affinity* conceptualizes a world "stitched together" by "lines of force [that] pull things or persons which have an affinity strongly toward one another" (167). This definition aligns with the one with which I set out, suggesting both the more Romantic aspect of affinity as a force drawing entities together, as well as drawing attention to the form of affinity as lines. As I will show, these two dimensions are central to *Four Shadows*. However, the film itself makes no reference to Goethe or the novel otherwise. Thus, this essay takes up this phrase as a password, a tool, or opening to think with the otherwise self-concealing and repetitive imagery

of landscapes it offers. What are the elective affinities of *Four Shadows*? While this essay primarily answers this through a close reading of the film and an insistence on affinity as having to do with its structural interplay, I want to first map out the tensions between the line as structural device and visual form, and between a Romanticist imaginary and formal abstraction within the film that guide my analysis.

## II. Overview

With *Four Shadows*' gridded structural shape foregrounded, its relation to the footage of landscapes is brought into question: is this film trying to present the structural domestication of these landscapes? If this becomes the guiding representational question of the film, it becomes evident that every image of its landscapes actually has to do with measuring, gridding, containing, diagramming, or simply proliferating them with lines. That its imagery shows landscapes being lined or gridded in some way, and that the film itself structures this imagery of landscapes within a lining or grid structure, suggests a critical dimension to the project.

This essay's analysis hinges on the role of and interrelation between the film's visual and structural lines: its *visual gridding* and *structural gridding*. On the one hand, it can be read as a Romanticist complaint against the over-rationalization and domestication of natural landscapes. On the other hand, the film presents

landscapes pervaded with both visible and abstract lines that can be said not to enclose its space but rather to express something abundant and untamable within those landscapes: lines of direction, relation, trajectory. This film, I argue, is situated between these two readings.

Both readings are given critical depth with the film's many references to Romantic period figures: William Wordsworth, Paul Cézanne, Claude Debussy, and, as mentioned, Goethe. With each of these references, however, there is a tension between Romanticism and formal abstraction. Each reference can be read in terms of the former as presenting an encounter with nature that is transformative, affective, and affinitive. Following the Romantic tradition, this encounter narrates a self, shaken but ultimately expanded by the experience of nature, giving it a more complex sense of being, and ultimately affirming a subjective individualized viewpoint in some deeper way. Here, to domesticate, rationalize, or delimit a landscape is to abandon the possibility of this kind of overpowering encounter with it. At the same time, every reference made here also brings with it either a nineteenth-century tendency toward modernism or a description of nature full of abstract lines that potentiate the environment rather than contain it. Instead of the lines in these landscapes being the cause of its enclosure, in this reading they present the form of something at play within the landscape *despite* its enclosure.

This tension between a Romanticist heritage and abstraction is a recurring debate in structural films. The argument is between whether the emphasis on structure in these films works to uphold a Romantic viewpoint or instead works with principles of abstraction in order to draw attention to the processes of the film playing out. In the case of *Four Shadows*, the former suggests that it structurally domesticates its visual landscapes but uses Romantic references to generate an affinity for more sublime or less-gridded, less-rational landscapes. The latter suggests, alternatively, that the film's repetition of unmotivated images signaling the film's shape is sufficient, as it brings attention to the film's formal processes — to the film itself instead of to the illusions of representation. My argument combines these two perspectives in several ways. I hold that the diegesis and references are indeed important to this film, but that they are not necessarily there to represent affinity through Romantic ideals. This also means that the film is not simply about marking its own presence through abstraction. This essay focuses on the lines of the landscape in order to develop the lines of its structure. Going back to my initial claim, it is with the interrelation of these lines — visual and structural — that *Four Shadows* formalizes affinity.

My argument centers around one theoretical claim: the affect of affinity, the force traversing boundaries to connect two entities, is sensed and

formalized as a line. Thus, if *Four Shadows*, as I hold, formalizes affinity, then to traverse its gridded structural enclosure requires the drawing of a line. Again, affinity is the boundary *and* the drawn connection across it. The film, in this sense, does not offer its meditation on lines in order to name the source of enclosure; rather, it realizes an abundant form at play in these confined spaces that offer the shape of fleeing it. It is in bringing into relation or drawing a line between the shared form of the various lines in the film — visible, structural, referential — and in making and sensing connections across, through, and beyond the rigid structure that I argue affinity is formalized.

I will now offer a close reading of how this plays out both structurally and in terms of the content of the film. The structural section reads the formal logic of the film, and also takes up the aforementioned debate within the discourse on structuralist films. The content analysis reads the imagery of the film as well as the implications of its references in relation to the structure. Further, this section takes up the task of explaining how lines can be understood not as delimiting but rather as the shape of affinity itself.

### III. Structure

*Four Shadows* is an hour-long film consisting of four equal-length segments. The shape of the film is then a grid, made up of a coordinate plane of quadrants, and

each region itself contains another quadrant. Taking further the point that this film presents a structured metric, these four parts, visually, are exactly the same. The film is ostensibly, then, the same sixteen-minute sequence of four segments repeated four times. As the sequence repeats its second and third and fourth times, its order appears ever more enclosed, predetermined, and certain. This filmic obsession with fours, and this increasingly predetermined structure, gives clarity to the title's reference to *foreshadowing*, or the indication of a future condition, here substituting the “fore” with the number of repetitions it will offer, “four.”

The structure of the film works to evince the fact that its content works within a grid, while the repeated sequence itself becomes the visibly recognizable grid of the film. *Four Shadows* works against the dominance of this grid primarily through sound. Similarly, with its visual grid, the sound plays out over the length of the film in four equal-length parts, each part consisting of four equal-length segments. However, instead of sequencing like the visual grid (ABCDx4), the sound permutes sequentially: ABCD, BCDA, CDAB, DABC. The result is that every four-minute sound segment matches with every four-minute visual segment once, without repeating.

The distributed sound atop the stable visual grid forces new affinities to emerge. In other words, within the quadrants of this self-similar and recursive

visual grid, the film suggests an incessant presence of difference by matching them with other sounds upon each iteration. The sound forces upon the stultifying visuality the sense of difference, the sense of possible relations, new bonds, new potentialities within the self-similar.

That the film can be said to concretize this grid structure and at the same time modulate it with sound suggests that, in drawing out the grid, there is another kind of drawing out that has to be taken into account. When the visual grid, which begins when the sequence first repeats itself, emerges, so too does a deviation: Sound B, which was first sounded with Visual B, now sounds alongside Visual A. This necessarily changes this sequence formally. Whether or not the content of the affinity is stronger between Sound B and Visual B versus Visual A is beside the point. What this permutation requires is that from this point on lines are necessarily redrawn between sound and image as they are also reiterated by the unrelenting linear order of the visual sequences.

This is the image of affinity: a boundary line traversed by a line connecting two parts. Here, affinity is formalized through the always-different interlines drawn between sound and image, despite the stable, bounded relations of the image sequence. The visual grid opens its structure when introduced to differentiating sonorities. In this understanding, the film

creates a structural grid by foregrounding its shape through repetition, while at the same time creating a counter-grid through sound in order to destabilize the visual grid. While interesting in its own right, one way of understanding what is at stake in this structuring of affinity is by asking how the film figures in the debate around the function of structure in structuralist films. Two poles of this debate are given by American film historian P. Adams Sitney and British film theorist Peter Gidal.

Sitney argues in *Visionary Film* (1974) that structural films work to “trace the heritage of Romanticism” (xiii). Following this argument, *Four Shadows* would present its non-narrative, unmotivated landscapes in order to somehow restore or establish an affinity with them, to be moved by them, or register that they are in danger of being rationalized to the point of precluding affinity altogether. To structure affinity, then, would service to remind and emphasize the role of affinity, of being moved and affected by landscapes. That affinity is what is structured suggests that it is the driving element of the film, as for Sitney structural film “insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline” (348). Here, it is not landscape that restores a deeper sense of self, but rather an affinity with it. While an affinity with a landscape cannot be filmed or indexed, if affinity is structured and sensed by the spectator or the director,

then the film achieves its Romantic heritage.

A counterargument to Sitney's for understanding why *Four Shadows* structures affinity through rigid grids and supple counter-grids is given by Gidal in his essay "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film." In this essay, Gidal similarly suggests the primacy of structure over content. He argues, however, for the predominance of *abstraction* at play in the structure and content, rather than its enacting a Romantic heritage. Here, the aim with structural film is to demonstrate and draw attention to the shape of the film's structure without resorting to representation or illusory intent. This means that a structural film should perform structurally what it offers visually, namely what Gidal calls low-level signification (8). This is an important concept for painting: denoting marks without associative content such that they end up signaling instead a record of their being produced or drawn out. Landscape, in the case of *Four Shadows*, would not be registered as a space that affirms a history of what natural perception assumes a landscape is. Rather, Gidal argues that landscape, or whatever the content consists of, should be primarily a "foregrounded fabric of the complex system of markings itself" (7). The visual content of this fabric should signal, then, the shape that the film's own structural duration draws out. In the case of *Four Shadows*, we can consider the lines of the structure, the lines drawn between image and sound, and the lines that I will argue proliferate the landscapes as low-

level signification. Lines, low-dimensional and highly general, render visible not the qualities of entities and relations between them, but rather their being drawn out in time. If the film structures affinity, it is an affinity between content and structure, an affinity with which the film signals using the bare minimum means.

With *Four Shadows*, Sitney's claim emphasizes structural shape as a way to unlock a purposive and subjective sensibility with which the content can be approached, here being structural affinity and visual landscapes. Gidal's claim, on the other hand, suggests that the structural shape is evinced in order to draw attention to the material presence of the film's own processes, here being a process of drawing lines, forming grids. Moving into the next section, which offers a close reading of the film's content, I want to keep these in mind not as separate theoretical approaches but rather as thought together.

#### IV. Content

I set out defining affinity as a force on which common ground is established between two disparities. One of the principles of *Four Shadows*' content is that it presents four highly different visual landscapes that require a common ground to be rendered visible between them. What will become clear is that what is common between the passages is their presentation of landscape in relation to lines. Following the last section, not only are there

interlines drawn between sound and image, there are interlines drawn between visual passages. What is interesting here is that these lines of common ground are drawn between passages whose common likeness are themselves lines. The common ground, the affinity between these landscapes, is not their scenography, then, but their linealogy: not their landscape-ness but their lines.

In this section, I will read each visual passage and each sound passage for its presentation of lines and landscapes, asking how each offers their interrelation both in the Romantic tradition and as presenting a world in which lines abound, despite being structured or concealed.

The first visual segment consists of shaky, obstructed footage of two surveyors on a hillside with a measuring rope, itself a visible line, shot from a distant remove. This passage not only shows these two men holding a line, traversing the land in an attempt to measure it, but also insists on the presence of rhumb lines, of a landscape potentiating invisible lines. On the one hand, these invisible lines can be used to grid the landscape, which the structural grid of the film itself might affirm. On the other hand, these invisible lines of the landscape can be said to elide such measurement, which the camera itself surveys at a distance: lines of relation between the surveyors and their movements across the hillside. The former understanding upholds the sense that this is a landscape that the Land Ordinance of 1785 demanded become “lined, gridded, numbered, and

known” through the “imposition of human will on natural landscape” as American surveyor and poet John Hales notes in his memoir *Shooting Polaris* (13; 27). Here, this opening passage can be said either to deride this imposition or to simply document an attention to the landscape approached for its lines. In *The Garden in the Machine*, film Scholar Scott MacDonald calls this lined landscape throughout Gottheim’s oeuvre a “techno-pastoral” grid (41). However, this pejorative understanding of a line as intrusive to the purity of nature is highly problematic, least of all because it assumes that these surveyors are in fact working to impose their will.

Formally, this passage presents two men pointing, holding a line, and traipsing the landscape. If we do take them to be surveyors, they equally measure the land as they do assume a hidden logic of lines within it. That these men are measuring a possibly sublime landscape and marking it for modernity is a limiting trope of structural films that overrides the latter reading. David Melbye argues in *Landscape Allegory in Cinema* that what the American avant-garde takes from Romanticism is the trope of “man’s struggle with nature” and its growing modernization or rationalization by seeking to “spiritualize” an encounter with the sublime “uncharted American wilderness” (60; 39). This passage undoes this trope as it upholds it by drawing attention to two ambiguous kinds of line: lines that measure and

those proliferating an environment left unmeasured.

The second visual passage is a close up of a book: Erle Loran's *Cézanne's Compositions*. This book, in general, finds Loran rendering Cézanne's spatial logics into diagrams or line drawings. Here, the shot begins on a page that renders the painting *Road at Pontoise* (1875). In one sense, this passage reestablishes the trope of a landscape reduced to lines found in the first passage. However, I want to argue that this segment also sustains the search for unseen lines in a landscape — here as an art-theoretical project that pays attention to how Cézanne figures landscapes formally. As art theorist Rosalind Krauss argues in *The Optical Unconscious*, Loran's diagrammatic conception of Cézanne's landscapes moves to chart their "inner dynamic" (103). Finding common ground with the footage of the surveyors, there is the sense that Loran is surveying the lines of relation within the painting, marking their secret and inner dynamic. If the painting remarks on the inner dynamic of Pontoise, and Loran remarks on the inner dynamic of Cézanne's painting, then *Four Shadows* remarks on the inner dynamics of this very interplay. On the one hand, this can be read as staging an immense distancing from natural landscape, again purporting the Romantic notion of a nature in danger of being rationalized and figured out: diagrammed and gridded. However, I want to suggest instead that this segment looks at Loran as surveyor, searching Cézanne's landscapes for invisible

lines, diagramming and marking not to reduce them but rather to draw attention to lines within the landscapes that are overpowered by its imagery.

This aspect is key to Cézanne as a reference in the film. While this painting is situated in his early career when he was still somewhat indebted to Romanticism, it marks a turn away from realism and begins to leave the brushstroke itself visible. Going back to Gidal's fabric of markings, we can find in this particular image an attention to drawn lines that are free from representative subordination. While Loran's diagramming can be said to investigate the schema of the painting, to better understand the grid it uses to spatialize the landscape, it can also be understood itself as a kind of attention to thinking the grid on which Cézanne's lines begin to move beyond the pictorial figure.

The third visual segment sequences various shots of a small industrial town in winter, with each falling spot of snow drawing its trajectory across the frame. Though the town seems ordinary, its space is fractured by the film's framing: buildings are cut off and reduced to their edges, pipes and electrical lines are foregrounded, railway lines bisect the town center, and cars pass along perpendicular roads and park in parallel spots. On the one hand, we see an eventuation of the surveyors' work from segment one, where the imaginary lines are now embodied and the gridding has

been realized or at least built upon. On the other hand, the film transposes an attention of lines potentiating within a landscape to those which are the landscape's central logic. The town's lines are made explicit.

*Four Shadows* diagrams these lines as Loran diagrams Cézanne, foregrounding the inner logic of the town: gridded, edged, lined. This is not a lament, but a formal reading of lines composing the relations of a space.

By fragmenting the town to its topography of lines, *Four Shadows* asks the question: What kind of affinity does this town produce? Formally, the visual passage has a number of affinities with the first two, as I have described. How, though, is one to conceive of forces of attraction cutting through the grid of this town, in regard to my opening definition of affinity? In a town so rigidly and architectonically structured, what emerges are movements echoing those of the snowflakes: bodies cut through, across, behind, and between these environmental lines. Kids run or ride past on bikes, trains pull into town, cars drive by, puddles ripple, birds fly, workers cross the train tracks, headlights draw out a path. Every shot, amidst the static lines of the landscape, presents movement of some kind. Here, trajectories become forces, pulsive lines drawing themselves out despite the town's enclosure.

The fourth and final passage is situated in front of a cage at a zoo, behind which are siamang gibbons, and behind them, now in the barely visible background,

a green and watery landscape. The logic of the grid that the previous segments experiment with is now entirely foregrounded, the unmoving perpendicular lines of the cage cutting and fragmenting the action of the siamang gibbons. Whereas movement and landscape co-composed the rigid lines of the third passage, here they are pushed entirely to the background by the grid of the cage.

In one sense, this is the fully didactic conclusion to this cycle's Romanticist problematic, where gridding landscapes and the spaces of life are ultimately a form of encaging. However, the clear formalization here is the grid itself. Visually, this passage foregrounds grids above all else, thus affirming that it has been the common figure in the film thus far becoming more pronounced with each passage. What this represents is largely beside the point, as the passage so unrelentingly commits to these gridlines. At this point, *Four Shadows* inverts its logic, committing to these gridlines *despite* the teeming life and landscape it frames. The ontology of this passage *is* a grid: everything is gridded.

The four sound passages in *Four Shadows*, as I have suggested, work to destabilize the rigidity of the structural grid. The first segment is a quiet field recording of a typical rural creek with insects and flowing water. The second is a reading of the opening to William Wordsworth's Romantic magnum opus *The Prelude* (1850). The third is a field recording of the siamang gibbons screeching and moving about in their

cage along with the sound of passersby. Notably, this is the only synchronous sound of the film, aligning with its visual in the final four minutes of the film. This suggests perhaps a conclusory alignment of the visual grid with the sound grid, freeing the structural grid in the end from its own rigid combinatory game. The fourth passage is a recording of the tragic climax of Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1898). The narrative of the story describes a prince who discovers the mysterious Mélisande in nature, and brings her home to marry her. However, she falls in love with the prince's brother Pelléas, and when the prince finds them kissing, he murders Pelléas. This is a narrative of affinity, of coming into contact with a natural force that changes the entire order of relations. Like Cézanne, Debussy's harmonic work is generally understood as demonstrating a tendency that links Romanticism with modernist composition. The recording in *Four Shadows* demonstrates the force of the voices winding their way through the open, shifting harmonics of the score. The quiet creek, the screeching of the siamang gibbons, and the polyphony of the opera constitute three increasing degrees of sonic density. The effects of this create differing degrees for how affinity between sound and image is formed. For example, the combination of the surveyors with the quiet creek suggests a low-intensity, harmless and idyllic activity that when paired with the opera renders a sense of urgency and tragedy. Again, the differentiation

of sound and image causes different affinities to be formalized and different expressions and sensations to be drawn. The density of each passage affects the drama of the visual passage.

The second sound passage, however, holds the thesis for the film's own referencing of a double reading of line and landscape, and thus of abstraction and Romanticism. In this passage, sixteen non-native English speakers take turns reading an opening passage from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850). Formally, this sound passage, repeated four times throughout the film, is a microcosm of the film itself. Each iteration has four new readers read a fourth of the passage in sequence. While the script remains the same, the voices slowly mutate upon last iteration. Furthermore, these voices — belonging to Jonas Mekas, Taka Iimura, Peter Kubelka, among others — are not speaking their native language, giving the sense that they are, like the surveyors, in less-charted territory, reading lines that aren't as clear yet as they would be elsewhere, in this case in another language.

*The Prelude* passage itself narrates an attempt to commandeer a small rowboat for a joy ride that leads to a confrontation with the sublimity of a natural limit that thereafter distorts the protagonist's sense of the world. The passage read is worth quoting (almost) in full:

I *unloosed* her *chain* ... pushed from the shore ... small circles glittering idly in the moon, until *they melted all into one track* of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows, proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point with an *unswerving line*, I fixed my view upon the summit of a craggy ridge, *the horizon's utmost boundary* ... when, from behind that craggy steep ... a huge peak, black and huge ... and growing still in stature the grim shape towered up *between me and the stars*, and still ... with trembling oars I turned, and through the silent water stole my way ... but after I had seen that spectacle ... my brain worked with a dim and undetermined sense of unknown modes of being ... *no familiar shapes* remained ... (my emphases)

While this passage demonstrates the Romantic position of encountering nature in a way that opens subjectivity to new modes of being, it also suggests a linealogy of space: lines as chains, lines in the water, lines at the horizon, lines between the protagonist and the world. Secondly, it presents temporal lines of leaving, fleeing, and returning. On the way out, the line is “unswerving,” but on the return the line is trembling and of an unfamiliar shape. In short, this describes an encounter with a landscape, an event where inside (the stable unswerving protagonist) and outside (nature) fold into

one another, distorting and rippling their stable perception of the world. This is the force of affinity, of a border being suspended such that an inside can open onto an outside.

I consider this the thesis of the film because it demonstrates the two lines I've been presenting. On one hand, it offers a Romanticist affinity with nature formalized as unswerving lines that stabilize being. On the other hand, it offers an affinity with some unknown mode of being formalized by “unfamiliar” lines. Like the invisible lines of the landscape that the surveyors investigate, like the lines that Loran and Cézanne are after in their own ways, like the flows interpenetrating the still lines of the town grid, and like the presence of anything that emanates through the ontological grid at the zoo, what this passage's linealogy suggests is an attention to those undetermined radiations that beam once the grid is weakened, once the grid's unswerving form is made supple. Like Gidal's fabric of markings, these lines draw attention to the incessancy of a landscape being drawn out — not one marked for measurement but one teeming with lines that mark its emergence.

## V. Conclusion

I began this essay with a definition of affinity as a two-part process of being drawn to something and the traversing of a boundary that this force requires.

I suggest that affinity, in this definition, is a line: a line emanating between two attractors, opening them onto one another. The film's subtitle is "Elective Affinities," which invites the question of what this might mean considering that the film makes no reference to affinities, the concept, or to Goethe's novel. In this way, I asked: what are the elective affinities of *Four Shadows*? What are the film's drawn lines? As this is a structural film, affinity is the logic of the film's formal interplay. The film reveals that its structural shape is a grid, or lines of sequences that repeat in such a way as to form quadrants of the same imagery. While this visual grid is rigid and stultifying, it is permutated by a sounding counter-grid atop it, whose differentiating effects on the visual grid open it. This opening occurs as interlines of affinity redraw the certain bounding of the visual grid.

This is one way of understanding how *Four Shadows* structures affinity. For Sitney, a possible explanation for this is that by foregrounding the structural shape as affinity, the film restores a Romantic sense of affinity as a force that can help to better understand subjective experience. For Gidal, the film can be said to structure affinity in such a way as to reveal the processes of the film itself: an affinity between the visual fabric and the structural fabric of the film. My argument is that the film structures affinity in order to draw attention to the shape, or the form of affinity itself.

The film's visuals support this as every passage features prominently a landscape composed of lines, which I argue is the form of affinity. That every passage ambiguously features ways that lines can be taken either in a Romantic tradition or in a more abstract tradition draws attention to the role of lines in each passage. Drawing lines between these lines is, I maintain, the film's remarkable formalization of affinity by means of its content, its diegeses.

*Four Shadows* is an ambiguous film. It can be read as fully supporting a Romantic notion of a landscape in danger. Yet, at the same time, it formalizes the proliferation of something in these landscapes that even the most enclosed grid cannot tame. What the film ultimately considers to be the meaning of these lines of affinity abound in these landscapes is beside the point. Here, the importance lies in the film's linealogy:

fig. 1



The first passage from *Four Shadows*: surveyors on a hillside

fig. 2



The second passage from *Four Shadows*: rendering of Cézanne's *Road at Pontoise*

fig. 3



The third passage from *Four Shadows*: an industrial town

fig. 4



The fourth passage from *Four Shadows*: siamang gibbons at a zoo

biography    Aaron Dowdy is a graduate student at Columbia University. His research focuses on twentieth century aesthetics, philosophy, and the cinematic image.

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