

FORMATS 2

The first minutes of *King Kong*: an example of cinematic self-advertising

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If a single instant of perception were enough for the understanding and detailed enjoyment of a whole story, the art of cinema narration would have ceased to exist. Consuming a film needs time, not much time, admittedly, because the seventh art -a true child of its century- has a capacity for ellipsis that the novels of the nineteenth century did not need, and mostly reduces what it has to offer to an agreeable couple of hours.

But, however fast it may be, the deployment of information in any film is not instantaneous. The events the public expect to find in it not only can, but must, be delayed. The receiver *does not expect the whole story* in the first few minutes: he knows that he has to give it time, that it will last a certain amount of time, and that his expectations will be satisfied gradually, leaving some in suspension until well into the film. The reception of a film requires the audience to *accept suspension*.

The operations of suspension are so frequent and automatic that we do not even pay attention to them, and we might even say that the story does not emphasise them either. In some cases, however, that implicit game of anticipation may be heightened, explicitly underlining some of the future elements, thus arousing curiosity or a simple desire to keep watching. Advertising the existence of attractions is no more than suspending them temporarily, producing a distance (inherent to any advertising process) between the product to be consumed and the spot that advertises it. The fact that the Bond films always open with a frantic action-packed prologue which seems to be a compendium of all the typical ingredients of that extremely popular series (fights, chases, acrobatics, explosions) is a way of advertising the product which will be seen immediately afterwards, but also of calling for patience if, in the inevitable exposition stage of the first few minutes, the displays of action are delayed. That strategy -which Spielberg followed to the letter in his *Indiana Jones* trilogy- seems typical of contemporary films, which normally tend to speed up their opening minutes to the maximum, with initial dramatic effects that spectacularly ratify the generic characteristics for which the audience have bought their tickets (1). But the need to advertise what we will be seeing later (whether by showing a snippet or by announcing its imminent appearance through dialogue) is and has been inherent to any fiction film that aspires to receive the blessing of the audience.

It is not just a question of defining the character of certain films as intrinsically self-promotional, as Antonio Weinrichter defined *Star Wars* (1977) on its release as a film which is in itself an advertisement for itself (2), but to discover that the anticipatory practices of the film involve a prolongation of the usual advance publicity practices and for that reason still tend to separate the advertisement from its object in time. We want to give a detailed example of this possibility for self-advertising with an analysis of the first minutes of a masterpiece, characteristic of the finest classic cinema. The film we are referring to is *King Kong* (1933).

Self-advertising suspension in *King Kong*

"Hey, is this the moving picture ship?"

The opening words of Watson, the theatrical agent who arrives in New York harbour to interview the popular film director Carl Denham, are the first the spectator of this fantasy movie is obliged to listen to in order to become immersed in his enjoyment of the extraordinary adventure he has been promised. A few seconds before, the film has rolled its credit titles, following the prevailing trend of the first years of classicism, when the titles were not interrupted or superimposed on the action, but simply preceded it.

The importance of the credit titles is not superfluous to a reaffirmation of the expectations the audience in the cinema have already preconceived through the publicity, or even when the audience do not know exactly what type of product they are about to see, through anticipation of certain trademarks normally linked to genre codes (3). The credit titles of *King Kong* correspond to the standard production customs of the day -they begin with the RKO logotype-, but they are characterised by a touch of sophistication which already points to the blockbuster status that the film had acquired at the time of its release: the letters of the title, *King Kong*, immediately after the words *RKO presents*, move towards the audience from a middle ground consisting of a dynamic pseudo-Cubist play of lines in movement until they majestically occupy the whole centre of the screen, achieving a powerful relief effect whose power of captivation is underscored by Max Steiner's music.

The title of the film, *King Kong*, refers to the name of the main monster that appears, a creature whose existence the audience are probably aware of before entering the cinema through the advertising material -posters, trailers, press releases- the film generated before release. The expectations aroused by an imminent viewing of the film are focused on the scopic desire to watch, from the comfort of a seat in the stalls, the dynamic apotheosis of the fantastic body of a giant gorilla in motion. The force of the *King Kong* title corroborates that, but one last peculiarity of those credit titles carries their self-advertising nature to an unexpected degree of virtuosity: after the main people who have made the project possible have appeared, alone or in lists, according to the canons of all productions of the period, comes one final title, before the film begins, with the list of actors announced under the common denominator of "The

Players", a list which includes a total of eight names. The dynamic lines in the middle ground are deployed outwards as if to give way to a new background, where in another title with letters of the same size as the ones that presented the names of the cast -a title constructed like a large arch- we can read "and King Kong (*the eighth wonder of the world*)".

That last title leaves no doubt about the film-makers' intention to arouse in the audience the desire to see the monster that has been announced. But the graphic advertising has not yet finished, because after a fade to black which predisposes us to expect the beginning of the story, a last title, against the same Cubist background which dominated the organisation of the previous ones, reproduces an old Arab proverb, in the style of the quotations that precede literary works: "*And the prophet said: 'And so, the beast looked upon the face of beauty. And it stayed its hand from killing. And from that day, it was as one dead'.*"

Not content with commenting on the importance of the monster in the configuration of the whole film, the creators of *King Kong* find an opportunity to advertise the contents of the story from a proverb which, as the audience will find out for themselves, provides a perfect summary of the theme of the film. It has now been stated that in the next few minutes we shall be following the drama of the conversion of a Beast into an inoffensive being through the love of a Beauty (who, as the audience knows, will be wearing the face of the star Fay Wray, recently the heroine of a similar adventure film made by the same people, *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932).

After an establishing shot of New York harbour, the narration takes us to one of the wharves, beside which we see an image of a huge ship at anchor. A man is walking along the wharf towards the gangway. The man -as we find out immediately- is the theatrical agent Watson, who speaks the words -addressed to the harbour watchman- with which we opened this chapter. The dialogue which follows, held first with the watchman and then with the first mate, Driscoll, who appears on deck, is a perfect example of the possibility of continuing to hold up the show through the prolongation of an advertising process. In this reproduction of the dialogue, we have picked out in bold face some of the most explicitly self-advertising phrases in the extract:

WESTON: **Hey, is this the moving picture ship?**

WATCHMAN: The Venture? Yep. **You going on this crazy voyage?**

WESTON: **What's crazy about it?**

WATCHMAN: **I dunno, but I hear everybody's talkin' about this crazy feller that's runnin' it.**

WESTON: Carl Denham?

WATCHMAN: Guess that's the name. They say he ain't scared of nothin' - if he wants a picture of a lion he walks right up and tells it to look pleasant.

WESTON: He's a tough egg, all right. **But why the talk about this voyage being crazy?**

WATCHMAN: Well, there's talk around the docks about the cargo for one thing. And I never see a ship this size with such a crew.

WESTON: Not enough men to handle her?

WATCHMAN: Not enough! The crew's three times too big for the ship. I dunno where they find room enough to sleep.

DRISCOLL: (from above deck) Hey, there! What do you want?

WESTON: Denham aboard?

DRISCOLL: (comes down gangway into picture) Yes. Who are you?

WESTON: I want to see him. I'm Weston, the agent.

DRISCOLL: Come aboard. Denham's getting wild. Hope you have some good news for him.

The dialogue we have just reproduced contains the most usual expository characteristics of classic cinema narration, but into that detailed opening some daring notes of self-advertising have been introduced to heighten expectation. That self-advertising is very important in Weston's first question to the watchman, which we have already mentioned, *Hey, is this the moving picture ship?*, which reveals an evident concept of cinema narration as a kind of ship the audience is invited to board and which, until it sails, delays the start of the story we have all come along to enjoy.

The metaphorical conception of *narration as a vehicle* -to use the terms with which Núria Bou detects and analyses that implicitly self-conscious trend in classic cinematic narration (4)- is not necessarily understood in that way by the audience in the cinema, but what they do accept as soon as the dialogue begins and alludes to a journey is that until the ship leaves harbour the story they have come to see will not exist. Up to then we can speculate about the characteristics of the person who has planned that journey (Carl Denham, not just another adventurer but, symptomatically, a *film director*, defined humorously as someone on the verge of madness, but also, apologetically, as *a man who is afraid of nothing*) and about the nature of the journey (the watchman refers to it as *a crazy voyage* in a subtle form of advertising the fantastic elements of the show which is about to begin).

The scene that is linked to that first dialogue is a direct continuation of that same self-advertising spirit: self-advertising which, insofar as it announces the characteristics of the journey which has to take place, delays its real beginning. The scene takes place in the ship's captain's cabin and, when it starts, shows him sitting down and Carl Denham standing up; they are already deep in conversation. We will now reproduce the dialogue in full, and once again emphasise some of the most explicitly self-advertising phrases in bold face:

CAPTAIN: Well, Mr Denham, **you know the reasons for hurrying as well as I do.** The insurance company has found out we're carrying explosives, and the Marshal will be aboard tomorrow or the next day.

DENHAM: I suppose if we make a legal case of it, we'll be held up for months.

CAPTAIN: With ship's articles falsified and ammunition enough to blow up the harbour? And what do you think the Marshal will say to these new gas-bombs? According to you one of them is powerful enough to knock out an elephant.

DENHAM: We've got to get to where we're going before the monsoon starts.

CAPTAIN: You can trust me to get you through a blow, I hope.

DENHAM: Don't get sore, Skipper. But you know what it means to hit the tropical rainy season when we're making an outdoor picture. Months wasted, money gone, and nothing to show for it.

CAPTAIN: **But you still always bring back a picture** and everyone says, "There is only one Carl Denham".

(Driscoll and Weston come in)

DENHAM: Weston! I was just going ashore to ring you up.

WESTON: If I'd known that, I'd have waited.

DENHAM: Meet the Skipper. This is Weston, the theatrical agent. And this is Driscoll, the first mate. Well, where's the girl, Weston?

WESTON: It can't be done, Denham.

DENHAM: What? It's got to be done. Look here, Weston. The Actors' Equity and the Hays outfit have interfered with every girl I've tried to hire; now every agent in town has shut down on me. All but you. You know I'm square.

WESTON: Everybody knows you're square, Denham, but you've got a reputation for recklessness that can't be glossed over. And then you're so secretive.

DRISCOLL: I'll say so.

CAPTAIN: **When even the skipper and the mate don't know where they're going.**

WESTON: There you are. I've got a conscience, Denham, **I can't send a young pretty girl, such as you want, on a job like this without telling her what to expect.**

DENHAM: **And what is she to expect?**

WESTON: **To go off for no one knows how long, to some place you won't even hint at, the only woman on a ship with the toughest mugs I ever looked at.** I mean the crew.

DENHAM: Good Lord, you'd think I never brought anybody back alive! The skipper and Driscoll have stuck by me on two trips. They seem healthy.

DRISCOLL: Sure we're healthy.

CAPTAIN: But it's different taking a girl into danger.

DENHAM: Oh, I suppose there's no danger in New York? Why, there are dozens of girls in this town tonight in more danger than they'd ever see with me.

DRISCOLL: Sure. But they know that kind of danger.

WESTON: **You never had a woman in your other pictures. Why do you want one in this?**

DENHAM: Holy mackerel! D'ye think I want to haul a woman along?

WESTON: Then why ...?

DENHAM: **Because the public -bless 'em- must have a pretty face to look at.**

WESTON: Everybody likes romance.

DENHAM: Isn't there any romance or adventure in the world without a flapper in it?

CAPTAIN: Well, Mr Denham, **why not make a picture in a monastery?**

DENHAM: **It makes me so sore. I go out and sweat blood to make a swell picture, and then the exhibitors and critics all say, "If this picture had love interest, it would gross twice as much." All right, the public wants a girl, and this time I'll give 'em what they want.**

WESTON: I don't know where you'll get her.

DENHAM: Weston, I've got to. We've got to sail on the morning tide - we've got to be out of here by daylight.

WESTON: Why?

DENHAM: Well, there's a good reason.

WESTON: **Everything I hear makes me like this thing less.** I'm glad I didn't get you a girl.

DENHAM: You are, eh? Well, I'll show you. If you think I'm going to give up just because you can't find a girl with a backbone. **I'm going to make the greatest picture in the world, something that's never been seen or dreamed of. They'll have to invent some new adjectives when I come back.**

CAPTAIN: Where are you going?

DENHAM: **I'm going to bring back a girl for my picture** - if I have to marry one.

We should single out a couple of new aspects on which the meaning of this curious conversation rests. First, it is obvious that there is a strange process of introspection of the narrative, a barefaced exercise of disguised metalanguage in eminently classical genre forms. Although it in no way hampers an ingenuous perception of the story (far indeed from the calculated attacks on ingenuity carried out by some modern examples

of cinematic introspection), *King Kong* is certainly *a film about a film*, even though at a certain moment the second devours the first. But the procedure is most of all a resource to hold up a film that has been announced and which, thanks to that self-referential process, is not allowed to begin just yet.

The conversation we have transcribed effectively alludes to another film which is to have all the characteristics of *King Kong* itself: Carl Denham, the director, seems to be a covertly autobiographical mirror image of the real directors of *King Kong* (Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper who, like him, were specialists in documentary films in exotic places), but regardless of any knowledge the audience might possess about that circumstance, the transcribed conversation prepares, and unmistakably advertises, the only film -the one by Schoedsack and Cooper- that audience has paid to see.

The dialogue that confronts the Weston/Captain/Driscoll group on the one hand and Denham on the other thus reproduces, in a kind of tautological introspection, the same process of *urgent question-tardy answer* that is generated between the audience and the creators of the film. The complaints about the uncertainty *-even the skipper and the mate don't know where they're going ... some place you won't even hint at-* are opposed by the director's strategies to hold the audience's attention. The captain seems to make himself the spokesman for the audience's ultimate confidence in the project (*But you still always bring back a picture*), but it is Denham who provides the most revealing slogans of the sequence: *I'm going to make the greatest picture in the world, something that's never been seen or dreamed of. They'll have to invent some new adjectives when I come back*. Needless to say, those are phrases that refer to the advertising for Schoedsack and Cooper's film, the real *King Kong* (5). Meanwhile, he has taken another opportunity to advertise the presence of an actress who will turn out to be the centre of attention of the real film, with Kong: two figures, Kong and the girl, who allow the audience to reassert their desire for what the previous advertising and the credit titles themselves have already guaranteed: a show bigger and better than any seen before, and a love story like the kind the audience are always calling for.

The second characteristic worth mentioning is the similarity between the construction of the dialogue and the characteristic formulae of a newspaper interview. The director Carl Denham is certainly the one who takes charge of advertising his own forthcoming film, while producing a series of clever answers to the curious questions that are being put to him, as in a press conference: specifically, Denham's behaviour in the face of the questions Weston asks him (*You never had a woman in your other pictures. Why do you want one in this? (...) Why not make a picture in a monastery?*), but the tone of the conversation in general subtly confirms the impression that we are listening to a director promoting his film. And to what film, if not to *King Kong* itself, can this surprising piece of advertising refer?

King Kong will spend a considerable part of the remainder of its footage continuing to stir up expectations without, for the time being, delivering any of what the advertising promised. After the two dialogues above, a third sequence shows Denham's meeting

with Ann, the down-and-out girl about to steal an apple, whom the director will hire to play the lead in his film (parallel presentation of the leading actress of *King Kong* picked out in a -self-advertising- close-up of Fay Wray), and with whom he will have a new introductory conversation, of which the last fragment is worth reproducing:

DENHAM: I'm Carl Denham. Ever hear of me?

ANN: Yes, yes. **You make moving pictures. In jungles and places.**

DENHAM: That's right. **And I've picked you for the lead in my next picture.** We sail at six.

ANN: Where to?

DENHAM: A long way from here. (...) And I'll be square with you. No funny business.

ANN: What do I have to do?

DENHAM: **Trust me. And keep your chin up.**

It is rather significant that the final exchange of phrases not only evokes a relationship between a director and an actress, but that from her question "Where to?" Ann also seems to be cunningly embodying the same audience expectations, whilst Denham is still holding back information and recalling the seriousness of the project. When, to the final question *What do I have to do?* Denham answers *Trust me. And keep your chin up*, he seems to be asking for a fresh vote of confidence from the audience to follow him to watch a film that has been announced, but which repeatedly suspends a viewing of something that has never ceased to advertise itself.

By this time, after the credit titles and the three introductory conversations, the adventure of *King Kong* has run for about 9'35" (of an approximate total of 92'15"), but the start of the announced adventure will still be delayed in the following sequences. What follows the introduction of Ann takes place the next day on the deck of the ship and shows the preparations for departure. But when, at the moment of sailing, the girl exclaims (and with her, we suppose, the whole audience) *We're off*, no-one could imagine at that stage to what extent the exercise of suspension will still be practised by the people in charge of the film.

After the promising fade to black which would seem to be announcing the opening of another chapter that will set the story in motion, the fifth sequence of *King Kong* opens with an image of the ship, still and almost motionless, in a foggy place (almost as foggy as the constantly cheated expectations of the audience) where Ann, on deck, is chatting with the ship's Chinese cook. In the interior of this new delaying sequence a new process of self-advertising of the film takes place: in the middle of the

conversation with the Chinese cook, Driscoll reappears on deck. We will now transcribe the dialogue to the end of the sequence. The bold face, of course, is ours.

DRISCOLL: Hello, Ann.

ANN: Hello, Jack.

DRISCOLL: Where have you been all morning?

ANN: Trying on some costumes for Mr Denham. He's going to make some tests of me this afternoon, here on deck, when the light's right.

DRISCOLL: Tests? Why?

ANN: Oh, to see which side of my face looks best - and all that.

DRISCOLL: Both sides look all right to me.

ANN: Yes, but you're not the movie director.

DRISCOLL: If I was, you wouldn't be here.

ANN: Well, that's a nice thing to say.

DRISCOLL: It's no place for a girl.

ANN: I wish you wouldn't keep harping on that. It's very mean of you. Anybody'd think I'd been a lot of trouble. I haven't! You can't say I've been one bit of trouble to anyone. Have I?

DRISCOLL: Sure you have.

ANN: I don't see ... Well, how?

DRISCOLL: Just your being here's a trouble.

ANN: Oh dear. I thought everything was going so nicely.

DRISCOLL: Aw, you're swell. Women can't help being a bother. I guess they're made that way.

ANN: Well, anyhow, I've had the happiest time of my life on this old ship.

DRISCOLL: Why, that's fine. D'ye really mean that, Ann?

ANN: Of course. Everyone's so nice to me - Mr Denham and the Skipper. Don't you think the Skipper's a sweet old lamb?

DRISCOLL: I'd hate to have him hear me say so.

(Ann laughs and picks up Ignatz, the monkey)

ANN: Ignatz is nice to me too. He likes me better than he does anyone on board, don't you Iggy?

DENHAM: **Beauty and the Beast.**

DRISCOLL: Well, I never thought I was handsome, but ...

DENHAM: Go put on a costume, Ann. Light's good for these tests now.

ANN: I won't be a minute, Mr Denham.

DENHAM: **Beauty and the Beast.**

DRISCOLL: Mr Denham, I'm going to do some butting in.

DENHAM: What's your trouble, Driscoll?

DRISCOLL: **When do we find out where we're going?**

DENHAM: **Pretty soon now.**

DRISCOLL: **Are you going to tell us what happens when we get there?**

DENHAM: **How can I? I'm no fortune-teller.**

DRISCOLL: But hang it, you must have some idea what you're after.

DENHAM: Going soft on me, Jack?

DRISCOLL: You know I'm not for myself. But Ann ...

DENHAM: Oh, you've gone soft on her? I've got enough on my hands without a love-affair to complicate things. Better cut it out, Jack.

DRISCOLL: Love-affair! You think I'm going to fall for any dame?

DENHAM: It never fails. **Some big hard-boiled egg goes goofy over a pretty face and bingo! he cracks up and gets sappy.**

DRISCOLL: Who's getting sappy? I haven't run out on you, have I?

DENHAM: Nope. **You're a good tough guy, Jack. But if beauty gets you ...** (he stops, then laughs a little) **Why, I'm going right into a theme song.**

DRISCOLL: What are you talking about?

DENHAM: **It's the idea for my picture. The Beast was a tough guy, Jack. He could lick the world. But when he saw Beauty, she got him. He went soft, he forgot his wisdom and the little fellers licked him.** Think it over, Jack.

SAILOR (coming up): Mr Denham, the Skipper says will you please come up on the bridge? We've reached the position you marked, he says.

DENHAM: Come on, Jack. **You're in on this. I'm going to spill it.**

There is no need to expand on the motif that dominates this new delaying sequence: it is none other than fresh advertising of the events of the story that has not yet taken place, a retrieval of the announcement summed up in the initial Arab proverb over the motif of *Beauty and the Beast*, which is now evoked again by Denham (*Beauty and the Beast*, he repeats during the conversation), which associates him directly with the film he is planning (*It's the idea for my picture*), whose plot (which coincides to a T with the plot of *King Kong*) will be summed up in a later comment: (*The Beast was a tough guy. He could lick the world. But when he saw Beauty, she got him. He went soft, he forgot his wisdom and the little fellers licked him*). But on that little announcement of the theme of the film is superimposed, in this scene, a fresh stimulation of the desire to simply watch the show, now from an ironic deformation strategy, no less an advertisement for being humorous: Ann plays with the little monkey, constituting a domestic version of what the audience are set to see sooner or later on a gigantic scale. But the film continues unperturbed with its exercise in delay, and to Driscoll's question to the director *When do we find out where we're going?* -a question which everyone in the audience could be asking-, the only answer is the laconic *Pretty soon now*.

The following sequence, indeed, introduces some variations on the delaying tactics used so far. But those variations are only an increase in the content of the advertisement, never an consummated supply of what has been advertised. In this sequence, which takes place on the bridge of the ship, Denham shows the captain and Driscoll a map of a mysterious island which a ship's captain sent him, with a detailed

description of a setting (a wall divides the island into two separate territories) which inevitably have to be the setting for the adventure that has been advertised so far. Let us take up the dialogue again from that point:

DENHAM: Across the base of that peninsula, cutting it off from the rest of the island, is a wall.

D: A wall?

DENHAM: Built so long ago that the people who live there now have slipped back, forgotten the high civilisation that built it. But it's as strong today as it was centuries ago. The natives keep that wall in repair. They need it.

D: Why?

DENHAM: There's something on the other side, something they fear.

D: A hostile tribe?

DENHAM: (drawing a long breath) **Did you ever hear of - Kong?**

Why, yes, answers the captain. And everyone in the audience could say the same thing because they have indeed heard something, or rather they have not stopped hearing about Kong since a series of advertising manoeuvres (the last of which was included in the credit titles themselves) has brought them along to consume a film with the title *King Kong*, unmistakably referring to a giant gorilla, but whose appearance has been delayed so far (we are 16'28" into the film when Denham speaks those words), without the audience being provided with anything other than a repeated self-advertisement for the show they have paid to see. Even so, the power of fascination of that dialogue makes up for the delay and plunges the audience into a state of expectation which is now heightened, which combines the stimulation of a mimetic desire (the presentation of the setting, the new allusion to the monster) and a diegetic desire (adventures and battles to come, a possible armed solution to the confrontation with the beast) with total organic coherence:

CAPTAIN: Why, yes. Some Malay superstition. A god or a spirit or something.

DENHAM: **Anyway, neither beast nor man. Monstrous, all powerful - still living, still holding that island in the grip of deadly fear. Every legend has a basis of truth. I tell you there's something on that island that no white man has ever seen.**

D: And you expect to photograph it?

DENHAM: If it's there, you bet I'll photograph it.

D: Suppose it doesn't like having its picture taken?

DENHAM: Well, now you know why I brought those cases of gas-bombs.

But the most overtly self-advertising moment of *King Kong* is still to come, and it comes immediately after the sequence we have just commented on. That extreme moment of self-advertising is constituted by the supposed screen tests that Denham does of Ann on the deck, a sequence of absolutely revealing gratuitousness and improbability from the point of view of the plot, but one which finds its maximum meaning as an uninhibited metonymic trailer in relation to the mimetic and diegetic expectations of the whole film. The scene is not to be missed, either for the dialogue, which we will reproduce below, or the visualisation of a rehearsal for what, as the audience will soon discover, is, with a few minor variations, the key scene of the film:

(Denham is on deck and has the camera set up. Ann comes in in Beauty and Beast costume)

DENHAM: Oh, you picked out the Beauty and the Beast costume!

ANN: It's the prettiest.

DENHAM: All right. Stand over there.

ANN: I'm sort of nervous. Suppose I don't photograph well?

DENHAM: Don't let that worry you. If I hadn't been sure of that, I wouldn't have brought you half way round the world.

ANN: What shall I do?

DENHAM: Now when I start cranking hold it a minute, then turn slowly towards me. Look at me, look surprised, then smile a little, listen and then laugh. All right, camera.

(She does as he has said. Cut to fo'csle head, several members of crew peering out, watching with great interest. Charley the cook among them.)

1st sailor: Looks kinda silly, don't it?

2nd SAILOR She's sure a pretty dame.

CHARLEY: You think maybe he like take my picture, huh?

1st sailor: Them cameras cost money. Shouldn't think he's risk it.

DENHAM: That was fine. I'm going to try a filter on this one.

ANN: Do you always take the pictures yourself?

DENHAM: Ever since a trip I made to Africa. I'd have got a swell picture of a charging rhino, but the cameraman got scared. The darned fool. I was right there with a rifle. Seemed he didn't trust me to get the rhino before it got him. I haven't fooled with cameramen since. Do the trick myself.

(Cut to the bridge. Captain and Driscoll leaning over, watching Denham and Ann)

DRISCOLL: Think he's crazy, Skipper?

CAPTAIN: Just enthusiastic!

DENHAM: **Now Ann, stand there. Look down. When I start to crank, look up slowly. You're quite calm, don't expect to see anything. Follow my directions. All right - camera.** (He cranks. He gets more excited through this scene, trying to force her to feel the emotions he wants.) **Now - look up. Slowly. You see nothing yet. Look higher. Still higher. That's it. Now you see it. You're amazed. You can't believe it. Your eyes open wider. It's horrible, but you can't look away. What is it, Ann? What can you do? No chance for you, no escape. One chance - if you can scream. Your throat's paralysed. Try to scream, Ann. Try. If you didn't see, perhaps you could scream. Throw your arms across your eyes, and scream, Ann, scream for your life!**

(Ann's scream)

DRISCOLL: **What's he think she's really going to see?**

That question of Driscoll's, made about 19'25" into the film, condenses the whole audience desire for a film which has been characterised up to then by unhesitatingly following the advertising campaign that has brought the audience into the cinema, an audience that are now following the successive postponements of the show advertised through a bold but extremely effective delay of the real show for which they have bought their tickets. King Kong will not appear yet, but the advertising of the film will

no longer be so bold. After a new sequence of navigation through the fog, the advertised setting -Skull Island, a detailed reproduction of a famous picture by Arnold Böcklin- will appear, once the fog has lifted, at 21'05" of the film, and receive a first and fruitless visit by the members of the expedition where, in front of the wall which continues to block the access to the gratifying spectacle that has been advertised, Denham will insist for the last time: *Oh boy! What a chance! What a picture!* That first visit to the setting and the showing of the natives' ceremony, the return to the ship, the capture of Ann (the first event which really triggers off the action at 32'50") and the crew's second trip to the island are the last points of delay before access to the other side of the wall (where the show that has been advertised duly explodes into action) until the arrival of the figure of King Kong, seen after 40'30", almost half way through a film which, as we have tried to show, had no need to reveal it at the beginning when, through a studied process of self-advertising suspension, it had already captured the audience's attention (6).

Notes:

(1) Patrice Buendia, "Les héritiers de Hitchcock", in *CinemAction* 71, pp. 62-69.

(2) Antonio Weinrichter, *El nuevo cine americano. Aproximación al cine americano de los años 70 desde una perspectiva de los géneros*, Zero, Madrid, 1979, p. 94.

(3) As Enric Satué observed, genres have already found certain signs of identity in this first piece of advertising: the wooden letters of the Western are one of the most obvious examples (see Enric Satué, "El principi i la fi de les pel·lícules", in the catalogue for the exhibition *El segle del cinema*, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Barcelona 1995, pp. 65-70).

(4) See the chapter "My best girl: narration as a vehicle" in Núria Bou, *La mirada en el temps: mite i passió en el cinema de Hollywood*, pp. 86-87.

(5) The effect of introspection is reproduced throughout the film, beyond the strict sequence of self-advertising we are discussing: when Denham transports the captive King Kong to New York, he presents it as the *eighth wonder of the world*, just like the credit titles of the real film announcing the presence of Kong.

(6) That deliberate exaggeration of the waiting time is characteristic of other cinema classics. The mechanism used in *King Kong* was probably inspired by the delaying effects achieved in the first of the films produced by Metro Goldwyn Mayer the year before (1932) about Tarzan, *Tarzan the Ape Man*, directed by W.S. Van Dyke. Cutting out the expository mechanism of the original novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs altogether, the film begins with the presentation of a long trek through the jungle in search of the elephants' graveyard: a plot device once again based on advertising a mysterious being who answers to the name of Tarzan, whose cry is heard and whose actions are hinted at, but whose physical presence is cleverly held back by the writers

of the film. The effectiveness of the formula is so evident that it was reproduced in the second film of the series, *Tarzan and his Mate* (1934), just as the makers of King Kong would repeat the procedure in the sequel, *Son of Kong* (1933).

