Surviving Politics: André Bazin and Aesthetic Bad Faith

by

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In memory of my parents,

Shaher Bano Razvi and Syed Mohammed Abu Sayeed

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Dudley Andrew first gave me the keys to his Bazin archive and to his office in the summer of 2012 that lay the grounds for this research. And he then agreed to spare time from his hectic schedule to be on the committee and to take time out for extensive feedback throughout. In too many ways, this work would be unthinkable without his own unsurpassable work on Bazin and then without all the support he has offered. It is his rare conversational generosity that encouraged me to ask more productive questions throughout. Matthew Solomon's commitment to thinking film theory and film history together has meant that he encouraged me to think through my methodology more rigorously. It is his intervention that also led me to work out the

place of historiography in Bazin's own thinking. Without his critical eye, certain crucial dimensions of my argument would have remained severely undeveloped. Daniel Herwitz has consistently responded in a way that assured me there is something of broader significance to be recovered by revisiting the work Bazin. His own ability to combine theoretical concerns with an intense engagement with specific works has provided much needed illustration that hermeneutics, very far from being a hermetic practice, is among the most critically enlivening modes of inquiry. Angela Dalle Vacche, ever since I met her by chance in the archives at New Haven and Paris, has been a de facto member of the dissertation committee. She has been a constant source of invaluable feedback and conversation. I greatly look forward to her own re-reading of Bazin.

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Giorgio Bertellini, Richard Abel, Sheila C. Murphy, Matthew Solomon, and Colin Gunckel as chairs of the graduate program, and Markus Nornes and Caryl Flinn as chairs of the

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professional and personal generosity. Her many carefully created newsletters added a valuable dimension to my graduate school education. When I despaired over working out an argument through disparate archival material, Ben Strassfeld showed what working with archival material really looks like. Yuki Nakayama has been a great friend, colleague, and neighbor. Her responsiveness to a wide range of films has enlivened many a conversation. I have benefited greatly from conversations with Roberto Vezzani on Italian cinema as well as from his generosity in translating some material of relevance from Italian. Josh Morrison, Kayti Lausch, Joseph Deleon, Richard Mwakasege-Minaya, Kaelie Thompson, Vincent Longo, and Marissa Spada have all greatly enriched the community of Screen Arts and Cultures. As pioneers of the program, Kristy Rawson, Michael Arnold, Nancy McVittie, Peter Alilunas, and Erin Hanna set high standards for those who follow.

The questions I ask in my work would not be the same if not for the resolutely non-hermetic education I received from my teachers at The English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad. But the satisfaction of having completed this project was immediately marred by news of Javeed Alam's death. Alam provided his students the best kind of philosophical education that anyone can ask for. He went out of his way to continue lessons at his home even after retirement, and he invested our engagement with philosophy with an immediacy that made us all feel the personal and collective stakes of modernity, teaching us to critique it but also reminding us that any worthwhile critique can only be made from within modernity. Above all, he combined this intense engagement with a rare personal warmth. I will greatly miss not being able to resume our conversations.

Madhava Prasad's comments on my M.Phil thesis on Robert Bresson lay the ground for this project. The rigors of his own scholarship is exemplary of the possibilities of combining

theoretical and historical inquiries in the investigation of cultural politics, and I have much to learn from it. Alok Bhalla encouraged and consolidated in me a predilection for engagement with a diverse range of texts of all kinds. His willingness to go out of his way to engage in passionate and lucid conversations about them is a quality all too rarely encountered. Rajeev Krishnan is the first person from whom most students at EFLU learn about the rigors of academic writing, and he is responsible for encouraging me to continue my graduate education. My understanding of modernism would be severely impoverished without the education he has offered.

I wouldn't have been able to come to the US to continue my graduate studies without the support of my brother Akheel and Afshan baji. Hopefully I won't again have to go so many years without seeing them and others back in Hyderabad.

Chinmayi and I have managed to get this done between Hyderabad, Los Angeles, and Ann Arbor. It's been a long ride and it is wonderful to be wrapping up our dissertations at the same time. For long stretches, hers was the only ear I had for working out the confusion of my thoughts, and if what follows makes any sense, a large part of the credit is hers. Her close engagement with texts and the clarity of her writing was a great example to have throughout. And her presence has kept me grounded in many other ways.

Despite her grave ill health, my mother recognized how much I wanted to do this and encouraged me to go away. With her death, this dissertation and much else will now remain incomplete. This is for my parents.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations of Sources

Abbreviation	Publication Title
ABNM	*André Bazin's New Media*
BW	*Bazin at Work*
CdC	*Cahiers du Cinéma*
CFLNV	*Le Cinéma Français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague*
COR	*Le Cinéma de l'Occupation et de la Résistance*
EF	*L'Écran Français*
Esp	*Esprit*
FCOR	*French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance*
Obs	*L'Observateur/France Observateur*
QQCI	*Qu'est ce Que le Cinéma? I: Ontologie et Langage*
QQCII	*Qu'est ce Que le Cinéma? II: Le Cinéma et les Autres Arts*
QQCIII	*Qu'est ce Que le Cinéma? III: Cinéma et Sociologie*
QQCIV	*Qu'est ce Que le Cinéma? IV: Une Esthétique de la Réalité: le Néo-réalisme*
RCT	*Radio, Cinéma, Télévision*
WCB	*What Is Cinema?* (trans. Timothy Barnard)
WCI	*What Is Cinema? Vol. I* (trans. Hugh Gray)
WCII	*What Is Cinema? Vol. II* (trans. Hugh Gray)

Abstract

This dissertation offers a revisionary account of the seminal French film critic and theorist André Bazin (1918-1958) to argue that his work, long considered to be largely apolitical, instead offers a model of aesthetic politics that calls for a critique grounded in an affective-hermeneutic practice. Against the standard account of Bazin as a realist film theorist, it argues that not realism but the idea of "mythology" is the cornerstone of Bazin's work. His understanding of cinema as a producer of mythologies conceives of it as a site for both escape from ongoing historical experience and for an orientation within it. Putting him in dialogue with his contemporaries, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes, I argue that Bazin's model of aesthetic politics confronts the troubling character of all political experience by refusing the satisfactions of either expert demystification or heroic commitment.

The first part of the dissertation reconstructs Bazin's readings of key genres and films, such as the Western and the films of Chaplin, and the debates within which he made these readings, to bring out his argument that an essential task of aesthetic critique is to identify the ideological contradictions in mythologies in spite of which we become affectively committed to them. This is a recognition of the "bad faith" character of the aesthetic, a term that designates, in an extra-moral sense, a necessary margin of unconscious self-deception involved in how mythologies orient us in history.

The second part undertakes an excavation of hitherto unnoticed but prominent anxieties that Bazin had about the ontological realism of film. It is the context of totalitarianism, heavily marking some of his key texts, that gives a special charge to these anxieties. The realism that

Bazin championed was an aesthetic realism that responds to the model of mythologies developed in the first part.

Introduction

Which Aesthetic? What Politics?

The burgeoning revival of interest in classical film theory since the turn of the twenty-first century has generally been explained by a limited set of reasons. The one evoked most often has been that digital technologies have once more rendered the media landscape fluid, so it makes sense to turn to theorists who, working under similarly fluid circumstances, asked fundamental questions about a medium in relation to which they staked out strong positions: what is this medium, what do we want from it, what does it do, and so on. Such a turn could not have been self-evident since it meant turning to theorists whom the discipline had happily excoriated while paying perfunctory homage due to pioneers. Such a turn has entailed discovering that we never understood them very well in the first place.[1] Apart from re-readings of canonical texts, it has been necessary to discover several others that have never been available

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[1] Miriam Hansen has played a central role in the revaluation of Siegfried Kracauer from when he was known primarily for his American monographs *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film* to his status now as an important figure in the broadly conceived Frankfurt School of critical theory. Johannes von Moltke has further situated Kracauer in his American milieu, revising our understanding of him as a solitary figure in his adopted country. Both André Bazin and Rudolf Arnheim have been subjects of major edited volumes where scholars from across the discipline have re-reading familiar texts and brought to light lesser known aspects of these authors' works. New translations of Jean Epstein too have been accompanied by critical revaluations. See Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, ed., *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Scott Higgins, ed., *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Jean Epstein, *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, ed. Sarah Keller & Jason N. Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Christophe Wall-Romana, *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Cinema and Film Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

For critical debates on the renewed significance of classical film theory, see Johannes von Moltke et al., "Dossier: What's New in Classical Film Theory," in *Screen* vol. 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2014), pp. 396-420; Dudley Andrew et al., "Roundtable on the Return to Classical Film Theory," in *October* no. 148 (Spring 2014), 5-26.

to the discipline, as well as writers who registered rarely with scholars or not at all.[2] This

enlarging of the corpus has drawn attention to the range of filmic practices that the early theorists

confronted, thus giving us hope that they might be able to address the variety of image-practices

opened up by digital platforms. Even more significantly, the fact that most of these writers often

wrote shorter pieces rather than theoretical treatises, in their roles as cultural critics rather than

just film critics, also resonates with what some feel is a general crisis in the status of theory in

the discipline which requires us to understand the media in relation to the broader cultural

artefacts and concerns. So improving the historical record as well as historical understanding

stand alongside a sense of uncertainty regarding the status of images and film theory in today's

media landscape. Drawing the two aspects together, Johannes von Moltke argues that it is only

by understanding the historically-specific discursive contexts of the theorists we turn to that we

can make them speak to our present concerns.

    While I agree with the general assessments about the importance of understanding the

classical film theorists in their historical contexts, I believe we need a better account of our own

predicaments as we turn to them if we hope to make them speak to us. To say that we are living

in a time of technological upheaval as the classical film theorists did is to say too little. One of

the most remarkable things about the declaration of the "end of history" with the fall of the

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[2] In Bazin's case, the major effort has been the creation by Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin of an archive of his complete writings at Yale University and Université Paris-Ouest – Nanterre, La Défense, accompanied with an online indexed database at http://bazin.commons.yale.edu/index.php and www.baz-in.com. In addition, Andrew has published a translation of Bazin's writings on television and the new film technologies of his time. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson have edited a volume of Kracauer's writings from his American period that expands his corpus beyond the available monographs. See André Bazin, ABNM; Siegfried Kracauer, *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). As Stuart Liebman reminds us, the work of recovering the archive of classical film theory has been going on since the '80s, in particular with Richard Abel's anthology of French film theory and criticism before World War II, Richard Taylor's translations of the work of Sergei Eisenstein and of Soviet film theorists in general, and anthologies of writings from *Cahiers du Cinéma*. For Liebman's remarks, see Andrew et al, "Roundtable on the Return to Classical Film Theory," 5-6.

Soviet Union was how quickly it was refuted by the genocidal violence and the eruption of new nationalisms in the Balkans and the former Soviet Bloc countries in general. This moment also brought a critical interrogation of secularism—one of the tenets of modern liberal democracy that was said to have emerged the victor of history—as religion in a variety of forms became visible in the public sphere. But, for the most part, a sense prevailed at least in the West that a new economic-political consensus was established which was the logical conclusion of the long historical churning of modernity. If the old demons of nationalisms, religious ideologies, and authoritarian regimes still erupted in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, it could only be that history has not yet caught up with those parts. This narrative has been difficult to sustain in the first decades of the twenty-first century as economic strife, a climate riven by industrial processes, global wars, revolutions, terrorism, forced mass migrations, and political demagoguery have once again arrived at the shores of post-history, creating a historical atmosphere not unlike the one that classical film theorists lived through.

The re-emergence of an uncertain global condition should also alert us to something in the nature of media landscape itself: that it no longer easily coincides with the postmodernist discourse of the last quarter of the 20th century wherein media technologies gain their purchase on experience through their role as the generator of simulacra that constitute our only reality. In lieu of a detailed analysis of this distinction, I will only note that we have been living on the cusp of a possibility that the distinction between the gore in the latest splatter film and the beheadings of the ISIS videos may matter, as may the difference that beyond the superficial similarity of the videogame screens and the target locators of aerial-bombing drones or aircraft there are real bodies at the end of the latter, whether in Red Cross hospitals or not. Indeed, it seems strange that after more than two decades of Michael Moore and Errol Morris, a documentary filmmaker

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is once again on the defensive for some strategic editing that (merely?) introduces a pause in the speech of its subjects.[3] All I am suggesting—without prejudice to splatter films, video games, or Moore and Morris—is that the gap between image and referent has not been completely subsumed into the image despite digital possibilities, and that what resides in this gap may be of great political import in this historical moment.

So, a renewed stake in the political significance of the image rather than the more general question of the status of the image or a crisis in theory may be the more expanded horizon for turning to classical film theorists. From this perspective, the work of some theorists should resonate more immediately (emphasis on the 'immediately') than that of others: say, the Soviet montage theorists and the Frankfurt school broadly conceived rather than Rudolf Arnheim and Hugo Munsterberg. It must then seem odd that I turn to the work of André Bazin to come to grips with the political conditions of the cinema. Criticisms of his theoretical positions—his 'naïve realism'—were always motivated in the first place by attempts to invest film with political and ideological import.[4]

From the battles Bazin fought against filmmakers and critics associated with the French Communist Party (PCF) such as Louis Daquin and Georges Sadoul in the late '40s, through the

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[3] Lois Beckett, "Katie Couric gun control film entangled in #Gungate and a question of ethics", *The Guardian*, May 28, 2016, accessed November 9, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/may/28/katie-couric-under-the-gun-documentary-criticism.

[4] For some prominent early critiques of Bazin, see Gérard Gozlan, *L'Anti-Bazin* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'Eau, 2013 [1962]); Annette Michelson, "Review of *What Is Cinema?*." In *Artforum* vol. 10, no. 6 (1968), 68-72; Christopher Williams, "Bazin on Neo-Realism," in *Screen* vol. 14, no. 4 (1973), 61-68; Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," in *Screen* vo. 17, no. 3 (1976), 7-28. Williams and MacCabe have since come to read Bazin differently and the latter had initiated the project for creating an archive of Bazin's complete works. See his discussion of Bazin in Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); Colin MacCabe, "Bazin as Modernist," in *Opening Bazin*, 66-76.

I will be looking at his critical battles with his contemporaries in chapter 1, but for overall historical accounts see Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 5; Antoine de Baecque, "Bazin in Combat," in *Opening Bazin*, 225-233.

belated but highly vituperative obituary by Gerard Gozlan in 1962, to the ideology theorists of the '70s, Bazin emerges for different reasons as an obfuscator of film's political role. Of course, the substance of the various critiques is significantly different, and the critics of the '70s would always make it a point to mention Bazin's formation in the social Catholicism of Emmanuel Mounier's Personalist philosophy and the journal *Esprit*. This would allow them to mark him off from what they saw as the more reactionary positions of the younger critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. But his social engagement appeared to them as too self-evident and positivist, much like his faith in the realism of the film image, and finally subsumed by the mystification of spiritual terminology and the sentimentality of love for the world. However, Bazin has been the subject of an extensive reassessment in recent years and I'll first offer a synoptic account of recent scholarship on his work as it pertains to my argument before specifying my own intervention which argues that Bazin indeed has something to teach us about the conjunction of aesthetics and politics in modernity.

Bazin's Split Personality

The question of realism has unsurprisingly been central to recent reassessment of Bazin's work and this has involved a greater appreciation of the complexity of his position on this topic. Scholars have tried to complicate our understanding of Bazinian realism by linking him to

Surrealism,[5] the Lettrists,[6] deconstruction,[7] Walter Benjamin[8] and modernism in general,[9] non-anthropocentric thought and posthumanism,[10] Wittgenstein,[11] and much else besides. Either, as Dudley Andrew remarks, this is realism "sophisticated beyond our comprehension," or this is a case of scholars reading their own interests a little too hastily into Bazin.[12] Then there are several scholars who have convincingly broadened the picture we have of Bazin by highlighting his interests in a wide range of films, including animation[13] and science documentaries,[14] and television.[15] Given this highly complicated picture of realism on the one hand and a seemingly

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[5] Adam Lowenstein, "The Surrealism of the Photographic Image: Bazin, Barthes, and the Digital *Sweet Hereafter*," in *Cinema Journal* vol. 46, no. 3 (Spring 2007), 54-82; Jean-François Chevrier, "The Reality of Hallucination in André Bazin," in *Opening Bazin*, 42-56.

[6] Rochelle Fack, "Bazin's Chaplin Myth and the Corrosive Lettrists," in *Opening Bazin*, 246-253.

[7] Louis-George Schwartz, "Deconstruction *avant la lettre*: Jacques Derrida before André Bazin," in *Opening Bazin*, 95-103.

[8] Dudley Andrew, "Malraux, Benjamin, Malraux: A Triangle of Hope for Cinema," in *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche (Hampshire: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2012), 115-140; Monica Dall'Asta, "Beyond the Image in Benjamin and Bazin: The Aura of the Event," in *Opening Bazin*, 57-65.

[9] MacCabe, "Bazin as Modernist."

[10] Angela Dalle Vacche, "The Difference of the Cinema in the System of the Arts," in *Opening Bazin*, 142-152; Jennifer Fay, "Seeing/Loving Animals: André Bazin's Posthumanism," in *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 7 no. 1 (2008), 41-64; Seung-Hoon Jeong, "Animals: An Adventure in Bazin's Ontology," in *Opening Bazin*, 177-185.

[11] Burke Hilsabeck, "The "Is" in What Is Cinema?: On André Bazin and Stanley Cavell," in *Cinema Journal* vol. 55, no. 2 (Winter 2016), 25-42.

[12] Dudley Andrew, "A Binocular Preface," in *Opening Bazin*, xi. It is not that one can't find the affinities these scholars argue for, but one does need to ask what the point of any such affinity might be and how far each goes. Beyond the specifics of the arguments, given my concern with the question of politics, I am a little wary that the impulse behind looking for such affinities is to recover Bazin through the 'radical' prestige of some of these theoretical currents. It is also as if we are willing to listen to Bazin again, but on condition that he tells us what we already know and are comfortable with.

[13] Karen Beckman, "Animating the *Cinéfils*: Alain Resnais and the Cinema of Discovery," *Cinema Journal* vol. 54 no. 4 (Summer 2015), 1-25; Grant Wiedenfeld, "Bazin on the Margins of the Seventh Art," in *Opening Bazin*, 262-267.

[14] Oliver Gaycken, "'Beauty of Chance': *Film ist*," in *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 11 no. 3 (2012), 307-327.

[15] Michael Cramer, "Television and the Auteur in the Late '50s," in *Opening Bazin*, 268-274; Bazin, *André Bazin's New Media*

more diffuse set of engagements with a broad range of films and media on the other, a sort of consensus has emerged on the existence of two Bazins.

Andrew, writing in 2004, distinguishes a 'pure Bazin' of the first two volumes of *Qu'est-ce Que le Cinéma?* that deal with questions of realism and intermediality from the Bazin of the last two volumes dealing with cinema's relation to sociology and with Italian neo-realism whose 'prose [was] meant not for posterity but for a palpable French audience.'[16] For Daniel Morgan, Bazin's idea of realism is not restricted to his writings on the cinematic image but designates any internally-coherent work that must be understood on its own terms. He argues this from the fact that Bazin calls a range of films 'realist,' including those of Sergei Eisenstein. Thus, according to him, there are two paradigms of Bazinian realism: one, a more limited paradigm, relating to the ontological realism of the image and the other an infinitely broad one that applies to any film that succeeds in doing whatever it set out to do.[17] For James Tweedie too, there are two Bazins: one who wrote studied essays about realism and another who 'has no coherent identity at all, as it lies scattered in occasional pieces about individual films.'[18] The general drift of this partition is that there was Bazin the theoretician who took clearly defined positions on the medium, and then there was Bazin the critic who wrote to the vagaries of the films on offer and was flexible enough to adapt to the challenges thrown up by them.

On the question of Bazin's politics, several scholars have recently either drawn attention to his political engagement or provided pointers to the political dimensions of his film theory.

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[16] Dudley Andrew, "Foreword to the 2004 Edition," in WCII, xi-xii.

[17] Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 443-481.

[18] James Tweedie, "André Bazin's Bad Taste," in *Opening Bazin*, 277.

Antoine de Baecque has revised our understanding of Bazin as a saintly figure who acted as a mediator between competing ideological positions to offer a picture of a critic constantly engaged in combat, going out of his way to dispute the positions of those with whom he disagreed, and also mentoring a group of younger critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* to continue a practice of polemical criticism.[19] Philip Watts and Karl Schoonover, again in addition to Andrew's detailed account in his biography of Bazin, emphasize the specificity of the postwar situation in which the critic's understanding of cinematic realism was formed.[20] Watts speaks of Bazin's search for a 'stylistic austerity' as a way of making cinema respond in an adequate manner to the horrors of the Holocaust and the war in general. He argues that Bazin's preference for a stylistics of integral realism was formed in relation to the fact that filmed footage of the camps served as evidence in the Nuremberg Trials. Schoonover focuses on another fallout of the war in which the cinematic image and Bazin's theorization of it had great stakes. This was the discourse of international humanism in which global spectators were called upon to witness the vulnerability of postwar Europe from a distance, both desiring a spectacle of suffering and reaching out in empathetic identification. Schoonover argues that Bazin's critical imperative for respecting the integrity and ambiguity of reality, that is of what exists, is formed in relation to this postwar discourse of international fraternity; further, the locus in the cinematic image where this integrity is tested and guaranteed is the suffering body or the body in danger. He, like Serge Daney and Pascal Bonitzer before him,[21] points to the many instances in which Bazin prizes

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[19] de Baecque, "Bazin in Combat".

[20] Philip Watts, "The Eloquent Image: The Postwar Mission of Film and Criticism," in *Opening Bazin*, 215-224; Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), ch. 1.

[21] Serge Daney and Pascal Bonitzer, "L'écran du fantasme," in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 236-237 (March-April 1972), 30-41; Daney's portion of the text has been translated as Serge Daney, "The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and

images of bodies threatened with death and, unlike them, links this interest to Bazin's program for making realism the basis for an international film culture.

Marco Grosoli argues for Bazin as a theorist of films as social fantasies that are in fact documentaries of the gaps in the empirical world. He emphasizes Bazin's interest in cinema's relationship to the collective unconscious of its time which the filmic image can tap into through a dialectic of presence and absence. He links this to the Lacanian notion of the Real as that which exceeds representation.[22] The idea of an absence in presence is also at the heart of Dudley Andrew's *What Cinema Is!* as he proceeds from Serge Daney's characterization of what has always informed *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s orientation towards film: "The *Cahiers* axiom is this: that the cinema has a fundamental rapport with reality and that the real is not what is represented— and that's final."[23] Andrew emphasizes the importance to Bazin of the sense of dislocation that comes from the fact that the cinematic image points to the presence of something in the past, as well as signaling its capacity to survive the present and resonate in an unknown future.[24] Morgan too sees Bazin as proceeding from the premise that films create worlds on the screen that mediate our relationship to the lived world and it in this mediation that the political function of Bazin's aesthetics resides.[25]

In this brief review, Bazin emerges as a heterogeneous and even contradictory figure. On the one hand, his realism is disruptive and modernist and, on the other, it responds to a call for an

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Animals)," in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 32-41.

[22] Marco Grosoli, "André Bazin: Film as Social Documentary," in *New Readings* no. 11 (2011), 1-16.

[23] Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 5.

[24] Andrew, *What Cinema Is!*, 16.

[25] Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 481.

empathetic relationship to the suffering of others. Further still, it turns out that realism was one concern among others in his writings. While heterogeneity of interpretations of any body of work is to be expected, Bazin's heterogeneity is contained by a strategy of division of theoretical and critical labor between a realist aesthetic on the one hand and broader stylistic and sociological concerns on the other. In this dissertation, I seek to group this diversity under the rubric of aesthetic politics without separating off realism from non-realism or sociology from aesthetics to argue that there is a coherent line running through Bazin's writings which allows us to reclaim him on the very grounds he was criticized, which were those of politics. However, this is not an attempt to re-contain a body of work whose ecumenism has just been recovered within a new dogmatic structure.

Coherence neither equates to dogma not does it guarantee critical consistency. At the level of responding to individual films, Bazin changed his mind about several of them. For example, as we will see, he found the montage of *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942-1945) manipulative in 1946 and then transparent in 1952. He equated *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) to the work of Italian neo-realists only to regret his judgment later. But his ideas of what neo-realism was trying to do or how montage works did not change because they were informed by a broader or ontological understanding not just of cinema but of the aesthetic with its specific political implications. In order to make this argument, I will examine the two terms 'aesthetics' and 'politics' separately to then arrive at a synthesized understanding of aesthetic politics that Bazin's work yields. While I lay out this understanding in this introduction, it will be the chapters to follow that demonstrate how Bazin worked it out in the course of writing about specific films or when arguing explicitly about the political dimension of cinema.

Why the Aesthetic

In this dissertation, I make Bazin's ontological account of the cinema a subset of his understanding of the aesthetic. This might seem like a counter-intuitive approach to the work of a theorist who has been seen as exemplifying the medium-specific discourse of classical film theory. Also, the word 'aesthetic' has certain long-standing associations that make it seem unsuitable for an exploration of cinema's relationship to politics. In general, we take 'aesthetics' to refer to questions of style in relation to the specific powers of the medium. Within this understanding, the question of aesthetics becomes *a priori* separable from the question of art's relationship to society and politics. This understanding can lead to a histories of film style as exemplified by the work of David Bordwell in which the term 'aesthetics' is subsumed within 'style.' It can also lead to an understanding of art as autonomous and self-sufficient to be judged based on disinterested pleasure and nothing more where aesthetic value is not only separable from art's social significance but entirely transcends the latter. We won't find strong expressions of this in disciplinary film studies but it is a caricature of the aesthetic attitude for which no doubt several empirical examples can be found. Thus, most attempts at giving an account of the socio-political dimensions of art itself seeks to overcome the aesthetic, as we see in the opening sentence of a collection that seeks to go 'beyond aesthetics': 'Is it useful to see art objects, not as bearers of meaning or *aesthetic value*, but as forms mediating social action?'[26] Aesthetic value is here expressly opposed to social action. I will argue here for why this need not be the case.

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[26] Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas (ed.), *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and Technologies of Enchantment* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), vii. My emphasis.

Let us first take up the charge, as argued by Noël Carroll, that Bazin's discourse, as of classical film theory in general, was medium-specific.[27] Thinking about cinema's relationship to the other arts was not of peripheral concern to Bazin, nor was it an opportunity for merely marking cinematic specificity, but a way of inquiring how cinema fit in with a constellation of the arts; that is, within a certain idea of the aesthetic. Andrew and Angela Dalle Vacche have emphasized the centrality of such intermediality to Bazin's thinking, and the title of the latter's essay, 'The difference of the cinema in the system of the arts,' nicely captures the relational nature of Bazin's question 'What is cinema?' where the difference is marked within a larger system that holds it together with the other arts.[28] We can also get a sense of what is at stake in the intermedial nature of the question by attending to the words of Emmanuel Burdeau, a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

> When Bazin emphasized the idea of an impure cinema—his famous piece, 'For an Impure Cinema'—this impurity was defined in terms of the position that the cinema held in relation to the arts that were born before and which, in this hierarchy, were above it. There was literature, theater, music, painting, and, if one continues with Rohmer, architecture… Today, the question of an impure cinema remains in its entirety. But things have turned upside down. The impurity of cinema might now be seen as occupying a new position relative to the media and the arts, as though the latter came after; there has been a reversal. Fifty years ago, cinema was the child of all the other arts; today it would more likely be the parent of all the arts or certainly

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[27] Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[28] Dalle Vacche, "The Difference of Cinema"; Dudley Andrew, "Malraux, Bazin, and the Gesture of Picasso," in *Opening Bazin*, 153-166. Dalle Vacche seems to be referring to Paul Oskar Kristeller's foundational essay that defined the specificity of the modern arrangement of the arts within an overarching framework of art. See Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics I", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Oct. 1951), pp. 496-527; Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics II", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1952), pp. 17-46. Incidentally, Kristeller, a Renaissance scholar, knew Kracauer in Germany and became a close friend and interlocutor in the US around the time Kracauer started work on his book on historiography. He would eventually edit the manuscript of this book after Kracauer's death. Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (Princeton: Markus Weiner, 1995).

of all new media. This reversal should be thought about more deeply: it can help define the critical work of today.[29]

What I take from these remarks, keeping aside the idea of hierarchy, is the idea that cinema can only be understood in relation to the other arts, whether those that came before or those that came after and those still to come.[30] What this then requires is to ask that embarrassingly vague question, 'What is art?' before asking about the identity of this or that art form. Therefore, when Bazin chose to gather a decade and half worth's writing on the cinema under the question 'What is cinema?' he based it on Sartre's 'What is literature?' and both he and Sartre explicitly placed their inquiries within a questioning of the general function of art in their historical moment. And they were aware that their moment both in history and in art was still wrestling with the complex and not always happy legacy of the nineteenth century. If the question seems vague to us, it is not because it was so to begin with but perhaps because it has been caricatured too easily for too long.

What had for some time clouded the disciplinary vision with regards to the fact that the question of medium-specificity, not only in Bazin's work but in that of the other classical film theorists, was always posed within a cross-medial framework, was the moment of film studies' emergence in the 1970s. Its inquiry into the workings of cinema coincided with a moment in film history when several films made the cinematic apparatus and experience itself their subject.[31]

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[29] Dudley Andrew and Mary Ann Lewis, "'Writing on the Screen': An Interview with Emmanuel Burdeau," in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50:1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2009), 230-231.

[30] Bazin's speaks of a hierarchy of age in the arts, not of value; cinema the youngest of the arts understandably leans on the experience of the arts that preceded it, starting not with the novel or the bourgeois theater of the 19th century but with the much older traditions of the farce or the serial story of the popular press still contemporaneous with the moment of cinema's emergence. André Bazin, "For an Impure Cinema: Defense of Adaptation," in WCB, 114.

[31] This is not at all to say that cinema discovered reflexivity in the '60s. But there is a difference between, on the one hand, the "attractional" qualities of *The Great Train Robbery*—which manifested themselves at a moment when the fact and wonder of cinema itself rather than specific films were of greater interest—and the staging of cinematic fantasy in *Sherlock Jr.* in a vein of thrilling celebration, and on the other the overt dissatisfaction at the fact of

This moment of reflexivity in the cinema made theoretical inquiry the medium-specific discourse that was by then commonplace in the modernist moments of the other arts and that we thought was what the classical film theorists did.[32] The canonical articulation and institution of this misunderstanding has been the work of Carroll who has sought to *rescue* film theory from the fallacy of medium specificity.[33]

Carroll's characterization of classical film theory as concerned with defining the specificity of the filmic medium places this body of thought in the tradition of Lessing's *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766). This reference to an 18th-century paradigm is motivated in Carroll's work by its re-deployment by Clement Greenberg in *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940).[34] Thus, Carroll sees an essential continuity across centuries in the aesthetic discourse within which he places most film theorists, classical and otherwise. But by linking a 20th-century modernist discourse of medium specificity, whose North American specificity as well as its museum context need to be emphasized, with an 18th-century text and 20th-century film theories, Carroll effectively placed a red herring in our assessment of the history of "classical" film theory. Greenberg's text picks up from Irving Babbitt's *The New*

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cinema's industrial conditions in *Contempt* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963) or an increasing sense, as in *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), that a fatal voyeurism attends the cinematic experience of both recording and viewing. The sense, however disturbing or wonderful, that cinema can put us in touch with the world and even enchant it is the opposite of the sense that cinema alienates us from the world and traps us in our own consciousness.

[32] To be sure, the fact that apparatus theory would see cinema as a culmination and consolidation of the Renaissance discovery of perspective in painting and the empiricism of the 19th-century realist novel makes this medium-specific inquiry very much relational to the other arts. But the difference is this: where this relationality in classical film theory was understood with regards to how media use their different means for relating to the world, the apparatus theory was an unmasking of a cross-medial complicity with bourgeois ideology. This unmasking went hand-in-hand with the medium's turning in upon itself, making its own means its subject in the manner that characterized the specifically modernist notion of medium-specificity like that of twelve-tone music, the poetry of Mallarmé, the New Novel in France, or the paintings of Jackson Pollack: all instances that severely doubt the possibility or desirability of their material to refer to something other than itself.

[33] Noël Carroll, "Medium Specificity Arguments and the Self-Consciously Invented Arts" and "The Specificity of Media in the Arts", in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 3-36.

[34] Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in *Partisan Review* 7 (July-August 1940), 296-310.

Laokoon (1910) which bemoaned the Romantic legacy of mixing the arts that he traces back to Rousseau. In fact, one of Babbitt's contentions is that Lessing's text was singularly unsuccessful in drawing the boundaries it wanted to.[35] Given this discontinuity in the history of medium-specificity and the historically specific location of Babbitt's and Lessing's attempt to restore it, it is curious that Carroll could so easily assimilate almost all film theory to this anachronistic paradigm.[36]

It is not that Bazin or other classical film theorists did not inherit an earlier paradigm of art or that did not inquire into the specific powers of the filmic medium. But the paradigm they would have been inherited was the one that Carroll neatly skips over and this paradigm meant that, contrary to what he argues, they did not inquire into the specificity of the medium for its own sake. The meaning of medium specificity in the aesthetic paradigm of the *nineteenth* century, a Kantian legacy, which informs so much film theory until mid-century, is much more relational and its stakes are not just the status of one art form or another or the self-referential powers of the medium but of the aesthetic as an experiential and epistemological category in general. It is therefore important to recognize that the question of aesthetic politics as Bazin

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[35] Irving Babbit, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), pp. viii-ix.

[36] There have been arguments recently, other than those about Bazin, that can reorient our understanding of classical film theory that would be more sensitive to its own location in the history of aesthetics. Johannes von Moltke and, to a limited extent, Rodowick draw our attention to the fact that so much silent-era film theory was, characterized by in von Moltke's words "media promiscuity". While Rodowick still largely emphasizes self-identity in the aesthetic discourse of different media, in discussing Ricciotto Canudo's work he points out a desire for the fusion of all the arts. This idea of the "total artwork" is one direction taken by the cross-medial concerns of 19th-century aesthetics. Von Moltke, on the other hand, pays attention to the literary activities of Béla Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, and Siegfried Kracauer to demonstrate how, rather than a primary obsession with what a medium does, there is trans-medial migration of thematic concerns and rhetorical devices as these theorists move across working in and thinking about different media. He tracks how thematic concerns with exile and fantasies of reparation in the literary work of these theorists inform the particular theoretical and formal concerns when they turn to writing about film. Johannes von Moltke, "Theory of the Novel: The Literary Imagination of Classical Film Theory", *October* 144 (Spring 2013), pp. 49-72; D. N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Film Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 80-83.

raises it is indissociable from this understanding of the aesthetic. Here, raising the question of aesthetics has nothing to do with parsing films and other texts into an *a priori* hierarchy of values; such a question would have to be indifferent to whether we are dealing with a mainstream film, airport fiction, or the latest set of 'New Wave' films from whatever country's production happens to be prominent at the festivals. This also means that one can identify more than one paradigm of art to which these different kinds of works respond, and the 'aesthetic' as I discuss it here is one of them. Under the pressure of proliferating technologies most scholars may be highly reluctant to raise the question of politics of the image in this form, with reference to 'art,' or even to 'cinema,' with all the 'spiritual dust and grime' (Bazin) these terms have accrued; to these they may prefer something like 'media' or 'visual culture.' It only means that they are looking to carry out their inquiry under a new ontological paradigm of art. Whatever that happens to be would be more compelling if it has a clear view of what it wants to replace. It certainly would not be replacing a hermetic medium-specific discourse. This inquiry seeks to recover in Bazin's work the political promise of what for many may be a lapsed paradigm.

I would now like to briefly address the charge that the idea of aesthetic autonomy is explicitly opposed to art's socio-political function. I referred earlier to arguments by Andrew, Morgan, and Schoonover for Bazin's understanding of cinema as a mediator of social experience. If we look at each argument, they all either state or assume that film's ability to mediate historical experience is predicated on some idea of autonomy. Andrew's idea of dislocation captures cinema's ability to put the world out of our reach by paradoxically making present delayed images of the past that will potentially survive the present. The fact that films can speak to us differently each time we watch them, that others respond to them differently from us, and that the responses they will call forth in the future cannot be predicted is a marker

16

of the autonomy of images. Morgan speaks of "Bazin as committed to a specific movement from image to reality. What we learn by watching and responding to films… can be transferred to the way we engage reality." He also specifies that such a movement is possible only in relation to "things outside ourselves, things that stand freely of our capacity to impose an order on them." And he calls this commitment moral and political.[37] Schoonover's argument that Italian neo-realism constructed a model for empathizing from a distance is also predicated on the autonomy of Italy on the screen from, for example, the world of the North American spectator but which nonetheless are brought into a relationship. These are all models of what we might call a relational rather than absolute autonomy, something that is indeed central to the conception of aesthetic politics that emerges from Bazin's work. But rather than take it as the unique achievement of cinema or Italian neo-realism, I would like to probe a little more into the origins of this idea to which Bazin was particularly attuned.

M. H. Abrams has argued that the idea of aesthetic autonomy and related notions of disinterest and 'art for art's sake' were eighteenth- and nineteenth-century successors to longstanding metaphysical and theological ideas in Christian thought, particularly the Augustinian tradition which channeled Platonic ideas of beauty and the good as markers of the divine and of disinterested love as its contemplation. As ideas that applied to secular art, or secular understandings of even religious art, they designated the aesthetic as new theology founded on principles of the old Christian religion.[38] Abrams traces the two-faced trajectory of this new idea: on the one hand, aesthetic experience aspires to being unworldly and is committed

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[37] Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 481.

[38] M. H. Abrams, 'Kant and the Theology of Art,' in *Notre Dame English Journal*, vol. 13 no. 3 (Summer 1981), 75-106.

to disengagement from the historical world; on the other, the aesthetic is also a site where new secular utopic visions are formulated. In *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, he describes how a Christian philosophy of history, with its structure of a determining crisis ('the Fall') and a teleological destination, becomes determinant for the expression of a range of secular religions in Romantic literature as it was for Hegel's philosophy of history.[39] This genealogy of the aesthetic as a secularization of religious concepts, far from being an argument against its political significance, will turn out, with some significant variations, to be its foundation in the work of Bazin. I emphasize this genealogy in chapters three and four in particular, and here I will lay out some markers to demonstrate how deeply Bazin was aware of this legacy of the aesthetic.

To begin with, as Andrew's biography tells us, Bazin wrote his thesis at the École Normale de Saint Cloud on the religious aspects of Baudelaire's poetry, and he did so in the years immediately after the publication in 1939 of the first edition of the monumental work of Albert Béguin on German Romanticism, *L'Âme Romantique et le Rêve*.[40] Béguin's work is an exhaustive study of the Romantic tradition as shaped by and in reaction to the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment. It places French Romanticism in this lineage taking in not only Baudelaire and the nineteenth century but also the Surrealists who were Béguin's contemporaries. The figures Béguin studies were deeply immersed and familiar with the scientific culture of the nineteenth century and who at the same time sought to create intricate

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[39] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973)

[40] Andrew, *André Bazin*, 39; Albert Béguin, *L'Âme Romantique et le Rêve: Essai Sue le Romantisme Allemand et la Poésie Française* (Paris: José Corti, 1939). Ludovic Cortade has found that Bazin's thesis was destroyed in a wartime fire at the École Normale at Saint Cloud. E-mail correspondence with Ludovic Cortade, April 16, 2016. In the postwar years, Béguin would be a key collaborator with *Esprit* and would succeed Emmanuel Mounier as editor upon the latter's death.

worlds of the imagination that could give supra-rational form to the dispersed experiences of modernity. As someone who studied a key Romantic figure in Baudelaire, Bazin would have been intimately familiar with this dialectic of the religious and the secular and of the rational and the irrational that defined Romantic aesthetic philosophy.
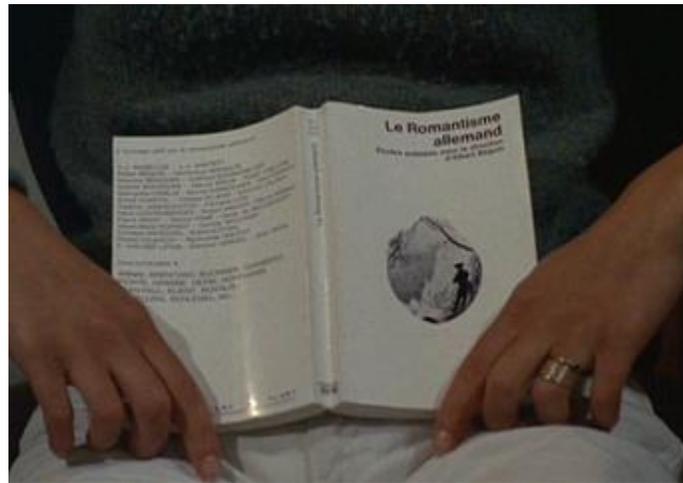
Fig. 1: Haydée (Haydée Politoff) reads a work on German Romanticism by Albert Béguin in Eric Rohmer's *La Collectioneuse* (1967)

What Bazin understood about the Romantic sensibility is its contention that in a world without the theological certainties that used to frame social institutions and practices, the imagination needs new structures of belief that can give form to experience. Speaking about Kafka, a key writer for him to whose work we will see him compare the films of Chaplin and De Sica, Bazin writes:

> [Kafka'] drama is this: God doesn't exist, the last office in the castle is empty. There perhaps is the specific tragedy of the modern world, the passage to the transcendence of a social reality which births its own deification.[41]i

Bazin believed that the loss, or at least the loss of primacy, of the Christian God in Western modernity, calls necessarily, as the phrase 'births its own deification' indicates, for new

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[41] André Bazin, "De Sica Metteur en Scène," in QQCIV, 85 (WCII, 73).

19

transcendental structures of belief but formed somehow from the very social reality it is supposed to ground. The internalization of such structures of belief which then orient our experience of the world, consciously or otherwise, we know by the 'scientific' term ideology. Bazin's term for this, which recalls the structural substrate of religious belief, is mythology. A mythology's transcendence is not the perfect, vertical transcendence of revealed religion but a lateral transcendence which emerges and terminates in the historical world. It is made up of the same contradictions and confusions as the historical world but these elements are, to use a Hegelian term, sublated; that is, internalized and neutralized. A clear example of such a mythology and one that we will see Bazin analyze is that of the Western understood as one form of the American national consciousness not only for Americans but also the non-Americans who have used it to form a picture of America. Yet, what the genre takes from history is so basic— some character types, certain ways of dressing, talking, a few recurring tasks—that it would stand very little scrutiny as history by any empirical measure.

As quasi- or pseudo-religious structures of belief, mythologies acquire an internal consistency which they then subliminally impose on our imaginations and through it on to our world. In order to so impose itself, mythologies must have a semblance of the transcendence that characterizes all structures of belief that we learn to take for granted. But as contingent structures formed out of history's contradictions, the hold that secular mythologies have on us is bound to decline and their contradictions inevitably show through. This is the 'tragedy of the modern world' that Bazin refers to, a word not to be taken as indicating regret or nostalgia for revealed religion or enduring certainties but as a marker of the openness of the modern political condition where new possibilities inevitably come at the expense of the old without for all that constituting linear progress towards utopia. A mythology that no longer exercises any force on us is not a

20

stepping stone to a better mythology but only to one more in tune with historical changes. The drama of the politics of the social imaginary is both the inhabiting of historically-contingent mythologies as well as the transitions from one mythology to another.[42]

The aesthetic understood as a generator of secular mythologies in these senses—as quasi-theological structures rooted in but relatively autonomous from history—rather than realism, I will argue, is the cornerstone of Bazin's work. Indeed, Bazin's achievement was to take the framework of high Romanticism and argue that it finds its justification not in hermetic utopic visions of solitary authors but in an industrialized, democratic, and popular culture where an opaque correspondence between a historical moment and its artworks sub-consciously orients the political imagination of their spectators and readers. While any solitary spectator watching any film engages a mythic imaginary, for Bazin the specifically popular and industrial character of cinema made it a pre-eminently political medium that brought together a large number of these solitary spectators who together make a film's mythic imaginary potentially politically effective. In this regard, the cinema was an inheritor not so much of Romantic poetic or painterly traditions but of the nineteenth-century novel and its origins in the serial format. Therefore, the Bazin we will come across is one who was deeply invested in genre films as vehicles for the social imaginary and who worried about cinematic realism's capacity to convert the image as imaginary to images that constitute, in his words, 'a fallacious alibi of [empirical] reality.'[43][ii]

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[42] Andrew traces these ideas in Bazin to the influence of Teilard de Chardin and André Malraux; more specifically, de Chardin's attempts to reconcile science and religion and Malraux's argument that modern art is a substitute for lapsed religion. See Andrew, *André Bazin*, 57-60.

[43] André Bazin, "La langage de notre temps,' *Regards Neufs Sur le Cinéma* (Paris; Peuple et Culture, 1972 [1953]), 17.

To summarize this discussion of the aesthetic, it is a cross-medial paradigm under which the work of art is a bearer of social mythologies. In this, it is a quasi-theological structure that has a relative autonomy from this history from which it takes its material only in turn to impose its form on it. Let us now turn to the other key term, 'politics,' that too needs some historical and conceptual specificity. The question is in what sense we can call the structure of the aesthetic I have described political and what kind of critical response it calls for. After all, it might be a commonplace to say that works of art influence our sense of history in ways that we don't grasp clearly. One response to this might be to call for formal strategies that expose the illusory qualities of the aesthetic, another might be to sharpen critical strategies of demystification, another still might be to call for works of art that give us the ideological orientation that *we* want from them. Understanding the specific attitude that Bazin took towards the 'bad faith' inherent in the mythic structure of the aesthetic is crucial for understanding the specificity of his idea of the political.

The Bad Faith of Sartrean Politics

When I said at the outset that some classical film theorists might seem better placed to inform us about cinema's political role at this moment of historical crises, all it meant was that an Eisenstein or a Benjamin believed cinema had a role to play in the transformation of consciousness at a moment of high political stakes similar to our own. For them, cinema may thus have been a political tool in some sense. But this is just one idea about what cinematic politics might be. For the apparatus theorists of the late 1960s and '70s, the politics of the image entailed the role of cinema in stabilizing the ideology of a self-sufficient subjectivity that in itself was a class construct. A political engagement *with the image* and its apparatus involved unmasking its workings. For cultural studies scholars, it involved going beyond the formal

constructs of the image to look at how a range of historically-specific interests, identities, and expressions intersect within and around it.

Given the diversity in even a thumbnail listing of only three paradigms for understanding the relationship between politics and art, and the fact that so many scholars occupy themselves in interrogating it, it should give us pause that neither Raymond Williams's *Keywords* nor the more recent *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* has an entry on 'politics' or 'political art.'[44] It surely cannot be that the meaning of these terms is self-evident. There clearly are varying patterns for how some of the other keywords—society, representation, democracy, culture, liberalism, radical, and so on—come together to constitute the 'political' character of art and aesthetics. In this part of the introduction I will take up the reigning paradigm of aesthetic politics in Bazin's time—Jean-Paul Sartre's theorization of 'committed' literature—that Bazin had to contend with, and which was used by his contemporaries to accuse him of formalism at the expense of politics. Bazin had a complicated relationship with Sartre's work that might best be described as 'using Sartre against Sartre' in the realm of aesthetic politics. The ideas of 'surviving politics' and 'bad faith' in this dissertation's title are meant to capture this and I will elaborate upon the significance of these terms in the discussion to follow.

Sartre too traced the emergence of modern art as a product of its dissociation from the theological and political programs of the Church and the Court. He argues that Kant invented an empty autonomy of the aesthetic in order to mark this break, but also to prevent art from serving

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[44] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2005).

the emergent ruling class of the bourgeoisie.[45] However, he argues that this is a self-deceiving autonomy since art ends up serving the new ruling class by omission. As the 1945 preface introducing the journal *Les Temps Modernes* makes clear, this stance of aesthetic autonomy implicates the likes of the Goncourt Brothers and Flaubert for the events of the Paris Commune, not because they sanctioned it ideologically but because they used the idea of aesthetic autonomy to remain silent as these events took place.[46]

For Sartre, one must always ask 'For whom does one write?' since the idea of complete autonomy cannot keep literature from serving an ideology if only through omission. For him, since the nineteenth-century writer gained his autonomy in the context of class development in an industrial context, he should have written for a split class public, raising the consciousness of the proletariat and bringing the bourgeoisie to witness its own inequity. If only he had done this, 'without doubt, Marxism would have triumphed' while at the same time become an open ideology that is transformed by the rival ideologies that it would have digested.[47] As a realized ideal, concrete literature would be a synthesis of 'Negativity,' which abolishes the self-satisfactions or inequities of whatever exists, and a 'Project,' which outlines a future order.[48] As such, literature would be a perpetual questioning that keeps the future open, a quality which he identifies with an 'undifferentiated feminine desire' rather than analytical thinking.[49]

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[45] Jean-Paul Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 111-112.

[46] Ibid. 252.

[47] Ibid., 131-132.

[48] Ibid., 138-139.

[49] Ibid., 103, 137.

Sartre's ideal of aesthetic politics requires an appeal to the freedom of the reader by the freedom of a writer who writes for his time.[50] But since such an ideal situation of perpetual questioning did not exist either in postwar France or elsewhere, the role of the writer is simply defined by the choice of whether or not he writes for his time. Choosing to write for one's time entailed putting aesthetic autonomy at the service of concrete social requirements: "[E]ach book proposes a concrete liberation on the basis of a particular alienation."[51] So aesthetic politics in this Sartrean sense requires a clear stance by the writer on the issues of the day that proceeds from a negation of what is towards a projection into what might be in the future. We need to here link Sartrean understanding of literary commitment to his philosophy and in particular to the idea of 'bad faith' from which we can then identify some contradictions pertinent to how Bazin responds to this discourse.

The ideas of negation and projection may map on to a philosophy of history in Sartre's work, and they certainly have Hegelian origins, but he had worked them out most sustainedly before and through the war in relation to understanding individual being. The key terms in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) are the being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Being-in-itself is pure, undefined non-conscious being which through the unavoidable freedom in which it exists must come to consciousness as being-for-itself. The undefined character of being-in-itself must be understood as 'undefined by itself' because it inevitably exists in and defined by a situation not originally of its own choosing, such as the fact that one is born in a certain class, in a certain place, and a particular time in history. The situation defines the possibilities for being but never entirely since there is always a residue of freedom that exceeds the situation. For being to come

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[50] Ibid., 73

[51] Ibid., 72.

to consciousness and become for-itself, it must nihiliate or negate the situation and chose its possibility. The negation of the situation in a movement towards some possibility at the same time negates all the other possibilities that being has not chosen. So far, Sartre's ontology of being appears as a phenomenology of self-realization. However, there can be no self-realization because that would mean that the self or being would have arrived at its destination and become another in-itself and thus lose the self-consciousness it must always strive towards. If a person having been born in a working-class family transcends this class situation into a bourgeois life, it would be a mistake for her to take this as achieved self-realization. It is in the nature of being to put everything that simply is and its possibilities into question and to forever strain towards being-for-itself. This is a picture of a constant disintegration of being since the fact, but not the idea, of self-realization is alien to it. When we chose to act in order to become something, there is nothing that justifies this goal over others, since there are no metaphysical guarantees.

> Everything happens as if the world, man, man-in-the-world succeeded in realizing only a missing God. Everything happens therefore as if the in-itself and the for-itself were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis. Not that the integration has ever *taken place* but on the contrary precisely because it is always indicated and always possible.[52]

According to Sartre, we overcome this disintegration of world and being through a process of bad faith which is a form of self-deception. It is not strictly a lie because the person does not consciously know that he is lying. Moreover, it is a process rather than a lie about any determinate fact other than that of the disintegration at the heart of being. For example, in order to be a hairdresser, one needs not only to be able to perform tasks such as cutting hair but also comport oneself in a certain manner. A hairdresser may be expected to be gregarious so one learns to talk about the trivialities of the day when cutting hair. This is to conform to one's social

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[52] Ibid., 623.

role as a given, a facticity, or an in-itself. But then the hairdresser always transcends the role of

the hairdresser, as for example someone who is also an amateur ornithologist and organizer of

the local bird-watchers' society expected to have specialized knowledge about te migratory

patterns of birds. But she transcends both these roles as a free being which she must deny in

order to go on inhabiting her customary roles. This constant, unconscious denial of other

possibilities is the structure of bad faith. We need bad faith in order to go on being true to

whatever contingent acts we perform. But bad faith also works as necessary denial in another

way. The moment we decide to shed the roles we have come to play unconsciously and decide to

acknowledge our freedom and become something else, we are required to confront what we

are—a hairdresser, for example—and then negate that in order to try and become what we are

not yet. In this moment of suspension, bad faith consists in in effect denying a fact ('I *am not* a

hairdresser or an expert in ornithology.') in order to affirm the possibility of something that does

not yet exist. We return through this version of bad faith to the same instable structure of being,

what Sartre calls a 'perpetually disintegrating game of synthesis.'[53]

On Sartre's analysis, either bad faith is inescapable or, as he says in the conclusion of

Being and Nothingness, it can only be escaped by denying all symbolic values that attach to

empirical states.[54] Such a denial is the constant affirmation of freedom and a constant realization

of the equivalence of all action, 'whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations.'[55] What

kind of ethical imperative can come from this realization of the equal futility of all action that

can then ground political experience? Sartre himself asks, 'And can one *live* this new aspect of

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[53] Ibid., 58.

[54] Ibid., 626.

[55] Ibid., 627.

being? In particular will freedom by taking itself for an end escape all *situation*?'[56] Sartre

promised a future work that would address these questions on the ethical plane, something that

he never completed.[57] Given such a precipice on which his philosophical inquiries remained at

the end of the war, we might ask what advance the idea of commitment he espoused in the

immediate postwar years represent. It seems nothing more than a call for as full an

acknowledgement as possible of one's situatedness in history, attended by an 'anguish as

conditioned freedom [that] accepts more fully its responsibility as an existent by whom the world

comes into being.'[58] History and politics, in other words, come into being through us, for which

we are responsible, and since whatever comes to be is futile, acceptance of history and politics is

a perpetual game of anguish and disintegrating synthesis. In the postwar years, however, this

consciousness of futility called upon certain strategies of bad faith on Sartre's own part.

As Alice Kaplan and Philip Watts have argued, there were some key consequences to the

fact that Sartre conceived his postwar program for a literary commitment in the midst of the

postwar purges of collaborators, including by the National Committee of Writers formed under

the Occupation and in which Sartre participated prominently.[59] As Watts writes, his involvement

in the purge was only one of a long line of involvement in judicial cases—such as his campaigns

for the release of Jean Genet and the case of Henri Martin, a naval soldier who refused to fight in

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[56] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1992 [1943]), 628.

[57] Drafts of a 'notebook on ethics' were published posthumously but this was unfinished, fragmentary work. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[58] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 628. This quotation is a paraphrase of one of the questions Sartre promises to answer in the later work on ethics but that I find captures well what the idea of commitment amounted to.

[59] Alice Yaeger Kaplan, "Literature and Collaboration," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 966-971; Philip Watts, *Allegories of the Purge: How Literature Responded to the Postwar Trials of Writers and Intellectuals in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Indochina—which saw "Sartre consistently [assign] to himself the roles of attorney, judge, and jury."[60] Thus, his writings acquired a juridical quality in which ideas and people seem to be on trial. What is curious about Sartre's leading role in articulating such a mandate for the writer is the fact that during the Occupation he wasn't among the most active Resistants. As with so many French people, he carried on with his professional duties and his career did not suffer any significant setbacks, and he occasionally published by complying with German censors and even, in one or two instances, with collaborationist publications and presses.[61] Therefore, Tony Judt reads Sartre's postwar rhetoric and practice of commitment, and also the general process of the postwar purges, as a compensatory exercise for a less-than-exceptional political record during the Occupation.[62]

But the indicting mode of argument in Sartre's postwar writing can already be traced in philosophical terms to the end of his prewar novel *Nausea* where Roquentin, a historian, has come to accept the realization about the inescapability of existence's situatedness. He knows that existence cannot be dismissed for its lack of meaning, but that it requires justification in an act. He decides to abandon history since "an existant cannot justify the existence of another existant." So he thinks that he might write another kind of book, "A story, for example, something that could never happen, an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence."[63] The idea of shame is important here because Roquentin in true Sartrean fashion senses that any justification for existence can only be contingent and not

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[60] Watts, *Allegories of the Purge*, 60

[61] Watts, *Allegories of the Purge*;

[62] Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), ch. 3.

[63] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), 174.

necessary. So the closest one may come to escaping bad faith may just be to expose the bad faith

of others. So postwar, Sartre set about energetically prosecuting and shaming those who would

fall short of its demands which also involved him becoming a self-appointed spokesman and

advocate for the proletariat, the colonized, and everyone else who was persecuted by the state.

However, in the absence of a clearly defined moral basis, the rhetoric of commitment became

glibly moralizing. Perhaps the most famous instance of this moralizing disguised as

philosophical truth was his use of the word '*salaud*' ('bastard') ('raised,' as Bazin notes wryly at

one point, 'to the level of philosophical dignity') to characterize those who insist that the

contingent facts of their lives are in fact necessary, such as for example the idea that their wealth

is a sign of deserving hard work rather than a certain arrangement of relations of production.[64]

The idea of political commitment in Sartre is therefore inseparable from a certain juridical

attitude and a provocation of guilt as the marker of coming to consciousness which was aligned

with the historical experience of the Occupation and the Liberation years.

Another important problem with Sartre's notion of commitment is its medium-specificity.

Those in the French film community in the postwar years who wielded the idea of committed

cinema overlooked a simple point about Sartre's position, which was that he spoke only of a

committed *prose* literature and not even poetry. In the very first part of *What Is Literature?*

Sartre invokes a medium-specific discourse to restrict his notion of commitment to prose.

Literature needs commitment because it deals with words with determinate meaning, that is refer

inescapably to the world; all other arts, even poetry, essentially explore the nature of their

material, not how it refers to the world. The meaning of works of art other than prose literature is

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[64] Sartre, "Existentialism and humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. Stephen Priest (London: Routledge, 2001), 43. The
French word is "*salaud*" which this translation gives as "scum." But "bastard" or "swine" is the more common
translation of this word. For Bazin's remark on this, see "Le cinéma américain: la dignité de l'être."

always inexhaustible and often extraneous to their exploration of material and style. This too-convenient division allowed Sartre to explore aesthetic complexity when exploring works in the other arts and to abandon similar critical acuity in the assessment of literature.

And yet it was Sartre's literary criticism of the pre-war and war years that established him as the fine critic who appealed to Bazin and Eric Rohmer and their generation. Rohmer would write in 1994 "We all devoured his texts in NRF. They renewed criticism. Collected in *Situations I*, these texts have not lost their freshness. It is regrettable that he who spoke so well of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Mauriac, Bataille, was not inspired, or was badly inspired, by cinema…."[65] Initially, Sartre spoke to Rohmer and his generation even on the subject of cinema. The inaugural issues of *Gazette du Cinéma*, a journal founded by Rohmer, published a speech by Sartre to school students in 1931—belonging roughly to the generation of the young critics—that argues for the cinema as a privileged medium that will mediate the relationship of the new generations to the world around them.[66]

Sartre's postwar division of aesthetic labor, exempting the other arts from a clear social function while subordinating literature to the political demands of the time was essentially an exercise, as Sartre himself admits, in recovering "the professional good conscience" of writers in the aftermath of the Liberation and the coming to terms with the fact of writers' collaboration with the Germans during the War. Because of its transparent utilitarianism, it was prose literature that had compromised France, and therefore it needed to redeem itself.[67] Thus, soon after

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[65] Eric Rohmer, "La 'révolution' Bazin : Le mystère de l'existence", *Le Monde* (15 December 1994).

[66] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le cinéma n'est pas une mauvaise école", *Gazette du Cinéma*, (June and July 1950).

[67] There was some bad faith on Sartre's part in elevating the role of prose in both its guilt and in its postwar mandate to redeem literature. Poetry was an extremely fertile ground in France during the Occupation for debates on whether to write during such historical conditions or not, and what to write. Among those who chose to write alongside other Resistance activities, there was already a return to more classical forms and tropes that anticipate Sartre's emphasis

publishing the last instalment of *What Is Literature?*, Sartre could write with fascination and easy conscience about the artist's "quest for the Absolute" in the sculptures of Giacometti with not a reference to history or politics.[68] What was dereliction of history in literature, for Sartre, was a valid mystical quest in the other arts.

There are two key aspects of Sartrean discourse that Bazin would have resisted. The first is the rhetoric of shaming and prosecution that counted for politics in his work. We could point to the fact that Sartre stood up for important causes such as those of the working-class, the cause of the black people in America, and the colonized. But this would be to judge the idea of aesthetic politics primarily through the worth of the ideological commitments of specific works. The problem of aesthetic politics in Bazin's work will turn out to be a confrontation with works which affect us despite the contradictions of their ideological commitments rather than their accordance with our own. As ideology critique understood, with a popular art form like cinema in particular, the problem is precisely one of being held in the grip of ideologies that are not our own. Sartre was an *author* speaking to others authors about commitment, worried about the political good conscience of authors. Bazin was a critic trying to understand how socio-political and historical experience is mediated by whatever works we as spectators encounter. Even if individual filmmakers were very important to him, he did not equate the ideological commitments of works with the explicit ones of their authors. In fact, for him the modernity of cinema as well as the modernity of the aesthetic was precisely its ability to indirectly tap into the

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on clarity and transparence. Philip Watts, following Denis Hollier, sees in Sartre's sidelining of poetry a marginalization of a rival literary form, something that he was to rehabilitate in the 1948 preface to an anthology of African and West Indian poets. See Watts, *Allegories of the Purge*, 70; On debates in French poetry during World War II on the question of a writer's responsibilities, see Ann Smock, "1940-1944: The Honor of Poets," in *A New History of French Literature*, 948-953.

[68] Sartre, 'The Quest for the Absolute,' in *The Aftermath of the War {Situations III)*, trans. Chris Turner (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2008), 333-353; originally published in *Les Temps Modernes* in January 1948.

historical unconscious distinct from the consciousness of the author. To this end, the second

aspect that Bazin would have found untenable was the Sartrean split between clear and

committed prose (in which language is a tool for drawing an exact portrait of reality) and poetry

(which 'withdraw[s] [the reader] from the human condition and invite[s] him to consider with the

eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out').[69] It is rather in the inside-out

appearance of the world on film, its character as a site for mythologies, that he would locate the

political character of the aesthetic. But there are aspects of Sartre's work that deeply informed

Bazin's thought and I will now offer a theoretical sketch of how he draws upon them in

elaborating the mythic character of the aesthetic which is at the same time, unlike for Sartre, a

political construct.[70]

The Bad Faith of Bazinian Aesthetics

A mythology for Bazin, as I suggested earlier, necessarily takes its material from history

but gives it an imaginary shape that then imposes itself on how we relate to our world. (I use

'history' and 'historical' not only in the sense of 'the past' but also and more often to mean the

publicly shared world in the present. In this sense, it has a close relationship to 'politics' and

'political.') In Sartrean terms, what mythologies do is negate the multitudinous character of

historical experience to give an abstracted image of history. Rather than an 'in-itself' with all its

empirical thickness, history appears 'for-itself,' giving us a historical consciousness that orients

experience. But the world in all its empirical thickness continues to exist behind the mythic

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[69] Sartre, *What Is Literature?* 34

[70] Sartre's disbarring of poetry as a political form is predicated on its ability to create myths in opposition to the portraits that prose draws. Sartre, *What Is Literature?* 333ff4

image and when we try to explain how this image orients us, we inevitably come up against a point where we alternate between the image and the world.

To take an example, a rudimentary reading of *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987) and *Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese, 2013) may be that they are images of decadence and corruption not just of Wall Street but of a financialized society in which an increasingly intensified sensorial, hedonistic reality corresponds paradoxically to an increasingly vanishing world of stable objects, as the value of money, no longer tied at the source to the physical standard of gold, multiplies as if by itself. A university professor offers a sophisticated version of this reading in peer-reviewed scholarship and teaches it to students. The same professor is also part of a committee on increasing the university endowment where he sometimes needs to meet and convince financial traders that contributing to the university may be a good idea for a variety of reasons, neglecting to mention that he firmly believes that university education helps in training the next generation of the country's citizens to think critically about the economic foundations of its society and who will then hopefully work to transform it. But apart from these professional duties of making rigorous arguments and participating in university administration, the professor in watching the films is also drawn to identify with the pleasures such a society affords. All these contradictions, especially the last fact of pleasure in the very contents of the object of critique, are an effect of aesthetic bad faith.

Sartre, who quit his academic position and refused the Nobel Prize to avoid being tied to the symbolic and practical constraints of these institutions, would no doubt tap into the guilt of the unconscious self-deception involved in the hypothetical situation I just described. Bazin would resist this line by arguing that since bad faith on Sartre's own account is unavoidable there could be no question of guilt unless perhaps if some sort of conscious deception is involved

which does not concern the aesthetic or anything except the individuals involved. A residual bad faith is constitutive of all experience and it is constitutive of aesthetic experience. The specificity of aesthetic bad faith consists in the fact that *it commits us to history and its contradictions affectively rather than intellectually*. In my example of the Wall Street films, the hypothetical argument would have no force unless we are drawn into the film's pleasures however objectionable we might find them. This second aspect of involuntary pleasure is what critics of *Wolf of Wall Street* understand who point out that the film's depiction of the hedonistic lifestyle feels like a validation rather than a condemnation of fraudulent trading. But any aesthetic critique needs to pass through at least a vague sense of complicity with what is being critiqued, and only reactive pleasure rather than rational argument can be the basis of complicity with contradictions.

There is another layer of bad faith to the aesthetic that further complicates its political function. In my example, the professor whose political imagination is oriented by a reading of the films is put in a situation where that orientation seems to have a direct bearing when he has to convince financial traders to part with money because the state does not give enough for the university to be financially secure. But while the film orients him in the historical condition, no particular action necessarily follows from it. He could try and convince the trader or he could as well try to recuse himself from the committee and spend the same time trying to lobby the state to increase funding for higher education. Assuming, of course, that he is not seduced by the Wall Street lifestyle and embarks on a late second career as a stockbroker. The films, therefore, are a false alibi for any action that follows from the orientation they provide. To argue otherwise is to, like Sartre, reduce the work of art to a tool wielded by the ideology it serves. In which case, when Scorsese's film, instead of a resounding critique of financial fraud that we expected gives

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us its glorification we would be within our rights to sue the filmmakers as we would sue the car company when the air bag fails to deploy in an accident.

Finally, there is the fact that the pleasure we take in films as aesthetic objects is dependent on, in Sartre's words, the 'inside-out' appearance of the world on screen. This 'inside-out' appearance would for Sartre be a turn away from the world and in this Bazin agrees initially. We will see that for Bazin film as an aesthetic medium could hope to be political only by first accepting its status as a site of escape from a history whose uncertainties or unwelcome certainties we seek to survive. As Abrams argues, the theological basis of the aesthetic means that it is predicated on a turn away from the uncertainties, conflicts, and discontents of the temporal world. However, he points out, these are the same conditions that furnish the material for works of art and 'on which they impose their artistic order so as to achieve their entirely human effects.'[71] Given this paradox, any relationship that a film as an aesthetic object has to the historical world of the spectator is formed on the spectator's escape route from history. Therefore, aesthetics has no *direct* bearing on politics as action, but it has the potential to re-form at a remove the political horizon of experience that is the historical world.

On Sartre's account with which Bazin would agree, *politics* occurs only when one acts or speaks freely in situations of ambiguity. The aesthetic gives an imaginary form to the world but does not take away the ambiguity of action and speech. This imaginary form is its *political* character. I take this distinction between 'the political' and 'politics' from Chantal Mouffe who in turn bases it on Heidegger's distinction between the ontological and the ontic, but also from Hannah Arendt's theorization of politics. For Mouffe, the ontological level of the political is that

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[71] Abrams, "Kant and the Theology of Art," 102.

which frames a society as a set of antagonisms represented by a range of interests and positions. The ontic level of politics is the set of practices and institutions in which the antagonistic positions are provisionally contained and given an order.[72] For example, representative parliamentary democracy in the West has conventionally framed politics as progressive and conservative, Left and Right, often with a two-party system. However, the actual politically agonistic interests do not naturally align with this arrangement. For a conventional Left program working class interests and racial equality may run together but at a given historical moment these interests may clash at the *political* level, and it is the work of *politics* to re-contain their opposition within the shared framework of parliamentary and party representation.

My use, in relation to the aesthetic, of Mouffe's distinction between the political and politics is slightly different from hers. It is the political, in the form of a work of art, that provides a provisional, imaginary form to the historical world and politics is how our actions and speech negotiate the antagonisms and ambiguities of the historical world. It is this imaginary form imposed on the world that, to use a phrase from Arendt, introduces us into politics.[73] In the first chapter, we will see how Bazin conceives of the cinema as a medium that potentially forms the political horizon of a world that for its spectators is often devoid of politics because it is either formless or its form has become unbearable. In giving it a (new) form, films therefore make it political again.

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[72] Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and the Political," in *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 8-9.

[73] The phrase "Introduction *into* politics" identifies one of Arendt's incomplete manuscripts now published as part of *The Promise of Politics*. She herself does not explicitly elaborate upon it, but a reading of her work suggests that since politics occurs only through public contestation over whatever exists, it cannot be defined in advance. For her, we emerge into the public sphere of freedom from the private realm of necessity and are therefore introduced into ongoing politics. See Hannah Arendt, "Introduction *into* Politics," *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken, 2005), ch. 6; ebook.

On Bazin's account as it will emerge in this dissertation, there is only an indirect link between the political form of the aesthetic and the politics that may follow from it. Despite the political importance of the aesthetic, the closest we come to an aesthetic politics is when we speak about films and argue, from a place of affect, about what they have meant for us and seek to persuade others of the validity of our interpretations. In doing this, we attempt to make effective the political imaginary offered by a film which would otherwise perhaps not outlast the week of its release. But the tension between the political and politics of aesthetics reaches a particularly intense pitch when films affectively attach us to contradictions and ideologies that we cannot accept rationally, as in the tension for some spectators between enjoyment and critique in responding to the world of *Wolf of Wall Street*. I mentioned earlier that what is particularly important to Bazin is the fact that more often than not to watch films is to put oneself in front of an ideological picture that we do not control but which controls us. In talking critically about a film, everything turns upon giving an account of what ideological picture we become attached to and despite what contradictions within it, contradictions that we are otherwise not inclined to abide. One important effect of the political, therefore, is the unexpected acknowledgement of the force of ideological pictures and therefore historical experiences that we otherwise refuse. In this, the aesthetic retains an ability to keep giving us a world other than what we are inhabit unselfconsciously. The work of a critic and of critique for Bazin is 'to prolong… the shock of a work of art,'iii a shock that is more often than not felt in the imaginary or, to use another word, ideology.[74]

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[74] André Bazin, "Réflexions Sur la Critique," in *CFLNV*, 213.

Keeping the Faith

A last but significant point before I move on to the chapter descriptions concerning the quasi-theological elements in this understanding of the political character of the aesthetic. If any politics that follows from aesthetic experience must often acknowledge the power of what we cannot abide in rational terms, then for Bazin it can only be a politics based on love, particularly on the Platonic and Augustinian idea of love for the non-self that Abrams has argued is the basis of the modern understanding of disinterested pleasure in the aesthetic. Emphasizing this philosophical and theological basis of the aesthetic and arguing for its political character from there is bound to touch upon some disciplinary sensitivities that have accompanied Bazin's reception both in France and in the Anglophone academy. Philip Rosen, for example, argues that if only Hugh Gray had made different translation choices, the ideology critics would not have mistaken Bazin's theory to be contaminated by Catholic piety.[75] Hervé Joubert-Laurencin criticizes Marie-José Mondzain for placing Bazin's discourse within a Christian theological framework, particularly her use of the idea of *acheiropoeisis* or creation without hands to discuss Bazinian ontology of the cinematic image.[76] His argument, from biography, is that Bazin seems to have lost his faith in 1940, and that his time studying at the very secular École Normale de

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[75] Rosen particularly questions Gray's use of the word 'faith' in certain key passages of 'The ontology of the photographic image.' In particular, he objects to its use to translate '*Le plus fidéle dessin*' as 'A very faithful drawing' and '*emporter notre croyance*' as 'bear away our faith.' He would have preferred instead, to give Rosen's alternate translation of the sentence in full, '*The most exact drawing* may actually tell us more about the model, but despite the promptings of our critical intelligence it will never have the irrational power to bear away our *belief*.' For Rosen, the religious status of the word 'belief' is more ambiguous than that of 'faith' and would have helped counter the secular suspicions of his critics. In a way, Rosen is doing what Bazin too did, which is to transpose terminology and concepts from a theological context to a secular one, but he does not inquire into what it means to do so. Philip Rosen, "Belief in Bazin," in *Opening Bazin*, 107-108. For a critique of Rosen's and Joubert-Laurencin's arguments drawing on arguments about religion in recent continental philosophy, see Blandine Joret, "Today, Icarus: On the Persistence of André Bazin's Myth of Total Cinema," (PhD Diss., University of Amsterdam, 2013).

[76] For a discussion of Mondzain's work as it pertains to Bazin, see Andrew, *What Cinema Is?*, 136-139.

Saint Cloud must have marked him much more than any religious training in his earlier years.[77] Where Rosen tries to bracket and ironize Bazin's Christian references, Joubert-Laurencin attempts to resolve the question at the level of biography and argues for a similarly ironic attitude towards religion.

Blandine Joret has characterized the attitude of Rosen and Joubert-Laurencin as 'subtle hypocrisy' (with some justification I think) since the pre-eminence of Christian terminology in Bazin's work and ideas cannot be so easily wished away.[78] The rather insistent attempts at cutting the link between any religious heritage and Bazin's theoretical commitments speaks less about any possibility that Bazin may have been a confessional critic than about a certain narrow conceptualization of secularism that cannot stop to question what it might mean for vocabulary from a paradigm that no longer commands the social efficacy or adherence that it did in the past to persist in other more current paradigms of discourse. The question is not of Bazin's biography and personal faith at all, and it is difficult to see what the point is of denying any piety in Bazin when any careful reading of even the long available translations, despite Rosen's quibbling, yields no sign of any. Therefore, the question to ask is if it is possible for religion to be secularized, what it means to do so, and also what it meant historically in Bazin's time.

Bazin's intellectual formation, as Andrew describes, was in the milieu of *Action Catholique* and its mandate to forge a social mission for Catholicism. On the eve of the war he was a member of the *Jeunesse Étudiants Chrétiens* (JEC), the student arm of this movement. This is important for figuring out what he understood of religion from the experiences of *Action*

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[77] Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, *Le Sommeil Paradoxal: Écrits sur André Bazin* (Montreuil, Les Editions de l'Oeil , 2014), 26; Andrew, *André Bazin*, 39-40.

[78] Joret, "Today, Icarus," 101.

Catholique. And we get a clear sign of this in an article titled 'Cinema and Theology,' which is actually a lengthy essay on *Dieu a Besoin des Hommes* (Jean Delannoy, 1950). Delannoy's film is about a priest from the mainland serving on an island on the Brittany coast but who quits his office after being frustrated for long by the coarse attitudes of the villagers and their practice of ransacking shipwrecks. When he leaves, and as the church hierarchy for some time cannot find anyone willing to replace him, the villagers feel uneasy and push the sacristan to take up the priest's duties. With the sacristan in his new role and with a manner and thoughts familiar to his parish, the church and the villagers once again become responsive to each other. The drama turns when the church authorities on the mainland send a new priest with the same haughty attitude as of the one who quit, and to whom the villagers prefer their homegrown priest. At one point in the essay, Bazin writes:

> In effect, isn't the highest religious merit of this film to remind us of this eminent Christian truth that the last few centuries of Catholic history have perhaps dangerously obscured but which the experience of the missions is in the course of restoring: the knowledge of the communitarian origins of the priestly vocation?[79][iv]

There are two things to note in these lines. The first is the idea of the communitarian origins of priesthood and the other is the reference to the missions that were restoring this insight. The second of these aspects holds the key to the significance of the first. Bazin was not referring to the missions in the colonies but those in France.

While the gradual erosion of the primacy of the church and of faith in public life had set in in Western Europe since at least the late eighteenth century, the scale in Catholic France was perhaps much smaller through the nineteenth century than in Protestant countries. It is only with the growth of the working class population and the rise of Communism in the early twentieth

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[79] André Bazin, 'Cinéma et Théologie,' in *Esprit* vol. 2 no. 176 (February 1951), 244-245 [BW, 70].

century, along with the separation of church and state under the Third Republic in 1905, that the church began to worry about diminishing numbers of those who turned to it. By the onset of the war, there was a creeping sense that France was well on the way to being de-Christianized. This had been behind the Far Right *Action Française*'s attempts at re-claiming power from the secular Third Republic during the 1930s and what had also made the Vichy regime during the Occupation an engine of hope for those who wished to restore the centrality of the church to public life. But Bazin had in mind the work of *Action Catholique* organizations from even before the war in thinking about the church's relationship to the working classes. In 1943, a key work by two secular priests from the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétiens* (JOC) described the state of the church-society relationship in France in its very title: *La France: Pays de Mission?*[80] The question mark was moot because the book led to the founding of the *missions intérieures*, efforts towards which had been underway in a muted manner since the 1930s.[81]

A key insight of the book was that the church could no longer operate, or operate exclusively, on the geographical idea of the parish because the life experiences of the classes had formed new lines of community identification. A worker was less inclined to go to the church because he had little in common with the bourgeoisie that attended from the same parish. Therefore, the community of the church must be located in places, such as the factory, where communal bonds were already in place. The implied idea is that the church no longer founds a community but goes searching for communities to which it must adapt. It is this change in the

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[80] Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, *La France: Pays de Mission?* (Lyon: Abeille, 1943). For my account of this history as well as of the book, I draw upon Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology, 1924-1959: The First Wave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a brief but relevant account of what it meant to secularize religion in relation to politics in postwar France, see Colin Roberts, 'Secularization and the (Re)formulation of French Catholic Identity,' in Kay Chadwick (ed.), *Catholicism, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 260-267.

[81] Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology,* 235-242.

function of the church to which Bazin referred when he wrote about 'the communitarian origins of the priestly vocation.' While the drama of the film turns ostensibly on the office of the priest, it is the whole theological basis of Christianity that is in play here as indicated by the title of the essay. Thus, what Catholicism had forgotten over the last centuries was the communitarian origins of its theological elements. Bazin's lines here echo those of the key theologian of *Mission de France* who, in defending the decision to allow the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* as well as the works of Marx into the seminary libraries, wrote: 'Christians committed a grave error when, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they believed that one could love God without loving other human beings, without that passion for justice, *to love human beings without knowing them*. Christian thought has lost its revolutionary motivation.'[82] Through these lines we return to the observation which started this digression on Bazin's understanding of French Social Catholicism: that the idea of aesthetic politics that we get from Bazin's work is based on spectatorial and critical love for the world on film, a love that precedes any clear understanding of the contradictions films involve us in and, in the end, despite their contradictions. We will see this play out in Bazin's readings of Chaplin's films, the Western, an anti-war documentary, Italian neo-realist films and some others still, with no reference whatsoever to theological concerns.

What I have tried to show here is that Bazin's redeployment of Catholic terminology comes from a historical experience of the secularization of Catholicism in France, much like, as Abrams has argued, the aesthetic conception of art itself was a secularization of Christian theology. But when Abrams points out that the Ancient Greek heritage subsumed with Christianity, in the form of Platonic philosophy, re-appears in this process of secularization, we

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[82] Marie-Dominique Chenu, quoted in Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology,* 243. My emphasis.

must note that what is revealed are the pagan origins of Christianity itself. (This point will be important to my reading of the 'The ontology of the photographic image.') This historical genealogy reaffirms Bazin's point that theology is made out of the material of history and is secular in its origins, and I find that this insight serves to cut through the anxieties around the appearance of religious terminology in a secular critical discourse such as film theory.

The final question is why love as an affective attachment to both the unknown and the contradictory is a political idea. The answer will emerge in my readings of Bazin's work over the course of the dissertation. Here I will only point out that at a couple of moments in the argument I will be drawing upon Arendt's theorization of love in its Augustinian conception as a secular, political experience that can reconcile us to the necessarily unpredictable and contradictory character of politics instead of opting to foreclose this condition either through authoritarian solutions or through a defeated turn away from politics. As someone who drew on this insight amidst sustained analyses of the experience of totalitarianism, Arendt's contemporaneous work is well-placed to complement the broader historical significance of Bazin's insights.

Chapter Descriptions

The argument is organized in two parts, with the first set organized around Bazin's conceptualization of films as vehicles for mythologies and the second set addressing the problem of realism within his aesthetic framework. All chapters offer philological readings of Bazin's work to identify the debates he was involved in and to reconstruct some of his key film readings with a view to the arriving at an account of his aesthetic politics. While the first part looks at popular film genres as the sites of mythologies, it is in the second part that I take up more explicitly the quasi-theological structure of aesthetic mythologies as I have discussed it in this

introduction. However, as we will see, this structure pertains as much to the discussion in the first part as it does to the second.

Chapter one delineates Bazin's understanding of modern art as a two-faced structure that is at once a site of escape from history and a site from where history acquires a form in the spectator's imaginary. We will see that, in order to affirm this duality in film as an aesthetic medium, Bazin equates cinematic realism with a democratic desire for history but argues that the medium soon turned to fiction and narrative forms to acquire the ambiguous relationship to history that characterizes the political form of modern aesthetics. Chapter two continues this exploration with more specific reference to debates in Bazin's times over the relative political significance of subjects (as in the topics of films' narratives) and style. Through his various writings on adaptation, Bazin arrived at an understanding of subject *as* a mythological form embodied in genres, stars, and fictional personae. It is through such forms, he argues, that cinema speaks to historical experience.

Chapter three begins an exploration of the mythological structure theorized by Bazin through a reconstruction of some of his most important genre and film readings. Here we see him him launch a spirited defense of Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and using this film to re-read the entirety of Chaplin's work in order to sketch the mythology of his alter-ego, Charlot. He appropriates Sartrean existentialist terminology to take on Left-wing critics who were confounded by Chaplin's welcome critique of the establishment but did not know how to respond to his new misogynistic persona. Bazin reads Verdoux into Charlot to argue that what Verdoux is Charlot always was, but that for decades audiences had overlooked his contradictions. And yet, Bazin argues, once we recognize Charlot in Verdoux, we cannot renounce our attachment to either. This introduces the idea of an "ontological sympathy" that

audiences have for screen or aesthetic mythologies; that is, a sympathy not dependent on conventional moral categories.

Chapter four derives theoretical insights regarding the appropriate critical response, on Bazin's account, to mythological contradictions like those we will have seen in the Chaplin films. Here I take up additional readings by Bazin, including those of the Western, a Marcel Carné film from prewar France, and a pacifist documentary by Georges Franju. Through these readings, I arrive at an argument for the centrality of the spectator to Bazin's conception of critique as politics. In the course of the argument, I put Bazin briefly in dialogue with Parker Tyler and his somewhat similar reading of Chaplin to Bazin's and with Siegfried Kracauer who reviewed Tyler's book negatively. Bazin was aware of Kracauer's work on *From Caligari to Hitler* and I use this triangulate the three critics over the question of what it is to read a film and on what counts as an aesthetic and political response to films. This chapter concludes one cycle of my argument about Bazinian aesthetic politics and its basis in a criticism of love.

Part two of the dissertation offers a revisionary account of Bazin's theorization of cinematic realism. Without denying that a complex realist aesthetic is an important part of Bazin's theoretical contributions, I argue that it cannot be understood without first coming to grips with so far unnoticed concerns that he had about the ontological condition of the photographic and filmic image. Chapter five reconstructs the argument of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (henceforth, "Ontology") by taking its historical narrative seriously and by reading it alongside Bazin's other writings that fill in the gaps of the essay. We will see Bazin place the specificity of photo-filmic realism in the context of scientific modernity and secularization. But his account of secularization, as we have seen briefly here, is much more complex than a linear passage from religious to scientific thought. I will elaborate upon this to

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draw a relationship between Bazin's theorization of modern mythologies, secular modernity, and realism. We will also see that at the heart of "Ontology" is an unease about photo-filmic realism's ability to alienate us from the very world it reproduces. Chapter six will elaborate upon one source of this unease: the truth claims embedded in the filmic image that align it with a logic of totality. In this chapter, 'totality,' and its variations 'total war,' 'total history,' 'total artwork,' and 'total cinema,' are the key concepts through which I read Bazin's analyses of various propaganda or thesis films. Chapter seven continues this focus by reading the place of the body in the totalizing powers of cinematic realism against the background of the totalitarian experiences of the Moscow Show Trials and the Holocaust. Realism here appears either complicit with totalitarian ambitions or inadequate for providing testimony to the experience of totalitarian terror.

Chapter eight argues that the two cornerstones of the reception of Bazin's theorization of realism—the idea of integral realism (illustrated by the long take and deep focus) and Italian neo-realist films—need to be read not so much in relation to cinematic ontology but the accommodation of ontological realism within the framework of the aesthetic, and this is as true of documentaries as fictional films. It turns out, for example, that Bazin defended *Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk, 1947) against *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1947) arguing that the realism of Dmytryk's film was much more aesthetically compelling and therefore the more important document of postwar American experience. His writings on De Sica actually provide an argument for how the filmmaker had succeeded in moving away from the documentary realism of the earliest neo-realist films which for Bazin had become a mannerist trait in global film production by just 1948. Here I conclude with a discussion of Bazin's reading

of neo-realism's ability to combine a refusal of existing socio-political reality with a love for it, returning us to the crux of the political character of the aesthetic in Bazin's writings.

The epilogue discusses Bazin's anticipation in the 1950s of the already impending "end of cinema." Following Sam Di Iorio, but departing from his premises, I take *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961) as a historical marker of this crisis in cinema as Bazin may have understood it.

Note on Sources and Translations

I have drawn upon a much larger corpus of writings of Bazin than those available in print, either in French or English. In this I have benefited greatly by a month spent in New Haven consulting Dudley Andrew's archive of the complete writings of Bazin. And I benefited further and immensely from the online catalogue of these writings created by Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, meticulously indexed with details of film titles and filmmakers mentioned in *each* of the more than 2600 articles. It has allowed me to track several of the writings on my own and made it much easier to consult articles relevant to my argument. Without this aid, the work on this dissertation would have been infinitely more difficult.

Depending on availability for close reading, I have relied on certain publications more than others in order to track Bazin's thinking over the years. The publications where Bazin published regularly at different periods of time that I was able to consult are *L'Écran Français*, *Esprit*, *L'Observateur*/*France-Observateur*, *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The daily *Parisien Libéré*, where he reviewed all new releases, I could access only partially, but *L'Observateur* and *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, where he often published longer pieces every week than in *Parisien Libéré*, I hope, compensate to a large extent in tracking his responses to the full range of films he came across in the course of his career.

For the most part I have translated quotations directly from the French and, where available, have cited the corresponding publication and page numbers of the English translations in brackets. While I have benefited greatly from consulting the existing translations, wherever the original French text is cited with the available translations referenced in brackets, the responsibility for the given translations, including any errors, is mine. The original French text is given as footnotes, marked by roman numerals, in the Appendix. On the few occasions that I have found the existing translations adequate, I have cited them directly.

Part I: Mythology and History

Chapter 1

Cinema and the Non-Space-Time of History

      If we can accept the basic premise that to inquire into political character of the aesthetic is to inquire into a work of art's or a medium's relationship to history, then an aesthetic idea of cinema requires that this relationship be understood as two-faced, both turned towards history and turned away from it. Turned towards it because it takes its material from history, and away from it because it cannot be reduced to history. In this brief chapter, I uncover Bazin's argument for this two-faced character of cinema. In the first part, I will look at the original version of the "The myth of total cinema" (henceforth "Total cinema (1946)") which is substantially different from the 1958 version published in the first volume of *Qu'est-ce Que le Cinéma?*[1] In the original, we will see Bazin argue for a privileged relationship between the cinema and the historical moment of its emergence in the late nineteenth century, in particular a democratic desire for participation in history. Despite this argument, Bazin welcomed the fact that the medium soon adapted itself to the narratives of fantasy and escape rather than remain a privileged site for the direct appearance of the image of history. In the second part, we will see him argue that it is only by making cinematic realism a paradoxical site for an escape from history in the form of narrative cinema could the medium, he argues, orient us within this history. By drawing comparison with Arendt's reading of the condition of modern history, I will argue that Bazin's two-faced conception of cinema is not only in line with a nineteenth century

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[1] André Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total et les origines du cinématographe," in *Critique* no. 6 (November 1946); André Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total," in QQCI, 21-26.

conception of the aesthetic but is particularly attuned to the experience of cataclysmic wars and ideological impasses that defined the twentieth century. The form of the political the cinema takes is that of a "non-space-time" within history.

The Apparatus

The general understanding of "The myth of total cinema" (henceforth 'Total cinema (1958)") is that it calls upon us to understand the significance of cinema's realist vocation in relation to a timeless idea of and desire for a perfect reproduction of reality. Tom Gunning, in his re-appreciation of "Total cinema (1958)," recalls how this led a couple of generations of film scholars to dismiss Bazin as an idealist. Though he himself attempts a sympathetic reading of his idealism, he cannot ultimately remove him from that framework, only shifting the idealist paradigm from a Platonic to a Hegelian idealism (because Hegel is a friend of history and Plato isn't), tempered with the phenomenological irresolution of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger.[2] However, the Hegelian character of Bazin's argument in "Total cinema (1946)" is not limited to an abstract dialectical structure but can be seen in its insistence on seeing a deep correspondence between the cinema's invention, the particular form it took, and the democratization of history in the nineteenth century. This substantial difference between the two versions—between an argument for cinema's 'timeliness' and one for its 'timelessness'—makes the note accompanying the later version, "Extrait de *Critique*, 1946," less than exact. We can only speculate on the reason for the changes, but I will here look at the original argument and how it reorients our understanding of Bazin's working premises.

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[2] Tom Gunning, "The World in Its Own Image: The Myth of Total Cinema," in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its After Life*, ed. Dudley Andrew & Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119-126.

Bazin argues in "Total cinema (1946)" that the subject of his essay, Georges Sadoul's first volume of the *Histoire Générale du Cinéma* (1946), is a "psycho-sociology of the invention" of cinema rather than a purely material or technological one. He asks, "How do we grasp with certainty the subjective motive [*le mobile subjectif*] of an invention? What psychoanalysis would give an account of the relative importance of a technical progression, sometimes accidental, and of myths more or less confused that consciously or not orient the research?"[3] ¡ In "Total cinema (1958)," if we recall, Bazin describes the subjective dimension of cinema's invention by arguing that the cinema is an idealist phenomenon because its invention cannot be deduced from its scientific history alone. This is the case, he argues, because the principles behind its functioning and the rudimentary technology were at least theoretically available for a very long time before its actual invention. What explains this delay in cinema's invention is the fact that most people who attempted to invent it were not scientists who patiently worked through each step of the process, from finding a suitable base, to fixing the image, to adding sound and depth but tried straightaway to invent it whole, full of sound, color, and depth. This argument appears in the original too, but its points of reference are very different. The argument is no less idealist, even if the explicit insistence is missing, but the historical scope does not stretch back insistently through Renaissance to Antiquity and to the Myth of Icarus. Instead, the locus of attention is the late nineteenth century and, more particularly, the difference between the apparatus and productions of Edison and Lumière. The basic difference is the Kinetoscope's use by individuals whereas the Lumière apparatus was one that projected the image for communal viewing.

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[3] Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total," *Critique*, 554.

Gunning notes that Bazin does not pay much attention to the history of projection and suggests that he is more interested in the history of the recording apparatus.[4] But the question of projection indeed figures prominently in the first version of the essay and Bazin explicitly enquires into its meaning in relation to the camera's recording function. He writes that where Edison was caught up in tying the Kinetoscope to the gramophone, the "fetish of a recording disc placed at a narrow window," other inventors were busy trying to refine his invention for projection. Bazin found in the collective audience a manifest metaphor for the extension of a political will not just to separate individuals but to whole societies. He places great emphasis on this as he repeatedly marvels at Edison's "failure of the imagination" on the frontier of this one crucial feature of the new apparatus he was trying to develop, concluding from Sadoul's book that Edison must be seen as a "specialist of electricity rather than optics"[ii] because what escaped him was precisely what was most important about the historical demand for images of history: its collective vision.[5]

The question of projection was not all since it is irrelevant whether the Lumières were the first to hold a screening or not, and it is certain that they were not. Others might have also invented devices that facilitated projection, but what clinched the 'invention' for Lumière in Sadoul's account was the combination of recording, development, and projection within the same device, and the device's mobility that allowed it to be transported with ease around the world.[6] But we are still here at the level of technology and a kind of materialist explanation that

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[4] Gunning, "The world in its own image," 121. Projection as a key idea in Bazin's theory is central to Dudley Andrew's account of the *Cahiers* line of cinema and which he sees most threatened by digital film technologies. See Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 66-94.

[5] Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total," *Critique*, 554-555.

[6] Ibid., 553.

Bazin could not be satisfied with. Ultimately, it is not a matter of technical detail but of technology's experiential meaning:

> The genius of Louis Lumière would not have bought him the place that he occupies in the paternity of cinema if he had limited himself to technology. He knew how to make the first films that responded to a certain expectation of a collective conscience when faced with this new invention, and to create at once a true spectacle. While Edison, in his Kinetoscope, merely ran some scenes whose interest did not go beyond the curiosity of a faithful reconstitution of movement, Lumière, with his light camera, could go and catch "nature in the act." *Workers Leaving the Factory*, *Arrival of a Train* are the ancestors of our newsreeels and of documentary reports with which one whole part of global production is profoundly occupied. It suffices to recall Dziga Vertov and the Russian school, or the recent war films.[7]iii

Going beyond the opposition of the projection apparatus of Lumière and the personal apparatus of Edison's Kinetoscope, Bazin now places the emphasis on what is recorded and viewed. "Nature", as the Lumière films instantiate, is thoroughly historical, and the desire for "the world in its own image" is the desire for an image of history. We need to read these lines in conjunction with another important essay he wrote in the same year: a review of *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942-'45). In that review, he writes, "The taste for newsreel, combined with that for cinema, is nothing but the *will to presence* ["*volonté de présence*"] of modern man, his need to be present at the unfolding of History, in which *political evolution* as much as the technical means of communication and destruction are irremediably mixed up."[8]iv Bazin's emphasis here on political evolution and the will to presence at the unfolding of history of the newsreel spectator draws a very literal connection between the democratizing forces of modernity and the role of cinema, and it links back to the fact of the "collective conscience" mentioned in "Total cinema (1946)." Chapters in part two of the dissertation will look at Bazin's confrontation with

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[7] Ibid., 556-557.

[8] André Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*: Histoire, documents et actualités," in QQCI, 32 [BW, 188]. My emphasis.

the darker side of this desire. For now, the preceding argument should make it clear that for Bazin the invention of cinema and its consequent realism lay at complex crossroads of what he calls the collective unconscious of history and technological and political developments.

But for Bazin the conjuncture of historical and political evolution and the technological promise of realism was only a point of departure, not a demand-supply equilibrium. At the outset, I mentioned that Bazin welcomed cinema's turn to narratives and fiction and he was well aware that there was no inevitability to this. Long before the revisionist historians of our own time, Bazin was struck by the fact that the cinema need not have become an art form in the sense that it came to acquire with narrative and what we now recognize as feature-length cinema. He tried to understand how a technology that could catch history on the run and whose earliest production was dominated by newsreels could come to adopt narrative and fictional forms. He would also have had to address the question of why a medium so much of its time and with a privileged relationship to material reality needed to borrow its categories and conventions from pre-cinematic art forms. He raises these questions in "Le langage de notre temps," where reflecting on the material of cinema he remarks that it is radically unlike that of music (sound) or painting (color) whose expression exists largely in works of art, and if they have a function of communication it is largely indirect. Cinema's reliance on images could actually be read as a dialectical evolution of the relationship between image and writing: it could be traced back to hieroglyphs which combined image and alphabet; and to their separation in a non-figural alphabet on the one hand and illustrations on the other. If the cinema seems to now include the role of direct communication in the image to which written language plays a supplementary role, it does so in a strange manner in the light of even the first twenty-five years of cinema's evolution. Rather than use the uncanny precision of its images to become a privileged vehicle for

journalism and pedagogy, it had lent itself predominantly to fiction. While newsreels and pedagogic films existed in large numbers, "[i]t's a question of kilometers of film: for every meter of technical film, we print a hundred for a fiction film. It's as if language were used nine times out of ten for writing novels and plays."[9]v

There is another way in which cinema had taken a surprising turn for Bazin. If cinema had to put the just-mentioned uncanny precision of its images to an uncanny rather than communicational use, then it could well have continued doing so in the fairgrounds where it had migrated soon after the "passing infatuation"vi of the public with the realistic views captured by this new medium.[10] According to Bazin, it might have remained a fantastic curiosity by taking its place alongside the anomalies of nature displayed in the musées Dupuytren and become a vehicle for conjurers' tricks.[11] This is only partly what Georges Méliès did by "restoring paradoxical virtues to the moribund realism" of cinema. Taking advantage of its ability to "bear away our faith," he made it a machine for producing "miracles." But by also narrativizing his spectacles, Méliès prepared the ground for turning cinema into "an art of the imagination" in the sense of the other major arts.[12] So a medium well-placed on the one hand to add to the precision of means of communication and on the other paradoxically able to speak to the underbelly of modern rationality, somehow chose for the most part to become a means for conventional narrative. In doing so, it placed itself recognizably in line with the existing art forms of the novel and the

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[9] Bazin, "Le langage de notre temps," *Regards Neufs Sur le Cinéma* (Paris: Peuple et Culture, 1972 [1953]), 11.

[10] Ibid., 6.

[11] "Cinéma, langage de notre temps," 6. In the first version of "Le mythe du cinéma total," Bazin draws upon Sadoul's research to point out that by as early as 1897, cinema's realist views had lost most of their interest for the audiences which then pushed it into becoming a fairground attraction where it might have stayed but for the work of Méliès. Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total", in *Critique*, 557.

[12] Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total", in *Critique*, 557.

theater while also drawing upon the conventions and material of other art forms such as music and painting. Bazin welcomed this much-deplored lack of nerve (or what seems to be such for some scholars) on cinema's part because he saw how cinema had a role in the ongoing transformation from within of the role of art in modernity where it depended not on the patronage of clearly-bounded communities but on large publics that cut across communal identities. Here, he argues, that the seemingly contradictory paths open to the cinema of documentary and fiction are reconciled in the essential realism of the cinematographic image: realism grounds the imagination as much as imagination animates reality.[13] When it cedes exclusively to one or the other, it loses the friction necessary to intervene in the experience of history and may become just another inert record of this history or become unhinged from it. I will take up questions of narrative, style, and audiences that follow from this discussion in the next chapter. I will now turn to briefly defining the basic political significance of the two-faced relationship of cinema as an aesthetic medium to historical experience.

A Gap in History

Rather than work within a duality of high and low forms, Bazin took cinema's mass appeal to be the surest foundation of its aesthetic character. We can understand this best by the fact that he did not equate the cinema's masses exclusively with the working classes but based its popular character on its ability to appeal to audiences across class and other identities. This cross-sectional appeal of the medium defines what is specific to the modern aesthetics: its disconnect from any clear ideological regime, religious or political. It is not that it has no relationship to ideology but that this relationship is obscure and indirect. One of the early essays Bazin wrote, in 1944, is called "The cinema and popular art" and explicitly addresses the

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[13] Ibid., 556-557.

difference in the popular quality of this earlier art and the popularity of the arts since the

nineteenth century of which the cinema in his time was the culmination.

> Until the nineteenth century the notion of popular art was inseparable from that of
> the community. The typical example we have is that of folklore whose is essentially
> characterized by its rootedness in a given milieu. A dance, a song, a tale, a style of
> furniture or housing is the more popular the more it corresponds to the most limited
> and differentiated human group, and so less assimilable to other human groups.
> Popularity is therefore understood here in the sense of the particular and the
> intensive. It is expressed in tradition and ritual.[14][vii]

Popular art in a pre-modern understanding has a "positive internal necessity" which expresses

and conforms to a pre-existing communal self-understanding and therefore appears as its

enduring culmination. In this sense, even the art of the nobility or the church is popular in an

intensive sense. The cinema, on the other hand, in order to be popular needs to appeal across

communities, classes, and even nations, therefore its popular character is extensive and in it

"[t]he relationship of the artist to the consumer is radically overturned."

> Cinema… because it does not spring from a communal psychology but from a
> sociology of atomized and gregarious masses, cannot benefit from… spontaneous
> generation. The suitability of the work to the consumer cannot be the result of an
> obscure and infallible thrust of which the craftsman or the artist is only the
> intermediary. At most, one could say that the popular need, for all intents and
> purposes, exists virtually, like an invisible void that the work may fill but by which it
> cannot be automatically molded.[15][viii]

Because the virtual need that Bazin speaks of here—which we have seen him characterize in

"Total cinema (1946)" as the collective unconscious of history—can never be directly

represented in the cinema, films can at most mark an interval in this collective unconscious—,

indicated by the characterization of an "invisible void"—rather than provide its adequate

representation. And this invisible void itself is can only be a moving placeholder since it is

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[14] André Bazin, "Le cinéma et l'art populaire," in COR, 103-104 [FCOR, 82].

[15] Ibid., 104-105 [FCOR 82-83].

constituted by masses of atomized individuals. But if the link between the communal need and

the work is so tenuous, then what needs explaining is why audiences would be drawn towards it.

Bazin wrote about what draws audiences to an obscure picture of history from the cusp of

the Occupation years and the Liberation, in an essay titled "Reflection for a vigil of arms."

During the Occupation, he says, French cinema had turned to fantastic or distant historical

subjects because "[t[he public wanted the screen to be its window and not its mirror," not a

window opening on to the world but out of it. He goes on to say that this demand for a dream

world is unlikely to go away with the Liberation since people will continue to be oppressed, no

longer by an occupying force but "by life itself."[16] Bazin elaborates what he means by "life

itself" in another essay he wrote during the Occupation years.

> In our mechanical civilization where man is devoured by the technicality of his
> profession, normalized by social and political constraints, the cinema, beyond all
> artistic concerns, responds to the repressed but indefeasible collective psychic
> needs.[17][ix]

Once again, the horizon of a seemingly timeless condition of being oppressed by life itself is

actually industrial modernity, and its dual dynamic of containment and release of socio-psychic

energies. Therefore, when audiences look to cinema for a release from the containments of

modernity, all one can ask of cinema is that the escape it provides no longer be the same as

during the Occupation—an undialectical vid—but commensurate with a new historical reality.

Bazin's remarks about the intimate relationship between historical reality and the escapism of the

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[16] André Bazin, "Réflexions pour une veille d'armes," in COR, 123-124 [FCOR 98]. When we note that Bazin
elsewhere actually speaks of the film screen as a window *on to* the world, this might seem like self-contradiction,
but what he theorized throughout, as we will see, was cinema understood as a window that like all functional
windows straddles the world and a space just outside it, except that the way in and way out are not so clearly
assigned. On some examples of Bazin's analogy with the window, see "Cinerama: A Bit Late," "Will CinemaScope
save the cinema?," "CinemaScope and realism," and "Massacre in CinemaScope," all in ABNM, 223; 275; 283-284;
289; 304.

[17] André Bazin, "Pour une esthetique realiste," in COR, 50 [FCOR 36].

cinema go beyond arguing that there is some relationship between reality as it exists outside the movie theater and the fantasy on screen. What he is arguing is that modern works of art, pre-eminently films, can mark their escape from historical reality the better they reproduce this reality. Since he found that the cinema during the Occupation had been unable to mark this relationship, his example in both "The cinema and popular art" and "Reflection for a vigil of arms" is Alain-Fournier's novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913).[18]

Alain-Fournier's novel is a *Bildungsroman* set in the French provinces whose protagonist finds love in an enchanted place but loses the way to it. It is a place in the heart of reality, but when re-found is not where he thought it should have been. This escape in the midst of reality, found and lost repeatedly, gains it traction for Bazin through an "exact evocation of the French countryside." And when we add to this the fact that Alain-Fournier wrote this novel on the eve of World War I in whose battlefield he would soon die, and that Bazin evokes this fact in his deeply-felt obituary for Maurice Jaubert, the composer for the landmarks of French poetic realist films and who died in the few months that France remained at war in World War II, we see the depth of Bazin's estimation for the co-existence of reality and a desire for escape;[19] for as Bazin himself understood and as Dudley Andrew argues at length, the poetic realist corpus was an expression of nostalgia deeply grounded in the polarized historical reality of France's interwar years.[20]

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[18] Bazin, "The cinema and popular art," Bazin, "Reflection for a vigil of arms," 85; 99.

[19] Bazin, "Reflection of for a Vigil of Arms," 110.

[20] Bazin, "Quinze ans de cinéma français,: in CFLNV, 19-22; Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

From this discussion, what emerges is Bazin's understanding of the ambiguous character of the *experience* of the democratization of history in modernity. While we are invited to witness, think about, and potentially participate in a vast sphere of experience from which many had been excluded either by living under non-democratic political regimes or through sheer limitation of means, often either the invitation is illusory or we are incapable of looking at history in all its openness and complexity. Writing in the aftermath of the experience of fascism that many in Europe had welcomed as a way out of the uncertainties of history, Bazin felt that one cannot, like Sartre would soon do, simply lay down an imperative for a direct engagement with history. A conception of democratic politics that does not account for a desire for escape from it would have seemed deficient to him. The task for him was to understand how cinema as the pre-eminent art form of its time could be both the site of such necessary escape as well as a re-orientation towards history. In this, he echoes his contemporary Hannah Arendt whom he surely never read but who too came to a similar understanding of politics and history in the aftermath of totalitarian experiences.

The key to Arendt's understanding of modern history is her reading of a parable from Kafka in which a "He" is best by two antagonists, one who "presses him from behind" and the other who "blocks the road ahead." Each supports him in his fight against the other, but he himself can't or won't pick a side. Kafka writes:

> His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment—and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet—he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.[21]

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[21] Hannah Arendt, "Preface: The gap between past and future," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 7.

Arendt at first reads this as a parable of a time in which the past has ceased to shed its light on the future and thus marks a breakdown of tradition, making the present a moment where past and future collide rather than transition into each other. But she marvels at the fact that the point at which the conflict takes place is not only a "He," human existence, but that the human is an actor in this conflict instead of being swept up by these forces as in a historical process: this "insertion of [an acting] man breaks up the unidirectional flow of time." The only problem is that this actor engaged in this interminable fight can only dream "the old dream which Western metaphysics has dreamed from Parminedes to Hegel of a timeless, spaceless, suprasensuous realm as the proper region of thought."[22]

Arendt sees the dream of escape from the space-time of history as the only possibility so long as we, along with Kafka, stick to a rectilinear description of historical time. However, the very fact that in the fable two opposing forces meet at a point of resistance should suggest that they will be deflected, even if ever-so-slightly, from this rectilinear arrangement. In their deflection, they create an angle, a third force, at a diagonal to the meeting point in the present of past and future. This diagonal, for Arendt, is the "non-time-space [of thought] in the very heart of time"[23]: thought, which is an unending activity that only looks for a beginning. But unlike the thought of philosophers which seeks to contemplate unchanging ideas, this thought is turned towards history and seeks orientation within it.

This reading of Kafka's parable must be seen as an imaginative recasting of the Hegelian dialectic. The latter synthesizes the two terms, thesis and anti-thesis, into the third event of an ending, and for Hegel philosophical thought is always late to history. Arendt attempts to imagine

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[22] Ibid., 11.

[23] Ibid., 13.

the possibility of thought taking its distance from history in order to orient itself within it. This has a particular relationship to her definition of political action as the freedom to begin something new, a beginning that rescues history from a deterministic, processual flow. Keeping with this, she describes the non-space-time of history in Augustinian terms as "a beginning of a beginning."[24] Where political action normally requires an enduring world, the alienation of the world itself into an impersonal and uncertain historical process demands a non-time-space within history for breaking out of a processual existence and creating the possibility of beginning something new.

But just like the traditional dialectic which arises out of a despairing attempt to account for history's ungraspable movements, Arendt's recast version is in danger of remaining nothing more than a thought experiment with which to console ourselves. Arendt herself points out that the fatal problem with her reading is that the gap in time she locates at the crossroads of past and future does not exist in historical or biographical time.

> This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.[25]

Though this gap in history that makes historical experience political is so precarious, what functions as its placeholder is the aesthetic. Despite the importance of Kant's Third Critique for her political thought, Arendt was unable to give the work of art this role because on the one hand she was beholden to an idea of art as memorialization of the past and on the other

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[24] Ibid., 11. For Arendt's definition of the political, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9, 175-198.

[25] Arendt, "Preface," 13.

her tastes led her to deplore "the kitsch of the nineteenth century, whose historically so interesting lack of sense for form and style is closely connected with the severance of the arts from reality."[26] But that should not prevent us from seeing the special relationship between the possibility of a politically productive distance from history and the aesthetic. Kant's aesthetic philosophy, which forms part of his account of epistemology in general, after all conceives of a work of art as something that gives form to a nature (to be understood as history) that is either too amorphous to grasp or too unbearable to look at.[27] And Friedrich Schiller, who sought to distill Kant with an explicit focus on the question of the aesthetic's relationship to politics, posed the problem as the need to reconcile the unpredictability and amorphousness of the sense drive, which is an expression of boundless temporality, with the similarly inescapable drive to give form to nature, which seeks to escape time. It is the work of the aesthetic as play drive which effects this reconciliation and which Schiller describes as "annulling time *within time*."[28]

So we see that there is legacy of aesthetic thought that Arendt was drawing upon in imagining the possibility of a "non-time-space in the very heart of time," and which Bazin found illustrated in Alain-Fournier's novel, and which he took as the model for thinking about cinema's relationship to society. What we need to note is that, for Bazin, cinema's ability to offer us an escape route from history which also orients us within makes it a site for a potential renewal of

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[26] Arendt, "The crisis in culture: its social and political significance," in *Between Past and Future*, 203; see also Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 167-174. Arendt reads Kant's third critique as a document of his political philosophy in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[27] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 25, 180.

[28] Friedrich Schiller, "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," in *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, trans. Walter Hinderer & Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Continuum: New York, 1993), 126.

our experience of history, a "beginning of a beginning" that could make experience political again.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to first show that Bazin considered cinematic realism as a manifestation of a democratic desire for access to history. This at first reinforces a picture of him as a theorist and advocate of realism, only now on political grounds. However, the second part shows him arguing that to be properly political for a mass of people across identities and amidst an often formless and sometimes intolerable history, the cinema needs to partially turn away from the very history it is so well placed to record. Only at such an angle does it acquire the proper aesthetic potential to give form to history and renew its political character. In the following chapter, we will see him argue for this with greater specificity about questions in film history as they relate to narrative and stylistic forms and the formation of specialized as opposed to undifferentiated audiences.

Chapter 2
Subject, Style, Audience

In this chapter I will discuss Bazin's attention to the question of subjects and narrative as a way of deepening our understanding of him as a theorist committed to the popular character of cinema. For him, subject and style in a commercial art form such as the cinema were the sites for the dialectic of expressing as well as molding the collective unconscious of history. The reason I will be discussing these two elements in turn is that the distinction between them played an important part in debates on the politics of aesthetics in Bazin's time, as I will show in the first part of the chapter. Though Bazin sometimes moves between emphasizing one or the other, he resisted an absolute priority of one over the other. The critical task, as he saw it, was to trace shifts in balance between the two as a way of understanding how the medium plays the role of mediating the social imaginary at any given historical moment.

In the first parts of the chapter, we will see Bazin theorize and argue for the importance of subjects and narrative. This will be important to the next two chapters where we will see him reading genre films, but it is also necessary in relation to revising our understanding of Bazin because he is generally considered to have been uninterested in narrative. As I attempt to argue here and throughout this dissertation, the question of realism in Bazin must be understood in relation to overarching questions of subject and narrative rather than as his theoretical point of departure. In the later parts of the chapter, we will see Bazin engage his intellectual and ideological adversaries over his apparent interest in style at the expense of subject. It is to these arguments that we owe the articles that went on to make up what we now know as "The

evolution of the language of cinema" where he apparently argues for film history's inexorable

evolution towards greater realism. Apart from the fact that the argument of the essay is much

more complex than is generally assumed, we will see that Bazin tried to understand postwar

experiments in film style, such as staging in depth and increased attention to material realism,

against the background of a seeming crisis of subjects in Hollywood. These debates form the

crux over postwar debates on "commitment" in cinema. In the last part, I look briefly at the

dilemma Bazin faced as subjects and styles started to address specialized audiences and the

cross-identity appeal of films started to erode.

What Is Literature?

With the exception of Dudley Andrew, the reception of Bazin has discounted his interest

in narratives to such an extent that for most scholars, if they bother to notice his careful readings

of the Western or the Chaplin films, they take them as nothing more than digressions in his

theoretical program.[1] Instances where they do look at his writings on Chaplin are even more

revealing of this neglect of narrative, as I will show in the next chapter. Here we might take

Jacques Rancière as an example for whom Bazin is a theorist of the incarnation of being on film,

an "occasional philosopher" who was a precursor to the apparently much more rigorous

theorization by Gilles Deleuze of the transition in film history from the classical movement-

image to the modern time-image.[2] According to him, both Bazin and Deleuze emphasized the

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[1] One of the inaugural declarations of Bazin's exclusion of narrative from his theoretical concerns was Noël Carroll's claim that "fiction wreaks havoc with Bazin's theory." Among the latest is Branigan's, "In aesthetic matters, Bazin's film theory is generally suspicious of both narrative and editing for their ability to abstract away from reality…." See Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 158; Edward Branigan, "Epilogue: Death in (and of?) theory," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory*, ed. Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (London: Routledge, 2014), 496.

[2] "The correct intuitions and theoretical approximations of the occasional philosopher Bazin find their solid foundation in Deleuze's theorization of the difference between two types of images, the movement-image and the time-image." Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford, Berg, 2001), 107.

coming of a cinema that breaks from narrative and denies the work of the "fable" that is inherent

in any film. Against this repression, Rancière seeks to theoretically rehabilitate the dimension of

the fable in order to restore the aesthetic balance between the real and the fictional in cinema.[3]

But Bazin uses precisely the word "fable" to argue that the cinema needed the work of narrative

and imagination in order to become the socially-effective art form that it did: "In order to survive

commercially, the realism of the Lumière films had needed the birth of a creative cinema which

would subordinate it to the imaginary economy of the artistic work… [With] Méliès, the cinema

became a work of the imagination. It enters into fable."[4][i]

It isn't only "occasional film theorists" who work with this caricature of Bazin. Jean-

Louis Comolli, the theoretical spearhead of *Cahiers du Cinéma* during its radical years of the late

1960s and early '70s, has had a complex relationship with Bazin's work. After largely critiquing

him during these early years,[5] he now says that Bazin has been a "constant reference" in his

thinking about cinema.[6] And yet at the most fundamental level, he retains an astonishingly

simplistic idea of Bazin. Comparing Alberti's window to Bazin's, Comolli argues that the

Renaissance conception of the window acknowledged that the picture in the window is an effect

of construction rather than transparence and that, therefore, it is "the tale that engenders the

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[3] Rancière, *Film Fables*, 11-12. For Frederic Jameson too, another theorist for whom the work of narrative is central, Bazin, along with Siegfried Kracauer, is a theorist who denies narrative and for whom the ideal of cinema is a black-and-white photograph! Frederic Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 185-186.

[4] André Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total et les origins du cinématographe," in *Critique* no. 6 (November 1946), 557.

[5] During this period, Bazin was both an ally and an ideological foe for Comolli. He drew upon Bazin's argument that cinema is not just a scientific technology but a desire for the reproduction of the world to counter arguments that the filmic apparatus is nothing but a neutral scientific device that precedes any ideology. But his perceived bourgeois idealism ws at the same time an object of critique for him. See the first two instalments of "Technique of Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field" in Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema Against Spectacle*, trans. Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 147-207.

[6] Ibid., 58.

world onto which [the window of the image] 'opens.' As for Bazin's window, it seems it does not depend on artifice, *does not proceed from a fiction*, does not interfere in the things it receives…."[7] Comolli thus reinforces the general understanding of Bazin as a theorist primarily of the image's relationship to reality in opposition to narrative and its fictional character.

As I mentioned earlier, Andrew is an exception in noting the importance of subjects and narrative to Bazin's work. He notes the importance of Hollywood films to Bazin but concentrates on the postwar European context where the work of *auteurs* such as Roberto Rossellini, Robert Bresson, and Agnès Varda stand as exemplary of modern subjects that stick close to current reality instead of remaining cloistered in the conventions of studio narrative.[8] Here I will argue that it remains an important task to recover the complex investment that Bazin had in the narrative forms of generic cinema throughout his career because it formed a contested site for the political import of cinema in his time. It is only with this in view that we can get a measure of his interest in realist style. Since these issues were a matter of contestation, I will also be emphasizing the debates within which Bazin staked out his positions.

"For an impure cinema," dealing with the topic of adaptation, was seemingly incongruously published in a book titled *Cinéma, un oeil ouvert sur le monde*. If Bazin were primarily a theorist of realism, one would have expected him to take the proposed title of the publication, a clear reference to Dziga Vertov's 'kino-eye' and its documentary realism, to perhaps talk about newsreels, or the postwar advances in realist style. Instead, he set about arguing for the importance of the cinema drawing upon other arts for its material. To understand why this was not an incongruity either in relation to the topic of the book in which the essay

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[7] Comolli, *Cinema against Spectacle*, 62. My emphasis.

[8] Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), ch. 4.

appeared or within Bazin's own theoretical program, we need to note, as Andrew too emphasizes, that this essay was a culmination of around four years of concentrated thinking about the cross-medial basis of cinema. The earliest landmark in this trajectory was his 1948 essay, "Adaptation, or Cinema as Digest," (henceforth "Adaptation") which appeared in the July issue of *Esprit* that year.[9] But between these two essays, and even before the first of these, Bazin had been involved in debates on the relative significance of narrative and style and was fighting a theoretical battle on two fronts. Let us first sketch out the background against which "Adaptation" and Bazin's other articles on cinema's relationship to the other arts had been written.

Firstly, these were the years when there was still nostalgia for the stylistic freedom of the silent cinema and its avant-garde productions. Bazin, as we will see in the next section, did not deny the importance of this period, and particularly affirmed the significance of the Soviet avant-garde which found its justification in its political and historical context. However, he saw the French avant-garde as having privileged authorial and experimental freedom over a concern for addressing the large audiences that underwrote cinema's social character. He saw the emphasis on stylistic freedom by these filmmakers as a marker of the freedom of authorial subjectivity and expression though not in the sense of a transparent and coherent subjectivity. Rather, Bazin would have understood it as the irreducible and incommunicable subjectivity of Romanticism. Secondly, these were the years when Sartre's emphasis on clear prose as a marker of literature's commitment to the political issues of the day was contemporaneous with the anti-formalist imperatives of the Zhdanovian doctrine in the Soviet Union and in Communist circles more broadly. As his colleagues in French film culture denounced American genres and the formalism

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[9] André Bazin, "L'adaptation, ou le cinéma comme digeste," in Esp vol. 7, no. 16 (July 1948), 32-40 [BW 41-52].

of Orson Welles and called for the promotion of films with subjects of current political importance treated in classical style, Bazin was pushed to theorize his understanding of the relationship between subjects and style. We see the beginnings of the debates as early as 1946 when Bazin acknowledged them in an article on the "new American style" to which I will return.[10] But what must be noted is that Sartre's discourse of commitment that Bazin's critical adversaries took up also privileged authorial subjectivity and expression, though in a different way. Sartre criticized the Surrealists for critiquing bourgeois subjectivity by merely withdrawing into an irrational subjectivity.[11] Instead, he called for a heroic commitment on the part of the author even in the face of absurdity. Authorial commitment comes through in the choice of important subjects and in transparency of exposition in the narrative. We saw in the introduction that emphasis on such exposition was tied in Sartre's work to an increasingly juridical logic that we will see Bazin resist in the chapters to come.

"Adaptation" must be read as a response to both these conceptions of authorial subjectivity that take precedence over the subjectivity of the audience. The avant-garde subjectivity withdraws into itself and alienates its audiences while authorial commitment seeks to force audience subjectivity to face up to historical predicaments without acknowledging the audience's need for escape from history when it turns to a novel or to a film. In either case, the result is an alienation of audiences in the older arts. Bazin, in his role as critic, sought to resist this involution in the cinema. "Adaptation" points to three characteristics of the modern conception of art which have combined to effect a divorce between the arts and the public. These

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[10] André Bazin, "Le nouveau style américain: Le cinéma est-Il majeur?," in *L'Écran Français* no. 60 (21 August 1946).

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 152-176.

concern the privileging of form over content (applies only to the avant-garde), the absolute integrity of the single work of art, and the consequent privileging of the artist over the public.[12] The privileging of form and artist go along with a new premium on originality which is then consecrated in the idea of a self-sufficient and original work of art. The significance of these remarks to contemporaneous debates in aesthetic politics is best gauged by the fact that in early September 1948, two months after "Adaptation" appeared, Bazin gave a lecture, arranged for a screening of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), and participated in the discussions at the annual meeting of *Rencontres Internationales de Genève* which had emerged as a key annual venue for the reconstruction of European intellectual culture after the war.

In 1948, the *Rencontres* had for its topic "Débat sur l'art contemporain" which, in the midst of the swirling debates on committed art, could not but take up the art and society relationship as the central concern. In attendance were the likes of the Italian author Elio Vittorini, the philosopher Gabriel Marcel, and the Dada artist Tristan Tzara.[13] The published proceedings of the conference do not include Bazin's lecture. However, there are a couple of

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[12] Bazin, "L'adaptation," 36-37 [BW 46-47].

[13] The proceedings of the conference were published as Jean Cassou et al, *Rencontres Internationales de Genève, Tome III (1948): Débat Sur l'Art Contemporain* (Neuchatel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1948). Over the past year, Elio Vittorini had been involved in intense debates within the Italian Communist party over precisely the question of commitment in literature and his talk, titled "L'artiste, doit-il s'engager," took it up explicitly. Bazin singled out Vittorini for praise when he reported on this conference in *Esprit*, referring readers to an earlier piece by him that had appeared in the January 1948 issue the journal. The special topic of that issue was postwar Italy and it is there that Bazin's "Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of Liberation" had appeared which too, as we will see in chapter seven had an explicitly political orientation.[13] Without going into great detail, Vittorini's article "Politique et culture" was the translation of an open letter by the writer to the leader of the Italian Communist Party Palmiro Togliatti, arguing for art's right to a relative autonomy from immediate political tasks as well as its right to an ideological ecumenism which, as far as Vittorini was concerned, were the necessary conditions of any culture that claims a Marxist basis! He reprised these arguments in Geneva and the appeal to the relative autonomy of culture must have appealed to Bazin. See Elio Vittorini, "Politique et culture," in Esp vol. 1, no. 141 (January 1948), 34-57; André Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique et l'école italienne de la libération," in Esp vol. 1, no. 141 (January 1948), 58-83 [WCII 16-40, WCB 215-249]; André Bazin, "Les Rencontres Internationales de Genève" in Esp vol. 11 no. 150 (November 1948).

references to it in the ones that are included and he figures in the transcript of one of the discussions. Marcel raises the question of the importance of audiences by crediting Bazin for being the only one to bring it up during the whole conference, though, as we will see, Marcel and Bazin would go on to disagree on how to address the issue. All other lectures in one way or another privilege the role of the artist in the art-society relationship. Given the arguments Bazin had developed in "Adaptation" (about to be discussed) and the fact that he brings them up during the discussion, the essay must have been written expressly for this conference. The choice of *Hamlet* for the conference screening further underlines this. With this background of debates in aesthetic politics and the focus of the conference in mind, let's look more closely at the argument of the essay.

"Adaptation" looks at cinema as a medium that can play a role in popularizing literary works in "digest" form, restoring to literature and theater the audiences that had gradually deserted them. This secondary role for cinema as the handmaiden of canonical culture is far from the high hopes that Bazin had for cinema as the medium of its time. Jean-Charles Tachella, Bazin's colleague at *L'Écran Français*, wonders if Bazin's attitude towards adaptations did not contain "something of the generous reaction of the professor—I'd even say elementary school teacher—happy that the cinema would allow for a wider exposure to classics."[14] There may be some truth to this, but the understanding of literary classics that emerges from this essay could and did shock those who represented the culture of classics. Further, as we will see presently, the essay is not important for placing cinema in this role but for illuminating the popular origins of

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[14] Jean-Charles Tachella, "Appendix: André Bazin from 1945 to 1950: The Times of Struggles and Consecration," in Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 228.

even canonical literature, origins with which the cinema alone in the twentieth century seemed to retain close contact.

Bazin was addressing representatives of literary culture to argue that they—in their concern with the role of the author and with questions of personal expression and style when discussing the social mandate of art—had lost sight of those elements that have fulfilled this mandate in modernity: their generic elements. The role of cinema as "digest" tells us that the works of Shakespeare, Dumas, the music hall, the burlesque, Hugo, Diderot, to Cocteau and Bernanos have all had an audience—very wide for some like the burlesque performers and Hugo and limited but significant for others—not primarily because of the style of the authors and other finer aspects of the texts but because of the appeal of the elementary blocks of a work: its characters and plot.

> Actually, the real obstacles to be overcome in discussing the possibilities of such adaptations do not belong to the realm of aesthetics. They do not derive from the cinema as an art form but as a sociological and industrial fact. The drama of adaptation is the drama of popularization. A provincial publicity blurb for *La Chartreuse de Parme* (Christian-Jacque, 1948) described it as taken from "the famous cloak-and-dagger novel." We sometimes get the truth from film salesmen who have never read Stendhal.[15][ii]

Bazin is here arguing that the sociological and industrial reality of the cinema brings out a similar reality within works consecrated as self-sufficient and defined by their stylistic refinements. The generic elements of Stendhal's novel make its specific stylistic achievements

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[15] André Bazin, "Pour un cinéma impur," in QQCII, 18 [WC II 65; WCB 121]. Barnard translates "Le drame de l'adaptation" as "tragedy of adaptation." While "drame" can suggest tragedy in some contexts, there is no strong sense of tragedy in what Bazin says here. He would often express reservations about adaptations that sacrificed the most lively parts of their texts in favor of either grandeur in style or a metaphysical vision; in principle he did not deprecate these last two in themselves, but only their being privileged over a certain frankness of appeal to our emotions and interests. See for example, André Bazin, "*Le Plaisir* de Max Ophuls" in Obs no. 95 (6 March 1952); André Bazin, "*Trois Femmes*", in *L'Observateur* no. 119 (21 August 1952); André Bazin, "*Mina de Vanghel*: Géometrie Dramatique à Trois Dimensions", in *Radio, Cinéma, Télévision* no. 166 (22 March 1953)

interesting and not the other way round. Further, the characters in these works have a life of their own that exceeds the integrity of single works or authorial intention.

> It is interesting to note that the novelists who defend so fiercely the stylistic or formal integrity of their texts are also the ones who sooner or later overwhelm us with confessions about the tyrannical demands of their characters. According to these writers, their protagonists are *enfants terribles* who completely escape from their control once they have been conceived. The novelist is totally subjected to their whims, he is the instrument of their wills. I'm not doubting this for a minute, but then writers must recognize that the true aesthetic reality of a psychological or social novel lies in the characters or their environment rather than in what they call the "style."[16]iii

Don Quixote and Madame Bovary have a life of their own which does not depend completely on the reading of the novels in which they appear and it is perfectly legitimate for audiences to encounter them first in the cinema instead of the novels. For Bazin, if not for film and radio adaptations of these novels, most inhabitants of the twentieth century would have been deprived of the opportunity to meet their counterparts from seventeenth century Spain and nineteenth century France who too acted out their imaginations soaked in the popular culture of the time. It can only make more people first aware of and then probably interested in reading Cervantes and Flaubert, and if this is even a handful then there has still been a gain for literature.

Coming from a critic who wrote complex essays on both the importance of film style and fidelity in film adaptations, the intent of the argument in "Adaptation" is clearly polemical. But the polemics do not distract from the theoretical insight that Bazin was trying to get at, which is to place cinema in line with the *popular* character of nineteenth century literature. In the previous chapter I argued that for Bazin cinema, like any other art form, cannot represent history in all its detail but needs to offer its image at an angle. We can now see that it does this through generic

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[16] Bazin, "Adaptation," 36-37 [BW 46].

narratives, exemplary characters, and other conventional features. "Myth" is the word that

contains all these conventional elements that characterize popular subjects. Myths return our

reality to us after having distilled it into forms that the seeming amorphousness of existence

either already contains or needs or both. "Novels," Bazin writes, "are the matrices of myths."[17][iv]

Three decades before Fredric Jameson reaffirmed the place of narrative as the locus of

the political unconscious, Bazin looked to it as a site for negotiating the collective unconscious

of history; he called this function of narrative "myth." If dictionaries of academic terms are to be

believed, this term has lost the critical privilege that it seemed to enjoy in the 1950s, following

the work of Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss in France, the translation into English of

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, and the work of Northrop Frye in Anglophone

literary criticism (all in the same decade). The analysis of myths—ancient and modern—became

foundational to the development of semiology as a science of discourse analysis. But in due

course "myth" as a critical term gradually ceded ground to others such as "ideology" and the

"political unconscious."[18] But myth, Bazin tells us from his earliest works in the '40s, is a useful

term for understanding what is perhaps specifically modern in art's relationship to history: at

once history's obscure image and also something that generates forms that it in turn imposes

upon history. Therefore, so much modern art is obsessed in one way or another with creating

new myths or refounding old ones. As one extreme example, we may recall the intricate mythical

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[17] Bazin, "L'adaptation," 37 [BW 46].

[18] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* 2nd ed. (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968 [1st ed. 1958]); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957); Claude Levi-Strauss, "The structural study of myth," in *The Journal of American Folklore* vol. 68, no. 70 (October-November, 1955), 428-444; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 1981). Jameson draws upon Frye only to translate the latter's idea of mythic narrative into the master narrative of Marxist modes of production.

universe of Blake's poetry. But modern myths that truly resonated with history were to be found, as Bazin argues, in the form of the (often-serialized) nineteenth-century novel.

The characters that populated nineteenth century consciousness—the Werthers, the Rastignacs, the Pips, the Emmas, as also many more that may have been more alive in the popular literature of the times but which have not survived in our school readings—came from fiction. But even more than individual characters, Bazin argues that the mythologies of modern art reside in genres: "In fact, the true basis for aesthetic differentiations is not to be found among the arts but within genres: between the psychological novel and the novel of manners, for example, rather than between the psychological novel and the film based on it."[19] The cinema performs the same function as the other arts in modernity. But it not only gives new life—that is, new historical significance—to older myths but also creates its own that play upon the elementary appeal of myths, as he writes in an article from 1950 on the question of form and content in the cinema.

> A large part of the cinematic production still belongs to... primitive literary forms, playing at an elementary and collective level with the popular imagination. The story that the filmmaker claims to recount is essentially only a pretext for stringing together symbols that please us only to the extent that they resonate in our subconscious. The most unrealistic pre-war American comedy, with the romantic entanglements of millionaires in a universe without the economic crisis, unemployment, illness, or suffering, is certainly— for those who know how to read it with the competence of a psychoanalyst reading a dream—a documentary of the human geography much more rigorous than the *Naked Cities* of Hollywood neo-realism.[20]v

If generic narratives embody a mythic unconscious, then the cinema has the added dimension of stars who in something as simple as the way they walk or look embody such mythologies: "[T]he

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[19] Bazin, "L'adaptation," 39 [BW 49].

[20] Bazin, "La forme et le fond: La technique et le "sujet" ne jouent pas au cinéma le même rôle que dans les autres arts," in RCT no. 45 (28 September 1950).

novelty of cinema in relation to folktales and mythology is that in it the fable can originate from a simple physical appearance: from the curve of a face or the moisture of a look (*l'eau d'un regard*]."[21][vi] This play of rudimentary narratives and resonant symbols is what defines Bazin's theory of narrative. More precisely, we could say that narrative for him is a combination of the subject—comprising the symbolic, mythic elements—and narration which is a temporal flow of an autonomous world into which we escape. He describes this escape eloquently in "For an impure cinema" with reference to an experience of watching Louis Feuillade's silent-era serial *Les Vampires* (1915) at the Cinémathèque Française. The print had no intertitles and only one of the two projectors was functional.

> I suppose even Feuillade would not have found his assassins. Bets were on for finding out the good and the bad guys. The one we took for a bandit turned out to the victim in the next reel. And then the lights coming on for changing the reels multiplied the episodes. Presented in this manner, the masterpiece of Feuillade revealed in an astonishing manner the aesthetic principle behind its charm. Each interruption brought on an "Aw!" of disappointment and each resumption a sigh of relief. This story of which the public understood nothing could catch this public's attention and desire through only the pure urgency of its narration. It wasn't in any way a preexistent action arbitrarily broken down with intervals, but *a creation unduly interrupted, an inexhaustible spring whose flow had been interrupted by a mysterious hand*. Hence this intolerable unease brought on by the "to be continued," and the anxious wait, not so much for the events to follow, but for *the unfolding of a tale, of the resumption of a suspended act of creation… the delicious wait for the tale which substitutes itself for daily existence which in turn is no more than a crack in the continuity of the dream*.[22][vii]

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[21] Bazin, "Plaidoyer pour les vedettes", in RCT no. 35 (17 September 1950).

[22] Bazin, "Pour un cinéma impur," in QQCII, 12-13 [WCII 59-60; WCB 114-115]. Though Bazin here is speaking about a silent-era serial, he argued that this need to be absorbed into an indiscriminate flow of narration remains an important part of all film watching experience. In 1955, French and American film theaters still had drop-in admissions and this seemed to have caused some controversy in relation to Henri-Georges Clouzot's *film noir Les Diaboliques* (1955) whose surprise elements would have required that audiences to not walk in at the end if they did not want to have their experience of the rest of the film ruined. Bazin wrote an article on this examining the practice of drop-in admissions, and defended the audiences' right to enter any time they wished since "the cinema exists *also* as a vending machine for dreams and escape, and this aspect of its reality isn't *a priori* contemptible nor is it sterile on the artistic plane." Some films could indeed benefit from being watched out of order, he writes. But even on the level of production, the example of *Les Diaboliques* made him speculate about the trajectory of the American *film*

What we get here is a distinction between narrative and narration, between something self-contained and structured and something indefinitely open, and it is the latter, in combination with the concentration of mythic elements, that is the key to understanding the experience of art. This dual-character of concentration and flow, Bazin would argue, is true as much for the novel as for early film serials; for the Dickenses, the Eliots, the Balzacs, and the Dostoevskys also began their lives as serials. And when we read them now as single works, we still read them for something of this same need to be absorbed into another continuum than that of our lives.

Concentration-flow/history-escape is the aesthetic structure we have seen Bazin elaborate and which substitutes concerns of authorial subjectivity and personal style with those of the historical unconscious and the audience's need for escape from history. And he did this in dialogue with representatives of official culture in Geneva who in his eyes were clearly overestimating the role of the author in relation to cultural politics. Marcel, who agreed with Bazin that the arts need to think in terms of audiences, proposed cultivating the taste of audiences. Taking the example of music, he suggested amateur performances as a way of making classical music popular again. This again reduced the question of audience to one of aesthetic competence and reinforced questions of style and authorship.[23] Bazin pointedly disagreed with Marcel arguing that only the work of popularization can renew and create socially-responsive works.

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noir. Where Clouzot insisted on making a film with elements of suspense and surprise, American *film noirs* had adapted the flashback structure. He conjectures that this just might have been an effect of adapting to the structure of drop-in admissions. In doing so, they seemed to have traded suspense for a potentially more tragic mode of narration. Bazin, "La pratique du permanent est-elle cause de l'évolution du film policier américain", in RCT no. 267 (27 February 1955).

[23] Cassoul et al, *Rencontres Internationales de Genève, Tome III (1948)*, 392.

Even on the question of forms, where aesthetic training reinforces a narrow set of standards, something like the radio, Bazin points out, allowed for the spread of Jazz into Europe which would perhaps not have happened, at least on such a large scale and so quickly, if left to the work of performance. Radio and the cinema, just like the digest form in literature, make palatable what is unfamiliar and prepare the ground for a possibly deeper engagement rather than pre-empt such an engagement. When one adapts something for the cinema or the radio, argues Bazin, one is not adapting in the first place to these media but to the public because they are "more public" than the other arts.[24] Rather than a "generosity" towards the other arts, this argument for popularization must be read as an emphasis on the unconscious processes by which modern art responds to the collective experience of history. While as a critic Bazin himself would emphasize the need for attention to the history of forms and for a critical engagement with products of popular culture, he argued for some distance between these activities and the work of the historical unconscious on the production and reception of this culture.

Bazin's ideas were met some coldness in Geneva. The Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet leading the discussion was swift in his disapproval as he pointedly redirected the conversation to "the substance [*fond*] of art."[25] When Bazin reported on this conference in *Esprit* a couple of months later, he recalled a bitter joke by Tzara to write that those present were busy "disputing over the gender of angels while the atomic bomb is being prepared to resolve the divorce between the artist and the public…."[26][viii]

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[24] Cassoul et al, *Rencontres Internationales de Genève, Tome III (1948)*, 391-392; Bazin, "L'adaptation," 34, 39 [BW 41-42, 49].

[25] Cassoul et al, *Rencontres Internationales de Genève, Tome III (1948)*, 392.

[26] André Bazin, "Les Rencontres Internationales de Genève", 721.

The Subject of Style

Though Bazin was hoping to wake up official culture to the importance of audiences by holding the atom bomb over its head, his debates over the importance of subjects were largely carried out with French film critics. Here, unlike in Geneva where artists and philosophers were preoccupied with questions of style, the importance of subjects was everything in the cultural and political battle with America. Within these debates, Bazin's critics drew a sharp distinction between form and subject. The filmmaker Louis Daquin and Georges Sadoul would cast him, Alexandre Astruc, Pierre Kast, Jacques-Doniol Valcroze, and the older Roger Leenhardt[27] as the aesthetes. Daquin would reprise the idiomatic phrase "disputing over the gender of angels" to accuse them of being "technico-aesthetico-philosophic" critics.[28] In a matter of months, Bazin found himself at the end of the very barrel he trained on those present in Geneva. But he was surely expecting this given that the debates had been going on since 1945, but the onset of Cold War politics did intensify them greatly. The irony would be even more pronounced as he would be accused of deemphasizing the importance of the subjects of films in favor of the metaphysical implications of techniques such as depth-of-field composition. Daquin, Sadoul, and other promoters of 'committed' cinema accused the younger critics of a dereliction of duty by not exposing American propaganda in the films they reviewed and in giving such high importance to questions of form.[29] More than anything else, they wanted critics to emphasize the importance of

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[27] Collectively labeled "la jeune critique;" to be distinguished from the Young Turks around Rohmer and Truffaut who would come to prominence after 1949.

[28] Louis Daquin, "Remarques Déplacées", in *L'Ecran Français* (8 March 1949).

[29] Daquin would go so far as to say, "[A]llow me to tell you that you are not worthy of this critical liberty and independence that your elders had such difficulty obtaining. You are not worthy of it because you use it ill." Ibid.

subjects that speak to the problems of the moment and to fight the censorship that stood in the way of filmmakers who were willing to take them up.

Bazin agreed with his detractors that commercial and political factors joined in limiting the possibilities of subjects in the cinema. He blamed censorship for this state of affairs, not only in France but in America too with the Production Code. As a representative of critics on the censor board, Bazin fought against the fact of censorship while trying to limit the damage from within. But when cinema was criticized for being less committed than literature he pointed out in 1947 that writers such as Aragon and Sartre use their greater liberty to move between political and thoroughly apolitical subjects at will.[30] If these writers wanted to test the censorship of subjects, Bazin argued, they should try a literary equivalent of an international film festival where the writers read their work aloud, with all the money and the false burden of diplomatic relations at stake with film festivals: "One wonders how a book of Miller [Arthur or Henry would both work well in this context] or Sartre would withstand such an oral test and if we wouldn't notice a palpable reduction in literary themes…"[31] [ix]Still, of the two sets of reasons,

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[30] André Bazin, "De la Forme et du Fond, ou la "Crise" du Cinéma", in *Almanach du Théatre et du Cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de Flore), 173. In a dig at the Communist Aragon, he points out the fact that during the Occupation he had published a censored version of a psychological novel set during the Belle Époque.

[31] André Bazin, "A Propos de l'Échec Américain au Festival de Bruxelles," in Esp vol. 9 no. 137 (September 1947), 428. Bazin was reporting on a festival in which the adaptation of Raymond Radiguet's *Le Diable au Corps* (Claude Autant-Lara, 1947) was met with a walkout by the French ambassador for its anti-militaristic and, therefore, supposedly anti-patriotic theme. The film survived this instance of official disapproval but gave rise to heated debates. (It would however enter into critical Purgatory following Truffaut's diatribe "A Certain tendency of the French Cinema" some years later.) Several films, including Louis Daquin's adaptation of Guy de Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1954) and Chris Marker and Alain Resnais's *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) to name only the most prominent, would be banned. For a glimpse into the debates around Autant-Lara's film, see "*Le Diable au Corps*: La Réalisation… La Querelle", in *Ciné-Club* no. 2 (November 1947); for a discussion of the fate of *Bel-Ami*, see Susan Hayward, "Censoring the Classics, *Bel-Ami*, Louis Daquin (1954; released in 1957)", in *French Costume Drama of the 1950s: Fashioning Politics in Film* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 327-346.

commercial and censorship, he found censorship to be ultimately less determinant in the medium's choice of subjects.

After nearly a decade of polemics, in 1957 Bazin launched with some authority a sharp critique of the same industry that constantly complained about censorship and quotas and whose most vocal supporters would denounce Jean Renoir for making period dramas.[32] Responding to Jean Carta, the critic at the *Témoignage Chrétien*, a publication with links to the Resistance, he argues that even if censorship had prevented anti-colonial and anti-militaristic subjects, there had been no attempts to make a fictional film on the pressing postwar housing crisis; he knew because he not only hadn't seen a single such film but he also hadn't seen a single script on the subject submitted to the pre-censorship screening.[33] And Louis Daquin's *Point du Jour* (1949), a film about the lives of miners, fared miserably, especially in the working-class North of France, and Daquin made none on the subject since. As for Sartre, whose notion of commitment Carta brought up to criticize Renoir, Bazin, after a decade directly or indirectly parrying with the writer-philosopher on aesthetic and philosophical grounds, now responded on specifically political grounds: "Carta invokes Jean-Paul Sartre. But his support is doubly dangerous. Firstly because nothing so far has solidly confirmed the ideas stated [on commitment] in the preface to *Les Temps Modernes* [from 1945], and then above all because the latest commitment of Sartre—

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[32] André Bazin, "Cinéma et engagement", in *Esprit* vol. 4 no. 246 (April 1957), 681-684.

[33] On Bazin's articles on the topic of censorship, see Marc Vernet in "Bazin the cenor?,"in *Opening Bazin*, 234-239. Given that in France municipal governments could ban films at their discretion, Bazin thought that central censorship clearance might counter this unpredictable censorship in some ways until the case for removing all censorship could be won. But, as in the case of Marcel Pagliero's *Un Homme Marche Dans la Ville*, the Left-wing municipal administrations were less than shy in using their discretion to ban films. One of the last pieces Bazin wrote was a severe critique of censorship in relation to the French ban on *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, 1957) which treated a historical miscarriage of justice in the French army during World War I. In concluding, he wrote that the fact of Kubrick's film being unable to "even cross the French border for a private screening says a lot about the deterioration of liberty and democracy in France." André Bazin, "*Les Sentiers de la Gloire*," in Esp vol. 10 no. 266 (October 1958), 510-514.

shoring up, three years late, Stalinism from the outside at the very moment it was about to collapse—is an adventure that seems to justify those who in all these years have continued to write as if playing dodgeball."[34]x

Amidst these polemics, we must remember Bazin's theoretical position on the question of subjects. Critics like Carta, Sadoul, Daquin, following Sartre, thought that what was politically important in cinema were transparently committed subjects, whereas he, Bazin, argued for the political importance of generic subjects in an art form beset by severe commercial and political constraints. Moreover, subjects at an angle to historical problems are often better placed at engaging the affective imagination of the times. In cinema, as in most literature with any degree of popular appeal, subjects rely on an apparent simplicity to give a "form" to historical imaginary. The work of style in cinema as in literature is to complement this simplicity with an affective appeal that would turn a film into a site for the social imaginary. He explicitly drew this distinction between "form" that has a mythic function and "style" that pertains to the more narrow concerns of technique.[35] And this now brings us to Bazin's critical investment in realist style for which he was accused of aestheticism.

Approaching Realism

"The evolution of the language of cinema" (henceforth "Evolution") has given us the impression that Bazin argued for a teleological evolution of cinematic styles towards the realism of the long take and depth of field. Daniel Morgan has warned us that we should situate this essay in its historical context as a polemical response to the nostalgics of the '20s avant-garde

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[34] Bazin, "Cinéma et Engagement", 683.

[35] Bazin, "L'adaptation," 39 [BW 49].

techniques.[36] He is right about the historical specificity of the argument but only partly so about the primarily polemical significance; this is not surprising since Morgan is conscious of attempting a preliminary (and important) revaluation of Bazin's realism without exploring the historical context. Despite welcoming cinema's initial turn from its originary realism to an imaginative realism, Bazin like the rest of his generation was deeply aware that under the pressure of the war cinema in the 1940s had to once again confront its realist powers, and so his interest in new realist techniques such as depth-of-field composition follows from these developments. But it also follows from what Bazin perceived as a crisis in Hollywood genres that had pushed classical realism beyond its equilibrium point to explore the dramatic possibilities of the long take and staging in depth.

As we know from Bazin's footnote to "Evolution," he never wrote an essay with this title. It was an amalgam of a piece he wrote for an article on "depth of field" in the first issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951 and another on "découpage" for the Venice Film Festival publication in 1952.[37] Of these two, it is interesting to note that the 1951 essay is already called "Pour en finir avec le profondeur du champ." As he indicates at the outset of the essay, it comes towards the conclusion of polemics over the relative merits of subject and style that go back as far as 1946. Given this reference, this essay should be further placed at the intersection over several

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[36] Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006)," 476.

[37] André Bazin, "Pour en finir avec le profondeur en champ," in CdC no. 1 (April 1951); André Bazin, *Découpage*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2015 [1952]); He also mentions a third for *L'Age Nouveau*, but this last reproduces most of its content from *Découpage*. André Bazin, "Le découpage et son evolution," in *L'Age Nouveau* no. 93 (July 1955).

others that Bazin wrote in which either a "crisis" or the importance of subjects is highlighted

alongside an interest in realist techniques:[38]

- a 1946 article in *L'Écran Français* on the "new American style"[39]
- a report on the 1947 Brussels film festival in *Esprit* and another for the Cannes 1949 brochure which discuss at length what was seen in France as a crisis in American film production generally and film genres more specifically[40]
- four articles in 1949 promoting a new avant-garde in conjunction with the launch of the *Objectif '49* film festival[41]
- two articles in 1950 and 1951 on the relationship between technique and subject[42]

In the 1946 article, Bazin placed his interest in the new explorations of realist technique

within the context of a "crisis of subjects" and this article contains the germ for all subsequent

articles listed above. But the early emphasis on the fact that the "depth of field" techniques were

a way out of the neutral style of classical editing and composition—what he calls the "no man's

land" of film style—hardly seemed to address the question of subjects. At this point, he still

seemed to believe that development of cinema depended on new stylistic breakthroughs. But

when he wrote the report on the failure of American cinemas in making a mark at the Brussels

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[38] A dossier in the journal *1895* collects excerpts from some of these articles that give a glimpse into the form-content debates with two articles by Sadoul which engaged Bazin. Because of the selective excerpts, it does not shed light on Bazin's deeper analysis of the crisis of genres in Hollywood, especially the question of misogyny. It also does not broach the question of adaptation. Georges Sadoul and André Bazin, "La Profondeur du Champ et la Crise du Sujet en Débat (1945-1949)," in *1895: Revue d'Histoire du Cinéma* no. 67 (Summer 2012), 126-143.

[39] André Bazin, "Le nouveau style sméricain".

[40] André Bazin, "A propos de l'échec américain au Festival de Bruxelles," in Esp vol. 9 no. 137 (September 1947); André Bazin, "U.S.A 1938-1948: Sur le Champ D'Azur," in *Festival Internationale de Cannes 1949* (brochure)

[41] André Bazin, "Decouverte cu Cinéma: Defense de l'Avant-Garde," in *L'Ecran Français* no. 182 (21 December 1948); André Bazin, "L'Avant-Garde Nouvelle," in *Festival du Film Maudit: Biarritz, 29 Juillet à 5 Août* (brochure); André Bazin, "Nous Autres Chevaliers de l'Avant-Garde," in *Combat* (16 July 1949); André Bazin, "À la Recherche d'une Nouvelle Avant-Garde," in *Almanach du Théatre et du Cinéma, 1950* (Paris: Éditions de Flore, 1950), 146-152.

[42] André Bazin, "De la Forme et du Fond, ou la 'Crise' du Cinéma," in *Almanach du Théatre et du Cinéma, 1951* (Paris: Éditions de Flore, 1951), 170-177; André Bazin, "La Forme et le Fond". In order to understand the origins of the New Wave, we can also add here that a key topic in the first round table at *Cahiers* was a crisis of subjects in the French cinema. See André Bazin et al, "Six characters in search of *auteurs*: a discussion about the French cinema," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985), 31-46.

film festival of 1947, he started to address this question beyond the level of technique. Here Bazin starts to speak more clearly about the crisis of subjects in American cinema as a crisis of genres.

Responding to critics who argued for the primacy of subject over style, Bazin argued that style may indeed serve the subject in the abstract, but this correspondence cannot be one in which a neutral style becomes the ground for laying out the important subjects of the times. This was possible in 1930s Hollywood only because the real "forms" there were genres that allegorized historical realities. Through and after the war, these genres—the screwball comedy, the Western, the gangster—had to negotiate their limits. These generic limits, to be discussed in the next two chapters, were the main subject of the Cannes 1949 article, and are still suggested in the final version of "Evolution".[43] In view of a historical crisis in genres, the question of film technique once again became important, and the question of subject must once again confront the enduring fact of borrowing and adaptation from the other arts. It is, therefore, that the peak of Bazin's quarrels over his attention to realist style are framed on the one side by 1948's "Adaptation" essay and on the other by 1952's "For an impure cinema." It isn't that cinema automatically channels the mythologies created by the other arts but that it deepens its stylistic arsenal as a way of making these mythologies speak to a new historical moment when cinema itself remained constrained in its choice of subjects.

There is another more general aesthetic reason as to why cinema had to confront the question of realist film technique more seriously. The classicism of the '30s style was a consequence of the fact that the inventiveness of silent cinema had exhausted one avenue of

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[43] André Bazin, "L'évolution du langage cinématographique," in QQCI, 136-137 [WCI 28-29; WCB 94].

stylistic innovation, which had to do with taking the material reality in the cinematic image as a point of departure rather than an element of stylistic probing in itself. This first-level reality matters to Bazin which is why he could not abide extreme examples of its abstraction such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1920), but in all other prominent instances, the modification of reality through heightened processes of abstraction had good technical and historical reasons. On Eisenstein he writes:

> In 1926, Eisenstein emerged as the realism of the promoter of realism, almost a realism par excellence: to the cinema of dreams and escape, Potemkin opposed a cinema incarnated in a History it sought to transform. But this reality was of matter and not of expression. The confusion lasted only so long as the technical evolution of cinema and even of the Soviet Revolution allowed it… With some distance, we can see what in *Potemkin* was on the one hand of Romantic inspiration and on the other, in terms of form, an admirable aesthetic machinery perfectly independent of the reality it mobilizes.[44][xi]

Comparing this to the trajectory of all stylistic schools, he argues that it is the fate of them all to lose to one degree or another their ability to convince us of their reality: "there is realism and then there is realism, and the problem isn't so much knowing if the production of 1952 is more realist than that of 1938 as seeing in what the difference consists."[45][xii] One era's realism becomes another's aestheticism as happened with the poetic-realist style of 1930s France when filmmakers kept to its conventions after the war when it no longer had any historical resonance; as happened also with Soviet montage aesthetics once the Soviet Revolution had changed course; as happened also when some French and Hollywood filmmakers employed the same elements as the Italians did after the war (location shooting, for example) but failed to produce anything with

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[44] André Bazin, "*Le Cuirassé Potemkin*: une reprise qui est une grand première", in RCT no. 167 (29 March 1953)

[45] André Bazin, "Néo-réalisme et 'reportage à thèse'", in Obs no. 109 (12 June 1952). Elsewhere he writes that each age has its romanticism that we take for realism in some sense only to discover its contradictions later, and that the romanticism of cinema was still largely embodied in 1952 by stars. André Bazin, "*Jocelyn*, ou les Ennuis de la Fidélité", in Obs no. 97 (20 March 1952).

similar urgency.[46] The introduction of sound was a key element in the exhaustion of editorial

inventiveness, so there are technological reasons too why styles exhaust themselves.

The exhaustion of stylistic options in an art form also exhausts its ability to speak of the

world with any confidence. As artists seek *personal* stylistic signatures, they break the collective

historical basis of the evolution of the art form. While at their limits, poetry like Mallarmé's and

painting like Picasso's form a peak in stylistic innovation, such a reckoning with limits

announces an art form's turning in towards itself and its gradual alienation from the world and,

therefore, from its audiences. While some artists in these arts will find an audience, the art forms

themselves become marginal to their times. For Bazin, cinema's advantage lay in the fact that at

its limits it still encounters the world and cannot escape it. The medium of cinema is the world

and not, like a Man Ray might claim, the film strip. It is in this sense that we must read his

comparison of William Wyler's exploration of staging in depth in *The Little Foxes* (1941) to the

blank page of Mallarmé's poetry.[47] While Wyler's exploration of space for him is a stylistic peak

in cinema comparable to Mallarmé's explorations of the silence inherent in language, his critical

task was to argue that cinema even at this peak cannot turn away from the world. Through this

unavoidable contact with the world it might continue to draw audiences by tapping into our

mythic imaginaries.[48] Despite this confidence, Bazin had to confront the fact that the appeal of

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[46] Bazin, "Néo-réalisme et 'reportage à thèse'"

[47] Bazin, "Le nouveau style américain"

[48] The clearest statement of this faith comes from Eric Rohmer in his article on the Lettrist poet and a one-time filmmaker Isidore Isou's film *Traité d'Bave et d'Eternité* (1951). Writing with great irony, he describes the ambitions and anxieties of Isou's avant-garde program according to which the arts had come to the end of their resources and now need to be chiseled down to their essence in order to begin again. Rohmer congratulates Isou for taking on the medium of film and demonstrating that, for all the scratching of surface and the disjunction of sound from image, at the end of the chiseling what remains on the surface of his film are still images of him criss-crossing the streets of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the mythic geography of French literary culture. This article appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* as part of a dossier on the avant-garde which included an article by Hans Richter and a reprint of Bazin's article from the Objectif 49 brochure. Richter too makes a somewhat similar point to Rohmer's when he

films to audiences across identities was already beginning to break down with the emergence of arthouse cinemas. Audiences and with them films seemed to become increasingly specialized as had occurred in the other arts. It is here that Bazin initiated the program of a new avant-garde that would retain a popular rather than exclusive appeal.

For a Popular Avant-Garde

The political polemics in which Bazin participated were as much a result of him and other young critics giving importance to technical questions as of their organization of Objectif 49, a festival of "accursed films," giving every indication of an elite group of filmmakers and critics. The fact that it was organized as an alternative to Cannes which had a commercial and diplomatic as much as, if not more than, an aesthetic mandate, gave further credence to this charge. But as Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb's comprehensive history of Objectif 49 documents, the festival was a crossroads for a range of issues in French film culture whose inflecting by this event would resonate long after its short existence.[49] It was also a coming together of complex and even contradictory interests where elitism confronted upstart enthusiasts.[50] In this, Bazin, one of the initiators of the project was clear throughout that the festival had a popularizing rather than an esoteric objective. This, however, was not necessarily understood or shared by others, particularly the president Jean Cocteau.[51] A look at the contributions to the festival brochure is

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argues that one of the two ways cinema can come into its own as an art form is by confronting its documentary essence in keeping with its time, the way *Battleship Potemkin* and *Paisa* had done. The other way for Richter, of course, is experimental cinema and its search for autonomous expression. See *Cahiers du Cinéma* vol. 2 no. 10 (March 1952), 11-32. Rohmer's article is available in translation as Eric Rohmer, "Isidore Isou or Things As They Are, in *The Taste for Beauty*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 53-58.

[49] Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49: Cocteau et la Nouvelle Avant-Garde* (Paris: Séguier, 2013)

[50] Andrew, *André Bazin*, rev. ed., 145

[51] Gimello-Mesplomb writes that Bazin's positions on the avant-garde were little understood by some within the club/festival. He framed the festival within a pragmatic focus on questions of production and distribution with a view to the popularization of some of the challenging current productions. Cocteau himself saw the festival as having a resolutely anti-commercial mandate. Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 18, 53-55, 153.

sufficient indicator of Bazin's differences from some of the other prominent voices. In keeping with the theme of "accursed films," the filmmaker Jean Grémillon speaks of the "curse of style," Roger Leenhardt—Bazin's mentor in many ways—writes of the "curse of intelligence." Cocteau complains about commercial pressures and saw the festival as a bulwark against commercial concerns. These were clear signs that several filmmakers were repeating the Romantic excesses playing at being misunderstood authors who are forced to address indifferent audiences. Bazin, however, was at pains to re-define avant-garde as one that seeks to make way for aesthetic innovations that would sooner or later gain the assent of a large public and make a difference to the quality of the wider production. As Gimello-Mesplomb notes, the selection of new or soon-to-be-released films emphasized a present or future-oriented mission rather than one that consecrated the classics. [52] To this extent, good films that had difficulty in finding an audience must be promoted but not shielded from public scrutiny for the delectation of the initiated, something of which he accused the '20s avant-garde (which he would rather call a "flanc-garde."[53])

To understand the significance of Bazin's position, we would have to take full measure of his activities within networks of postwar popular education as well as his activities in organizations that promoted new structures of production and exhibition such as mechanisms of state-funding for films and the establishment of arthouse theaters which would go under the label "cinéma d'art et essai." But the contours of his position are clear enough. He resisted a complete specialization of either production or audiences—with the popular and commercial on the one hand and the rarefied and the initiated on the other. But he also believed that different aesthetic

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[52] Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 59.

[53] Bazin, "Découverte du Cinéma: Defense de l'Avant-Garde"

levels of production and a certain differentiation of audiences—provided that this differentiation was interactive rather than isolating—would turn the automatic popularity of the cinema into a critical engagement with the social imaginary. He never hesitated in defining an important, even if insignificant in the large scheme of things, to the critic in times when, as Daquin pointed out by citing a study, up to 24% of audiences in France consulted film reviews when deciding what films to watch.[54]

While Bazin believed that any film, whatever its overall formal merits, could be read for historical symptoms, he did not believe that this exonerated a critic or the audiences from the need to make space for aesthetic judgments, a space from which the historical moment is confronted in a state of affective but critical charge. As early as 1944, in "The cinema and popular art," Bazin writes" "[T]he problem of a popular art is not resolved by the mere appearance of a popular art. The popular works of the future will necessarily be cinematic. It would be dangerous to believe that they will necessarily find their material without the at least negative intervention of an *aesthetic politic*."[55] He then goes on to compare cinema to architecture wherein the latter can always get by with functional constructions so long as people don't demand something more of it; similarly, "on its own, cinema comes up with Emile Couzinet or Fernandel films." These films for him would lack the ability to make us take distance from and confront our own historical condition since they purvey "a demagogic mythology in which society believes itself represented and to which it ends by unconsciously

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[54] Louis Daquin, "Remarques Déplacées", in *L'Écran Français*. Bazin wrote several articles on the role of the critic from before the Liberation to the time of his death. See André Bazin, "Toward a Cinematic Criticism," and "To Create a Public," in FCOR, 53-66, 68-70; André Bazin, "Misère, servitude et grandeur de la critique de film," in *Revue Internationale du Cinéma* no. 2 (January 1948); André Bazin, "Réflexions sur la critique," in CFLNV, 207-213.

[55] "The cinema and popular art," FCOR, 83.

conforming."[56] As Bazin saw it, the French peasant who went to the cinema knew more about the life of an American worker than a French one so long as he had only Fernandel films to get a picture of contemporary France. But despite these reservations early in his career, Bazin would go on to read the majority of popular films symptomatically without making demystification a major part of his aesthetic politics. If his position on the mediocrity of most films may be surmised from over a decade and half of writing, it would be that cinema needed this production of indifferent quality to remain commercially viable in order to keep the more aesthetically ambitious films honest with their audiences. We will see this more clearly in his position of postwar Westerns in chapter four.

It might appear that Bazin's dream of creating a space of reconciliation between large audiences and critical engagement worn thin long ago with distinct audiences for distinct forms of cinema, a fragmentation intensified by the personalized viewing practices of our day. To parse the question of audiences and forms with all the historical complexity since Bazin's time would require a different project. All this dissertation tries to do is to recover what for Bazin constituted the conditions for the political possibilities of the aesthetic that we can then examine to see if they still remain possibilities in the current media landscape. The conditions this chapter brings out are the need for subjects that give a mythic orientation to history—distilling it into simple forms rather than capturing it directly—and an emphasis on the popular character of cinema even in its most artistically ambitious productions.

For the purposes of a discussion about aesthetic politics, Bazin's critical legacy over the years following his death is best glimpsed metonymically at two historical moments: one on the

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[56] Ibid., 85.

question of subjects in the early moments of the New Wave and another on the question of state

protection for films decades after the New Wave had entered into history. When Roland Barthes

reviewed Claude Chabrol's debut film *Le Beau Serge* (1958), which tells the story of a young

man returning to the provinces and getting caught up in the sexual and emotional crises of his

best friend and his wife, he wrote lines that bear citing at length in light of the discussion here:

> As I recall the opening images of *Le Beau Serge*, I say to myself yet again that here
> in France talent is with the right and truth with the left, that it is this fatal disjunction
> between form and meaning that stifles us… I would have given a lot to strip *Le Beau
> Serge* of its plot… it may be that truth resides in the style, while concession is in the
> content; it might be a paradox of structure that the existence of a narrative is merely
> an attribute of its form. Hence the generalized divorce between a truth of signs—the
> whole modern way of seeing the world strictly as surface—and the pretense of plots
> and roles sloppily borrowed from the crudest bourgeois folklore of a Paul Bourget or
> a Graham Greene. A casual gaze may yield sarcasm, or affection, that is, a truth; but
> casualness when it comes to subject matter yields a lie. No other art can endure for
> long under this contradiction; a story's naiveté quickly spoils the form's modernity.
> The terrible thing about cinema is that it makes this monstrosity viable. We might
> even say that our current avant-garde lives off this contradiction: true signs, false
> meanings.[57]

The remainder of the review is characteristic Barthesian oscillation between a longing for either

Falubertian ascesis or Brechtian confrontation. Barthes's theoretical insights are a far cry from

the blunt accusations of Bazin's interlocutors in the '40s, so he sees the "terrible viability" in the

cinema of the "monstrous" coupling between seemingly inconsequential plots and modern

stylistics. But Bazin had spent a decade and a half fighting for the aesthetic possibilities that arise

in the friction between simple subjects and complex style, between form and meaning, between

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[57] Roland Barthes, "Cinema Left and Right," in Philip Watts, *Roland Barthes' Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 121-124.

aesthetic naiveté and sophistication.[58] And he had the chance to write a few brief lines praising

Chabrol's film before he passed away without the detailed review he promised.

All of Barthes's theoretical sophistication cannot prevent his self-righteous distribution of

truth and talent between the Left and the Right respectively; the ideological truth of the former

and the stylistic sophistication of the latter. He betrays the same unreflective reflexes that had

sought to mire aesthetic debates in the desire for ideological clarity rather than ideological

negotiation. To this ideological impatience, Chabrol simply responded with a short piece for

Cahiers du Cinéma, titled "Petits sujets" in which he parodied the distinction between big and

small subjects.[59] And so the debates continued while the terms remained the same.

The other moment when Bazin's legacy on the question spoke most clearly was in 1993

in a classroom at the Sorbonne where Eric Rohmer had entered into his third decade of teaching

film. This pertains to the fact that Bazin had been involved in both fighting for some degree of

state protection of the French film industry and the development of arthouse cinemas while at the

same time warning against the aesthetic hermeticism that might come from an excess of

protection and specialization. 1993 was the year of negotiations over the renewal of the General

Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in which the Europeans felt threatened by the

possibility that the "cultural exception" clause to free trade would be removed. The film

industries of Europe, with France among those leading the campaign, called for retaining this

clause and several filmmakers signed petitions to this effect. Rohmer was among the signatories

to one such petition. He had never received state funding for his films, but not for lack of

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[58] André Bazin, "Après le festival de Locarno, Le beau Serge accumule toutes les audaces," in Obs no. 432 (14 August 1958).

[59] Claude Chabrol, "Les petits sujets," in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 100 ((October 1959), 39-41.

applying. Nonetheless, even when he was struggling to establish his filmmaking career, Rohmer

did not believe that the cinema should be protected by the state.[60] Despite signing the petition,

his actual position stood apart from the thrust of the debates. He laid this position out before his

students, most of them aspiring filmmakers. He was against complete free trade, he said, because

it is only viable in an economically homogenous world and not between countries with unequal

wealth. In this, he was opposed the core of GATT's *raison d'être*. But he also argued that film

had a utilitarian dimension that should not be shielded from competition if it is to remain socially

relevant.

> I signed the letter of protest against GATT for solidarity and not for protectionist
> reasons. I am a commercial filmmaker, and I can even say that my film [*L'Arbre, le
> Maire et la Médiathèque*] is the only commercial art film in France because it has not
> benefited from tax exemption. I don't think however that this is what everyone
> should do, or that I want to do this all the time, but I don't think art should be
> completely subsidized as is the case with repertory theatre… I say that it is all
> cinema that one should defend and not just "good cinema"… Even the most
> commercial cinema must be defended, because it must exist, the same as those
> houses must be defended that do not have an "architectural character."[61]

As for Rohmer's "subjects," the "series" format of his films—*Moral Tales*, *Comedies

and Proverbs*, *Tales of Four Seasons*—reproduce the generic character of cinema. And as

someone who was also his own producer with limited means, this format must also be seen as

much as a way of gaining a captive audience for his films as an aesthetically-productive

framework, with the two dimensions complementing each other.[62]

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[60] Eric Rohmer et al, "Vers un Livre Blanc du Cinéma Français: Le Cinéma et L'Etat," in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 200-201 (April-May 1968), 92.

[61] Fonds Eric Rohmer, Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine, Caen, RHM 106.7

[62] Gimello-Mesplomb reminds us that in addressing itself to commercial rather than exclusively arthouse audiences in France, the *Cahiers* wing of the New Wave remained true to Bazin's challenge even as they had to come up with solutions of their own once audiences deserted it. Among its members, only Claude Chabrol and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze received any kind of state funding until 1963, and most got their break thanks to independent producers such as Pierre Braunberger and Georges Beauregard. As the New Wave lost its momentum, most of the *Cahiers*

Conclusion

The emphasis on Bazin's interest in subjects here and the introduction of the idea of their

mythic character is meant to lay the ground for looking more closely in the following chapters at

his analysis of some filmic mythologies and what they have to tell us about the political character

of cinema as a narrative form. But this emphasis is also necessary because classical narrative

cinema has for long been an object of ideological caricature for political modernism and its

theoretical heirs among scholars of early cinema. Noël Burch had characterized it as an

Institutional Mode of Representation that enforced bourgeois ideology.[63] Colin MacCabe traced

its genealogy to the nineteenth century realist novel and its technique of meta-narration and

omniscience.[64] For most of them, its key effect was to reinforce a sense of stable subjectivity.

Following on from these critiques, Tom Gunning conceptualized early cinema as a vehicle for

"attractions" that through an unintegrated and excessive sensorial address breaks the stable

subjectivity posited by narrative.[65] The idea of "attractions" as opposed to the illusion of

narrative continues to be operative in film discourse. Thus, André Gaudreault writes, "One of

institutional cinema's principles is to dissolve attractions scattered throughout a films' discourse

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filmmakers still confronted the problem of audiences head on, even as the next generation of editors in the '60s campaigned for greater state intervention in film production. Chabrol, Truffaut, and Rohmer in different ways remained popular filmmakers. Godard went looking for revolutionaries and found an audience of academics adequate to his ambitions. Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 176-177

[63] Burch discusses the Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR) in opposition to "primitive" forms and the avant-garde in Noël Burch, "Primitivism and the avant-gardes: a dialectical approach," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 483-506; For discussion of IMR, see David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 83-115.

[64] Colin MacCabe, "Realism and Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," in *Screen* vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1974), 7-27.

[65] Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator", in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 736-750; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 381-388.

into a narrative structure—to integrate them in the most organic way possible."[66] Though acknowledging that attractions and narrative often co-exist, Gaudreault asserts an opposition between them.

Bazin would agree with these assessments partly and certainly disagree with its ideological basis. We have seen him argue that narratives are an effect of mythic elements such as generic patterns and stars integrated within the narrational flow of an alternate, dream world. For Bazin, there is no neat distinction between the two. If we follow his argument, cinema did come into its own in the second decade of the twentieth century, but not so much because of D. W. Griffith and his "invention" of montage or mastery of the long narrative. While, following Musser,[67] narration may have been important in films before this time and, following Gunning, "attractions" may have been the decisive factor in audience pleasure, films from the second decade onwards made cinema into an art form because they could reconcile these two poles in the creation of myths. In this, it is indeed the heir of the nineteenth century novel, understood not as the perfection of a stable bourgeois subjectivity but as a "matrix of myths." The cinema came into its own, Bazin explicitly argued, not with Griffith but with the Fantomas and the Vampires, the Tramp, the Stone Face, and the whole gallery of stars who embodied their own myths.[68] What cinema could now do is go beyond the transience of astonishment (and a rather bare idea of modernity that some early cinema scholars hold on to) and the inexhaustible flow of narratives

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[66] André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, *The Kinematic Turn: Film in the Digital Era and Its Ten Problems* (Montreal: Caboose, 2012), 5, 6.

[67] Charles Musser, "A Cinema of Contemplation, A Cinema of Discernment: Spectatorship, Intertextuality and Attractions in the 1890s" and "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity", both in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 159-180, 389-416.

[68] Against André Malraux's claim that it was with Griffith's discovery of montage that cinema had found its form, Bazin gives primacy to slapstick as the embodiment of the cinematic experience, going back to French films from the first decade. See André Bazin, "Voici le burlesque, le genre qui fut majeur le premier se survit en se parodiant," in RCT no. 82 (12 August 1951).

to create enduring emblems of historical experience. Bazin argues that we go to the movies for both the more or less undifferentiated continuum (narration) and the concentrated intervals (myths as "attractions" in an expanded sense and more variably historical). He would agree that these narrative films do indeed hold us captive within ideological, mythic pictures, but these are not a part of an indifferent bourgeois ideology but expressive, at a remove, of the historical and social imaginary that depends precisely on some kind conscious or unconscious interpretation to be effectual. In this, the avoidance of narrative by some disciplinary currents may just be an avoidance of politics, however much they may fly under the banner of critique.[69]

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[69] Richard Rushton critiques the narrative-spectacle divide in film theory, tracing it to Peter Wollen's essay "Godard and counter-cinema: *Vent d'Est*," but arguing that it has become much more formulaic than in Wollen's argument so that "the solidification of the hegemonic division between narrative and spectacle has reduced film analysis to a plug'n'play model." See Richard Rushton, "Absorption and theatricality in the cinema: some thoughts on narrative and spectacle," in *Screen* vol. 48. No. 1 (Spring 2007), 109-112;

Chapter 3

In which Bazin Settles Charlot's Political Accounts

We have seen that Bazin used the word "myth" to understand the social function of popular forms. I will now be looking, in this chapter and the next, at Bazin's account of myths that found their preeminent expression in the cinema and their morphology from their pre-World War II to post-World War II historical conditions. I will be concentrating on his reading of Chaplin's Tramp and the Western, and reference other genres in passing. Bazin's work suggests that writing in a time of crisis for classical Hollywood myths allowed him to glimpse more clearly both the significance of modern mythologies as well as their contradictory character. His writings straddle a period of naïve confidence (in a non-pejorative sense) that the cinematic genres inspired and, following the *Mythologies* of Barthes, the disenchanted exercises of demystification of popular culture. As will become clear, he understood the production of mythologies, with all their latent contradictions, to be an important, even a central social function, of modern art. The concealing of contradictions itself serves a historical need and they remain concealed only so long as history allows it. Therefore, the first section will outline Bazin's general understanding of a myth's relationship to history and his account of the crisis in Hollywood's mythologies.

The second section examines Bazin's reading of Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) to lay the ground for exploring his deeper assessment of the power of cinematic myths in the next chapter. The focus will be on Bazin's reading of the Charlot myth through the prism of *Monsieur Verdoux*, and this for various reasons. Firstly, *Monsieur Verdoux* was another occasion for Bazin

to explicitly engage advocates of committed cinema, but this time by performing a reading of a film's subject—precisely what these advocates championed but in this case a subject to which critics on Left did not know how to respond. Secondly, the unravelling of one of the most enduring myths of cinema drew some dramatic writing from Bazin; given the appeal of the Tramp, Bazin knew that "unmasking" him through the figure of a serial killer would bring out the full affective intensity of being witness to the contradictions of something that had held audiences in its spell for a period of time. Bazin's writings on the Western too, as we will see in the next chapter, offer us similar theoretical insights; but there he also had to defend a genre that was dismissed to begin with by several of his peers. The fact that he could take the appeal of Charlot for granted gave his insights into mythic contradictions added force when writing about *Monsieur Verdoux*. [I will be using "Charlot" and "the Tramp" interchangeably to refer to Chaplin's screen persona.] But both Charlot and the Westerns elicit such strong readings from Bazin because they were myths in crisis, past the peak of their appeal. But unlike other prewar genres they had not ceased to exercise considerable force on the social imaginary, both in America and abroad.

Myth and History

So far we have an idea of myths as having the function of orienting us in history. But we are yet to properly interrogate the relationship between myths and history as Bazin elaborates it. We can start with his preface to a book on the relationship of Westerns to American history. Jean-Louis Rieupeyrout was a French historian of the American West who wrote *Le Western, ou le Cinéma Américain par Excellence* (1953) detailing the historical foundations of the Western to demonstrate that it is more than a genre of fantasy and based on bonafide events and historical

102

figures.[1] Bazin found the book a useful reference for all his subsequent articles on the Western, but he cautions Rieupeyrout of losing sight of the significance of his object in an excessive quest for historical references.

> [B]y confining itself to films that justify his thesis, [Rieupeyrout's study] discards by implication the other side of the aesthetic reality… For the relations between the facts of history and the Western are not immediate and direct, but dialectic… In its most romantic or most naïve form, the Western is the opposite of a historical reconstruction. There is no difference between Hopalong Cassidy and Tarzan except for their costume and the arena in which they demonstrate their prowess. However, if one wanted to take the trouble to compare these delightful but unlikely stories [of the Westerns] and to superimpose them, as is done in modern physiognomy with several negatives of faces, an ideal Western would come through, composed of all the constants common to one and to the other: a western made up solely of unalloyed myth.[2]i

Too much historical specificity, Bazin tells us, defeats the experience of history that myths embody. And he goes on to suggest that such specificity completely misses the global resonance of the myths, exemplified in the fact that the Western as an idea of America is not just a myth for America but for audiences around the world. The fact that myths have a dialectical and not a direct relationship to history makes it possible for them to have an intimate but autonomous relationship to their historical moments of emergence and to have a trajectory of their own. This intimate autonomy reveals itself most clearly in the experience of the origins of myths.

Bazin calls the Western and the Soviet cinema of the '20s the two great mythic bodies of film history because they coincided with the founding myths of two national identities.[3] On a large scale, they reveal the political essence of all myths which is that their origin coincides with

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[1] J. L. Rieupeyrout, *Le Western, ou le Cinéma Américain par Excellence*, préface par André Bazin (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1953); reprinted as André Bazin, "Le western ou le cinéma américain par excellence," in QQCIII, 135-145 [WCII 140-148].

[2] Bazin, "Le western," 138 [WC II 143].

[3] Ibid., 145 [WCII 148].

some new beginning in society, the hallmark of political experience according to Arendt. The fact that myths impose themselves on history is more important than what they borrow from history, since the uncertainty of beginnings in history needs the structures of myths to place them on a surer footing.

> Like the conquest of the West, the Soviet Revolution is a collection of historical events which signal the birth of a new order and a new civilization. Both have begotten *the myths necessary for the confirmation of History*, both had to reinvent a morality to rediscover at their living source, and before their mixture or pollution, the foundation of the law which would make order out of chaos, separating heaven from earth.[4] ii

Bazin's emphasis on "reinvention" of morality and "rediscovery" of law at the source before "mixture and pollution" of the historical experiences suggests that these experiences were much too complex to be grasped directly, even as the motivations and needs at their origin lent themselves to neater distillation. It is to counter the messiness of experience that history needs such distillation, to give it a structure that orients experience. This is why myths are necessary for "confirming" history. We will return to Bazin's writing on the Western in the next chapter to see how he tracked the genre's confrontation with the "mixture and pollution" at its core that history inevitably laid bare.

That Bazin does not derive this understanding of myths only from the privileged examples of the Western and 1920s' Soviet cinema, and that he still affirms the dialectical relationship of the origin of the myth to the origin of the social phenomenon to which it refers, can be gauged from his experience of being present at the birth of a myth on an altogether smaller scale. In the summer of 1955, Bazin shared with his readers a filmic experience he had on his holidays on the Atlantic coast in France. He recalls feeling as if he was walking through

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[4] Ibid., My emphasis.

the world of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953), the Jacques Tati film of two years earlier which was also the first and at the time the only one to feature the eponymous character. He describes it as a sense that the film was "reality itself in the way that in some dreams we reassure ourselves that we are awake"—so perfectly real that it can withstand the first reflex of doubt. But this sense could not withstand any analysis because the analogies were vague. Ultimately, Bazin says, Tati's film may refer to the social reality of leisure, especially in a postwar society on the verge of economic boom, but it is a universe to itself. Its humor is not satire that seeks to unmask something in reality. Even if "the stupidity of the lodgers [where Bazin was staying] ceded nothing to those in the film… Jacques Tati has done much better: he has created, all of a piece, a universe perfectly imaginary and completely lifelike, in the sense that the real one, and we along with it, can no longer avoid resembling it."[iii] In the relationship between the imaginary of myth and the reality of the world, it is "the imaginary that takes root in reality and nourishes it… by the force of the myth that Jacques Tati has henceforth imposed upon us."[5][iv] Here we again see the primary significance of the aesthetic autonomy of the myth; it is autonomous from reality and history only so as to better organize them without our conscious intervention. The Free World and the Workers' State do not exist prior to their mythologization, and the carefully regimented rituals of beach holidays yield their joys in the anarchy introduced into them by the knees and elbows of Hulot. This last example is significant for underlining the fact that the socio-political resonance of aesthetic mythologies is not limited to the grand events of history and accompany us through the smaller but also more frequent shifts in our historical experience. And Hulot did indeed go on to become the myth of the postwar economic boom in France where he represented

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[5] André Bazin, "Vacances avec M. Hulot," in Obs no. 278 (8 September 1955).

the sometimes clueless presence of an older French sensibility in the drab but prosperous new suburbs.[6] But Bazin's description of his discovery also underlines perfectly the phenomenological experience of Arendt's phrase "introduction *into* politics" (see chapter 1) as a world is formed on film but which we enter in the historical world unexpectedly renewed by this image on screen.

Even as Bazin argued for the preeminence of characters and genres in art over style, he was aware that he was writing at a moment of crisis in cinema's ability—primarily Hollywood's since it had been the generator of myths like no other national cinema—to respond to the mythic imperative of the aesthetic. Not only the mythologies of the silent era, but those embedded in talkie genres such as the screwball comedy and gangster films had been exhausted with the war, and event that Bazin called the "the grand killer of myths."[7] He writes about the screwball comedies with their "heroes rich enough to forget about the fact… living in a universe without economic resistance where money acquires the fairytale powers of the magic wand"[8]ᵥ as paradoxically speaking to the Depression era not only because they offered an escape but also because reflection on anything other than matters of need in those times needed either the abstraction of wealth to such a degree that the fact becomes indifferent or a somewhat similarly indifferent poverty; Bazin implies that since the latter wouldn't survive comparison with prevailing conditions of poverty, it is abstract wealth that becomes the setting for the moral

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[6] When Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958) released in 1958, there was some discussion in France if his satire of a modernizing France that had just recovered from postwar economic uncertainties was "reactionary." Bazin responded to this by arguing once again that the satire must not be read as a direct critique but a sharp and humorous reminder that in the midst of necessary modernization, the country must learn to retain an unregimented sensibility that Hulot represents. André Bazin, "*Mon Oncle* est-il réactionnaire?," in RCT no. 438 (8 June 1958).

[7] André Bazin, "USA 1938-1948," in *Sur le Champ d'Azur : Festival Internationale de Cannes 1949* (festival booklet)

[8] André Bazin, "*Topper* au cinéma d'essai." *L'Observateur* no. 134 (4 December 1952).

fantasies of the epoch. But this myth could not survive the much grimmer realities of the War and the sharper presence of Communist critique on the political horizon.[9]

The energies of the screwball comedy, he writes, dissipated into postwar dramas that reflected on moral dilemmas more soberly.[10] The gangster film met with a simpler but also more dramatic end where it became moralized into "*criminel noirs*" or thrillers in which the heroes are men of the establishment, betraying the increasing authoritarianism that presaged the McCarthy-era America.[11] The same fate attended most film stars. In reviewing Adolph Zukor's book *The Public Is Never Wrong* (1953), Bazin remarks upon the "hecatomb" of stars, each a myth to him-or herself, that paid for the few that still endured in the public consciousness—Garbo and the Tramp, for example. But despite this gloomy picture of the demise of the most powerful mythologies on film, Bazin here writes something that gives a clue to the paradoxical resistance of aesthetic mythologies that can fall out of history but can always re-emerge to join up with it later. Most stars, like Clara Bow (Bazin's example), die with their historical moment, he writes and then suggests that for this reason we look out for those stars/genres/myths that are likely to endure—that is, inform changing historical experiences. Then he immediately catches himself and wonders if we should be condemning future generations to our tastes, suggesting that what seems fleeting may resonate much more after an interval of a generation or two.[12] And Bow's

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[9] If Bazin's reading of screwball comedies sounds familiar, it is because it is almost a sketch for Stanley Cavell's reading of the role of money in screwball comedies as "comedies of remarriage," particularly *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934). See Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[10] Bazin, "*Topper* au cinéma d'essai"; André Bazin, "Le cinéma américain et la dignité de l'être," in RCT (14 November 1956).

[11] André Bazin, "Le film policier (suite): grandeur et décadence du gangster," in RCT no. 92 (21 October 1951).

[12] André Bazin, "Adolph Zukor, inventeur des stars d'Hollywood (suite): comment vit et meurt la vedette," in RCT, no. 245 (26 September 1954).

restoration to the critical and public pantheon of stardom towards the end of the twentieth

century vindicates that caution.[13]

While most myths die, at least provisionally, at first contact with a different historical

reality, there are others that are much more stubborn in their demise. And it is these myths that

reveal the equivocal nature of all myths and participate most intensely in the drama of history. If

myths impose an order of experience on our world, they do so through a necessary idealization

of some aspect of socio-historical reality. It then follows that it is also a simplification, from

which, in turn, follows the fact that at some point its contradictions will be laid bare, not by some

demystifying critic but by history itself. Bazin is not interested in the demystification process but

in the drama of the myths' struggle with histories, their own and of the world. Those myths that

have maintained a relationship with a long period in history will cede with difficulty to historical

change, or perhaps history itself is not so easily ready to let go of them. Such were the

mythologies of the Tramp and the western. Both these mythologies had almost disappeared with

the war; he notes that the production of Westerns fell drastically and a fugitive version of the

Tramp got drawn into a joust with Hitler which undermined his essentially ambiguous

relationship to social reality. But they both reappeared after the war—the rebound in the

production of Westerns and the release of *Monsieur Verdoux*—changed by history but not yet

ready to submit to it completely.

Even in their hour of crisis and doubt, the Western and the Tramp's persona belonged to

the postwar world with as much currency as they did to the historical moments when they were

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[13] In 1988, there was a biography of Clara Bow, in 1994 the United States Postal Service put her image on a stamp, and several scholarly articles have followed. David Stenn, *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Marsha Orgeron, "Making It in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture," in *Cinema Journal* vol. 42 no. 4 (Summer 2003), 76-97.

at their peak. This is best seen in the specific crisis that they confronted. Writing a review of Hollywood between 1938 and1948 for the Cannes film festival brochure in 1949, Bazin identified misogyny as the central fault-line in the crisis of existing Hollywood myths and one that limited the resonance of its new genres such as the thrillers. It became an explicit trope in several films such as *Lady from Shanghai* (1947) and *Shadow of Doubt* (1943), as it did in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and in some Westerns such as *The Outlaw* (1943).[14] But a fault line is not an uncomplicated fault that one can point up to condemn these films and these genres. Beyond any historical reference, the fault lines in a myth expose something that was very much a part of the myth when it exercised its influence over us but has only now either come into view or morphed into something that follows from it. If we set out to condemn a myth that we once drew upon to orient our imaginaries, we condemn ourselves. While it may be gratifying to a moralist that we recognize and "confess" our misplaced pleasures, such self-righteousness suggests that either there are "clean" myths or that we can live outside ideology, to use a word that succeeded "myth" in designating the avowed and unavowed structures of thought and feeling that inform experience. There is a more complicated way of coming to terms with the intricate realities of myths, and Bazin's writings on *Monsieur Verdoux* offer a dramatic sketch of this process as well as one of the high points in his engagement with the question of aesthetic politics. In the remainder of the chapter, I will recount how Bazin seized this opportunity to settle some political scores—his own and Charlot's—and the following chapter draws out the theoretical lessons that follow from this account.

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[14] Bazin, " USA 1938-1948." The topic of misogyny in postwar American films was quite a popular topic among Parisian film critics into the 1950s. Apart from articles in *Cahiers du Cinéma* by Pierre Kast and Michel Dorsday early in decade, Jacques Siclier published a monograph, *Le Mythe de la Femme Dans le Cinéma Américain*, in 1955. For references, see Eric Rohmer, "Livres de Cinéma, » in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 62 ((August-September 1956), 56-59.

Verdoux/Charlot

      The furor in America surrounding Chaplin's personal character and his politics that accompanied the reception of *Monsieur Verdoux* is well-known. But among the European intelligentsia, a different kind of disappointment in Chaplin surfaced with this film. The Americans suspected him of being a Communist, but for the European Left Chaplin as Verdoux was a confusing ally: a man who went about killing widows for money and who in the end doesn't do enough to justify his denunciation of organized warfare and the legal system. To recall the plot briefly, Verdoux had been a bank clerk for over three decades before losing his job in the Great Depression. To support his wife (who is confined to a wheel chair) and child, he takes to seducing and marrying widows before killing them for their property. Eventually, though, his wealth is wiped out in another market crash before the war breaks out. We find him looking older and weak by the end, and his wife and child are dead. In the meantime, there are two women who survive Verdoux's attempts to murder them. One is a wife played by Martha Raye, already known for her "Big Mouth" persona which is the very opposite of the feminine ideal of the Tramp. She survives due to an accident that derails Verdoux's plans, but her openly misogynistic portrayal also sets off the innocuous and mostly unremarkable women that Verdoux succeeds in killing. There is nothing in them that would "justify" Verdoux killing them even within the realm of satire. The other person to survive is a homeless girl on whom Verdoux plans to test a poison but who turns out to have the kind of faith in life despite circumstances that recalls the girls from the Tramp films. Verdoux changes his mind about testing the poison on her, and he then comes across her after his fall back into poverty. She has by this time married an ammunitions manufacturer. Verdoux is spotted by relatives of one of the women he has murdered. Even though he has the opportunity to get away, he turns himself in. At his trial, he is sentenced to death, but justifies himself by saying that when mass murder is the rule of society,

his crime is of minor significance. Remaining his cynical self and seemingly at ease, he walks away to the guillotine.

Even before the film reached France, the ground for its reception was prepared by dispatches from America. One from Jean Renoir supporting the film and Chaplin appeared in *L'Écran Français* and another criticizing it came from a correspondent of *Les Temps Modernes*, Nathalie Moffat (both in July 1947).[15] Bazin himself did not have to wait for its French release in January 1948 to watch it since he was a correspondent for *L'Écran Français* reporting on the film's European premiere at the Mariénské Láznë Film Festival in the former Czechoslovakia.[16] He files his first (anonymous) notice in September 1947.[17] This context is important because he would recall in his longer pieces the dissatisfaction of the Marxists at the festival in "not having found any socially useful instruction" and who also found the film to be too dark.[18] His first long piece, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," appeared in the December 1947 issue of *Les Temps Modernes* as a direct and sustained response to Moffat, with a shorter piece the same month in *L'Écran Français* and another longer article for the January 1948 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s predecessor *La Révue du Cinéma*.[19] The last appeared as a long pamphlet written for a 1948

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[15] Jean Renoir, "Non, Monsieur Verdoux n'a pas tué Charlie Chaplin!", in *L'Écran Français* no. 107 (15 July 1947); Nathalie Moffat, "Lettre d'Amérique", in *Les Temps Modernes* vol. 2, no. 22 (July 1947).

[16] This festival was the predecessor of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

[17] André Bazin [anon.], "Le film d'Ariane: Monsieur Verdoux au coeur de l'Europe", in EF no. 114 (2 September 1947). This is identifiably written by Bazin not only because he refers back in later articles on the film to watching it at this festival but because he repeats a sentence from this piece in those longer articles.

[18] André Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," in *Les Temps Modernes* no. 27 (December 1947), 1114-1115. The dissatisfactions to which Bazin refers are documented in a history of the film's reception in the former Czechoslovakia. But despite these misgivings, it turns out that the Communists did manage to put the film to considerable propagandistic use. See Jindřiška Bláhová, "No place for Peace-mongers: Charlie Chaplin, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and Czechoslovak Communist Propaganda," in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* vol. 29 no. 3 (September 2009), 321–342, esp. 330 for an account of Communist misgivings.

[19] André Bazin, "*Monsieur Verdoux*, ou le martyr de Charlot," in EF no. 131 (30 December 1947); André Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," in QQCIII, 89-113 [WCII 102-123].

issue of *Doc Éducation Populaire*, the joint publication of the popular education organizations *Peuple et Culture* and *Travail et Culture* whose cinema-related activities were headed by Bazin.[20]

To expand the political context further, Moffat's piece appeared in the issue of *Les Temps Modernes* in which Sartre concluded his elaboration of the program for committed literature, under the rubric *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*. Elsewhere, in *L'Écran Français* the editorial line was beginning to split along those militantly opposed to American cinema on ideological grounds and those, including Bazin, who insisted on keeping aesthetic and social questions in a dynamic relationship, only to be labeled aesthetes. As we have seen, Bazin's defense of American cinema had already begun to bother the ideological critics. The ideological wing of the journal might still have been welcoming of Chaplin despite these divides, given his political sympathies, but the way Bazin would go about defending the film surely did not help matters in the long run.

"Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*" responds directly to Moffat's criticisms of the film, citing extensively from her piece, as well as to those Marxists with whom he watched the film in the former Czechoslovakia.[21] On *Monsieur Verdoux,* Moffat's conclusion is:

> The crimes of Monsieur Verdoux are not dictated by self-preservation, or the need to set right injustices, or by any deep ambition, or to set right whatever is around him…
> [N]ever are we given a coherent moral point of view of the murderer. And so it is difficult to critique social justice through the death sentence of such a man. I don't

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[20] André Bazin, "Les sources: Landru-Verdoux-Charlot," in *Doc Education Populaire* no. 6 (January 1948). It was one of three such major pamphlets he created to be used by ciné-clubs. The two others were for *Paisan* and *Le Jour Se Léve*. Bazin reworked parts of this pamphlet and published it in QQCI as "Introduction à une symbolique de Charlot," 97-106 [WCB 25-35].

[21] Moffat actually reviewed two films in her "Lettre": William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *Monsieur Verdoux*. She praised Wyler's film for its exposé of the difficulties awaiting soldiers returning from the war, qualifying her praise with the obligatory condemnation of the customary happy ending's obfuscation of social realities.

accuse Chaplin of being too bold, as the American critics do, but on the contrary of being as little convincing as possible. It is sad to have expended so much energy to prove nothing at all, *for having succeeded neither in making a comedy or a film with social significance, and for having rendered obscure and unintelligible the most important problems.*[22]

I have cited from Moffat's review not only because Bazin does so but more significantly because of the strong echoes it carries of another dispatch from New York on another key American film; that of Sartre in 1945 on *Citizen Kane*.[23] There, in the midst of preparing to launch *Les Temps Modernes*, Sartre too had mocked American cinema's ability to engage political problems intellectually. Casting Welles as first an anti-fascist and only then an artist, he had criticized the film's technical "excesses" for drowning out its subject. He read it as a symptom of an American intelligentsia at once out of touch with the masses and lacking the cultural institutions of Europe that could justify such "artistic" exercises: in short, good intentions perhaps and certainly good politics, but bad philosophy and bad aesthetics. He much prefers the studio production that, "unfortunately lacks social and cultural intentions, but catches you by the throat." But Sartre's article was written after the war against fascism had been won for the moment, before the Cold War and even just before his call in *Les Temps Modernes'* for committed literature. Moreover, it had some insightful observations on film technique and temporality and Roger Leenhardt and Bazin responded to him on that plane.[24] Moffat reprises Sartre's position amidst the growing tensions of the Cold War symbolized by Chaplin's own travails. She would have Chaplin make up his mind—either be the Tramp ("an imaginary character outside the world and of our life" but

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[22] Moffat, "Lettre d'Amérique", 179-180. My emphasis.

[23] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Quand Hollywood veut faire penser: *Citizen Kane,* film d'Orson Welles", in *L'Écran Français* no. 5 (1 August 1945).

[24] Roger Leenhardt, "*Citizen Kane*," in *Chroniques du Cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de l'Etoile, 1986), 117-118; André Bazin, "La technique de *Citizen Kane*," in *Les Temps Modernes* no. 17 (February 1947).

at least entertaining[25]) or become a true affront to society, like Raskolnikov she writes, instead of a worse-than-mediocre philosopher.

Bazin argues that indeed the stated philosophies of Chaplin's characters, whether in *The Great Dictator* or *Monsieur Verdoux*, have no intrinsic significance, but for this very reason they bring out what is essential about these characters: their participation in a myth "which singularly overflows all lessons that we set out to deduce on whatever ideological plane."

> M. Verdoux is like Josef K. [from Kafka's *The Trial*], a character plunged into certain situations. He has no need to justify himself to anyone. His sole reason for existing is to be. His aesthetic existence is sufficiently established if the relationship of the character to the situation and their reaction to each other seems true ["*s'impose comme vrai*"]. I mean *aesthetically* true and not morally, psychologically, sociologically or in relation to whichever ideology; because the distinctiveness of the myth is precisely its autonomy. The only criticism appropriate to *Monsieur Verdoux* would be the inverse of Nathalie Moffat's. It would need to proceed by sounding out the myth to judge its homogeneity and density, to detect the porosity of situations that mythological concretions have not filled up. According to this method, far from being able to attribute an ideology to the work, ideology is on the contrary impure and heterogeneous to the essence of the myth.[26] vi

The myth that Verdoux embodies, Bazin goes on to argue, is that of Charlot, the Tramp. We will come back to Bazin's argument for this and to the question of ideology's heterogeneity to the myth of the Tramp presently. Let us first mark the seeming provocation of affirming the aesthetic autonomy of a character whose essence is to react to the situations in which it is placed. Sartre had just finished outlining the responsibility of the author (not of characters) to claim the historical situation in which he finds himself and to respond to it without appeal to either the authority of the past or to the judgment of posterity. But the idea of the "situation" is a little more complex in Sartre; its most elaborate discussion occurs in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) but

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[25] Nathalie Moffat, "Lettre d'Amérique", 176.

[26] Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*", 1115.

Bazin's terminology also evokes Sartre's novel *Nausea* (1938). In order to take the full measure of Bazin's reading of Verdoux and its political provocation, we need to take a detour through these two aspects: first through this existential terminology that has a special relevance to Chaplin's screen personae, and second through his reading of the Tramp.

To recall the concepts from *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre distinguishes being-in-itself from being-for-ourself where being-in-itself is at one with its situation, completely determined by it, which is also a pure present; as such it has no self-consciousness. Only when a being, an individual, tries to become something, projects herself from the present to a desired future, does she meet resistance from the situation. This resistance is the precondition for freedom, which is also a coming to consciousness, a sense that we are not one with our situation, and thus that our project is to become beings-for-ourselves. But being-in-itself is not really a feature of human consciousness since such oneness with the situation and a suspension in a pure present is possible only for inert, non-sentient objects. The real suspension of human consciousness is between being-for-ourselves and being-for-others. Being-for-others is when we accept our existence in time and project ourselves, but do so inauthentically by letting ourselves be defined by how others see us. The awareness of our situatedness, that we are suspended between these distinct states, that there is a disintegration at the heart of being, comes to us as 'vertigo' (in *Being and Nothingness*) or as 'nausea' as it does to Roquentin, the protagonist of Sartre's novel by that name.

Bazin's geological terminology in the lines cited above certainly comes, as Ludovic Cortade demonstrates, from his education that emphasized the interrelatedness of geological and

historical structures;[27] but his idea that a mythology has its concretions and porous parts that define the situations in which it becomes active also evokes lines from *Nausea* in its tactility. Roquentin's coming to awareness of the self's suspension in the weight of material existence is to encounter its sticky resistance. After dismissing existence as meaningless because "[e]very existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance," Roquentin immediately feels that "existence is a fullness which man can never abandon." This "fullness," however, is not one of satisfaction and undisturbed belonging and his realization is less intellectual than haptic:

> It was there in the garden, toppled down in the trees, all soft, sticky, soiling everything, all thick, a jelly. And I was inside, with the garden… I hated this ignoble mess. Mounting up, mounting up as high as the sky, spilling over, filling everything with its gelatinous slither… I knew it was the World, the naked World revealing itself, and I choked with rage at this gross, absurd being… There had never been a moment in which [this World] could not have existed. That was what worried me: of course there was *no reason* for this flowing larva to exist. But *it was impossible* for it not to exist… to imagine nothingness you had to be there already, in the midst of the World, eyes wide open and alive… [Nothingness] was an existence like any other and appeared after many others.[28]

Existential nothingness in these lines is not a consoling absurdity that we can look forward to with death, but something that sticks to us in the interstices of porous and concrete situations, and resides in the resistance offered by these indeterminate sticky spaces. Confrontation with this nothingness then requires an attempt to come into being-for-ourselves even if the "meaning" of existence always remains elusive.

If it seems as if I reading too much Sartre into Bazin's metaphor of the situation, then one could look at Bazin's article on *The Great Dictator* (1940) from 1945, subtitled "Pastiche et

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[27] Ludovic Cortade, "Cinema Across Fault Lines: Bazin and the French School of Geography," in *Opening Bazin*, 13-31.

[28] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd ALexander (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), 134.

postiche ou le néant pour une moustache."[29] There Bazin describes, with dizzying philosophical

humor, how once Hitler "stole" Charlot's moustache, he ceased to have any existence for

himself. His being was now solely *for* Charlot who stole it right back with *The Great Dictator*;

from a historically-specific dictator, Hitler was now incorporated into the caricatural myth of

"The Dictator" which existed with that relative autonomy from history that characterizes all

myths. But Bazin admits that Chaplin's audacity could hope to be only partially successful given

that the presence of the real Hitler was still all-too-alive even watching the film after the war, and

that the only thing that made such a confusion between the Tramp and Hitler possible was the

moustache, an overall marginal characteristic of the Tramp's mythology. Charlot's essentially

ambiguous relationship with society had to be denied in order to draft him into the war effort.

But the relationship between existential thought and slapstick comedy was still on Bazin's mind

in 1946, drawn to it this time by a short film directed by the French comedian Gilles Margaritis,

L'Homme (1946) whose description suggests that it tries to unmask the absurdity of human

existence. While he found its "species of burlesque existentialism" excessively school-boyish to

be either really funny or to be enough of a satire, the philosophical resonances of the genre were

very much on his mind.[30] Finally, in an article on slapstick, he speaks about the "terrorism of

things" that convert humans into "machines of catastrophe," an idea that we will see is intimately

linked to Sartrean existentialism.[31] Chaplin's oeuvre was the most elaborate expression of what

Bazin sees as the existential concerns embodied by a long and shared tradition of the slapstick,

and it is therefore that the vocabulary of "situations" and "being" is particularly important to his

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[29] André Bazin, "Pastiche et postiche ou le néant pour une Moustache," in QQCI, 91-96.

[30] Bazin, "*L'Homme*: burlesque et existentialisme," in EF no. 77 (17 December 1946).

[31] André Bazin, "Voici le burlesque, le genre qui fut majeur le premier se survit en se parodiant," in RCT no. 82 (12 August 1951).

reading of the Tramp *and* Verdoux. As suggested earlier, Bazin reads Verdoux as a dramatically

inverted iteration of the Tramp, so an account of Bazin's reading of the Tramp in relation to the

existential echoes I have pointed out will complete this detour necessary for tackling Verdoux.

Bazin offers his reading of the Tramp in the articles he wrote on *Monsieur Verdoux* in

Les Temps Modernes and in *La Revue du Cinéma*, but he worked it out fully in a pedagogical

pamphlet on the film that followed up on those two articles. In this pamphlet, Bazin describes the

Tramp in terms that explicitly resonate with Sartre's philosophy, making him a peculiar model of

Sartrean inauthenticity. The Tramp has no intention of disengaging himself from situations to

become a being-for-himself. Even as objects fight him and society keeps running him out, all he

hopes to do is to turn whatever situation in which he finds himself habitable for the moment. In

one of the many episodes of nausea that besets Roquentin, and whose full evidence he still flees,

Sartre's protagonist becomes aware of the essential heterogeneity of the world of things and

human consciousness. He tells himself, "Objects are not made to be touched. It is better to slip

between them, avoiding them as much as possible." Where Roquentin entertains the possibility

of indifference to the world with morose rumination, the Tramp, when confronted by the

violence of the objects, works towards arranging the mutual indifference of being and objects

with desperate imagination. Bazin writes:

> [Charlot] completely lacks resilience when the world offers him too much resistance.
> He therefore looks to get around the difficulty instead of solving it. A provisional
> situation is enough for him as if the future did not exist. In *The Pilgrim*, for example,
> he blocks a rolling pin on the shelf with a bottle of milk which he will need to use a
> little later… But if the provisional is always enough for him, in the moment he
> demonstrates a prodigious ingenuity. No situation finds him at a loss.[32]vii

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[32] Bazin, "Introduction à une symbolique," 98 [WCB 26].

This relationship to things describes Charlot's equivalent of Roquentin's urge to slip between things, to have things and being inhabit an unchanging and even indifferent relationship to each other, whose impossibility Charlot keeps discovering every couple of minutes.[33] When forced out of a situation, the Tramp's reflex is to find another—almost any—situation to inhabit immediately: "At the limit, Charlot's defensive reflexes end in a reabsorption of time into space." That the Tramp would like nothing more than to be the same forever is perfectly illustrated when in *Modern Times* (1936) he prefers to remain in jail than to go out into the world. In this, he seeks to avoid not only the blows of the world but the "bad faith" that society imposes on us when its rules and conventions provide us with the alibi to escape the fact of individual freedom. As discussed in the introduction, for Sartre "bad faith" manifests itself in the lies we unconsciously and necessarily tell ourselves about our condition in the process of and in order to accomplish definite tasks. But according to Bazin's reading, the Tramp attempts a kind of bad faith that should be impossible for humans; a bad faith of turning into being-in-itself that is indistinguishable from its situation. However, society won't let him be.

To remain in a situation when thrown into society, the Tramp needs to emulate its norms and it is here that, at his own expense, he becomes a truly subversive presence. In imitating social practices, he exposes their absurdities. Bazin calls some of the films in which the Tramp appears, especially *The Pilgrim* (1923), "the most anti-clerical body of work that one could imagine in the provincial puritanical society of the USA." But the Tramp is also "outside the sacred," in the sense that, for Bazin, the "sacred" stands for all social rituals and institutions, the self-deification of a post-theological society. The Tramp reveals the absurdity of these

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[33] The urge to slip between things cannot be read, on Sartre's account, as a reclaiming of the freedom of being from the tyranny of the material world. Without coming into contact with the resistance of matter, there can be no consciousness of freedom.

pretensions but not out of any malice or in any revolutionary spirit, Bazin argues, but by his attempts at imitating the social rituals that are devoid of any commitment to or understanding of the social pact that underpins them. It may be useful to recall here the Tramp's appeal to the Surrealists in the 1920s when they saw him as the embodied rejection of all social norms and their attendant hypocrisy. Bazin is certainly gesturing towards and affirming this reading, but then he recalls the flipside of this. The Tramp's anarchy is attended by cowardice and cynicism. He argues that it is the "general rule of his comportment to not hesitate in committing little villainies when no one's watching him."[34] viii Not only is this a part of his subversive character in a society by which he is thoroughly outmatched, but it is also an internalized cynicism by which he is quite prepared to kick those who can't kick back. Bazin gives the example of *A Day's Pleasure* (1919) in which the Tramp beset by motion sickness on a boat kicks a vendor trying to sell him snacks. We can add several examples from the many short films featuring the Tramp, and there are prominent remnants of this right through till *Modern Times*. But this is not a list of the Tramp's moral failings. Bazin, once again emphasizing the Sartrean vocabulary, is clear that "[o]ur support for the hero, the fact that *we are for him and with him*, is fortunately not beholden only to the moral categories that he embodies." The point is to probe deeper into the Tramp's relationship with society. So far we can still read the Tramp as a subversive presence in society, and if we are inclined to be a little shocked to see the Tramp not only shirking boring work but also gratuitously kicking around other workmen (*The Tramp*), then we can always explain it as the sort of perversion to which society pushes those who resist; the over-compensatory defenses and the cowardly kicks of the Tramp are employed indiscriminately.

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[34] Bazin, "Les sources: Landru-Verdoux-Charlot," 6.

What the Surrealists did not notice was that while the Tramp had no social commitments,

he nonetheless wants to *belong* to society without those commitments. Since all he wants is to

be, if that comes with the material comforts and marriage, all the better; and if for that he needs

to mime the rituals of society, he will give it a shot. Indeed, we are likely to think that the Tramp

is confronted with the particular hostility of a capitalist-industrial world. But he is even less at

home with "nature." In *The Tramp* (1915), given the task of milking a cow, he wags its tail as if

it were a water pump, scared of milking it with his hands. And so in *Modern Times*, the dream of

a comfortable life is a mechanized cow: the "bourgeois" dream of all the conveniences of

machines in the guise of nature. Machines are not the antithesis of the guileless Tramp because

they are in a way the emanation of his central feature, what Bazin calls "the sin of repetition."

The Tramp is happy to repeat a maneuver that worked once even when it has become useless and

absurd, because adapting outside the mere instinct to survive would mean having a palpable

desire to "be for oneself." But this reflexive conflict with social existence, in which the violence

of objects succeeds in turning men into "machines of catastrophe,"[35] is not the real fault line in

the Tramp's relationship to society; it is rather romance.

> Between the tender and sweet Edna Purviance, the blind young girl of *City Lights*,
> and the frail invalid of Verdoux, there aren't any significant differences except that
> he is married to the last. They are all, like Charlot, unfortunate beings and the inept
> of Society, the physically or morally weak of social life. It is this hyper-femininity
> which seduces Charlot, and love's thunder-strike is at the origin of a striking
> conversion to social and moral norms.[36][ix]

This is the catalyst for a coming to consciousness, which is also a real fall into society. But,

Bazin points out, we see the darker side of this only in the shorts. There, as in *Payday* (1922) or

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[35] Bazin, "Voici le burlesque".

[36] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur* Verdoux," 103 [WCII 114-115].

A Day's Pleasure, we see Charlot married and here romance does not survive the conversion to

social norms. More than this, romance before marriage itself is not as idealized in these films as

it would be in the feature-length films. In *A Woman* (1915), for example, Charlot tries to

blackmail the patriarch with a healthy dose of queer subversion regarding his sexual infidelities

so that he can marry his daughter and presumably lay claim to his own share of bourgeois

hypocrisy. In *The Tramp*, he tries to steal the money of the girl he has just saved from other

thieves, but gives in to the girl's state of helplessness, returns the money, falls in love, and is

immediately put to work by the girl's father.

The ambiguities in the Tramp's characters are covered over for the most part beginning

with the feature-length films. Even *The Kid* (1921) sees the Tramp trying his best to get rid of the

baby before adopting him, but it is here that he starts laying open claims on our sentiments. "*The

Gold Rush* (1925)," Bazin writes, "is the most extended apology for the character, and which

most clearly solicits our protest against the lot of Charlot."[37] The Tramp may still get married but

we won't see his domestic life. This was also the beginning of the Surrealists' slow

disillusionment with the character, as he no longer seems to conform to their image of an outcast

revolutionary. But they had simply missed the signs. Be that as it may, the Tramp now openly

solicited our love. Bazin explains the reason for this transformation as follows: "[I]t is a law

common to the evolution of all characters that live by commerce with the public, that they tend

to justify our sympathy for them by greater psychological consistency and greater moral

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[37] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 101 [WCII 112]; See also Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 1117.

perfection. The character of Pierrot follows the same curve."[38] xCharlot's open solicitation may

have been troubling to a few Surrealists, but we know that a majority of radical intellectuals still

found in him a symbol of the oppressed of society.[39] Elsewhere Bazin writes that "the success of

[Chaplin's and Griffith's works] was built on misunderstandings. But even if *Monsieur Verdoux*

had not come to deliver the secrets of Charlot, in time, the retrospectives of ciné-clubs would

have revealed in the comedy of Chaplin the Kafkaesque universe in which the Little Fellow

thrashes about [*se débat*]."[40]xi But one cycle of the "psychological and moral evolution" of the

Tramp was complete with *Modern Times*, what Bazin calls the Old Testament of the myth. With

Monsieur Verdoux, it's the New Testament, but the news wasn't good.

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[38] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 101 [WCII, 112]. Bazin reminds us of the famous pantomime character who went from being a simple type in the eighteenth century to a Romantic symbol in the nineteenth century, similar to the Tramp in the twentieth.

[39] It is Kracauer writing about *City Lights* in 1931 who testifies to the power of the Tramp to invite us to cover over his contradictions.

> The ingenious scene with the cigar butt teaches that no one who is already a human being will elevate material possessions to the level of a fetish. Charlie stands in front of the Rolls-Royce which his drunken patron had given him, craving a smoke; his eyes desirously follow a man who is pleasurably smoking a cigar. The man soon tosses the cigar away; Charlie drives determinedly after it, rips the shabby-looking cigar butt out of the hands of the beggar who got there first, and steers off in his magnificent vehicle— puffing away lustily. A Rolls-Royce in pursuit of a cigar butt: that's how to put the world right.

A neat ellipsis to take out the beggar yields a striking image of unsentimental revolt against prevailing social conditions. But the rest of Kracauer's writing on the film is otherwise quite sentimental.

This was also a time by which Chaplin's personal life and wealth had come into conflict with the persona of the Tramp. Wondering about this seeming conflict as Chaplin travelled around Europe promoting the film, his wealth on display, Kracauer writes that this "has its drawbacks" but dismisses them by concluding that "money loses its commodity character the moment it encounters Chaplin, becoming instead the homage which is his due." Kracauer isn't wrong—after all Chaplin's filmmaking was incredibly wasteful by capitalist standards—but his quick resolution testifies to the subtle discursive maneuvers that the force of Charlot drew from his admirers to cover over the contradictions that already announced themselves too openly. See Siegfried Kracauer, "Two Chaplin Sketches", trans. John MacKay in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* vol. 10 no.1 (Spring 1987), 116-117; 119.

[40] André Bazin, "À la recherche d'une nouvelle avant-garde," in *Almanach du Théatre et du Cinéma, 1950*, 151. Cocteau was convinced enough by Bazin's analogy between the worlds of the Tramp/Verdoux and of Kafka since he mentions it in the Objectif 49 film festival's brochure.

Bazin notes the historical source of Verdoux in the real-life figure of Henri Désiré Landru (1869-1922) but finds the only relevance of this source in the fact that Landru never explained his actions and had remained the kind of fascinating, inscrutable, and blank myth on which Chaplin could superimpose his own. As for the misogyny, we have seen that this seemed to be an explicit trope in several Hollywood films at the time. The social realities behind this crack in Hollywood mythologies remained uncertain for Bazin though he was sure deeper familiarity with the American context would reveal something about this.[41] But if historical evidence were needed, Bazin argued that it could be well be found in the personal life of Chaplin himself who had for long now figured as a complementary persona to the Tramp's. But the films themselves offer the internal coherence of a myth which would be sufficient for understanding the significance of this misogyny.

Verdoux is in all ways the opposite of Charlot, but Bazin argues that this must be understood as a dialectical opposition mediated by the fact of marriage. His argument is that in Verdoux we see Charlot for the first time after marriage since he started appearing in full-length films. Bazin writes that the idealization of romantic love in the earlier films came from as a palpable reaction to a sense of inferiority complex that Charlot feels with regards to the "hyper-feminine" woman. This idealization, as we know from some shorts, does not survive contact with the mundane realities of domestic life. *Monsieur Verdoux* is not an exception to this, but here Charlot has adapted himself to society in all other ways: "Charlot is in essence socially

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[41] The filmmaker Nicole Védrès wrote an article on *Monsieur Verdoux* in *L'Écran Français* explaining this context with some humor, observing that in America men work hard and die early of heart attacks and the women live off their husbands' incomes into old age. Bazin references this article and moves on to an internal analysis of the myth itself. Nicole Védrès, "Chaplin-Barbe-Bleue: danger d'amour, danger de mort," in *L'Écran Français* no. 144 (30 March 1948).

maladjusted, Verdoux is over-adjusted."[42]xii He can plan and execute with great efficiency (that

is, he no longer seeks to remain one with his situation), and he has exchanged his profligacy with

any money that used to come his way for an ease with the ways of finance. He uses these skills

to offset the disappointments of the domestic life by which he was always tempted. Everything

turns on how we understand the relationship between his social adaptation and his misogyny.

The critics of the Left were disappointed that the misogyny wasn't convincing enough as

satire to condemn organized warfare and the hypocrisy of bourgeois law. The American

ideologues found it too convincing. This is where we need to return to Bazin's contention that

ideology is completely foreign to the myth of Charlot/Verdoux. In light of our post-Althusserian

understanding of ideology as the unavoidable structure of any experience, we need to remind

ourselves that in 1947 the word still overwhelmingly meant some openly avowed or denounced

political framework. "Social unconscious" would be Bazin's rough equivalent of Althusser's

"ideology" and in this sense ideology is very much a part of how Bazin understands the

Charlot/Verdoux myth. But ideology as an explicit political position is foreign to Charlot

because, Bazin argues, his mythic essence is similar to Kafka's K. Bazin does not elaborate his

choice of K but it must be seen as a direct response to Moffat's invocation of Raskolnikov. It

suggests that any similarities between Verdoux and Raskolnikov as gratuitous murderers must be

mediated through an understanding of K as an inheritor of Raskolnikov's predicament which is

that of asking whether individual transcends society of if society transcends the individual. If

Raskolnikov seeks to use murder to see if he can transcend society, the experience of K is that

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[42] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 93 [106].

society is indeed the new "sacred," as invisible and as inscrutable as a theological God and present everywhere.

Bazin was entering into a thicket of novelistic characters, which included the Meursault of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942; the similarities between Verdoux and Meursault are pronounced), and which would be the site of aesthetico-political debates in postwar France. Nathalie Sarraute, perhaps the most prominent of the "New Novelists" at the time, had just published "From Dostoevsky to Kafka" in the October 1947 issue of *Les Temps Modernes*, two months before Bazin's article. The point of departure of this article is a preliminary opposition between the psychological novel of the nineteenth century, as represented by Dostoevsky, and the novel of "situations" such as those of Kafka. Sarraute is essentially struggling with the fact that even novels that try their best to strip characters and events of psychology somehow let some psychological coherence slip in, and tries to find in Kafka's novels that complete psychological blankness which would allow the novel form to escape its conventions. This problem of psychology is what Bazin invokes in responding to Moffat's claim that Verdoux never manages to lay claim on our sympathies the way Raskolnikov does because his actions lack the psychological justification of the latter. Bazin writes:

> I]t isn't about proving that [Verdoux] was right to kill [the women] according to some ideological criterion; it's enough that he has reason to kill them in relation to himself. And this condition seems to me to be sufficiently met [in accordance with the myth's inverted logic of femininity discussed earlier]. As for invoking a feeling of sympathy while doing so, the word seems equivocal and insufficient to me because it's still too infused with psychology. I find it more apt to say that we are *with* M. Verdoux, which means more than a feeling, and more a sort of *ontological sympathy*. According to the argument of Nathalie Moffat, there would be no way of finding the law in the wrong here. At most we could expect that it would treat Verdoux as not responsible for his crimes. But nothing would be more absurd than a M. Verdoux in a psychiatric hospital. The judges *must* condemn Verdoux. Contrary to K, Verdoux is in essence the social culprit that the society does not recognize; because, let's be clear, society is incapable of finding him: it is he who lets himself

be caught and it's the judges who are afraid. (Is there a need here to underline the similarities of situations with Christ?)[43]xiii

Bazin suggests that Kafka's K is innocent in an elementary way, by the sheer blankness of psychology and action he presents—we, like him, are baffled by the lack of any specific accusation but this very absence makes any innocence or guilt almost primeval despite any guilt he might feel. In Verdoux, there is no Dostoevskian grappling with specific questions of conscience such as whether it is permissible for some to kill or of finding one's way to a spiritual conversion, but there is the same challenge to society through gratuitous murder. The elementary innocence of K is inverted in the elementary and clear culpability of Verdoux, and the intense psychological anguish of Raskolnikov is inverted in the perfect psychological blankness of Verdoux. But why then are we *with* Verdoux, why this "ontological sympathy" for him? Not because Verdoux's openly displayed guilt is of lesser consequence compared to the guilt of a society of organized warfare, but because it is simply a mutation of the "vague culpability" of the Tramp we all so loved and still love.

> [Charlot's] awkward and precipitate flight was always the sign of a vague culpability which betrayed itself and which could be sufficiently punished with the blow of a truncheon. Society was little troubled by this little man with a duck's walk, and his mischievousness and shrewdness never went beyond harmless revenge or the minimum of petty theft necessary for his survival. He was an easy victim who always escaped them at the last moment but who still remained in the role of the guilty one.[44]xiv

Because Charlot never adapted to society, his essential culpability remained harmless. This culpability, we have seen, was an effect of the disjunction between his temptation to become part of society through love and marriage and the fact that he neither really understood

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[43] Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 1117. My emphasis on "ontological sympathy."

[44] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 96 [WCII 107].

nor wanted to play by the social structures that came with it. As for society's guilt—its hypocrisies, its dehumanizing organization of work, and so on—Charlot could highlight it by disguising his own in the longer films, but society itself was never aware of its own guilt ("We have never known society to [declare its guilt]: Society by its nature only knows how to accuse."[45]xv) But the moment Charlot got married, met with its disappointments and revenged himself while playing by the rules of society, he became unrecognizable as Charlot; "No more Charlot, no more culprit! Society suffers from a strange unease…"[46]xvi It has no one to carry its guilt, of which the unsolved murders of the women are only a sign. Charlot and Verdoux have a social role to play as the essentially and undoubtedly guilty ones whose crimes society has no trouble pointing out and which cover its own. All of Verdoux's counter-accusations can eventually be dismissed as nonsense by the journalists (who nonetheless ask him to give his own story a moral) because his specific crimes are irrefutable.

Our response to Bazin's intricate dialectics turn on whether we recognize the Tramp in Verdoux or not. For Bazin, the irrefutable proof comes in the last shot in which Verdoux marches with that shuffling gait to the guillotine, much like Charlot would set out for the horizon; "This same road to nowhere, always taken up from one film to another by the little man with the walking stick, in which some recognized the Wandering Jew while others preferred to confuse it for the road to hope, we now know where it ends. The end of the road is the path of a prison courtyard in the morning fog in which we can make out the ridiculous silhouette of the guillotine…"[47] But in a way this ontological equivalence of Charlot and Verdoux was betrayed,

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 98 [WCII 109].

even without any nuanced reading, in reactions from across the political spectrum: "We understand that Mr. [Eric] Johnston's offices [the then President of the MPAA who would oversee the beginning of the Hollywood blacklist], the spokesmen of the Legion of Decency, and all women's clubs of America smell something fishy in Chaplin's latest. Beside it, *Scarface* is but the tale of a children's choir. M. Verdoux or Charlot the Martyr is avenged."[48]xvii

American society could always turn the gangster's tale into a moral lesson without confessing its prurience, but their satisfaction in condemning Verdoux, and Chaplin with him, is troubled by a vague sense that they are also condemning the Tramp they still love and need. But this unease is as prominent on the Left. Here, the intellectuals see that Verdoux embodies that same affront to society that the Tramp did, but to a degree and in a way they no longer find useful. Too busy reading the Tramp as the permanent revolt of the oppressed, they never noticed both the depths of his anarchy and his weak spot for the very society whose rules he shuns. Though they now sensed the Tramp in Verdoux, they insisted, like Moffat, on distinguishing between the two: "Charlot with all his fantasy, his rich intimacy, his view of the world and of men, constantly surges, like a devil from a box, out of the narrow frame of the stockbroker Verdoux."[49] Bazin sought to show that indeed Charlot is trapped inside Verdoux, and leaps out of every time he murders one of the symbols of his feminine ideal's betrayal.

While the postwar Left was bothered by the misogyny, the more "radical" Surrealists seemed to anticipate in their way Bazin's thesis that Verdoux's misogyny was an inverted manifestation of the Tramp's relationship to women; they simply beat Verdoux to an

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[48] Bazin, "*Monsieur Verdoux* ou le martyre de Charlot," EF no. 131 (30 December 1947).

[49] Moffat, "Lettre d'Amérique," 177.

unapologetic misogyny by two decades. In 1927, when Chaplin's second wife Lita Grey filed for

divorce and the sexual details of her divorce papers became public, the Surrealist group issued,

under the title "Hands off Love!", a little encyclopedia of misogynistic tropes (at least of the

variety amenable to anti-bourgeois rhetoric).[50] They accused Grey of trying to trap the free

loving Tramp in Chaplin in the codes of a grasping married life and much worse. This was two

years after *The Gold Rush* (1925) in which the Tramp went gold-prospecting and found both the

gold and the girl, so one can only assume that they were avenging the Tramp so that Verdoux

wouldn't have to. If only Chaplin knew! But the greatest irony, which was not lost on Bazin and

most probably neither on the editorial of *Les Temps Modernes*, was Bazin's settling of the

Tramp's political accounts—describing how four decades of history was taken in by this strange

exemplar of Sartrean inauthenticity (until he comes to consciousness and murders with clear-

sighted authenticity)—in Sartre's journal, founded with a political mission and that named itself

after the "gullible striker of *Modern Times*."[51][xviii] Bazin never wrote in *Les Temps Modernes*

again.

Tachella recalls that "Bazin was the only one to attempt rereading the author of Monsieur

Verdoux based on the film."[52] (Though re-reading the myth of Charlot rather than the author may

be a more appropriate description for what Bazin did.) And he did so by carrying out a veritable

campaign across all the important intellectual venues—*Esprit*, in addition to *Les Temps

Modernes*, *L'Écran Français*, and *La Revue du Cinéma* even before the film reached Parisian

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[50] The Surrealist Group, "Hands Off Love!," in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, 3rd ed., ed. & trans. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2000), 173-180.

[51] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 102 [WCII 113].

[52] Jean-Charles Tachella, "Appendix: André Bazin from 1945 to 1950: The Times of Struggles and Consecration," in Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 226.

theaters, throwing down a critical gauntlet across the ideological spectrum. This exacerbated the

divides at *L'Écran Français*, and by the time Bazin wrote his essay on the Stalin myth, he would

have to stop writing for the journal which had by then been taken over by the French Communist

Party (PCF). But the real measure of how much Bazin had begun to bother the ideologues comes

from an incident at *Peuple et Culture* for whose publication he had prepared his longest dossier

on *Monsieur Verdoux*, destined for the many ciné-clubs around France. Andrew notes that in

1948, with his Stalin article still more than a year away, Bazin had already become the focal

point of tension in the relations between *Peuple et Culture* and *Travail et Culture* as the latter

came increasingly under the influence of the PCF. The Stalinists engineered his removal from

the board, but his reinstatement on the insistence of *Peuple et Culture*'s president Joseph Rovan

precipitated the split of the two organizations.[53]

What then are we to make of Bazin's critical intervention? Was it mere political

provocation riding on a too-clever reading of the Charlot/Verdoux personae, or does it yield a

more sophisticated reading of the politics of aesthetics whose significance goes beyond the

historically-specific provocation? I think that the provocation itself has not dated if we realize

that Bazin's assimilation of the Tramp to Verdoux goes beyond the habitual condemnation of

society in the former's name and undercuts our own complacent denunciation of society as it

appears in the Tramp films. With *Monsieur Verdoux*, Bazin writes that we are called upon "to

condemn the condemnation of a man 'justly' condemned by society"[xix] and with him,

unsuspectingly, the Tramp.[54] But this provocation has very little to do with circumstantial

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[53] Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128.

[54] Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur Verdoux*," 101 [WCII 112-113].

polemics with the ideologues. A clearer understanding of why this is so will teach us something about the nature of myths as Bazin explains it.

Conclusion

This chapter has started an exploration of Bazin's understanding of aesthetic mythologies, particularly as they are embodied by genres. I have discussed what it means for a mythic imaginary to give a shape to history in the face of the complexity of experience. A powerful aesthetic mythology coincides with a new beginning in history and creates a political horizon for interpreting the world. But we have also seen that aesthetic mythologies run their course when history outstrips them, as occurred with the interwar Hollywood genres with the coming of World War II. But it is when generic mythologies undergo crises, such as the mythology of Charlot, they reveal the contradictions at their core that we often overlook when they are at their peak popularity and force.

Chapter 4

Mythological Politics

This chapter continues the focus on Bazin's analysis of mythological contradictions. The lessons gleaned from Bazin's reading of the Chaplin films—that coming up against a myth's contradictions does not undermine our ontological sympathy for it—will be deepened here in relation to Bazin's analysis of the Western, Marcel Carné *Le Jour Se Lève* (1939), and a pacifist documentary by Georges Franju on the history of a French military institution. While each analysis will add a layer of complexity to Bazin's understanding of the relationship of myths to history, the argument that I will be working towards is that what counts as an *aesthetic critique* of the political character of these mythologies is a triple-level negotiation between spectator, history, and criticism. I pose this problem in the second section of the chapter where we will also see an unexpected conjunction between Bazin and the Siegfried Kracauer of *From Caligari to Hitler* (1948).

Bazin, it turns out, knew of Kracauer's work on pre-war German cinema since he mentions him in passing in a review of Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* which was first published in French in 1952.[1] Eisner mentions *From Caligari to Hitler* to whose historical teleology she opposes a more aesthetic analysis. Bazin would most probably have read the introduction to Kracauer's book whose translation had been published in a 1948 issue of *Revue*

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[1] André Bazin, "*L'Écran Démoniaque*," in Obs no. 132 (20 November 1952)

Internationale de Filmologie.[2] He mentions him in the review parenthetically, but without explicitly engaging his work. He mentions Kracauer to point out that like Eisner he is of German origin. Noting the paucity of literature on inter-war German cinema despite its considerable international influence, he speculates that what is specifically German about this body of films may have been forbidding to Latin and Anglo-Saxon scholars. But the review contains a point of engagement between Bazin and Kracauer, and the former may even have been at least dimly aware of it. I briefly look at Bazin's analysis of Marcel Carné's *Le Jour Se Lève* (1939), the exemplary work of the poetic realist corpus in 1930s France, to trace resonances of Kracauer's analysis of prewar German cinema's relationship to history. This comparison will help to define the relationship of the spectator to the critic in Bazin's work.

What emerges in the later parts of the chapter is the importance to Bazin of spectatorial love as a point of departure for critique. Rather than the love of cinephilia, it is the Augustinian idea of love that, as we have seen in the introduction, was key to the formation of the aesthetic as a modern, Kantian framework for art. Drawing briefly upon Arendt's discussion of this as a political emotion, I will argue that what turns criticism into an aesthetic politics is the presence of the subjectivity of the critic which keeps in play the affective and ideological contradictions in which films involve us. I will distinguish such "aesthetic politics" from the "cultural politics" of a distanced critic whose exemplar, I will argue in conclusion, was Roland Barthes, the critic we most readily associate with the mythological criticism of popular culture.

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[2] Siegfried Kracauer, "Cinéma et sociologie (Sur l'exemple du cinéma de l'allemagne préhitlerienne)", *Revue Internationale de Filmologie*, no. 3-4 (1948). For Kracauer's exchanges with the French context, see Leonardo Quaresima, "Des Faux Amis: Kracauer et la Filmologie," in *Cinémas: Revue d'Études Cinématographiques / Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies* vol. 19, no. 2-3 (2009), p. 333-358. It is not inconceivable that Bazin read the book itself. Though he confesses in some of his articles that his English wasn't very good, we have seen that he reviewed Adolph Zukor's *The Public Is Never Wrong*. He also interviewed Hitchcock, suggesting in the text that the interview was in English.

Mythological Negotiations: The Western

The argument that when confronted with contradictions in mythologies that have exercised an affective hold over us we are required to acknowledge these contradictions without simply disavowing them plays out in Bazin's writings on the Western. Such an argument in relation to the exemplary American genre, as we might expect, had a special ideological charge in the Cold War era. Edgar Morin was still provoking the ire of the Left intellectuals in the 1960s not only for defending the Western but also for emphasizing the importance of Chaplin's appeal across classes and societies. These intellectuals included Lucien Goldmann and Pierre Bourdieu, the latter of whom tore up Morin's 1962 book on mass culture, *L'Esprit du Temps*, for making this argument and thus apparently obfuscating the role of mass culture as "an instrument of alienation at the service of capitalism to divert the proletariat from its revolutionary mission."[3] So one can imagine that Bazin not only writing about the Western but elevating it to the ranks of the perhaps the great national mythologies in film history would have been enough, for those who did not know him or his work closely, to class him as a reactionary critic. Unlike with the Chaplin films, however, Bazin's defense and analyses of the genre seem to have been carried out not so much in dialogue with ideological critics but those who preferred the new, self-conscious Westerns such as *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953) and *High Noon* (Fred Zinneman, 1952) to those more typical of the genre. With the opportunity to write the preface for Jean-Louis Rieupeyrout's book on the genre, however, Bazin mounted an analysis of the classical form of the genre against which he tried to understand the newer developments within it.

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[3] Lorraine Mortimer, "Translator's Introduction," in Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or the Imaginary Man*, trans. Lorraine Mortimer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xii.

When Bazin wrote his review of American cinema for the Cannes film festival of 1949, he classed the Western among the Hollywood genres that had decayed through the war.[4] But by the early 1950s when he came to write the preface for Rieupeyrout's book, he was happily amazed at its resilience, already indicated in its history by the fact that Westerns had been made in places like France and Australia. He felt that the significance of the genre may be revealed best by its ability to survive "counterfeiting, pastiche, and parody."[5] Two contrasting types of production revealed for him how the genre both registered history and survived its shifts for the moment. On the one hand were the "Super-westerns" such as *High Noon* and *Shane* which were hyper aware of their generic conventions; on the other were films such as *The Big Sky* (Howard Hawks, 1952), *Broken Lance* (Edward Dmytryk, 1954), and the Anthony Mann Westerns whose self-consciousness did not make them take an ironic stance towards the genre's conventions which they instead negotiated while remaining within a broadly classical framework.

Let us first look at some features of the Western myth as Bazin identifies them. The very act of colonization (though Bazin does not use the word, the emphasis is clear) of Native American land requires the epic's Manichean simplicity, with clear distinctions between good and evil, between pagan savagery and Christian White civilization. The vast landscapes and the task of building and protecting settlements and routes that would assure the existence of white society help in creating this fundamental simplicity. This civilizational Manicheanism and dramatic possibilities of the classical Western consolidate by World War II.[6] But within this

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[4] André Bazin, "U.S.A 1938-1948," in *Sur le Champ d'Azur : Festival Internationale de Cannes 1949* (brochure)

[5] André Bazin, "Le Western, ou le cinéma américain par excellence," in QQCIII, 137 [WCII 142].

[6] The recent recovery of the early Westerns suggests that the paradigm of the genre was much looser in the beginning with more complex representations of women, Native Americans, and other minorities. The standardization of the genre reinforces Bazin's point in the context of the Chaplin films that myths that grow by expanding the audiences they appeal to acquire greater simplicity. See André Bazin, Bazin, "Le mythe de *Monsieur*

simplifying discourse, some fault lines settle in which at first give the myth its distinctive appeal and create the necessary internal drama. The basic fault line of the Western are the conflicts between law and morality and society and individual which cannot be treated with the same Manicheanism as the conflict between the Europeans and the Native Americans because the *men* who can do the job of fighting and protecting cannot be made to conform to the social law easily simply because their "familiarity with death cannot keep alive [in them] the fear of hell, scruples, or moral quibbles."[7][i] The law protects the weak against the necessary unruliness of those who help consolidate the resources for founding society. Both in its methods and its ambiguous betrayal of what the "criminals" have done for society, the law comes to resemble those it prosecutes and from whom it is distinguished by nothing more that the badge of an institution: "The necessity of law was never closer to the necessity of morality, and their antagonism never more concrete and evident."[8][ii]

The moral complexity of law in the Western is mirrored in the conventions used for representing women. In addition to the difficulties of couple-formation that is one of the motors of the spectacular travails of the narratives, the genre also makes room for the figure of the good-hearted prostitute to draw an idealized picture of women.[9] The reason for this, according to Bazin, may be understood as the need to cover with virtue a part of society that needed protection. And as we have seen, this protection could be purchased not through a "fear as futile as the risk of one's life" but through "the positive force of a myth."[iii] But this discourse of

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Verdoux," in QQCIII, 101 [WCII, 112]; *Treasures 5: The West, 1898-1938* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2011), DVD.

[7] Bazin, "Le Western," 141 [WCII 145].

[8] Ibid., 142 [WCII 146].

[9] Ibid., 138-140 [WCII 144-145].

protecting women itself came, Bazin argues, from an understanding of them as property, much

the same as horses and cattle. In a world where mail-order brides were a possibility, the

idealization of women was nothing more than the idealization of property.[10]

So Bazin identifies three contradictions in the genre: the Manichean discourse of

civilization, the ambiguous character of law's relationship to morality, and the idealization of

women as property. This analysis by a lover of Westerns does not sound like that of an American

apologist, but nor was Bazin one to separate the thrills of the landscapes, the chases, and other

dynamic aspects of the genre from ideology, denouncing the latter and taking pleasure in the

former. As with Verdoux, he was interested in whether the genre could continue to play the role

of embodying the American national imaginary despite becoming aware of these contradictions.

A wartime film that seemed to tackle one of these contradictions seemed to Bazin to herald the

beginning of the end. Bazin identified Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* (1943) as one of several

films across genres that participated in a trend of openly misogynistic narratives. In light of his

analysis of the Western's tropes, we can already guess that he would analyze the film's

misogyny as well as the genre's other contradictions as internal to the its logic but revealed only

by the pressures of history. The general historical pressure is that of World War II, but not just

the usual horrors of war but also the slow realization of the genocidal violence that lay hidden

within it, a violence that could not but throw some harsh light on the history of colonization that

had far from run its course. But this too-difficult-to-acknowledge experience easily gave way to

something much easier to take on: the place of women in the myth.

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[10] Ibid., 140 [WCII 144-145].

Bazin analyzes *The Outlaw*, a film made during the war, in relation to the phenomenon of

the "pin-up girl" that was the subject of a separate essay.[11] The eroticism of the "pin-up girls"

made popular with the soldiers during the war rubs off on to the representation of women in

Hollywood cinema including in the Westerns. *The Outlaw* is exceptional in the way it handles

this, aided according to Bazin by the Hays Code's puritanism. The film had trouble being

released during the war because of apparent nudity which the released version did not contain.

The eroticism was important to the film's negotiation with the genre only to the extent that it

could reveal the treatment of women in the genre. The shock of nudity would have had the effect

of simply inverting the archetype of innocence with the sensationalism of nudity, but the

idealization of the Western woman was never tied to an idea of sexual innocence in the first

place. Rather, sexuality itself was a de-emphasized "virtue" in the naïve Western, but it was a

functional one not too different from the specific functions performed by cattle and other

property. *The Outlaw* exposes this feature of the Western myth not by inverting or changing

anything in it but by simply playing up its conventions.

Very briefly, *The Outlaw* tells the story of a friendship between the Sheriff Pat Garrett

and his friend Doc Holliday which becomes strained by the Sherrif's jealousy when the Doc

acquires a friend in the new arrival Billy the Kid. The Kid is responsible for the death of man

whose sister, Rio Macdonald, now tries to kill him, but he survives and rapes her. Rio is Doc's

mistress but when the Kid is injured in a shootout, it is Rio who nurses him back to health and

the two start a romantic relationship. Through all this, Doc and the Kid both have an ongoing

dispute over a horse. When Doc discovers the relationship between Rio and the Kid, he offers to

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[11] André Bazin, "*The Outlaw:* La meilleure ne vaut pas un bon cheval," in QQCIII 51-56 [WCII 163-168]; André Bazin, "Entomologie de la pin up girl," in QQCIII 45-50 [WCII 158-162].

settle for the horse rather than fight over Rio. The Sheriff and Doc fall out over the male

company they keep and the Doc and the Kid fight not over Rio but over a horse. Therefore,

Bazin's title for his review: "The Best of Women Isn't Worth a Good Horse." For all her erotic

appeal, Rio MacDonald isn't different from any prostitute characters from the other Westerns.

She is "good" because she performs her role of attending to the "heroes" who need her; men who

remain the film's focal point of identification. Everything else in the film too makes it a Western

like most others, but just an arrangement of situations to play up the homo-sociality of the myth

is enough to point up the place of women in it—lower than cattle in terms of what needs

protecting and much easier to share—without disturbing the processes of identification. "In *The

Outlaw* no one is antipathic; it is the order of the universe that confers his preeminence on man

and makes a domestic animal out of woman: pleasant but boring, to which a real animal is

always preferable."[12][iv] Bazin argues that the sexual hypocrisy of the censors after all had the

advantage of not attributing any visually explicit sexuality to the character of Rio. This allows

the film to bring out the latent misogyny of the genre without disturbing its conventions, and also

without allowing us to transcend our identification with the men who are the archetypal vehicles

of this misogyny.

The Outlaw* should have been the beginning of the end of the genre because by remaining

true to it, it showed up the contradictions that other filmmakers following it could only

exacerbate. Bazin compares the film to the comedies of Preston Sturges who "understood that

the mythology of the American comedy had arrived simultaneously both at saturation point and

the point of exhaustion. There was no way to make use of it other than to take its excesses as the

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[12] Bazin, "*The Outlaw*," 55 [WCII 166].

subject of a scenario."[13]v They are careful to stay within the limits of the genres but they no

longer believe in their mythologies: "It is no longer only a matter of a tragi-comedy of comedy

[in Sturges's films] but a real derailment where the spectator's roar of laughter is brought on by a

questioning of cinema itself."[14]vi There is something different about what happens to these

genres from what happens to Charlot; Chaplin has no sense of superiority over Charlot because

he personifies the character, but Sturges and Hughes take on such an attitude. This manifested

itself in the "Super Westerns" (borrowing Rieupeyrout's coinage) which Bazin defines as "a

western which would be ashamed to be nothing but itself and looks to justify its existence by an

additional interest: an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political, or erotic interest, in

short some quality extrinsic to the genre and which is supposed to enrich it."[15]vii Examples

include the baroque ornamentation of films such as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *Shane*,

and the social critique of *High Noon*.[16] He captures the difference between the classical and

Super-westerns with an analogy: "If Balzac and Stendhal were filmmakers, they could have

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[13] Ibid., 55-56 [WCII 167].

[14] Bazin, "U.S.A. 1938-1948".

[15] André Bazin, "Évolution du western," in QQCIII, 148 [WCII 150-151].

[16] Bazin actually liked *High Noon*'s dramatic structure but found that its social critique could have been made in any other genre. We can extrapolate from his remarks to see that the critique of McCarthy-era America had no direct correspondence with the generic elements since the Sheriff abandoned by the town actually side-steps the authoritarianism of the state to critique the social response. Though the Western is a genre about the founding of a society, its moral ambiguity is explored in the relationship of to its institutions to social outliers, and not in relation to society as people in general, or the masses, or even a certain class, which is what *High Noon* critiques. See André Bazin, "*Le Train Sifflera Trois Fois*," in Obs no. 126 (9 October 1952); For Bazin's criticism of the McCarthy witch-hunt, see André Bazin, "*L'affaire Chaplin*," in Obs no. 125 (2 October 1952); on Edward Dmytryk's seeming guilty conscience after testifying to the House Un-American Activities Committee, as seen in his plots that too-obviously create extenuating circumstances for the guilty parties, see Bazin's review of *The Caine Mutiny* (1954) in André Bazin, "*Ouragan Sur le Caine*, ou tempête dans une conscience?," in Obs no. 231 (14 October 1954).

made Westerns, but Jean-Paul Sartre would no doubt make Super-westerns and, for other

reasons, Cécil Saint-Laurent too."[17][viii]

The Western was too much of a foundational myth for a whole nation to disappear as

soon as its contradictions had been exposed. Bazin found this as Westerns remained a staple of B

film production and alongside them appeared higher-quality productions with the mark of their

auteurs and the self-consciousness of the super-westerns but without their condescension.

Bazin's preference for these films gives us an insight into his belief that genres are more socially

significant when they can reinvent themselves *both* through an internal necessity as well through

a response to history, failing which he would prefer their exhaustion rather than a self-

denunciation of their conventions. For Westerns such as *The Big Sky*, *Broken Lance*, *Red River*

(Howard Hawks, 1948), and *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), the self-consciousness about

history does not translate into a movement that Bazin describes as one from "[h]istory as

material to history as subject." They remain true to his understanding that films, like other

aesthetic objects, can engage history productively only at an angle. We can see this in Bazin's

discussion of how the Westerns respond to the historical experience of genocidal violence by

undertaking the "political rehabilitation of the Indian."[18][ix] In a film such as *Broken Lance*, the

hero is of mixed race and the social prejudice attached to it is the motor of the plot. This, for

Bazin, adds to the complexity of the genre because in every other way the film remains true to its

generic conventions. The mythology still remains about family, property, respect for the woman

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[17] André Bazin, "Western pas mort!," in RCT no. 308 (11 December 1955). Cécil Saint-Laurent was the *nom de plume* used by the novelist Jacques Laurent for writing erotic pulp novels featuring the character Caroline Chérie. Bazin wrote an extended piece on the adaptations of these novels which also discusses the author. Here, Bazin refers to him as an example of eroticism that is stuck between popular aspirations and literary ambition. See André Bazin, "De la Carolinisation de la France," in Esp vol. 2. no. 11 (February 1954), 298-304.

[18] Bazin, "Évolution du western," 148 [WCII 151].

(this time a Native American princess who is the hero's mother).[19] In another example, *The Big Sky*, a Native American is again the heroine in a mixed race romantic triangle as well as the one on whom the fate of a trade expedition into new territory depends. Sometimes, Bazin points out, a film like *Bronco Apache* (Robert Aldrich, 1954) looks into other aspects of the historical basis of the myth; in this example, the drama of the Native American protagonist played by Burt Lancaster is set in a period after the conflict with the Native Americans and their settlement on reservations.[20] In *Johnny Guitar*, Joan Crawford is undoubtedly the Westerner-in-chief despite Sterling Hayden's character. This film, like the others, has "fun with the [genre] but does not make fun of it."[21]x

The conventions remain the same but they acquire a degree of what we might now call political correctness. This does not mean that the particular contradictions in American society had been addressed or would be addressed satisfactorily. The films represent no more than a social fantasy of addressing them while retaining the existing mythological superstructure and the idea of America it represents. Any guilt behind these changes is not confessed to explicitly by the films themselves and therefore do not call for any in their spectators. It would be the easiest thing to condemn the genre, its films, and the mythology behind it, but that would leave us too free, too righteous. Better, so far as possible, to see if one can confront the contradictions by negotiating with the conventions of the myth until maybe a better one comes along to replace it. Bazin uses the word "sincerity" to describe this approach, but is keen to point out that by this he does not mean the sincerity of the *auteur* (even though *Johnny Guitar* and *The Big Sky* belong

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[19] André Bazin, "*La Lance Brisée*," in Obs no. 251 (3 March 1955); André Bazin, "*La Lance Brisée*," in RCT no. 269 (13 March 1955).

[20] André Bazin, "*Bronco Apache*," in Obs no. 250 (24 February 1955).

[21] Bazin, "Évolution du western," 153 [WCII, 155].

demonstrably to the personal thematics of Nicholas Ray and Howard Hawks respectively); he

means the sincerity of the style to the story.[22] He argues that this sincerity was possible because

there existed a current production of the more naïve Westerns without which the personal

expression of the filmmakers could easily have turned into disdain for the genre, as it already had

for some.[23]

Though Bazin was happily surprised by the resurgence of the Western after the War, and

though he hoped it would thrive for a long time to come, he was prepared to recognize the

pressures it would come under again with the Vietnam War. The renewed assault on the

mythology of the genre following its reworking by Italian filmmakers and by films such as *Butch*

Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969) and *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah,

1969) would have certainly prompted him to write about how the American national myth could

not but be heavily scrutinized at a time when America's place in the global consciousness was

shaped not by movement of peoples to its shores but by its political ambitions in the global

sphere.[24] However he might have assessed this phenomenon, he would probably have reminded

himself of an article he wrote in 1957 analyzing two American war films, one of which was

Anthony Mann's *Men in War* (1957). Mann's film is set during the Korean War that had ended

only three years ago and tells the story of an American platoon cut off from its base trying to

make its way back. Bazin was bothered by the film's lack of any ideological framework which

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[22] Ibid., 152-153 [WCII 154-155].

[23] Ibid., 151 [WCII 152-153].

[24] This role had already changed, especially since World War II, and this is what the Western's critics in France may have been pointing out. However, in Bazin's analysis, the War had prompted what still amounted to an internal self-reflection on the part of the genre where the figures of the Westerner, the Native American, the women, and the institution of the law were still sites for working through national history and not yet clear projections for confronting the new geo-political dilemmas in the present.

reduced the violence of war to "a fact of nature."[25] He noticed motifs of the Western in the

narrative—such as the platoon's journey through hostile territory—and in the mise-en-scène—

such as the panoramic shots that pick out distant signs of the Koreans much like the Westerns

identify the presence of the Indians. But the film isn't interested in distinguishing the two sides

on any ideological or moral grounds such as the righteous Americans versus the misguided or

worse Koreans; it treats them, according to Bazin, as abstract antagonists. The film's violence

and its aesthetics reduce the Western's motifs to pure abstractions. But in doing this, Bazin

argues, the film makes them "rigorously independent of the historical frame and conditions of

action."

> Therefore, this discomfort that I feel. If this war evokes something in us, it is more
> what is taking in place in Algeria, for example, than the battle with Indians. And it is
> of Indians that the Koreans of Anthony Mann force me to think. It is certainly not the
> case that the war against the Indians was particularly moral and brilliant but
> [historical] distance and above all the popularity of the Western have made them an
> almost abstract convention. One can think what one wants of the historical
> justification for the Korean War, but precisely think something rather than nothing. I
> would be more willing to have Anthony Mann make an indirect apology rather than
> present it as a fact of nature, a simple source of action.[26][xi]

In this war film, Bazin sees the Western becoming an abstract crossroads between as-yet-

unresolved colonial conflicts and the new model of Cold War imperialism. And for Bazin the

French spectator, the film's crossing of the Western (with its internalized history of American

colonialism) with modern warfare evokes the intensified Algerian fight for independence. And

this was also a time when America was already deeply involved in another French colonial

legacy; that of Vietnam. Though he criticized Mann's film in 1957 for its abstraction, he might

also have seen it in the 1960s as the point zero of the Western's entry into another phase of

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[25] André Bazin, "Films de guerre," in Obs no. 371 (20 June 1957).

[26] Ibid.

American and global history. In this phase, he might have seen on the one hand the revisionist Westerns that amplified the genre's ambiguities to the point of implosion and, on the other, parts of an American establishment that continued to work within the genre's frameworks even after its contradictions had been laid bare by history.[27] Bazin would most certainly have tracked closely this new phase of the drama between myth and history that marked the conclusion or mutation of a major cycle in the genre's genealogy.

Dangerous Fictions

With the Western, Bazin engaged a genre's mutation in step with history and he had clear preference for those films that mutate in line with inherited conventions to those which seek to overturn them entirely. With his reading of *Le Jour Se Lève*, taken as representative of the poetic realist corpus of 1930s French cinema, I will be looking at his engagement with generic conventions that had not survived the war in French film production, or rather did not survive it with any sense of urgency despite several attempts to revive them. The parallel with Kracauer's work on pre-war German cinema, apart from highlighting an unexpected affinity between the two critics, will sharpen the question of what counts as an adequate critical response in aesthetic

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[27] As J. Hoberman writes, in the mid-sixties, "The average [army] recruit had entered his teens at a time when eight of the top prime time TV shows were Westerns. Small wonder that John Wayne, the greatest of movie cowboys, became a talisman for a substantial number of American soldiers in Vietnam, or that he took the war as his personal crusade." The most famous establishment figure from this time to invoke the Western to explain his style of functioning was the then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a 1972 interview: "The main point stems from the fact that I've always acted alone, Americans admire that enormously, Americans admire the cowboy leading the caravan alone astride his horse, the cowboy entering a village or city alone on his horse. Without even a pistol, maybe, because he doesn't go in for shooting. He acts, that's all: aiming at the right spot at the right time. A Wild West tale, if you like… [T]he consequences of my actions, I mean public opinion's verdict, have never worried me." More recently, of course, George W. Bush "remembered" the "Wanted: dead or alive" posters from "out West" when justifying the Afghan invasion. See J. Hoberman, "How the Western Was Lost," in *The Western Reader* ed. Greg Rickman and Jim Kitses (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 85-92; Oriana Fallaci, "An Interview with Oriana Fallaci: Kissinger," in *The New Republic* (16 December 1972), 21-22; Toby Harnden, "Bin Laden is wanted: dead or alive, says Bush," in *The Telegraph*, September 18, 2001, accessed November 14, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1340895/Bin-Laden-is-wanted-dead-or-alive-says-Bush.html.

terms to mythologies that no longer have a hold on current historical imaginary and may in fact

be at odds with it. This aspect of the comparison between Bazin and Kracauer is actually best

approached initially through the latter's review of Parker Tyler's book on Chaplin.

Like Bazin, prominent critics across the Atlantic took *Monsieur Verdoux* as an occasion

to rethink the persona of the Tramp. These included Parker Tyler and Robert Warshow, both of

whose analyses show several points of coincidence with Bazin's but it is Tyler's writings on

Chaplin that have several uncanny similarities to Bazin's.[28] We have seen Bazin argue

throughout for an understanding of a myth as relatively autonomous from history but not

ahistorical for that reason. A comparison of his reading of the Tramp and Verdoux with Tyler's

will help explain this paradox a little more because their points of departure are as similar as

their conclusions are contrasting. Tyler's project is a psychoanalysis of *Chaplin* and the Tramp,

treating them as more or less identical; where Bazin's analysis is psychoanalytic in the very

rough sense of inquiring into the unconscious contradictions that are alternately repressed and

manifested over the lifetime of the Tramp, Tyler's is more closely dependent on some staples of

Freudian psychoanalysis such as the womb, the Law etc. Tyler treats Verdoux as a manifestation

of the Tramp who in his previous avatar had been a man-child, wearing a tattered garb and

satisfied by the mere act of dreaming; that is, as someone outside society. He even sees, like

Bazin, a premonition of Verdoux in Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923), a film in which Chaplin

does not act but whose melodrama of tragic bourgeois romance and its violence is for both critics

an inversion of the Tramp's romantic dreams.[29] They both emphasize the Tramp's sense of

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[28] Parker Tyler, *Chaplin: The Last of the Clowns* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1948); Robert Warshow, "*Monsieur Verdoux*" and "A Feeling of Sad Dignity," in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre And Other Aspects of Popular Culture* Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 177-209.

[29] André Bazin, "Défense de Monsieur Verdoux," in *Les Temps Modernes* no. 27 (December 1947), 1119.

inferiority complex in relation women. Like Bazin's reading of Verdoux's misogynistic violence as a consequence of an internal contradiction in the Tramp, Tyler finds the Tramp to be "ethically schizophrenic." Tyler writes, "Chaplin's steady rationalization compels him to ask: *what tramp* does not harbor an inveterate desire to be normal, to be able to work, and gain all the rewards familiar to men: women, children, home, possessions and—yes, just because he is a tramp—a million dollars."[30]

What's more, in 1950 Tyler wrote an essay comparing the Tramp to Kafka's K which contains some striking echoes. Tyler writes, "[T]he principle difference between Karl [from Kafka's *Amerika*] and K [from *The Trial*] is exactly that between Charlie and Verdoux: one of the two in both pairs is essentially *innocent*, the other essentially guilty," echoing Bazin's "Contrary to K, Verdoux is in essence the social culprit…."[31] Then there is the fact that Tyler's article contrasts the mythologies of America and Europe in the works of Kafka and Chaplin, again echoing Bazin's "*Monsieur Verdoux*, along with *A Woman of Paris*, is the only Chaplin film in which Charlot does not appear. Both take place in France. From that to infer that for Chaplin France is the mythological opposite of America is but a step. I take it cheerfully."[32][xii] Given so many echoes of Bazin across Tyler's book and article on Chaplin, one might suspect that Tyler's reading material in the late '40s included *Les Temps Modernes*. But that is both highly unlikely and besides the point: unlikely because Tyler's book excerpt on Verdoux appeared in *The New Leader* the same month as Bazin's article in *Les Temps Modernes*, laying

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[30] Tyler, *Chaplin*, 155-156.

[31] Parker Tyler, "Kafka's and Chaplin's 'Amerika'," in *The Sewanee Review* vol. 58, no. 2 (April-June 1950), 307; Bazin, "Défense de Monsieur Verdoux," 1117.

[32] Bazin, "Défense de Monsieur Verdoux," 1119.

out a template for his later comparisons with Kafka;[33] besides the point because what I want to

argue for is not Bazin's hermeneutic ingenuity but the ways in which his interpretation combines

an emphasis on the immanence of the myth to itself with its place in history. To this extent, the

similarities between the two critics suggest that whatever the provocation of Bazin's reading,

there were others for whom the release of *Monsieur Verdoux* cast a strong retrospective light on

certain motifs *internal* to the Tramp's character. But the differences on the question of history

are also telling.

Apart from the later article comparing Kafka and Chaplin, in 1948 Tyler read the whole

corpus of Chaplin's films as the biographical truth of Chaplin's life by employing heavy

Freudian symbols. This means that his whole analysis of the Tramp pulls out the features of the

character that escape right back into the recesses of Chaplin's mind without touching history.

This was Kracauer's complaint about Tyler's book when he reviewed it upon its release, finding

"the whole disturbingly fictitious" because its characteristics "made up a universe immune to

outer contingencies."[34] The allegation that Tyler's Tramp is cut off from history carried a special

charge coming from Kracauer since *From Caligari to Hitler* was published at the same time as

Tyler's book. And Kracauer too was examining a filmic mythology that had run its course, that

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[33] Parker Tyler, "Chaplin's Epic: Premonitions of 'Verdoux'," in *The New Leader*, 13 December 1947. As for the comparisons of Kafka and Chaplin, Tyler's article suggests that the Tramp had been invoked before him in relation to Kafka's *Amerika*. One comparison between Kafka's protagonist and the Tramp was made by Hannah Arendt in a 1944 article on Jewish figures and their outsider status in relationship to nationalism. She analyzes the Tramp as social "suspect" in distinction from Kafka's "the man of goodwill." It's almost impossible that Bazin read Arendt but it is clear that these comparisons are of their times and not the matter of any single critic's ingenuity. See Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," in *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 6 no. 2 (April 1944), 99-122.

[34] Siegfried Kracauer, "Portrait in Film," in *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Films and Popular Culture*, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 189.

of German cinema of the 1920s and '30s but, unlike Tyler, emphatically in relation to the catastrophic history of which they were a part.

Kracauer's reproach about ahistorical analysis may seem to apply as much to Bazin as to Tyler since, as we have seen, Bazin too insists on analyzing the mythology of Charlot/Verdoux in relation to its inner consistency and fault lines. But we have also seen in Bazin's discussion of the character of Monsieur Hulot, the Soviet cinema of the '20s, and the Western that myths are autonomous from history in order to impose themselves on it. Here Kracauer's trajectory from cinema (Caligari) to history (Hitler) suggests that he might have agreed at least partly with Bazin. For Bazin as for Kracauer, it is the social imaginary which carries more clearly the marks of aesthetic mythologies while the mythologies themselves register history by "condens[ing] within [themselves]… social affectivity."[35][xiii] But there is a real difference between Kracauer and Bazin that touches upon how to respond to contradictions in such affectivity. The question of "how to respond" is tied for Bazin to the question "who responds." The social imaginary is an abstraction that depends for its expression not only on films and texts but on the specific responses of audiences. Therefore, what myths take from history, they return to history through these audiences and their affective, performative, and epistemic responses. If Tyler stands at one end of the spectrum by removing the Tramp's mythology from history and putting it back in the mind of Chaplin, and if Kracauer, in his response to Tyler and *From Caligari to Hitler*, stands at the other end by insisting on the perfect immanence of mythologies to history, then Bazin places them, as I will argue after describing his reading of *Le Jour Se Lève*, in the spectator.

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[35] André Bazin, "Le mythe de M. Verdoux," in QQCIII, 92.

When Bazin reviewed Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*, he took from it the distinction between *Kammerspiel* and Expressionism. He came to understand these two modes to be complementary to the extent that they explore the relationship between the human mind and space. But where *Kammerspiel* moves centripetally from the exploration of space to its effects on the psyche of the characters, Expressionism is a centrifugal mode which "[recreates] the whole space that reduces man to a signifying geometry;" that is, space becomes a mere emanation of mind. He then states that it is the *Kammerspiel* mode that has had great international influence across Hollywood, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. This talk of international influence has nothing to do with Eisner's book which is much more concerned than Kracauer about insisting on an essential link between German film aesthetics and the "German soul".[36] Kracauer's introduction, on the other hand, not only makes explicit note of the international influence of these films but also points out that the paralysis which afflicted the German consciousness also prevailed elsewhere.[37] France, for example.

Bazin's example for German *Kammerspiel*'s influence in France is the work of Marcel Carné. He may well have said 1930s' French cinema generally or poetic realism as its most prominent genre, and he certainly had this in mind as we will see. But Carné was not only the most prominent filmmaker of his generation but also one whose *Le Jour Se Lève* Bazin had already closely analyzed in 1948 using terms which Eisner's book retrospectively clarified for

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[36] [36] For example, Eisner writes, "In order to make man's destiny understood, *Stimmungsbilder*—'mood pictures'—should be used. (The word *Stimmung* is complex and cannot be readily translated: English 'mood' and French 'atmosphere' do not quite convey the meaning. It stands for an atmosphere permeated in some sort by the emanations of the German *Gemüt*—a highly particular mixture of sensibility and sentimentality.) Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 152.

[37] Siegfried Kracauer. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* rev. and exp. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4, 9.

him.[38] For Bazin, Carné's film was the apotheosis of the poetic realist aesthetics of '30s French cinema and his analysis of it came in another pedagogical pamphlet he created for use in ciné-clubs across France. Among the narrative and other stylistic trends he emphasizes are the use of a frame narrative in which the flash back leads inexorably to a tragic present and the importance of a décor and music that gradually bear down upon the psyche of the protagonist, enclosing him spatially as much as psychologically. This character arc, exemplified often by Jean Gabin, and the stylistic elements is a common motif in '30s French cinema. This is the *Kammerspiel* mode he learns about in Eisner's book where the constriction of space is directly tied to its psychological significance and whose influence in France is exemplified by Carné. In the pamphlet Bazin insists on a distinction of the film's expressionist qualities from German Expressionism because the décor and the human figure remain distinct even as the one corresponds to the other dramatically. He compares it to Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) to distinguish it from the Expressionism of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1920). So Bazin sees a parallel between German and French cinemas but he doesn't have the word "*Kammerspiel*" for the style that brings them together.

Bazin's pamphlet appeared at the beginning of 1948, just around the time that Kracauer published *From Caligari to Hitler*, and Kracauer's introduction to that book would appear in France a little later in the year. Kracauer's book, as Johannes von Moltke points out, relies heavily on spatial metaphors to describe the sense of paralysis that these films mirrored and conveyed back to German society. For Bazin too, the analysis of the spatial pressure experienced by Jean Gabin's character in *Le Jour Se Lève* is a manifestation of the social climate of '30s France. He points out how the working class character played by Gabin shows no signs of

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[38] André Bazin, "*Le Jour Se Lève*," in *Doc Éducation Populaire 1948* (January-February 1948).

political interests, either in his conduct or in what the many significant objects in his room convey about his character, and he comes across in his solitude as an anarchist more than anything else, a mark of the "individualist anarchism" of Carné's and poetic realism's pre-eminent scriptwriter Jacques Prévert.[39] Bazin often emphasized the sociological correspondence between the mythic content of the poetic realist corpus and 1930s France but within it he found Carné's films more than any other filmmakers' intimately dependent on the "metaphors of history."[40] The tragic paralysis in these films resonated so deeply with the interwar period that on the eve of the war, the soon-to-be-last government of the Third Republic prohibited the production of films that were "depressing, morbid, immoral, or distressing to the children," such as Carné's, and called for "healthy, optimistic" productions.[41] And some in the Vichy regime in unoccupied France held the Carné-Prévert duo responsible for reinforcing the paralyzed atmosphere which led to France's easy defeat. Finally, right after the Liberation, Carné's film was again banned by the censors.[42] It clearly was a film that strongly represented a national consciousness that the country wanted to leave behind since it was a reminder of the mood that to it had become identical with national defeat and humiliation.

In Bazin's reading of Carné's films, and by extension the most prominent films of '30s France, as influenced by a German film aesthetic and reflecting a similar kind of paralysis in France as in Germany, the parallels with *From Caligari to Hitler* are obvious. They both subscribe to a general idea of a national or collective consciousness that films tap into and, in the

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[39] Bazin, "*Le Jour Se Lève*", see the section "Le décor, document psychologique et social".

[40] André Bazin, "Carné et Désincarnation," in *Esprit* vol. 9 no. 182 (September 1951).

[41] For these citations from state directives and for more discussion of this move, see Evelyn Ehrlich, *Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking Under the Occupation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 2-3.

[42] Ehrlich, *Cinema of Paradox*, 103.

particular cases they analyze, trace two disastrous national trajectories in the same historical

moment. A further parallel is that Kracauer looked back on the German films as a historical

warning for understanding postwar Hollywood's revival of these tropes in an increasingly

authoritarian atmosphere.[43] Bazin too often critiqued French cinema's attempts to revive the

style and the metaphors of poetic realism immediately after the Liberation since they no longer

corresponded to the new historical condition. But this is the difference between Kracauer and

Bazin: the latter often critiqued this return to a now-dead mythology without retrospectively

disowning the films that he and many spectators in France and abroad were captivated by and

still held in high regard.[44] He did not, like Kracauer, go from seeing in these films a historical

sensibility (and a terrible one at that) to reproaching them for it. In fact, as Tachella recalls, *Le

Jour Se Lève* was for Bazin the first key film in his work promoting cinema through popular

culture channels in the immediate postwar years. Bazin considered his study of the film to be the

"first serious thing" he had written (which must be understood as the first serious thing on a

single film since he had already written "Ontology," "Total cinema," and a few other key articles

by this time.).[45] In other words, even though the film's sensibilities were no longer appropriate to

the postwar world, for him it was an exemplary testament to the prewar imaginary and remained

central to the *longue durée* imaginary of the nation.

It is in the difference of attitudes between Kracauer and Bazin towards films from their

past—a difference of critical disavowal from critical acknowledgment—that we need to take up

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[43] Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 82.

[44] Bazin, "Carné et désincarnation"; André Bazin, "Quinze ans de cinéma français," in CLNV, 22.

[45] Jean-Charles Tachella, "Appendix: André Bazin from 1945 to 1950: The Times of Struggles and Consecration," in Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 223.

the question of what it means for a reading of a film to be an act of politics. Can one *explain*

what the political imagination of a film is in the abstract; do the facts of style, subject, and

history settle the matter; are film critics, theorists, and academics experts who can arbitrate the

political import of a film? In relation to these questions, it is striking to note that nowhere does

Bazin foreground his own subjectivity more than when explicitly ideological questions are at

stake. Thus, he begins his heated response to Jean Carta on the question of "cinema and

commitment" with a prologue on the role of the critic.

> Nothing is more stupid than to consider criticism as a specialty if not, in most cases,
> a specialty in stupidity. The authority of the professional critic is known to reside in
> the fact that it is his job, but only one of frequenting the dark halls more assiduously
> that the average spectator. In brief, it is a hypothetical superiority of training
> [*culture*], not of judgment.[46]xiv

Similarly, at the end of his "In Defense of Rossellini," written in dialogue with the Italian

Marxist critic Guido Aristarco, Bazin writes:

> I do not hope to have convinced you, my dear Aristarco. And one scarcely convinces
> by arguments. The conviction that one puts into them counts for more. I would be
> happy if mine, where you will find the echo of admiration of some other critics
> among my friends, can at least shake up yours.[47]xv

     In both these instances, as implicitly or explicitly in all of Bazin's readings, it is

important for him to disavow the discursive superiority of the critic in relation to the reader or

interlocutor beyond professional assiduity at the very moment when criticism turns into politics;

that is, when a critical argument reveals itself as an exercise in persuasion. Politics would not be

possible if arguments could be settled by merely pointing to facts; politics indeed appears just

when facts become ambiguous. If not, the ideological critics of the Western would be on sound

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[46] André Bazin, "Cinéma et Engagement", in Esp vol. 4 no. 246 (April 1957), 681.

[47] André Bazin, "Défense de Rossellini," in QQCIV, 160 [WCII 101].

ground in arguing that it mythologizes a history of colonization and patriarchy and the only reason to watch them would be to critique them. Only a critic who has responded reflexively to the mythic appeal can then try to acknowledge both the contradictions and force of the genre, and trying to acknowledge both is a matter of aesthetic judgment, which is also a matter of persuasion of the self and of others, an almost endless persuasion about our attachment to experiences that are often troubling. It is, in the case of *Le Jour Se Lève*, to keep alive the affective experience of past history—an atmosphere of social claustrophobia in this instance— and feeling its force even when what it represents is potentially counter-productive in the present. Since a mythology's relationship to the history it draws upon and in turn shapes is at a remove, older mythic imaginaries retain as much power to disrupt and reshape the present as those that emerge in step with it.[48] As a political feature of aesthetic experience, this is inevitably a danger and a promise that we cannot steer towards a single pole with certainty.

If Kracauer's analysis of the collective German imaginary in its cinema has seemed to several commentators both important and too insistent in its line of argumentation, it could be because, despite his deep familiarity with the films and their history, his affective attachment to the films is absent. The films disappear into their history and become a warning to the present. Here, von Moltke helps us understand what happened to the spectator in Kracauer's work on German cinema. He cites a letter from Kracauer to Erwin Panofsky at a time when the former was completing work on *From Caligari to Hitler*. In this letter, Kracauer describes himself as "a

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[48] Thus, Dudley Andrew, who has drawn a much larger picture of poetic realism, both in terms of thematics and style, than Bazin's reading of a single film, shows how at certain moments in history, the imaginary embedded in this corpus of films can become activated as an appropriate frame for experience. As a trajectory of political euphoria and disappointment, for example, he points to the activation of certain themes from Jean Renoir's films from the Popular Front period and just after in Alain Tanner's *Jonas, qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000* (1975) which itself is situated at the end of the curve of the promises and disappointments of 1968. See Dudley Andrew, "Epilogue," in *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 334-350.

doctor who is performing an autopsy and at the same time doing a cross-section of a piece of his own past, which is now completely dead."[49] Not only is his subject—the German cinema that led up to Hitler's regime—dead, but, in a manner of speaking, so is its spectator, the critic who watched them in the Weimar Republic. This becomes clearer when von Moltke points out that films such as Karl Grune's *The Street* (1923) and F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) which had previously made a strong positive impression on Kracauer are now assimilated to the book's grim thesis with only faint traces of their promise now registering with him.[50] This suggests that when Kracauer speaks of these films they carry little to no affective charge for the spectator Kracauer was in the 1940s. But, as von Moltke again points out, Kracauer's reading of German cinema as heralding a totalitarian regime must be read in light of his research activities on propaganda films and the expression of authoritarian elements he saw in Hollywood's "terror films." The affected spectator was not the one watching the old German films but the one watching new Hollywood films. This spectator instrumentalizes the old films to respond to the historical danger signaled by these new ones. Therefore, a different kind of spectatorial subjectivity comes into play here for Kracauer than an aesthetic subjectivity that passes through the risk of affective attachment to a potentially insidious ideological picture. We know from Kracauer's other work, whether it be essays such as "The Mass Ornament" and "Photography" or *Theory of Film*, that such complete critical distance is uncharacteristic of his theorization of our relationship to the threats of modern experience; threats that, he argues in these other works,

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[49] von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist*, 96.

[50] Ibid., 144.

cannot be escaped through critical distance but must be passed through in some way for us to have a chance at surviving them.[51]

We could argue that in relation to this one body of films—those of prewar Germany—Kracauer had already passed through their dangers and come out, with the rest of Europe, on the losing side of the "go-for-broke game of history" so that the films became indistinguishable from their historical moment.[52] Outside of these historical and biographical considerations, however, his response in this instance to German cinema's relationship to history may be usefully distinguished as "cultural politics" as distinct from the "aesthetic politics" of Bazin. The reading of symptoms off the surfaces of history without betraying, however indirectly, that the site where those symptoms manifest is the subjectivity of the reader is a mark of the politics of the cultural expert. A reading in which the subjectivity of the reader stands as the point of relay between an aesthetic world and the historical world is the politics of the spectator and an aesthetic politics.[53] It is thus that Bazin comes to a point, especially in his ideological debates, where he concedes that he can only count on the subjectivity of his interlocutors to respond to and experience, beyond only logical arguments, what challenges certain films pose to the ideological investments of our imaginaries: "The function of the critic is not to place on a silver platter some truth that does not exist but to prolong as far as possible in the intelligence and sensibility of those who

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[51] Here is a more direct statement by Kracauer on the ineliminability of subjective response to cinematic representation: "Our concepts of a foreigner necessarily reflect native habits of thought. Much as we try to curtail this subjective factor, as we are indeed forced to do in the interest of increased objectivity, we still view the other individual from a position which is once and for all ours. It is just as impossible for us to settle down in a vacuum as it would be to fuse with him." See Siegfried Kracauer, "National Types as Hollywood Presents Them," in *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings*, 83.

[52] Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans & ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 61.

[53] For the importance of the spectator in this sense to Kracauer's conception of both film experience and historiography, see von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist*, ch. 10.

read, the shock of a work of art."[54]xvi I will return to this distinction between "cultural politics" and "aesthetic politics" in the conclusion to this chapter.

Mythic Love and Guilt

So far we have looked at Bazin's analyses of three sets of films—the Chaplin films, the Western, and a French poetic realist film—all of which have turned out to contain what should be intolerable contradictions: misogyny in the Chaplin films and the Western, colonization in the Western, social paralysis amidst the rise of Fascism in *Le Jour Se Lève*. In the face of such contradictions, we might indeed prefer a cultural politics of distance to the affective politics of the aesthetic. This is where I have not yet tackled the question of why, according to Bazin, we need to affirm our "ontological sympathy" for such troubling experiences. We need to be clear that he does not mean a vindication of these disturbing attitudes and experiences. As he writes, Verdoux *must* be sentenced to death since there is no excuse for misogyny and murder; after the war, the Western *must* revisit its terms to see if its idea of America can stage an imaginary rehabilitation of the Native American; the tropes of poetic realism *should not* be recycled glibly after the Liberation. And yet we are somehow required to *love* Verdoux and the Western and the Carné film. A third American contemporary of Bazin, after Tyler and Kracauer, Robert Warshow summed up this difficulty with eloquence when he too undertook a revaluation of Chaplin's oeuvre upon the release of *Limelight* (1952).

> "Love me"—he has asked this from the beginning… And we have, apparently, loved
> him, though with such undercurrents of revulsion as might be expected in response

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[54] André Bazin, "Réflexions sur la critique," in CFLNV, 213. Or as Stanley Cavell writes, "It is essential to making an aesthetic judgment that at some point we be prepared to say in its support: don't you see, don't you hear, don't you dig? The best critic will know the best points. Because if you do not see *something*, without explanation, then there is nothing further to discuss." This is where the work of art constitutes the limit from which one could withdraw into an incommunicable subjectivity or it could be the limit at which distinct subjectivities coalesce without collapsing into an impossible harmony. Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 93.

to so naked a demand. Does he love us? This is a strange question to ask of an artist. But it is Chaplin himself who puts it in our mouths, harping on love until we are forced almost in self-defense to say: what about *you*? He does not love us; and maybe he doesn't love anything… It is no part of Chaplin's function as an artist to love us or anyone, and I do not offer these observations as a complaint.[55]

Warshow speaks in terms of the artist, but Bazin speaks in terms of the myth. In either case, the fact is that the "obvious morbidity in Chaplin's sentiment" and the "undercurrents of revulsion" could be felt with any clarity only with Chaplin's postwar films. How could this be lost on Bazin when only three years earlier he welcomed the sound version of *The Gold Rush* (1925) with the words, "[G]o see again… the little good-hearted, black-and-white fellow of your childhood and youth; the Charlot before we found out that somewhere in Europe a housepainter had stolen his moustache."[56]xvii Therefore, the first reason for emphasizing our ontological attachment in an aesthetic response is that it always to some degree precedes the awareness of contradiction. The trajectory of Hollywood film genres until the war is a demonstration of this on a large historical scale where it took some of them decades to give up their secrets. But we can become aware of contradictions even just a minute too late after having first been held by a film. Therefore, no spectator or any critic before *Monsieur Verdoux* was wrong to not see the full complexity of the Tramp's character. To begin with, as we have seen Bazin state, all the moral categories we use to describe the Tramp/Verdoux take on an air of neutrality with respect to our affective attachment to him. Whatever historical and ideological baggage we bring with us helps to suppress some features and emphasize others. For Bazin, to varying degree, all myths call upon us to cover over their contradictions in our attachment to them. The first edition of Bazin's

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[55] Warshow, "A Feeling of Sad Dignity," 193-194.

[56] André Bazin, "L'Écran Parisien: *La Ruée Vers l'Or*", in *Parisien Libéré* (16 December 1944).

book on Orson Welles contains some of his clearest lines on this subject and which thread

together all his various mythological treatments as well as his aesthetic philosophy in general.

> I dare say that ambiguity in the cinema is a criterion that never fails… Rare are the
> films which dare to impose on us an image of the world where all is not so simple,
> where we are required to take sides freely, be it against our sympathies. Only the
> figure of Charlot could attain the greatest popularity with the maximum ambiguity (it
> is true that this ambiguity was secret and that in revealing it Verdoux divided
> spectators).[57]xviii

This is not an understanding of an indifferent ambiguity but one that does not absolve us from

the need to take sides; that is, to love the contradictory worlds of the films. What is of value in

the myth so long as it draws our automatic adherence is its ability to make us love it even if it is

to some degree or another, without our knowledge, "against our sympathies." And this for Bazin

is the most important capacity of the aesthetic: its ability to steer us to things that our reasoning

and our immediate inclinations won't allow us to be drawn towards.

Once again, in an essay on *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948), he wrote,

"Isn't this a solid definition of realism in art: to force the mind to take sides without cheating

with beings and things?"[58]xix Keeping aside the question of realism for the moment, this is the

bad faith behind what we want from the aesthetic. Bad faith here is the necessary camouflaging

of contradictions in lived, historical experience in order to make it legible and thus habitable.

"The true problem of bad faith," as Sartre says, "stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is

faith." It is the "adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given

indistinctly."[59] This is what I take Bazin to mean when he writes that realism makes us "take

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[57] André Bazin and Jean Cocteau *Orson Welles* (Chavane: Paris, 1950), 30.

[58] André Bazin, "*Allemagne Année Zéro*," in QQCIII, 32.

[59] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1992), 67.

sides without cheating with beings and things." (As I will argue in the chapters to follow, realism for Bazin is another word for the aesthetic rather than primarily the material world captured by film.) The world, and beings and things within it, remains indistinct and at the cinema we adhere to it through the image on screen. The examples of Charlot and Kafka's K—and we might add Keaton's Stone Face and Samuel Beckett's Godot—as mythic figures of utterly minimalist, almost absent psychology must be seen as resolving the uncataloguable corpus of contradictions of modernity not by *representing* them but rather by casting a simplifying screen over them. But as the examples of film genres demonstrates, the screen works only until such time as history forces contradictions back into view.

If ontological adherence to mythologies under the pressures of history always precedes an awareness of contradictions, then Bazin argues we cannot disown them after we come to such awareness. To do so would be bad faith of another kind where we disavow what we have already been since it is our adherence to these mythologies that has defined our past. In the previous chapter, I described Bazin's argument that mythologies mark a new beginning in the world, and I illustrated it with his own discovery that his beach holidays had been re-shaped by *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) which announced and gave an orientation to a France on the threshold of a society of leisure. I will now draw upon a similar description by him of the experience of a vague mixture of guilt, nostalgia, and critique that accompanies the confrontation with mythic contradictions, even of those which we think we have left behind. This example also has the advantage of stepping out of the mythic framework of film genres and to confront even more directly a social mythology whose particular references in this example were in Bazin's postwar France.

162

Georges Franju was commissioned by the French state in 1951 to make a film on Hôtel des Invalides, the French military hospital in Paris that also houses a military museum and the remains of Napoleon and some prominent military generals. Franju's documentary, named after the military complex, focuses on the museum and the church visited by veterans, most of them marked for life by grave injuries. It shows us the history of the military from the beginnings of French history through its armors, artillery, tombs, and other relics. This history is traced along two axes: one is descriptive which plays up the motifs of the army such as its emblems and songs; the other is teleological, heading towards the nuclear present (Fig. 2, top two panels). These two axes are punctuated by images of injured veterans who are also seen visiting the museum and attending the Church service in their uniforms and sporting their decorations. The role of music heightens the contradictions by alternating between foreboding and illustrative (upbeat military music), and the commentary is punctuated by the voice of the guide who takes evident pride in the history that the museum represents. The film recalls in some ways the paintings of Goya. Its juxtaposition of the French military heritage with nuclear annihilation and the lingering images of the wounded gave it an unmistakable edge of pacifist critique and earned the film a ban for some months.
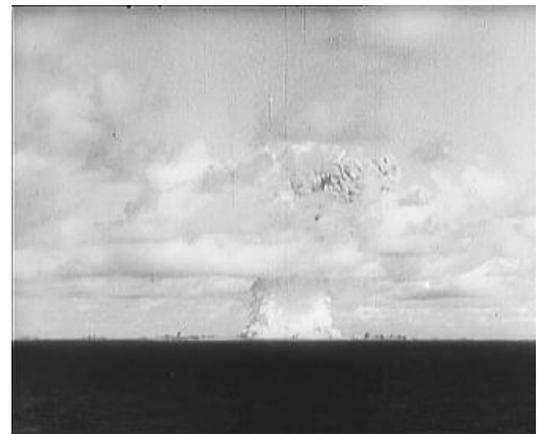
Fig. 2: Stills from *Hôtel des Invalides* (Georges Franju, 1951)

Bazin argues that the film is clearly a critique but one that draws its power not just through its obviously critical moments, such as the juxtaposition of ancient and modern artillery with images of victims, but by giving space and voice to those who are at one and the same time the victims of this narrative (or its most functionary guardians, such as the museum guide) and the ones who still worship it. In order for the spectator to make a critique, it takes some effort, however small, to get past this evidence that the *only* people we see upholding, in Bazin's words, an "outdated and ridiculous faith in a 'Paradise under the shade of swords'"[xx] are the wounded soldiers (Fig. 2, bottom-right panel).[60] But it isn't even about these believers wounded by their belief but the always somewhat questionable place from which critique is made. What the film shows is "a thousand symbols of war… surrounded by the faith of those who guard them, vestals of a little flame of jingoistic patriotism that is in the heart of forty million French."[xxi] Therefore, the critique that is most potentially effective in the film is that which implicates the spectators'

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[60] André Bazin, "*Hôtel des Invalides*," in Obs no. 134 (4 December 1952).

164

feelings. The best example of this, for Bazin, is the sequence showing in close detail a famous

nineteenth century painting depicting soldiers of the Third Republic dreaming of former glories

of the Napoleonic armies while waiting to avenge French defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian

War. The shots of the painting are accompanied by the tune of a familiar patriotic song with the

lyrics to the tune printed on the shots (Fig. 2, bottom-left panel).

> An effort of will is necessary to avoid humming the song. The whole theater, like
> yourself, sings on the inside.... Thus is revealed the evidence of conditioned reflexes
> in military music. Surely, the theater feels a vague shame and unease at this patriotic
> tumescence that it feels incapable of controlling. But few spectators would take clear
> note of it. In waking the Déroulède [a French nationalist who came to prominence
> after the Franco-Prussian War] that sleeps in each of us, Franju is simply being
> consistent with his subject whose echo he extends into the theater. It is true that in
> doing this he touches the limits of cinematic atrocity.[61] xxii

The sexual connotations of mythic affect and the shame associated with its uncontrolled

expression in relation to something that we weren't aware of desiring, and not wanting to desire

any more, are evident in these lines. While guilt and confession are not productive of anything

for Bazin except to set us off on a search for new mythologies, it is inevitable that we will

confront the bad faith of our current or former attachments. Within the realm of the aesthetic, it

is important that there be no one to confess our guilt to, no one around us who accuses and who

needs to punish or forgive. Franju's cruelty is vindicated only because he allows himself and us

to "admire the admiration of the museum guide"xxiii and witness the wounds *as well as the faith*

of the veterans.

In Bazin's response to the images of a worn-out mythology of nationalism we detect the

same love for the intolerable that we find in his readings of the mythologies of film genres.

Therefore I will now briefly take up this idea of love that grounds the political dimension of his

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[61] Ibid.

aesthetic philosophy. In the introduction, I referenced M. H. Abrams's argument that the

disinterested pleasure of Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics draws upon Platonized Christianity

and, in particular, the Augustinian ideal of love. And I have also drawn upon Hannah Arendt's

idea of the political as that which marks a beginning in history to theorize Bazin's understanding

of how an aesthetic mythology provides an orientation in history. And it is Arendt who uses the

ideas of beginnings and endings to theorize the political uses of love. For her, in the whole

mythic framework of Christianity and its devaluation of secular existence in favor of the idea of

a timeless realm, love is the only theological idea that speaks to the continued possibility of a

democratic politics. Love, in this Augustinian sense, is an emotion that restores the equality of all

subjects after the necessary conflict and inevitable injury that attend political experience. If

politics is to act in freedom, then we inevitably commit to an unpredictable course of action since

it also depends on and comes into conflict with other subjectivities. On Arendt's understanding,

this means that every course of political action inevitably comes up against insurmountable

contradictions that make it threatening to the possibility of politics itself. At such a point, politics

requires a new beginning and a new way of framing the world in which the same actors,

irrespective of their part in the contradictions of the past, can reappear as equals. And it is only a

gratuitous love that can restore such equality, without which politics would end in its antithesis

of juridical logic and the mechanisms of accusation, guilt, and punishment.[62] Love for Arendt is

concerned not so much with the "what" of the action but "who," a distinction which implies that

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[62] Actually, Arendt distinguishes between love as a private emotion that is apolitical and respect that is its public counterpart that is a political emotion. I use love here in the public sense of respect partly because of the in-betweenness of the aesthetic in relation to history, as a site of escape from it as well as one of orientation at a distance. The main reasons for preferring 'love' are its stronger affective register as well as the fact that Bazin himself uses it in a political context, as we will see in chapter 7.

our recognition is given not based on our agreement with the politics of the person but to the person herself.

It is this political idea of love that is operative in the aesthetic understanding of mythologies in Bazin's work. Our love for films on this account acknowledges the political orientation they have provided us even after such an orientation has become damaging. And we need this love for our past attachments to both acknowledge our past and to justify us in looking for new mythologies that will inevitably contain contradictions that we cannot know beforehand. This is a tragic idea of politics, not in any pessimistic sense, but as a necessary recognition of the irreducible conflict and contradiction that attends all politics. The work of love is to reconcile us to this irreducibility of limits so that we can go on attempting new beginnings within them. We will return to this idea once again at the end of chapter 7 where we will see Bazin explicitly claim this ideal of love as a basis for an aesthetic politics when speaking of Italian neo-realism.

The basis of Bazin's aesthetic politics in an ethics of love did not mean that it had no place for the demystification of aesthetic mythologies. There is after all demystification involved in his analysis of the Verdoux/Charlot and the Western; but demystification for him is justified only to the extent that the critic is willing to affirm the power of some mythological framework. For Bazin, a position of default demystification would have smacked of a bad faith worse than of those mystified.[63]

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[63] We can find one example of a purely negative demystificatory exercise in Bazin's critique of postwar detective films in Hollywood by which he was never taken, particularly since they moralized one of his beloved genres: the prewar gangster films. His critiques came in scattered remarks across short film reviews or in reports like the one in the *Cannes 1949* brochure. But his most sustained article on the topic came in 1952, titled "Peut-on être policier?" It traces the history of the detective film since the war. Bazin identifies one early variation as the misogynistic thriller, but the general trend was to illustrate the moral "crime doesn't pay" signified by the fact that postwar heroes are detectives rather than gangsters. He speculates about the particularly "democratic" character of this moralizing since the detective film did not exist in the Soviet Union. This was not, of course, because the Soviet Union had no police or no need to justify its existence but because it had "all the reasons, political and aesthetic, for remaining hidden."

We Have Always Been Postmodern

Bazin's demystification of the detective *noir* reminds us once again that he was deeply

aware of writing at a time of general crisis in film genres. That "grand killer of myths," World

War II, had pushed cinema into confronting its ontological relationship to reality. But as we will

see in the next chapter, he feared the possible consequence for political life of mythologies

deriving their power from cinematic realism. In the final chapter, we will see that for him Italian

neorealism was a body of work that at once confronted cinema's ontology and gave an imaginary

form to the experience of postwar Italy. From his own tastes, he feared the diminished

possibilities of new genres that could speak to the historical condition in the elementary ways in

which prewar genres did. But he held out hope for one genre that seemed to have trouble getting

off the ground: science fiction. His most extensive statement of this hope and frustration was a

review of *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks, 1951).[64] In its

simplicity and naïve claims on our affect it promised just the kind of genre that the Western

represented for him, and it also had a tradition of horror behind it. But its specificity in relation to

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In America, however, the increasing role of the police in a democratic society had to come at some expense to democracy itself, and this is what a film such as *Racket* (John Cromwell, 1951) tried to justify. Other American films had questioned democratic institutions before, the most famous example being *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, 1954). But the difference in *Racket* is that the specter of corruption in the legislature, the press, and other democratic institutions is tackled by a commissioner of police, and therefore to the benefit a non-democratic institution. The next step would be to make identification with the law more credible. For this, the police needed to appear a little more ambiguous than it did in most films to cover over the transparent morality of the genre. *Detective Story* (William Wyler, 1951) tries to rectify this by showing a policeman who grimly fights crimes when the lives of his own father and wife seem to be tainted. Embittered, he dies at the end at the hands of a criminal which convinces one of the characters to reform his life. Though seemingly tragic like *Scarface*, the film, Bazin argues, is only a convenient tale of sacrifice for the institution.

Jean-Charles Tachella recalls that Bazin could accept murder in *Le Jour Se Lève* but not in an American noir film, and concludes from this that he resisted these films because "they were too far from being documents and documentaries." He also says that "out of a sense of moral honesty, [Bazin] was careful not to thwart other people's pleasure." However, he sometimes neglected to reserve this modesty for his readers. André Bazin, "Peut-on être policier?," in Obs no. 111 (26 June 1952); for a capsule review that contains a similar critique, though much more brief, see André Bazin, "*Je Dois Tuer* (*Suddenly*)," in RCT no. 265 (13 February 1955); Jean-Charles Tachella, "Appendix: André Bazin from 1945 to 1950," in Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* exp. ed., 247-248.

[64] André Bazin, "*La chose d'un autre monde*," in Obs no. 90 (31 January 1952).

a historical moment "of objectively frightening scientific evolution" made it well-placed to speak to an important aspect of contemporary and future existence.

The film tells the story of an American scientific station in the North Pole where the crew find a crashed flying saucer. They also find a body frozen in an ice block which is brought to the station. While awaiting orders, an accident causes the ice block to thaw and for the body to be revealed. Until this point, Bazin argues, the film's realism is quite conscientious, laying a solid foundation for confronting the thrills and horrors of an as-yet-unknown reality. And yet the moment this reality is revealed, disappointment follows. The creature looks human and, though not human, needs human blood to survive, returning us to the myths of Frankenstein and vampires. Bazin finds that this might be too reassuring for the audiences who are withdrawn from the technological specificity of the new mythology to the shapes of fear from an earlier period in modernity. He wondered if the "authors themselves feared the logic of their script which would have taken them beyond well-tested myths: a fear of a fear without a [human] face." The challenge for the genre and of the history to which it belonged, he seems to be suggesting, would be to test what it means to imagine a world more than or other than human. Had he lived longer, he would certainly have read science fiction films that came to prominence after the 1950s— both those that met the challenge and others that did not—with great interest.

The search for new genres, for Bazin, did not just mean those that were sui-generis. Science fiction already started from the horror genre. We have also seen Bazin argue in chapter 2 against an absolute idea of originality. Originality for him consisted as much in original recasting of old mythologies and is first underwritten by a deep historical necessity. We saw a quick reference earlier to the Western's ability to survive "counterfeiting, pastiche, and parody." These terms did not only signal dangers that existing genres would need to overcome. Andrew's

169

anthology of Bazin's writings on television serves as a very valuable reminder of the latter's engagement with the forms and consequences, including for cinema, of the new media of his time. Across several articles, we see Bazin dissecting the possibilities of showing old films on television, making films for television, using filmed material in plays recorded for television, and also anthology programs for the cinema.[65] He finds productive possibilities for all of these practices, and even summarizes in some detail industrial trends in both America and France. Of these possibilities, the one that I am interested in here is his discussion of the use of film clips. He is all in favor of anthologies of film clips just as he defended literary digests, not only for their more basic pedagogical purpose of making audiences familiar with films they are unlikely to otherwise know about, but also for the possibilities of looking at familiar material in unusual light by juxtaposing and comparing parts of films, something of which "in ciné-clubs we have always dreamed."[66]

The repetition and fragmentation of films on television takes on increased importance in the larger scheme of things. Bazin mentions at one point that already in 1956 the stocks of old films that could be shown on television in their entirety were being exhausted. So repetition and fragmentation seemed to be a major prospect for revisiting film history on television. In these remarks, he clearly recognized that film history was on the verge of a "postmodern condition." Bazin welcomed the creative possibilities that could follow from this. But he also asked that they be handled with conscientiousness so that film titles are acknowledged correctly and that sequences be either representative of the originals or cast them in a new and interesting light.

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[65] See "Television and the Revival of Cinema," "Television and Cinema," "Some Films Are Better on the Small Screen Than the Large," "Should Television Be Allowed to Chop Films Into Pieces," all in André Bazin, ABNM.

[66] Bazin, "Should Television Be Allowed to Chop Films to Pieces?," 164.

What this entailed in practice is captured by a short piece, "Pastiches ou grossières parodies?" in which he reviews a disappointing attempt by a program to create a pastiche of literary and film works (Italian neo-realist ones at that).[67] While disappointed that the efforts weren't even proper parodies, he nonetheless affirmed the critical possibilities of pastiche; possibilities that involved "an intimate knowledge and an imitation of models at once free and precise"[xxiv] which "combined and inverted roles [and] situations"[xxv] of the originals. But these ideas and practices were not new in themselves. To recall what he wrote in "Adaptation" in 1948, "To the defensive intellectual and unconsciously aristocratic motto, 'No culture without mental effort,' the civilization in the making now responds with, 'Let's grab what we can.' So far as progress exists, this is it."[68][xxvi] New possibilities here are no more than whatever we can grab under the pressures of history.

Rohmer, in an important interview from the late '80s, said, "Our attitude in relation to those in our generation who called themselves 'modern' was an attitude that we now call 'post-modern'—already a hackneyed word."[69] While I would argue that Rohmer was justified in using the term "post-modern" to describe himself and other "Young Turks" in the '50s, I hope that the foregoing discussion offers a convincing argument on behalf of Bazin. However, postmodernism is not a monolithic construct—there are playful, cynical, grim, sober and other postmodernisms; adjectives that I won't distribute too carelessly here among Jean Baudrillard, Salman Rushdie, Jean-François Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, and others. Bazin's postmodernism was playful but

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[67] André Bazin, "Pastiches ou Grossières Parodies?," in RCT no. 149 (23 November 1952).

[68] André Bazin, "Adaptation", 36 [BW, 45].

[69] Serge Toubiana, "Solitude et Liberté d'un Cineaste: Éric Rohmer, Entretien avec Serge Toubiana", in *Le Débat*, No. 50 (March 1988), 273.

"responsible." Responsible because he called for some care in the mixing and grabbing of culture, especially on the part of the producers. A degree of care in these matters would prevent cynicism, a mood that even in its playful forms resists the lure of mythologies. Bazin was not disposed towards what we know as camp sensibilities. In writing about *Limelight*, he wrote that audiences now tended to "like nothing better than to be able to believe in a melodrama which announces itself as such (parodies prove this)."[70]xxvii Some wink at the audience from the work reassures it of its intelligence. For Bazin, this would be the equivalent of taking out an affective insurance policy. To this we can add Warshow's words from his own essay on *Limelight*, to characterize Bazin's position that in aesthetic experience we need to "intelligently prepare for failure, but not for the particular kind of failure that comes to us, and never dreaming that our essential worth can be called into doubt."[71] The intelligence with which we mix up our films must actually leave us available for an affective commitment and its unexpected openings on to history and its sometimes heavy consequences.[72] What I am calling Bazin's responsibly

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[70] André Bazin, "Grandeur de 'Limelight'," in QQCIII, 121 [WCII 130].

[71] Warshow, "A Feeling of Sad Dignity," 206.

[72] It is this suspicion of camp attitudes that must be understood as distinguishing Bazin from the "Young Turks" and other cinéphiles who offered their tastes and loves as sufficient justifications for their judgments. The historical specificity of the excesses of the "*politique des auteurs*" may not belong to the Romantic notion of the author but in the conversion of a necessary criterion for the spectator-critic's aesthetic judgment—taste—into a sufficient one. This did not stop Rivette, Rohmer and others from having definite ideas about the medium, about the significance of the author, and the centrality of mise-en-scène to cinema—all ideas they consciously or not received from Bazin and his generation. But their overwhelming focus on these broad ideas was a sign of their unwillingness to speak with any great specificity of the films they loved. To speak thus would have been to expose their judgments to the unpredictability of critical conversations. Thus, Bazin could not but be struck by the beginning of Jacques Rivette's essay, "The Genius of Howard Hawks" which he quotes in "On the *Politique des Auteurs*," evidently still reeling under its shock: "The evidence on the screen is the proof of Hawks's genius: you only have to watch *Monkey Business* to know that it is a brilliant film. Some people refuse to admit this, however; they refuse to be satisfied by proof. There can't be any other reason why they don't recognize it." Everything else that follows in the essay remains under this sign of what can only be called "critical terror." This terror was not a sign of the vulnerability of the *auteur* figures such as Hawks to the harsh light of argument but an egotistical defensiveness of the critic for whom taste has turned into an alibi, and notions such as the *auteur* and mise-en-scène the insurance he needs when expressing his love for specific films. As Bazin wrote to Aristarco, one does not convince by arguments; he might have added that one only terrorizes without them. Jacques Rivette, "The Genius of Howard Hawks" and André

172

welcoming attitude towards the condition of modernity takes nothing away from his lesson that, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, "we have always been postmodern."[73]

Conclusion

This chapter concludes one cycle of my argument where I have attempted to provide an account of Bazin's understanding of the political character of the aesthetic not in relation to realism but to the idea of aesthetic mythology that film genres embody. Mythology is here understood as an image that is both formed out of the material of history and which also imposes its forms on the social imaginary. We have seen that such an image is inherently ideological, but understood not as some abstract bourgeois ideology, but as any framework that gives form to historical experience that may otherwise remain too amorphous, or paradoxically too constricting, for subjectivity to find a hold. In this sense, an aesthetic ideology is both a political promise and a political threat since it could return the world to the spectator in a renewed form where subjectivity can indeed find its place or it can return it to us as another form in which subjectivity is *held* in place. For Bazin, we need to acknowledge that the consumer of modern art, an art no longer underwritten by metaphysical guarantees that it must conform, actually desires both to be held by a picture of a better world that she inhabits, a "second nature," and also a picture that frees up her subjectivity. For subjectivity to be held in place is for it to relinquish its political character and be absorbed into a non-self; but for subjectivity to find another frame for its world is also to potentially and provisionally reclaim its political character from an alienated world. Therefore, drawing upon Arendt's reading of a fable by Kafka, I have

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Bazin, "On the *Politique des Auteurs*," both in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 126, 257.

[73] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

argued that the cinema for Bazin inhabits a "small non-time-space in the very heart of time" where these contradictory desires and possibilities can play out. The work of critique, in reading any film that taps into these contradictions, is to affirm both these desires and both these possibilities. Bazin's example tells us that this is only possible when the critic's own subjectivity seems to be at stake in the process, for only then can criticism approach the character of an aesthetic politics.

A critique that identifies the bad faith character of the aesthetic to discredit it may well be right that films or any other works of art that lay claim to our affection get us caught up in impossible contradictions. It takes its distance and maps the cultural geology to (reprising Bazin's terminology) identify clearly the porous and concrete parts that remain (at least at first) indistinguishable to those who actually experience them intimately. I called this approach "cultural politics" to distinguish it from the aesthetic politics represented by Bazin's criticism. And an exemplar of this approach is the one we most closely associate with the idea of mythologies in relation to popular culture: Roland Barthes. Even though Barthes is understood to have renounced the demystificatory mode of criticism of *Mythologies* and its critical superciliousness, its influence on ideology critique has been tremendous. I return to it in concluding this part of my argument on behalf of a political Bazin because I am not sure that the aristocratic disdain for politics of a critic in whose name Bazin was sometimes criticized has been sufficiently registered.

Barthesian demystification, behind the semiological jargon, was itself little more than a complacent mythology and its markers are glaringly obvious. A critique of something called modern alienation in the name of an as-yet-unknown non-alienated reality; a critique of the pretensions to nature of ideology in the name of some unnamed unalienated condition that might

174

announce its contradictions openly without destroying itself at the same time.[74] We have already

seen that in 1958, in reviewing *Le Beau Serge*, Barthes had no trouble distributing truth and

talent between the Left and the Right, respectively. This is because he had already concluded that

"*Left-wing myth is inessential*" because "the objects it takes hold of are rare," "the speech of the

oppressed… is quasi-unable to lie"; "[s]tatistically, myth is on the right."[75] Such complacency

combined with a paternalism in relation to the working classes and even the colonized were signs

of a critical superciliousness which suggests that the critic might have ultimately been uneasy in

the company of those on behalf of whom he speaks.[76]

> [T]he mythologist cuts himself off from all myth-consumers, and this is no small
> matter. If this is applied to a particular section of the collectivity, well and good. But
> when a myth reaches the entire community, it is from the latter that the mythologist
> must become estranged if he wants to liberate the myth…. One must go even further:
> in a sense, the mythologist is excluded from this history in the name of which he
> professes to act. The havoc which he wreaks in the language of the community is
> absolute for him, it fills his assignment to the brim: he must live this assignment
> without any hope of going back or any assumption of payment.[77]

These lines tell us that the price of critiquing mythologies is an exile from the community.

Barthes was correct in announcing the death of the author who was above all the Romantic

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[74] "The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness." And yet it was an abstract and reactionary "bourgeoisie" that was supposed to be nostalgic for an unalienated wholeness. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. & trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1991), 159.

[75] Ibid., 147-148, 150.

[76] "Today it is the colonized peoples who assume to the full the ethical and political condition described by Marx as being that of the proletariat." Could it be that some among the colonized may have wanted to be excused from the punctual takeover without betraying history? This idealization of a class or a people or an identity deprives their experience of complexity to make them fit a pre-appointed trajectory of history. Ibid., 163ff25.

[77] Also, the mythologist finds reality itself keeps disappearing under the force of critique, and the critic does confess to feeling weary, so he uses "trickery: finding it painful constantly to work on the evaporation of reality, I have started to make it excessively dense, and to discover in it a surprising compactness which I savoured with delight…." Ibid., 157-158, 164ff30. Barthes's use of the word "mythologist" clearly stands for the critic of mythology.

author estranged from the community whose subjective truth he feels compelled to express. With Barthes, the critic now steps into this tragic-heroic role. And just as the Romantic author may not have been pleased to find the chimney sweep and the cab driver expressing the truth of community just as well without his poetry, the critic wasn't cheered by the sight of every other student and newspaper columnist counterfeiting his currency.

The Barthesian renouncement of demystification did not come only in search of a more subtle method or because "he took too much pleasure in the popular" as Philip Watts has argued.[78] Looking back in 1971 on the *Mythologies* project and looking around him, he found "not one student who does not denounce the bourgeois or the petit-bourgeois character of a form (of life, of thought, of consumption)." The method itself had turned "mythic" and a "catechism." So the critic now layers the jargon to reclaim his exile: "it is the sign itself that must be shaken up," the method must move from the "lexical" to the "syntactical" level, from "mythoclastie" to "semioclastie," and the object of critique is no longer the French bourgeoisie but, "historically and geographically, the whole Occidental civilization (Greco-Judeo-Islamo-Christian), unified under the same theology (the Essence, monotheism)… from Plato to *France-Dimanche*."[79] In short, critique as a desire for the end of all mythology as a desire for an end to politics, with politics understood as the necessary adherence of being to a necessarily indistinct picture of the world that both emerges from and in turn defines history.

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[78] Philip Watts, *Roland Barthes's Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 20. The popular that Barthes seems to have taken real pleasure in was culture that was popular in a class-specific sense, such as wrestling, and not the popular character of cinema that seeks to appeal across identities. He must have found cinema's popularity too impure, appealing as it did across classes. See "The World of Wrestling," in Barthes, *Mythologies*, 15-25. This was the first of the mythologies he published (in 1952), and the only one to appear in *Esprit* where Bazin may even have read it.

[79] Roland Barthes, "Changer l'objet lui-même," in *Esprit* vol. 4 no. 402 (April 1971), 613-616.

Part II: The Mythology of Realism

Chapter 5

Reconstructing Ontology

Bazin's account of aesthetic politics as seen in part one does not need an ontology of cinematic realism. But within this overarching framework, realism was indeed a special, historical problem which the remainder of the dissertation will track. The task of part two of the dissertation is to argue that Bazin did not posit an equivalence between cinema's ontology and its aesthetic character. Moreover, this and the following two chapters demonstrate that he actually worried deeply about how some kinds of realist cinema exploit the impression of such an equivalence to close off the political possibilities of spectatorship. This chapter reconstructs Bazin's argument about cinematic ontology as an argument about the political character of realism in modern aesthetics.

I start with a history of the reception of "Ontology" and identify some key problems with existing accounts. I make a case for reading "Ontology" in dialogue with Bazin's other writings, not to look for a correspondence or lack thereof from the former to the latter, but to flesh out the elliptical argument of the essay. I then argue for a complex account of secularization as the key to the essay's distinction between realism and aesthetic expression. We will see Arendt's notion of a "non-space-time at the heart of time" being given a literal turn in Bazin's narrative of the socio-political character of the aesthetic as he analyzes what happens to space and time on film. The concluding parts will show that the argument of "Ontology" leads Bazin to theorize the voyeuristic satisfactions and dissatisfactions inherent in cinematic spectatorship.

The Reception of "Ontology"

Steven Rifkin, in his dissertation-length study of "Ontology," has documented the history of the essay's reception exhaustively and reveals the paucity of close analysis of its argument when measured against the amount of polemics it has occasioned.[1] Nevertheless, some high points in the history of substantive theoretical attention to the essay may be divided roughly into readings that use the framework of an indexical relationship between the object and its photographic image and those that bring out the idea in Bazin's essay that the photograph is the presence itself of the object.[2] Peter Wollen's inaugural move of reframing "Ontology" through Charles Sanders Pierce's concept of the index emphasized the photographic image's undeniable reference to its object in the past whose trace it contains.[3] "But," according to Wollen, "whereas Pierce made his observation [about indexical bonds] in order to found a logic, Bazin wished to found an aesthetic."[4] He then concludes that this led Bazin to posit faith in the cinema as an instrument of revelation of interiority and spiritual reality.[5] The context in which Wollen was writing—that of emergent ideology critique—this could only be construed as false consciousness.

Philip Rosen took up the idea of the index to emphasize the significance of the photograph's referential character, and therefore its historicity, for Bazin's argument rather than

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[1] Steven J. Rifkin, "André Bazin's 'Ontology of the Photographic Image': Representation, Desire, Presence" (PhD Diss., Carleton University, 2011), 26-118.

[2] Rifkin himself does not include the arguments for presence in his account of the essay's reception. His own argument, as I will point out, seeks to downplay the notion of indexical presence and ultimately argues for a spiritual presence.

[3] Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, new and enlarged edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 126-136.

[4] Ibid., 126.

[5] Ibid., 134.

its ability to reveal reality.[6] He brought out Bazin's argument that a photograph contains a trace of the world because the world was present to the camera at the moment of capture. Moreover, since this capture occurs through an automatism and not through subjective representation, it guarantees referentiality to the past. But this referentiality does not guarantee the fullness of detail or accuracy that would allow us to reduce it to the status of empirical evidence. Rather, it activates spectatorial participation in reclaiming the world of the image. More recently, as against Wollen's and Rosen's differing accounts of indexicality in Bazin's argument, Tom Gunning and Daniel Morgan have sought to dissociate the essay from the framework of the index. Instead, they emphasize Bazin's point that the image is not just an indexical trace of an object in the past but that it is the object itself; a point whose uncanniness exceeds the idea of indexicality.[7]

Rifkin provides by far the most extensive treatment of the essay, and he argues that there are in fact multiple modalities at work in it that scholars have generally reduced to one or the other.[8] The three modalities he identifies are representation, desire, and presence. Each of these modalities is tied to three different human needs. Representation, through an image that resembles the world, satisfies the need for knowledge of the world. The second modality relates to the capacity of the image to induce a consciousness of time that releases a primordial desire to defeat its passing. Presence relates to the revelation of a spiritual reality in the material world.

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[6] Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-41.

[7] Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006)," 458ff43; Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 23-40.

[8] Rifkin, "André Bazin's 'Ontology of the Photographic Image'."

Rifkin argues that for Bazin a photograph, or photographic cinema, could respond to any one of these three needs.

A final and important reading, by Adam Lowenstein and Jean-François Chevrier, pays attention to Bazin's invocation of surrealism. Lowenstein argues that for Bazin photographic aesthetic, which extends to the cinema, abolishes the distinction between the real and the imaginary and the subjective and the objective. Chevrier, on the other hand, traces the genealogy of this idea to the nineteenth century French art historian Hippolyte Taine, and shows how it was picked up variously by Sartre, the Surrealists, and by Bazin himself.

Looking at the variety of metaphors Bazin uses to describe the medium, Morgan writes, "Each metaphor captures something important about what a photograph is, but each fails in some way."[9] I would say the same about these accounts of "Ontology." Each of them captures something important—historicity, presence, multiple modalities, and finally the blurring of modalities. But the greatest problem they have all had is in reconciling any of these accounts with the plurality of films that Bazin wrote about and admired. Morgan provides the most nuanced account of this plurality when he argues that Bazin in fact theorizes the autonomy of the cinematic image where multiple ways of relating to the world can be worked out. But this comes at the price of cutting it free from the argument of "Ontology." Indeed, one might then say that all media can be worked into such an autonomy. What then might have been the point Bazin offering any argument about the ontology of photography and cinema! While Rifkin offers the most nuanced conceptual distinctions at work in "Ontology," he has almost nothing to say about

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[9] Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 451.

style or even specific films, and ends up with the very problematic notion, as have many before him, that for Bazin the cinematic image reveals God in nature.[10]

One great problem most scholars seem to have in accounting for the plurality of Bazin's cinematic engagement is that the discovery of this plurality has invariably been against the belief that Bazin's essays on film style follow, however imperfectly, from his ontological arguments. We have often read the argument of "Ontology" in combination with the "Total cinema (1958)" as a teleological argument about cinema being the realization of a primeval desire to rescue the world from its temporal loss by reproducing it in its spatio-temporal exactitude. In a way, Bazin himself lay the ground for this in the preface to the first volume of *Qu'est ce que le cinéma?* by writing, "We will, as we should, start with the photographic image, the primitive element of the final synthesis, to arrive at, if not a theory of cinematographic language based on the hypothesis of its ontogenetic realism, then at least an analytical sketch that is not in contradiction with it."[11]ᵢ Thus, the volume that starts with "Ontology" and "Total cinema" ends with "Montage Prohibited," "The Evolution of Cinematographic Language," and "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of the Mise-en-scène," but it passes through several articles almost exclusively on documentaries, with two articles on Chaplin and one on Monsieur Hulot.

When Hugh Gray selected his articles from Bazin's first volume, we got only the first two and two of the last three, with an article on Chaplin and "Cinema and Exploration" placed *after* the articles from Bazin's second volume on "cinema and the other arts." Gray omitted the article on Wyler, but it represents Bazin's work in an important British Film Institute reader on

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[10] Rifkin, "André Bazin's 'Ontology of the Photographic Image'," 278-279. For his comments on style which conform to the general understanding of Bazin as a champion of realist styles, see 155ff53.

[11] André Bazin, "Avant-propos," in QQCI, 9.

cinematic realism.[12] *If* there is a real logic to Bazin's arrangement—and even so I would argue

that we shouldn't take it too strictly—then Bazin's exploration of questions of temporality in

Chaplin and of documentary films gets pushed out of the passage from ontology to language, a

passage whose neat line they would have productively interrupted. Without this disruption, we

get the impression that there is a *direct* line from his ontological account to his writings on film

style.

It isn't that there is no line from ontology to style but there are at least three qualification

to be made. Firstly, as I have argued in chapter two and as Bazin himself indicates in the preface

to the book, the arguments he formed in each article and especially those on style were attended

by specific historical debates.[13] Secondly, even in Bazin's arrangement for publication, the line

passes through accounts of documentary realism that do not follow from the standard reading of

"Ontology" as a vindication of photographic and cinematic reproduction of the world. All the

essays on documentary, as we will see in the chapters to follow, betray an unease about

cinematic realism even when offering sophisticated analyses of how some documentaries allay

that unease productively. Finally, something as narrow as style is a false destination in Bazin's

thinking. It is one of the many directions in which his considerations of cinematic realism open

on to and whose guiding paradigm remains the aesthetic mode of forming a relationship with the

world.

Because we tend to think that his championing of the long-take and depth-of-field follow

from his ontological account, we have been left in the strange situation of finding most of his

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[12] Christopher Williams, ed., *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1980).

[13] Bazin notes that he has given the date and venue of original publication to indicate that some aspects of his arguments are necessarily circumstantial. Bazin, "Avant-propos".

writing about specific films to be an exception to his first principles. It is not surprising, therefore, as I argued in the introduction, that Bazin's work has been divided into theoretical arguments on the one hand and practical ecumenism on the other. This dissertation has been arguing that Bazin's ontological account about cinema must be placed within the larger ontology of the aesthetic. This is one way in which "Ontology" can be displaced from a dubious reverse teleology in which it lies at the origin of Bazin's championing of realist styles. Cinematic ontology indeed has a privileged place in Bazin's work but, as we will see, for historical rather than stylistic or, well, ontological reasons. The need to displace "Ontology" from its seeming ties to Bazin's essays on style entails reading it alongside his other work in order to elaborate its elliptical narrative. Scholars might do this occasionally with parts of the essay's argument, but even then highly selectively. Such a dialogue across essays needs to be extended to the whole argument of the essay.

This brings me to a final problem in the reception of "Ontology." It has been almost exclusively read through an epistemic lens, as if it is making a purely logical argument about essences, whether of media or of human psychology. The essay actually offers a grand narrative about the arts with the emergence of realism in the Renaissance as the vantage point mediating the status of materiality and temporality from the Egyptian origins to the cinematic present. This grand narrative is elliptical and rhetorical but not teleological. From differing perspectives, the significance of the Renaissance to modern rationality has been registered. For example, Jean-Louis Comolli sees in it Bazin's complicity with "raging idealism," while Rosen, as we have seen, offers a more nuanced reading of this subjectivity.[14] But without asking what comes before

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[14] Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema Against Spectacle: Technique and Ideology Revisited*, trans. & ed. Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 176; Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 16-17. Rosen is careful to

scientific modernity, they have an impoverished account of what comes after. What comes before it is Egyptian religion and Medieval Christianity and what comes after is secular modernity. But secularization here means something other than the absence of transcendental structures of belief, and Rosen's quibbling over Gray's translation of "*croyance*" as "faith" instead of his preferred "belief" suggests that he would be resistant to acknowledging this even at his most nuanced. This more complicated understanding of secularization is key to understanding how Bazin stages the confrontation of photographic realism and modernity, and this is what the rest of the chapter will bring out through a reconstruction of "Ontology" in dialogue with Bazin's other writings.

Approaching Space-Time

"Ontology" addresses two distinct problems. The first problem is that of the material presence of the past in the present and the conditions that authorize such a presence; the second is the treatment of spatio-temporal reality by the aesthetic image. The essay starts with the discussion of Egyptian mummification in which "to artificially fix the carnal appearance of being is to snatch it from the flow of duration and to secure it to life."[15][ii] This securing of being through appearance confers upon it the "active modality"[iii] of a magical afterlife which interacts with the lives of the ones living in a more conventional sense; in Bazin's example, like the clay bear shot with arrows which augurs the real hunt.[16] This magical quality persists under different conditions into Christian medieval painting where the abstraction of the material world as we perceive it is itself meant to signal the presence of a spiritual reality. But, as Bazin reminds us,

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qualify that the perspectival realism of painting gives way to a photographic indexicality that is not dependent on perspectival accuracy.

[15] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 11 [WCI 9; WCB 3].

[16] Ibid.

materiality too remains solidly present—even if mainly in the margins of Catholic Church practice—in the form of relics that carry forward in time the presence of the Saints to whom they belonged. In all these examples—the mummy, the clay bear, medieval painting, the relic, the Turin Shroud, and the souvenir—the objects are spectral beings who *participate* in the world beyond the lifetime of their first existence.[17] Such a spectral presence is authorized by some transcendental structure of belief, whether the Egyptian or the Christian religion. But this sense of the material transfer of being also extends to non-religious contexts in the form of souvenirs that Bazin cites alongside relics as analogies for the photograph.[18]

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[17] Hans Belting has written extensively about the history of the icon and relics as "persons" and the problems it posed for the Catholic Church hierarchy. He has called for a renewed attention to this quality of presence in images in our own digital moment in order to break from the notion of aesthetic autonomy. While this call is undoubtedly timely and productive for understanding the specific power of images in the digital era where online identities are often embodied in images, I would argue that the two modes of autonomy and presence must be considered intersectional rather than successive since our engagement with images moves through different modes depending on their nature, the platforms on which they appear, long-standing conventions, and so on. Thus, Francesco Casetti has recently traced the survival of the conventional film experience amidst newer modes of film viewing made possible by digital technologies. Also, as this chapter and the next argue, the quality of magical presence that defined medieval Christian practices cannot be recreated in modern images without the possibility that it will simply be reduced to documentary evidence for the way the world was or is even in obviously fictional works. Seemingly responding to Bazin, whose "Ontology" he cites in one of his works without acknowledging the uncanny similarity of their premises if not arguments, Belting writes:

> This, too, photography can be: a copy or a kind of footprint of everything with which we ever have come into contact, the proof that such-and-such things and events must have existed when they were photographed. On the photographic plate, however, these things and events are torn away from the flow of life and "fixed" in an image that is like a left-over from past reality. But photography can only have this meaning if we are looking for a trace of reality. The loss of reference in today's photography has its origins in our selves. We prefer to dream of virtual or unseen worlds—and also of the sort of shadows that no longer need a body in order to come into being.

This argument for a preference for virtual worlds in images belongs recognizably to the 1990s and seems to have been superseded by an era in which a renewal of the image-as-document (with the proliferation of camera phones and the increasing importance of raw footage to news events) exists alongside a continuing fascination with the virtual. See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 54, 146-147; Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[18] Bazin, "Ontologie," 16ff [WCI 14ff; WCB 12ff5.]

It would be a mistake to think that souvenirs or even secular portraits are devoid of a sense of magical presence. In just one line, at the beginning of the second paragraph, Bazin passes from discussing the religious mediation of the active material presence of the past in the present to the lapse of this paradigm: "It is clear that the parallel evolution of art and civilization has detached the plastic arts from these magical functions."[19][iv] But in the very next line he qualifies this idea of lapse: "But this could only sublimate the irrepressible need to exorcise time for the sake of logical thought."[20][v] He writes that the function of the image was still to recall and to prolong in memory the existence of a past life. Memory as "re-*calling* in the present" has a dim relationship to the magical and religiously authorized presence of past materiality because it disrupts the conception of time as linear and irreversible. For example, recalling Bazin's work and wondering what he may have to say about the new media technologies of the day is to make him participate in ongoing dialogue. But our understanding of memory is mostly contained by the logical description "remembering the past;" that is, as a way of referring to some moment in the past when the person or thing existed.

Right after the line on the sublimation of the need to rescue the past in the present, Bazin makes an abrupt jump in his argument by writing, "Image making is itself freed from all anthropocentric utilitarianism. It is no longer about the survival of man but more generally of the creation of an ideal universe in the image of the real and conferred with an autonomous temporal destiny."[21][vi] We suddenly move from talking about the rescuing of being from temporal loss to the creation of an ideal universe that is no longer utilitarian and extends beyond the rescue of

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[19] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 12 [WCI 10; WCB 4].

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

human being to the being of the whole world. This line introduces the notion of aesthetic

autonomy of the image, and we need to understand why and how such a notion appears and what

it entails.

Following André Malraux, Bazin locates the genesis of the need to create an autonomous

universe "in the image of the real" in the Renaissance. Malraux is explicit about the weakening

of Christian faith as the background for the emergence of a sense of objective realism.[22] This

background of secularization of the image is key to Bazin's own narrative. For him, "the parallel

evolution of art and civilization" has caused "confusion between the aesthetic and the

psychological [realisms], between true realism, which is the need to express the at once concrete

and essential signification of the world, and the pseudo-realism of the *trompe-l'oeil* (or the

trompe-l'esprit) which is content with the illusion of forms."[23]vii Medieval art, as he says, had no

conflict between the real and spiritual because its spiritual symbolism was a guarantor of its

realism understood as the concrete expression of the signification of the world. The distinction

and conflict between symbolism and realism of appearance arrives with the Renaissance and

with the "decisive event" of the "the invention of the first scientific and, in some sense, already

mechanical system: perspective."[24]viii

Bazin explains the public's attachment to resemblance in a footnote by calling it an effect

of industrial modernity and its bourgeois spirit whose consequence is "the reduction of art to its

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[22] See André Malraux, *Esquisse d'une Psychologie du Cinéma*, ed. Jean-Claude Larrat (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2003 [1939]). 38.

[23] Ibid., 13 [WCI 12; WCB 6].

[24] Ibid., 12 [WCI 11, WCB 4-5].

psychological categories."[25][ix] By this he means the reduction of art to its correspondence with strictly human perceptual psychology shorn of the transcendental presence of art works. However, the psychological need for an illusory reproduction of the world not shaped by any greater significance, as Bazin notes, becomes no more than a desire for magical presence. This magical quality devoid of any potential to re-orient our world lacks any socio-political significance and is empty magic. The cinema that satisfies this purely psychological need is what Bazin calls the myth of total cinema. At best this is cinema as a scientific and not an aesthetic technology. Therefore this psychological need, when it goes beyond our appetite for vacuous illusion and magic, speaks to a modern desire for objectivity and empirical logic. If perspective was painting's original sin, then the original sin of the world whose significance art is meant to express was scientific reason which puts into crisis the transcendental structures of belief that used to underwrite the "essential signification of the world."

We cannot grasp Bazin's account of the antinomies at the heart of the photograph's and cinema's mechanical reproduction of the world without taking into account his narrative of secularization. I have discussed this to some extent in the introduction where I show that for Bazin modernity reveals the theological to be communitarian rather than divine in origin. There I also discussed the theological legacy that subsists in the Kantian and post-Kantian understanding of the aesthetic. I will here bring these two aspects—the sociological and the aesthetic—together by looking at other writings by Bazin where he discusses the persistence of quasi-theological but secular structures in history, and cinema as a key aesthetic site of this persistence.

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[25] Bazin, "Ontologie," in QQCI, 15ff [WCB 11-12ff4]. Bazin added this footnote to the revised version for QQCI.

The Mythology of Secularization

The concept of "mythology" in Bazin's work that I outlined in chapters two to four falls recognizably in a post-theological or rather quasi-theological conception of art which seeks to recover something of the hold on the social imaginary that religious frameworks used to have alongside something of the ritualistic dimension to the experience of art within those frameworks. Let us recall here the lines I quoted in the introduction where Bazin, in speaking of Kafka and De Sica, speaks of modernity's "passage from transcendence to a social reality that births its own deification."[26] To this we can add the definition of the "sacred" he gave in describing Charlot as "a man outside the sacred."[x]

> But it isn't only religious rites [that constitute the sacred]. Society keeps up a thousand proprieties which themselves are nothing but a sort of permanent liturgy which it performs for itself... Religious or not, the sacred is everywhere in social life, not only in the magistrate, policeman, and priest, but in the rituals of eating, professional relations, and on public transport. It is through this that society maintains its coherence as if through a magnetic field. Each minute we unconsciously align ourselves to its lines of force.[27][xi]

He explicitly places cinema in this understanding of the sacred at the end of his essay on Jean Gabin's screen persona.

> It is up to the sociologist and the moralist (singularly up to the Christian moralist and, why not, up to the theologian) to look into the profound signification of a mythology where, in the popularity of an actor like Gabin, tens of millions of our contemporaries find themselves. Perhaps a world without God again becomes a world of Gods and their fates.[28][xii]

As these lines make clear, secularization does not mean the absence of transcendental structures of belief but their persistence and even proliferation in modernity even and often without any

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[26] André Bazin, "De Sica, metteur en scène," in QQCIV, 85 (WCII, 73).

[27] André Bazin, "Introduction à une symbolique de Charlot," in QQCI, 105-106 [WCB 35].

[28] André Bazin, "Jean Gabin et son destin," in QQCIII, 82.

relationship to revealed religion. As Charles Taylor has argued recently, in modernity revealed religion becomes one option of belief among others. One could go to the Christian Church, one could become a Theosophist, a Communist, and so on, each claiming a transcendental horizon for meaning in the world.[29] These structures proliferate because scientific reason is predicated on an idea of progressive discovery which leaves any knowledge it generates in a necessarily provisional state. Even as it seems to promise perfection of knowledge and thus a world systemized and devoid of politics, its open-endedness leaves room for other totalizing imaginaries. Since all such imaginaries in turn are threatened by scientific reason's expanding realm, they need to adapt and ground themselves in a constantly shifting material reality.

At one point in the essay on Gabin, in relation to the working-class settings of Gabin's films, Bazin speaks about the "suburban Thebes" and the "Olympus of factories" and their "monsters of steel." This evocation of Greek archetypes and the signaling of their presence in a "world without [a Christian] God" should alert us to a feature of "Ontology." The argument of the latter essay is almost entirely under the sign of a pagan mythology, that of the Ancient Egyptian practice of mummification, yoked to a modern secular concern since the Renaissance that Bazin argues seeks to rescue the world in its own image; almost entirely except for the references in a footnote to Christian relics and icons and the Turin Shroud, all "relics" themselves of the pagan origins of Christianity.[30] Indeed, as Robert Markot argues, Egyptian mummification itself has been understood in analogy with Christian relics since Late Antiquity

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[29] For Taylor, our own time reveals the proliferation of formal and informal structures of belief on a heightened scale. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2-3.

[30] Indeed, following Marie José-Mondzain, Andrew points out how it was a photograph, seeming to reveal an image of Christ, that suddenly enhanced the Turin Shroud's status as a relic. However, the point I am making, following Hans Belting, is that this should read as the return of Christianity's repressed—its origins in the pagan society and practices of Ancient Rome—rather than exclusively the repressed of modernity. Andrew, *What Cinema Is!*, 137-138; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 36-41.

and the prism of relics informs how the display and reception of mummies is framed in the museum space.[31] This return to consciousness of the pagan with the erosion in modernity of the primacy of Christian theology is the hallmark of modern aesthetic philosophy, and its renewed desire to combine materiality and some sort of secular transcendence. For post-Kantian aesthetic, the art and philosophy of Ancient Greece, one of Christian civilization's pagan sources, become the ideal and the Absolute that it seeks to recover in its own forms, to its own measure, and cast in its own mythologies.

The truths of modern mythologies no longer appear readymade but are forged from the material of history in the process of expression.[32] They are, as Bazin writes in "The cinema and popular art," only indirectly formed by history. While they shape history as much as any of the institutional forms of belief, any single structure of belief is one option among others and much more precarious compared to the former authority of revealed religion.[33] Therefore, a modern mythology is the constant staging of a tension between the claims of reason and the claims of affect, between the chaos of history and its imaginary forms, with neither definitively canceling the other. It is in this tension that their political potential resides. As we have seen in part one, Bazin recognizes the functionality of myths in helping us come to terms with the contradictions

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[31] Robert Morkot, "Divine of Body: The Remains of Egyptian Kings—Preservation, Reverence, and Memory in a World Without Relics," in *Past and Present* no. 206, Supplement 5 (2010), 39-40.

[32] For Taylor too, a key feature of several modern structures of belief is the importance they give to "expressivism," understood as a mode by which the object of belief does not pre-exist as such the subject's act of expression. This is the particular Romantic, aesthetic character of several modern beliefs which for that reason also often remain under-elaborated or inarticulate. See chapter 13 in *A Secular Age*, "The Age of Authenticity," and for a more detailed discussion of the "aesthetic" origins of this mode, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), ch. 21.

[33] The notion of "one option among others" must not be taken to imply "choice of belief." It only means that several structures of belief make claims of us to which we respond with an uncertain mixture of affect and reason as the idea of "expressivism" mentioned in the previous footnote indicates.

of history and experience, and that they do so not so much by actually resolving those contradictions as by masking them, by forcing reality to resemble the mythic construct.

Modern political philosophy is heavily underwritten by such historically determinant mythologies: Hobbes's "Leviathan," Adam Smith's "invisible hand," the "clockmaker God" in Deist philosophy, and the "nation" are just some of them, and they all testify to an aspiration towards a regulative totality in modernity in the absence of final religious authority on the structures of state and society. But the aesthetic has been a privileged site for the production and consolidation of these mythologies, and Kantian philosophy marks a key moment in the designation of this privilege. The Third Critique's construction of the aesthetic as an experiential mode that provisionally reconciles the conflict between the demands of pure and practical reason famously lay the ground for the dominant strains of nineteenth-century aesthetics, particularly in its Romantic versions. Wagner gives us the ideal of the "total artwork" (*Gesamkunstwerk*) that captures the ritualistic and quasi-theological ambitions of art in the nineteenth century.[34] While the Wagnerian ideal may be a limit expression of this ambition, to various degrees this model describes most autonomous art that also seeks to give shape to historical experience.

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[34] David Roberts locates the genesis of the ambitions of the total work at the juncture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but more precisely with the French Revolution and the ensuing loss of the dual legitimacy of religion and the monarchy. Thus, Roberts argues, both politics and art in their modern forms no longer merely celebrate existing order but critique it in "[anticipating] a redemptive and utopian alternative. (Roberts, 3)" But, Roberts adds, "Politics and art in the modern sense not only presuppose the loss of religious legitimation; they both also laid claim to the inheritance of religion in their own right. (Ibid.)" Thus the total artwork lays claim to the same broad post-theological role that Bazin assigns it. However, as should be clear by now, Bazin shares nothing of Wagner's bleak assessment of modernity that the latter's aesthetics seeks to overcome, and his own analysis of aesthetic mythologies sees them as contingent and transitory formations that are far removed from utopias of the past or future. However, the idea of a work of art as an alternate totality that imposes itself on our imaginations and through that on to our worlds, even if this imposition is partial and always transitory, is very much operational in Bazin's understanding of the aesthetic. David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). On the total artwork, technology, and popular, see also Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

There is a difference, however, between the mythologies of political philosophy and those generated by works by art. As Bazin writes, "At the end of a traditional film, for a more or less long time we feel vaguely inhabited by the characters. The universe of the film is in us and we are in it; it is a state at once passive and passionate."[35][xiii] The broad structure of most aesthetic mythologies, including film genres and stars depends, as Bazin argues in his writings on the Western, on material taken from history which itself is too chaotic and complex to yield stable meaning without an aesthetic construction. It offers us forms of history that give the impression of capturing the essence of historical totality. But we confront these forms after self-consciously escaping history by entering the movie theater, by picking up a book, attending a concert and so on. This is why, as we saw at the end of chapter one, Bazin remarks that audiences look upon the screen as a window on to a world other than that of their historical moment. This is what he means when he speaks in "Ontology" about the "creation of an ideal universe… conferred with an autonomous temporal destiny."[36] Or, drawing upon Arendt's terms, we might call it a totality glimpsed through a gap in history.

The mythologies of political philosophy, on the other hand, inhabit history much more emphatically. Though no one may have seen the "invisible hand" or walked the borders of a nation, they seem to exist for many as greatly privileged empirical facts, backed up by economists, geographers, sociologists, and historians who work the data of history in and out of these mythic paradigms. The work of aesthetic mythologies is to keep a minimal distance between the empirical reality out of which they are formed and the works in which they are manifested so that they never become the kinds of alibis for historical experience that political

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[35] André Bazin, "La cybernétique d'André Cayatte," in QQCIII, 173.

[36] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 12 [WCI 10; WCB 4].

mythologies are. They inform historical experience from behind our backs but are never there when we turn around, so that they do not have an evidentiary purchase on reality. Keeping in mind Bazin's argument that the aesthetic is the site for the persistence of quasi-theological structures of belief, let us now see how the image in Bazin's historical account can claim aesthetic autonomy in order to generate its secular mythologies and what problems confront it in making this claim.

The Time-Space of the Aesthetic Image

To return to the conflict between symbolism and perspectival realism in painting, we can now see that this was an effect of competing claims of science and mythological expression over the horizon of meaning in the world. The image was now pulled between two different forms of knowledge. The demand for a realist image, on the one hand, was for an image that reproduced the world as it was or as it is. If it refers to the past as in the depiction of a historical event, it does so in order to tell how something was but without giving it an active presence as the aesthetic image is required to do. It serves the purposes of positivist historical knowledge. But to the extent that how something was may be seen as determining how something is, the positivist image also claims explanatory power over the present. Bazin doesn't explicitly speak of this image in "Ontology" but, as will soon become clear, he was highly suspicious of the affinity and alliance between scientific rationality and the photographic image.

The aesthetic image, in distinction from the historicist image, is disinherited from the old transcendental structure of belief provided by religion but still seeks to retain its role as the site for the imaginative expression of the world's meaning. Given science's much more sound epistemological claims on the world, if art needed to still claim some hold on experience, it needed, as several scholars have argued, to dissociate itself from the procedures of instrumental

and scientific reason.[37] But if scientific reason holds such strong explanatory claims on the world, art cannot do without adopting some of its procedures such as perspectival technique and realist detail in order to ground its expressive image. And when it does so, it gets caught in the confusion between imitation and expression. In trying to perfect its imitation it runs the risk of ending up as a vacuous trompe-l'oeil; vacuous because it satisfies only a "completely psychological need whose origin can be found in the magical way of thinking."[38][xiv] This remnant of magical thought is authorized by neither religion nor science, except by the latter in a superficial way at the level of technique. But since art cannot let go of this technique which brings it to share the same terrain as science—the spatio-temporal world of historical experience—it needs to acquire a transcendence that is characterized as "aesthetic autonomy." But since it is now deprived of the vertically transcendental realm, its transcendence could only be constructed laterally.

The idea of a lateral transcendence is based on the fact of the broad conformity of the image's space-time to the conditions of spatio-temporal perception. If the image claims an active presence in the same world as ours at the same as it claims to reproduce this world, it will either be exposed as illusion or be instrumentalized as a source of empirical information and thus cede to the primacy of logical reason. As Bazin writes, "the concept of universe itself is spatially

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[37] See in particular Paul Oskar Kristeller's history of how painting, architecture, and sculpture that had been classed as "crafts" until the Renaissance were gradually incorporated in modernity into the model of the "liberal arts" or "fine arts," synonyms for the aesthetic as it came to be understood through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kristeller writes, "[T]he separation between the arts and the sciences in the modern sense presupposes not only the actual progress of the sciences in the seventeenth century but also the reflection upon the reasons why some other human intellectual activities which we now call the Fine Arts did not or could not participate in the same kind of progress." Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of the Aesthetics Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 12, no. 4 (October 1951), 514, 526.

[38] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 13 [WCI 10; WCB 4].

exclusive. For a time, the film is the Universe, the World, or, if you will, Nature."[39][xv] Similarly, about theatrical space he writes, "The stage and the décor or the action that unfolds are an aesthetic microcosm forcibly inserted in the universe but essentially heterogeneous to the nature that surrounds it."[40][xvi] About painting, he writes that "the frame of the painting defines a centripetal space, from the exterior to the interior, heterogeneous to the depth that surrounds it,"[41][xvii] The question is how such a heterogeneity can come to be when the world in the painting contains the same material as the world and indeed still expresses something about this world and thus refers to it in the process.

Bazin got the opportunity to describe the process of modern aesthetic creation in an essay on Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Picasso Mystery* (1956) and in his other writings on films on painting.[42] We can take Bazin's arguments about how these documentaries treat paintings as arguments about how the aesthetic treats the world that it records. Clouzot's film shows Picasso painting on a transparent surface and claims to show the mind of the artist at work as we follow his hand tracing lines on the canvas. Bazin dismisses any notion that the film explains "how" Picasso paints in terms of cause (idea or technique) and effect (finished painting). Instead, he argues that the film shows the duration of the act of aesthetic creation that is a supplementary

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[39] André Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," in QQCII, 103 [WCI 108-109; WCB 197].

[40] Ibid., 100 [WCI 105; WCB 193].

[41] André Bazin, "L'espace dans la peinture et le cinéma," in *Arts* no. 210 (15 April 1949.

[42] André Bazin, "Un film bergsonien: *Le Mystère Picasso*," in QQCII, 133-142 [translated as André Bazin, "A Bergsonian Film: *The Picasso Mystery*," in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57-62]; for detailed discussion of Bazin's writings on films on painting, se Dudley Andrew, "Malraux, Bazin, and the Gesture of Picasso," in *Opening Bazin*, 153-166; Angela Dalle Vacche, "The Art Documentary in the Postwar Period," in *Aniki: Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image* vol. 1, no. 2 (2014), 292-313.

aspect of the finished painting. The idea of duration he has in mind is indicated by the title of the essay "A Bergsonian Film."

Duration for Bergson is a non-spatial conception of time in which moments do not exist separately and numerically as past, present, and future but interpenetrate in experience and acquire a qualitative unity that is distinct from the quantitative unity of numbers.[43] He describes the conception of matter and image that this understanding of duration yields as follows:

> Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of "images." And by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence halfway between the "thing" and "representation."[44]

The matter of the idealist is a representation of a reality that resides in a non-temporal realm, as in Platonic philosophy. The matter of the realist is the *object* of modern scientific reason. Therefore, even though Bazin is analyzing the work of time in his essay on Clouzot's film, it also has consequences for understanding what happens to matter, and therefore space, in aesthetic creation.

The key to the discovery of duration at work in Picasso's painting is when we see him paint something that then gets transformed into something else, a process that continues until Picasso stops working on the canvas definitively and calls it finished. The finished painting, we know, contains layers of other paintings. For example, the last painting he creates in the film, a version of *La Plage de la Garoupe* (1955), starts as beach scene during the day (Fig. 3, top

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[43] Bergson writes, "Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present from its past states… [I]n recalling [its past states], it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another." Henri Bergson, "The idea of duration," in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Continuum, 2002), 60.

[44] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

panel) and ends as a very different scene on the same beach at night (Fig. 3, bottom panel). Bazin

writes that with each of his paintings, Picasso could stop at any point and we could call it a

finished painting. But as he continues to paint, we see that what we might call the earlier

paintings get absorbed in the final painting.

Fig. 3: Stills from *The Picasso Mystery* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1956)

We cannot say about this process that Picasso needed to paint the day scene in order to

paint the night scene because the contours of figures and objects in the finished painting owe

nothing to the contours of figures and objects in the earlier one. In "both" paintings we see that

the house is on the top-left, the terrace café on the bottom-right, the beach in the background, and

the most prominent figure(s) at center-left. But they are all recognizably different in their very

outline, and the central figure is no longer the single girl but in her place a much larger dancing

couple. This is why, as Bazin writes, it would have made no sense to show the evolution of the

painting as one would use time-lapse to show a flower blooming.[45] That could not have captured

the intermediate states of the painting that are quite other than stages on the way to the final

destination. And yet, we who have seen the painting develop, can no longer think of the day

scene as a separate painting since we have seen it disappear into the final painting. It exists

nowhere else except as trace in the finished painting.[46]

Bazin describes this process as one in which each painting is "destined to devour itself or

rather to metamorphose until the moment when the painter wants to stop," and that each of them

"must be sacrificed to the next painting."[47]xviii This is a perfect illustration of the Hegelian idea

of sublation—the earlier painting is canceled and preserved in the final painting. This finished

painting, which is no more than Picasso's refusal to paint on that particular canvas further—and

thus an arbitrary destination—acquires "the autonomy of the pictorial microcosm crystallized

forever outside of time."[48]xix Bazin calls this spatial microcosm "evoked time" that is realized

only in the time that the viewer spends inhabiting and exploring it.[49] What we see occurring in

the act of Picasso painting is what occurs to the world in any aesthetic text. The durational flux

of the material world is taken up in a laterally transcendental space. Its character of flux is

preserved, whether evoked as in painting or as actual unfolding in a film, play, or a novel. But

the open character of this flux is canceled in order to arrive at an enclosed universe that the

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[45] Bazin, "Un film bergsonien," 140 [Bazin, "A Bergsonian Film," 60].

[46] Although it is claimed that the paintings exist nowhere but on the film, and so exist only as filmic time, *La Plage de la Garoupe* survives and may well be the same canvas as the one in the film. Another wide-canvas painting from the film, and claimed as such—that of a nude perched on her elbow—was on display at the Picasso Museum in Paris during the summer of 2015.

[47] Ibid., 136 [Bazin, "A Bergsonian Film," 58].

[48] Ibid., 134 [Bazin, "A Bergsonian Film," 58].

[49] Ibid.

spectator or reader inhabits for a while. This is a very different processing of material reality than the idea of referentiality Rosen privileges.

But another set of Bazin's writings on another set of films on art describes a different kind of sublation. In several articles on films on finished paintings, indeed canonical ones, he sketches a different process whereby the fixed spatiality of the image is temporalized.[50] His privileged example, Alain Resnais's *Van Gogh* (1948), takes multiple works by the painter to create his biography. Resnais tracks the camera on different parts, cuts from one to another, creates shot-reverse shots, and makes us enter and move about in the world of the painting without ever showing us the frame. The crystallized space of the painting becomes potentially infinite like the space of perception in the world.[51]

The film that results from the encounter between the paintings and the camera is neither the world of the original painting(s) nor a passive record automatically yielded by the camera. Instead, we get a symbiotic world that exists as an autonomous universe which absorbs both the painting and the spectator. This kind of sublation may be seen as the re-temporalization of a world that has congealed into the instrumentalized objectivity of reason. We have seen him argue

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[50] Bazin was writing these articles at a time when this genre flourished globally. When in 1952, the journal *Arts* called upon Bazin, "the water diviner [*radbdomancien*] of cinema," to write about this genre of films, the headline of the special section that included comments by filmmakers and art critics called attention to the global spread of its production. Also, as Andrew discusses in detail, this development acquired added significance with the publication of André Malraux's *La Musée Imaginaire* in 1947 which argued at length about the signification of photography in reorienting our sense of art history. Most of Bazin's articles appeared in 1949, with a reprise in important articles in 1951 and 1952. See André Bazin, "A propos de Van Gogh : l'espace dans la peinture et le cinéma," in *Arts* no. 210 (15 April 1949); André Bazin, "Le film d'art est-il un documentaire commes les autres," in *Radio, Cinéma, Télévision* no. 75 (24 June 1951); André Bazin, "La peinture vue par un trou de serrure," in *Arts* no. 340 (4 January 1952); P. F. Lacome, "Vingt nations filment febrilement leurs chefs-d'oeuvres," in in *Arts* no. 340 (4 January 1952). Andrew, "Malraux, Bazin, and the Gesture of Picasso."

[51] The argument that I sketch here is worked out in Bazin's key essays on the topic which include, André Bazin, "Le cinéma et la peinture," in *La Revue du Cinéma* no. 19-20 (Autumn 1949), 114-120; "Sur les films de peinture: réponse à Bourniquel," Esp vol. 11, no. 161 (November 1949), 817-819; Bazin prepared a short synthesis of some these articles for the second volume of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*. See André Bazin, "Peinture et cinéma," in QQCII, 128-132 [WCI 164-169].

in chapter one that the constraints of such instrumentalized modernity is the key catalyst for modern aesthetic imaginaries. Bazin is clear about this point when he writes that Van Gogh and Goya aren't much more than names to most people.[52] For them the paintings themselves exist as dead objects in the world that require a minimum amount of cultural initiation for their audiences to see that they invite us to enter another space and another world.[53] Film, by temporalizing the abstract space and bringing it closer to the conditions of normal perception, makes this world habitable for a large number of people.

At this point, we may ask, as did many critics of the genre, if paintings such as Van Gogh's or Picasso's that negate three-dimensional space remain themselves when subjected to this procedure. When replying to these critics, Bazin explicitly insists on a certain kind of betrayal inherent in his account.

> Having become soluble in the external world, [the painting] henceforth lends itself to all combinations of realism. It is delivered, bound hand and foot, to the discretion of the filmmaker who could make an apple by Cézanne into a dessert to be eaten with a knife.[54] xx

This very freedom of the filmmaker to do with the painting what she will opens it up to another creation than that of the painting.

> It is perhaps in the extent itself to which a film is fully a work and seems to betray the painting that, in the final instance, it serves the painting best.[55] xxi

The betrayal is necessary because the spatiality of painting must be dissolved. But in speaking of "serving the painting" Bazin invokes fidelity too. Fidelity is important to the extent that the

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[52] Bazin, "La peinture vue par un trou de serrure."

[53] Bazin, "Sur les films de peinture," 819.

[54] Ibid, 818.

[55] Bazin, "La peinture vue par un trou de serrure."

reality of the painting is still a matter of primary importance to the spectator. This paradox cannot be mediated through medium-specificity but only by the overarching epistemological and experiential structure of the aesthetic.

In the lengthiest of his articles on the subject of films on painting, after having elaborated the ontological encounter between the frame of a painting and that of the camera (which he calls a mask), he cautions against making this metaphysics of the medium the final arbiter in understanding what any single film in the genre does: whether it betrays at the same time as it reveals "some of its secret virtualities"[56][xxii] of a painting; if it simply betrays it; or if it servilely reproduces the painting despite seeming to take liberties.[57] This can be only determined discursively since the ultimate point of this sublation for the filmmaker is a critical reconstruction of the world of the painting and for the spectator to confront this reconstruction affectively. Bazin emphasizes again and again that the point of confronting the painting displaced into another universe is an unpredictable combination of critical and emotional responses. It is a critical engagement with the spatio-temporal reality of the painting that is at once dependent upon our empirical knowledge of it as existing outside the film as well as on our affective belief in the primacy of its reality as we experience it in the film. The film succeeds only to the extent that it betrays the given character of the painting in order to affectively transform our experience of it in the empirical world.

Such a transformation, instead of seeming to offer us another painting, releases some "virtual" existence of the painting— for example, the lived reality of certain psychological states

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[56] Bazin, "La peinture vue par un trou de serrure."

[57] Bazin, "Le cinéma et la peinture," 119-120.

that Van Gogh's life furnishes—other than the actual one it had for us—as no more than an object in a room, for example. The dialectic that results here is not one of reality and illusion but one of virtualities (or possibilities) and actualities, in which the released virtuality becomes an actuality for us that absorbs and negates the prior actuality that in turn now exists as a virtuality. I make this last point—that the experience of a Van Gogh painting as no more than an indifferent objet in turn becomes a virtuality—in order to not fetishize the word "virtuality," or its association here with temporality, as always the revelation of some better reality. For example, if we take the Futurists' celebration of velocity as a vehicle for the destruction and remaking of the world to be an expressive precursor to the destruction of the World Wars, we might be tempted to hold over it artworks that celebrate the experience of objectivity. But there we might find Imagist poetry's fetishization of the isolated moment in space as the harbinger of European fascism and its desire for the ornamentalized state. The point is that all virtualities exist over a field of contradictions, and this is what we have seen at the level of narrative in part one with Bazin's analyses of the Tramp and the Western, for example. To be political is to affectively actualize a virtuality as a way of provisionally virtualizing actuality, even if eventually all virtualities may turn into reified actuality.

The duration of Picasso's paintings and the space of Van Gogh's are very far from the spatio-temporal reality of normal perception. But Bazin's account of how the cinema treats them describes the process of sublation of material and lived reality that all aesthetic texts are called upon to perform in order to create a "non-space-time at the heart of time" that we can now characterize as a lateral transcendence. In distinction from the vertical transcendence of religion but just like it, aesthetic transcendence gives an imaginary form—or rather multiple and unpredictable forms unlike the religious imaginary—to the spatio-temporal reality of the world.

Bazin's argument about painting in "Ontology" is that it is unsuited to the task of performing this sublation while conforming to the conditions of spatio-temporal perception, but also that any aesthetic sublation in modernity can only be socially and politically significant when it conforms to these conditions.

Bazin finds two problems with painting's adoption of perspectival realism in trying to fulfill the aesthetic mandate of modernity. The first—the one he mentions in one of his articles on films on art—is that the space-time of the canvas is something altogether different from the space of the world.

> Until the nineteenth century, the alibi of resemblance constituted the realist misunderstanding by which those uninitiated [in the conventions of painting] could enter into the world of the painting. And so the dramatic and moral anecdotes multiplied to capture the mind while neglecting the genetic secret of the canvas.[58] xxiii

The implication here is clear that once the space of the canvas welcomes the world with its spatial parameters, it is also forced to take on the time of dramatic events that unfold in that space. These elements are the very opposite of the "genetic" flatness and blankness of the canvas that, as the last paragraph of "Ontology" argues, is the space of colors and their forms.[59] Bazin here uses the classical distinction between outline as a property of objectivity and color as a secondary quality that is an experiential but not an inherent property of objects.[60] Thus, the world that painting starts with in aesthetic expression is a world of secondary and subjective qualities that exceed the objectivity and linearity of spatio-temporal progression organized dramatically.

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[58] Bazin, "Sur les films de peinture," 819.

[59] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 19 [WCI 16; WCB 10].

[60] On the role of the idea of color as secondary quality in the elaboration of subjective vision in modernity and modern art, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 74-75. Where Crary welcomes the abstractions of subjectivity as a way out of reified subjectivity, Bazin would construe this valorization of absolute subjectivity as a turn away from the political.

But under the pressures of logical reason it was forced to conform its visual character to the conditions of three-dimensional visual perception.

The second problem that Bazin identifies in "Ontology" is that perspectival painting might create an autonomous world "in the image of the real" but however exact this image it cannot claim to be the world itself. This is because, "However skillful the painter [in reproducing the world], his work was always indebted to an inevitable subjectivity."[61] Here again we need to see the historical specificity of this point. He does not say that painting never succeeded in performing the sublation of materiality, and this point will be important to understanding Bazin's argument about the historical trajectory of cinematic realism.

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, most painting attempted to satisfy, with some success, both the psychological and the aesthetic modes of relating to the world. Without a better procedure for satisfying the psychological need, its imperfections went unchallenged. Bazin underlines painting's success until this point by not only referring to the great painters who achieved this synthesis, but even more tellingly in a footnote he added in 1958. There, following Malraux, he points out that some of the earliest photographers who wanted to be artists tried to imitate the style of paintings, since paintings "in their eyes already imitated nature 'only better'." It took a while for photographers to understand that in order to be artists they "could copy only nature," with nature to be understood as the historical, material world more broadly.[62]

While photography exposes painting's essential unsuitability to the task of combining the psychological and aesthetic needs, the latter nonetheless recovers the freedom to pursue aesthetic

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[61] Ibid., 14 [WCI 12; WCB 6].

[62] Ibid. 15ff1 [WCB 11-12ff4].

expression on the ontogenetic grounds of its medium. Photography and film, as Bazin writes, redeemed painting from its original sin.[63] And yet, the world could not be so redeemed since the invention of photography only signified the increasing hold of scientific reason on the world in the aftermath of the first wave of industrialization in Europe. Bazin is clear about the heavy price painting pays for recovering an autonomy from the world of objects when this world is the only one that matters socially.

> It is in the nineteenth century that the crisis of realism really starts (of which Picasso today is the myth) and which goes on to put into question at once the formal conditions of existence *and the sociological basis* of the plastic arts. Liberated from the complex of resemblance, the modern painter abandons it to the public [*peuple*] which identifies it on the one hand with photography and on the other with the only kind of painting that aims at resemblance [*à la seule peinture qui s'y applique*].[64]xxiv

In losing referentiality, painting renounces its tension with the world by ceasing to satisfy the psychological need of the social unconscious for the reproduction of the world; its autonomy becomes absolute rather than relational. Such an aesthetic autonomy would be devoid of the political significance of the aesthetic in modernity. This is clear from the fact that the public, when it does turn to painting in the age of photography, looks for the world in *ersatz* realist painting.

It is not that *ersatz* realist painting necessarily expressed something more compelling for the social imaginary than avant-garde painting. But any compelling avant-garde claims on the imaginary can be released for the larger public only by the work of photographic and cinematic reproduction. This was Bazin's claim in a footnote to the original version of "Ontology," four years before he encountered the surge in films on painting and even before Malraux's

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[63] "Perspective was the original sin of western painting. Niépce and Lumière were the redeemers." Ibid., 14 [WCI 12; WCB 6].

[64] Ibid., 14-15 [WCI 13; WCB 7]. My emphasis.

theorization of photography's role in creating a global *musée imaginaire*. He called such a

process, "The imaginary seen through the real."[65]xxv Thus, the demand for resemblance is

primarily a sociological demand under the pressures of scientific modernity, and realism is

literally a public problem. Therefore, the primordial desire to rescue being from time is nothing

without its historical and therefore socio-political specificity. With this dual insight into Bazin's

historical arguments for the secularized persistence of transcendental structures of belief and the

spatio-temporal form of the aesthetic in modernity, we can now turn to his ontological argument

about photography.

Photographic Ontology: A False Friend

When photography claims to reproduce the world with greater conviction, it is not

because it offers us greater detail or more clarity, but simply due to its automatic origins and the

absence of the intervention of human subjectivity: "The solution was not in the result but in the

genesis."[66]xxvi As against painting which represents the world, the photograph in some ways

gives us the world itself. As mentioned earlier, Daniel Morgan and Tom Gunning have pointed

out Bazin's insistence on the ontological identity between the object photographed and a

photograph of the object. But the nature of this identity is much more complex than their

accounts suggest.

When the world is reproduced by the automatism of a technology in which, in principle,

there is no intervention of human subjectivity, then something uncanny occurs. The object in the

image does not only conform to the conditions of spatio-temporal perception, but in some way is

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[65] André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique," in *Les Problémes de la Peinture*, ed. Gaston Diehl (Paris: Éditions Confluences, 1945), 410.

[66] Bazin, "Ontologie," 14 [WCI 12; WCB 6].

rescued from them. Through this, paradoxically, the object in the form of the photograph is also

reintroduced into this same world but seemingly immune to the corrosiveness of space and time.

Bazin writes, "On the photograph, natural image of a world that we could not or knew not how to

see, nature at last does more than imitate art: it imitates the artist."[67]xxvii He is here arguing—

reversing Oscar Wilde's summation of nineteenth-century aesthetics in the epigram "Life

imitates art"— that nature creates its own double by imprinting itself ("like a fingerprint"[68]xxviii)

on film.[69] It is its own artist in the sense that it rescues its own identity from flux to give itself a

permanent form.[70] Through this, the photograph "actually *adds itself* to natural creation rather

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[67] Ibid., 18 [WCI 15; WCB 9].

[68] Ibid.

[69] Bazin himself, as I will argue here, was ambivalent about the transfer of identity that Gunning champions. Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 448; Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index?," 24-25.

[70] Here Bazin uncannily echoes an essay on photography predating his by nearly ninety years which he probably never read but which describes with great precision the same understanding of the photograph as a new kind of natural object. Elizabeth Eastlake's 1857 essay forms part of the foundational statements on photography's presence at the crossroads of art and anthropology, along with those by Charles Baudelaire and Oliver Wendell Homes among others'. Eastlake, like Bazin, argues that photography liberates the painter from the need to proceed from draughtsmanship and allows her to go straight to the creation of forms. But her lines on photographic creation are the most resonant.

> What are [photography's] studies of the various stages of insanity—pictures of life unsurpassable in pathetic truth—but facts as well as lessons of the deepest physiological interest? What are her representations of… Charles Kean's now destroyed scenery of the 'Winter's Tale,' and of Prince Albert's now slaughtered prize ox but *facts which are neither the province of art nor of description, but of that new form of communication between man and man—and neither letter, message, nor picture—which now happily fills up the space between them*? What indeed are nine-tenths of those facial maps called photographic portraits, but accurate landmarks and measurements for loving eyes and memories to deck with beauty and animate with expression, in perfect certainty, that the ground-plan is founded on fact?

Bazin's claim that photography is tied to a "pedagogy of the phenomenon" evokes the "lessons of the deepest psychological interest" that Eastlake talks about, while his claim that only the impassivity of the camera lens can make us love things that we would otherwise pass by in the usual course of existence evokes her comments on the animation of the photographic object by love that is reassured by photography's factual basis. But it is Eastlake's line on the new form of communication that is not orthographic, oral, or iconographic that brings up the specter of the object or body itself rather than its representation. Also, her examples of destroyed scenery and the slaughtered ox very precisely evoke the continued presence of the object or being itself after its death. But Bazin, as we will see, is a little ambivalent about this development. See Lady (Elizabeth) Eastlake, "Photography," in *Photographic Theory: An Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrew E. Hershberger (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 65. My emphasis.

than substituting it with another creation."[71]xxix A photograph *materially embodies* nature as it was at the moment of photographic capture, but this past state now persists in a world that is no longer what it used to be. As we have seen, Bazin also says that it is nature itself which performs this operation on to film. But this has no automatic aesthetic significance. A photograph is much like the Egyptian mummy in its ability to persist as the body from the past, but it has neither the Egyptian nor any other religion to authorize such a persistence.

Bazin finds nature the world in the photograph suspended in its own moment of doubling and not completely at home in the afterlife into which it thrown: "unlike art, the photograph does not create eternity, it embalms time and rescues it from its own corruption;"xxx it "conserves the object enfolded in its instant like the intact bodies of insects of a bygone era preserved in amber."[72]xxxi In saying that the photograph does not create eternity out of material reality, despite arguing that it confers upon it a second existence, Bazin points to its failure to create aesthetic autonomy. The word "eternity" refers here to the transcendence that aesthetic experience requires so that the work is part of our spatio-temporal present but spatially removed from our world.[73] The photographed object exists *in* the world.

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[71] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI 18 [WCI 15; WCB 9]. My emphasis.

[72] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 16 [WCI 14; WCB 8-9].

[73] Here we need to recall Baudelaire's famous "rational and historical theory of beauty" in "The Painter of Modern Life" which he describes as "extract[ing] from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory." The exemplary subject of this essay was the caricaturist Constantin Guys who distilled such "eternity" into the quickly drawn outlines of his sketches rather than in exhaustive detail which for Baudelaire, as for Bazin after him, is the province of deadening rationality embodied by photographs (though this is only one half of Bazin's understanding of photography). Guys's sketches captured the eternity of events from the Crimean War to the daily life of Paris. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" and "Salon of 1859," in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, 392, 402, 295-298.

We must be careful not to think that Bazin argued for a substantial difference between the suspended reality of a photograph and the temporal reality of film. Though he says that film goes beyond the photograph's static conservation, the fact of its mummified suspension in two temporalities does not change substantially. Cinema is not central to the discussion in "Ontology" which barely touches it since the essay appeared in a book on painting. However, in "On Realism," a 1944 article contemporaneous with the writing of "Ontology," he claims that unlike works in other arts that are renewed with each performance or reading over centuries, "[f]ilm… remains by its very nature anchored in the duration of its birth. What remains in the layer of film gelatin is only a fossilized time."[74],xxxii "The "mummy of change" in "Ontology" describes only a "fossilized time" which is "effectively re-presented, that is to say made present in time and in space."[75],xxxiii

The suspension of reality between two temporalities that photo-filmic images create has a disturbing effect on us; the presence of people and objects in photographs is a "troubling presence" because they have been snatched from their destinies in time: "These grey or sepia shadows, phantasmic, almost unreadable, are the troubling presence of lives arrested in their duration, liberated from their destinies, not by the prestige of art but by the virtue of an impassive mechanism."[76],xxxiv The idea that photography is troubling because of its uncertain temporal condition might remind us of Cavell's characterizing of the world on film as productive

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[74] André Bazin, "A propose de réalisme," COR, 91 [FCOR 71].

[75] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 15-16 [WCI 14; WCB 8].

[76] Ibid.

of an "ontological restlessness" at the fact of being present at a world that is already past.[77] But the quality of "fossilized time" that Bazin describes here is, unlike for Cavell, an aesthetically unproductive suspension that does not really impose itself on the present of the spectator while retaining its autonomy. The liberation of people and objects from their destinies is also a freezing of identities in time which deprives them of the "becoming" that defines existence. Here Bazin's attitude is much closer to Kracauer's 1927 essay, "Photography."

Kracauer describes photographs as archaeological documents of the past but which strike us with little of the factual value of other such documents. Here he describes children looking at a photograph of the grandmother they have never seen living.

> The grandmother dissolves into fashionably old-fashioned details before the very eyes of the grandchildren. They are amused by the traditional costume, which, following the disappearance of its bearer, *remains alone on the battlefield—an external decoration that has become autonomous…* They laugh, and at the same time they shudder. For through the ornamentation of the costume from which the grandmother has disappeared, *they think they glimpse a moment of time past, a time that passes without return.* Although time is not part of the photograph like the smile or the chignon, the photograph itself, so it seems to them, is a representation of time. *Were it the photograph alone that endowed these details with duration, they would not at all outlast mere time; rather, time would create images for itself out of them.*[78]

This is a description of spatialized time—a displaced and frozen spatiality—in which referentiality is suspended between the past of the grandmother and the present of the children. What makes the grandmother unsettling is her dress which was a part of her identity at the moment the photograph was taken and which, "alone on the battlefield," now fixes her identity forever in the photograph. Time has created an image of the grandmother on the photograph but

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[77] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 17.

[78] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. & ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 48-49. My emphasis.

without conferring on her identity any posthumous existence, or, in Bazin's words, any eternity. The last sentence in Kracauer's quote, by referencing the idea of duration in the conditional, evokes the cinema to deepen the unease that even were it to capture our duration it would only deprive us of our existence the better; a mere "mummy of change." Bazin himself describes this as the participation of the photographed object in the existence of the model—"the existence of the photographed object participates… in the existence of the model like a fingerprint"xxxv—but this must be understood as a fossilized and spectral existence.[79] Photography does seem to save people and things from time, but by bringing their temporal being in our midst it renders our own uncertain. In photographs, as in the painting of Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and Jean Epstein's film of it (1928), life is rescued by being drained into the photograph which by itself does not refer to the past body but is the body in which past life continues to exist spectrally.

Aesthetic temporality needs an autonomy that exceeds or is different from the suspended temporality of photographs or bare film footage. One of the key reasons this qualification has not been registered is a precipitate transition in Bazin's argument, almost an ellipsis, where he goes from speaking about suspended temporality to its possible aesthetic consequences. This transition occurs with the lines, "The categories of resemblance which are specific to the photographic image also determine its aesthetic in relation to painting. The aesthetic *virtualities* of the photograph reside in the revelation of the real."[80] He then goes on to speak about the photograph's ability to rid us of "habits, prejudices, and spiritual grime" when confronting the world and making it available to our love. But the phrase "aesthetic virtualities" makes clear that

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[79] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI 18 [WCI 15; WCB 9].

[80] Ibid. My emphasis.

213

he is not collapsing this aesthetic effect with photographic ontology but drawing an imaginary line that connects the two.

He clarifies this further with a footnote to the word "categories" where, drawing upon the philosopher Henri Gouhier's distinction between dramatic and aesthetic categories in the theater, Bazin argues that the power of resemblance in photography is a category that determines its aesthetics but the two are not identical. Gouhier's argument, as Bazin reports it, claims that the drama of a play is devoid of any aesthetic quality in itself until a theatrical enactment lends it one. In an analogous sense for Bazin, in photographs and film, "the perfection of imitation is not identical with beauty. It only constitutes the primary matter in which the artistic fact comes to be inscribed."[81]xxxvi The move from a temporally suspended resemblance to the aesthetic power of resemblance passes through multiple virtual paths, and the ontology of resemblance in photographic film can be realized to varying effects.

The Discontents of Cinematic Ontology

At one of its limit, the cinema can make us love things that we would not know how to in real life through the sheer force of the ontological faith in vision that it calls forth. But because of cinema's ability to automatically confirm spatio-temporal reality, it also calls upon a different and more logical response that does not create aesthetic autonomy but confidently places the reality in the image on the continuum of history which then becomes unavailable to a revival in experience. Because cinema's primary matter is the world itself, its ontology calls for the greatest vigilance regarding its abilities to hypostasize it. Let us look at the following lines from

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[81] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI 18ff [WCI 15ff; WCB 12ff6]

"Langage de Notre Temps," Bazin's introduction to *Regards Neufs Sur le Cinéma*, a book

published by the popular culture organization, *Peuple et Culture*.

> All that passes on the screen is effected by a coefficient of realism to which no other figurative technique can lay claim. We perceive it as a *decal transfer of the external world* which exists as an object reflected in glass. Film is at once representation and language but it is only as representation that it is above all and universally understood.[82]xxxvii
> …
>
> [Cinema is] a language which presents itself in the forms of the sensible world and which aims to merge with it... A formation in cinematic culture is not only necessary for… a richer pleasure in works of quality but also for the awareness of ideas that a film aims to introduce into our consciousness *under the fallacious alibi of reality*. I do not speak only of films that are explicitly propagandistic… but of almost all other films that in one way or another are also implicitly propagandistic. Not always systemic and calculated propaganda… but also the diffuse expression of a way of life, of a moral; a subtle confirmation of the values of a regime or a civilization. Whether he accepts or rejects these implicit ideologies, the educated man should at least do so consciously.[83]xxxviii

We see here that the ontological understanding of the film image as a decal transfer of reality

also entails a concern about the illusion of accuracy, a "fallacious alibi of reality," which

functions as a vehicle for subliminal propaganda. The Western and the slapstick too can make us

love the history of colonization and the "terrorism" of modern objects[84] through recognizable

generic conventions that are not entirely specific to the medium, but we give in to them despite

knowing them to be conventional so that their ideological force works its way through our

imaginaries into our lives. Films that rely much more heavily on the ontological force of the

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[82] André Bazin, "Le langage de notre temps," *Regards Neufs Sur le Cinéma* (Paris: Peuple et Culture, 1972 [1953]), 14. My emphasis.

[83] Ibid., 17. My emphasis.

[84] André Bazin, "Voice le burlesque: le genre qui fut majeur le premier se survit en se caricaturant," in RCT 82 (12 August 1951).

image as record of reality have the potential to erase the line of irreality through which we encounter these imaginaries.

Bazin worked out, in a sustained manner, the problem of cinema's ability to collapse real and imaginary space-time in the second part of "Theater and cinema," recalling terms from "Ontology," but this time expanding the consequences for cinematic spectatorship. About photographic identity, he says:

> The photograph, through the intermediary of the lens [*objectif*], captures a truly radiant imprint, a mould. As such, it carries away with it, more than an imprint, a sort of identity. (The card by that name is conceivable only in the era of photography).[85]xxxix

The mention of the genesis of the identity card tells us of the power the photograph has over our very identity. In a rationalized modernity where everything depends on empirical proof, we become unrecognizable without our photographs testifying that we are who we say we are. Bazin writes about how, after cinema, theaters began to advertise their stars as being "present in flesh and blood": "This is because, for common sense, the word 'presence' now lends itself to equivocation, and a pleonasm [in order to establish it] is not out of place in the time of the cinematograph."[86]xl

Bazin here speaks about the "metaphysical obscenity" of the cinematic image, a feature realized in it absolute state by films that show actual death because it repeats potentially indefinitely the most unrepeatable moment of a person's existence, and thus deprives it of the possession of its identity most completely.[87] Similarly, Bazin compares the different modalities

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[85] Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," in QQCII, 91 [WCI

[86] Ibid. [WCI 97; WCB 185].

[87] André Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma (suite)," in Esp vol. 7-8 no. 180/181 (July-August 1951), 233 [WCB 184-185]. Bazin discusses the part about cinematic recording of death in the original version of the essay which appeared in

of spectatorship in theater and cinema by comparing how the (male) spectator relates to showgirls on screen and those on stage.

> On the screen, their appearance satisfies unconscious sexual longings, and when the hero touches them, he satisfies the spectator's desire to the extent that the latter identifies with him. On the stage, the showgirls awaken the senses of the spectator just as they would do in reality, so that there is no identification with the hero. He becomes an object of jealousy and envy. In short, Tarzan is unimaginable without cinema. The cinema placates the spectator, while the theater excites him.[88][xli]

These lines indicate that the medium's obscenity is not tied to sexual presence but to a specific way of relating to it: identificatory voyeurism. For Bazin, this is not possible in the theater not only because the actors are present in the flesh but because of the footlights that clearly separate the space of the spectator from the space of the play. The spectator has to consciously abstract away this separation in order to inhabit the world of the play (but without being able to participate in its action). He calls the footlights a censor that the audience needs to overcome in order to derive its pleasures, just as in a painting one's pleasure is dependent on avoiding the frame that exposes the limits of its worldliness.[89] As against these markers of heterogeneity, cinema works by completely substituting itself for our world.

Esprit. He removed these lines from the version in QQCII because he already treats this topic in QQCI with the essay "Death every afternoon." Barnard translates the *Esprit* version for his edition of *What Is Cinema?*

[88] Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," 94. [WCI 99; WCB 187-188]. He develops the same point in relation to striptease in "Marginal notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*": "In reality, striptease is based on the polarization and excitation of spectators' desire, each virtually possessing the woman who pretends to offer herself. But if someone were to jump on the stage, he would be lynched because his desire would become competitive and oppositional [to that of other spectators]. Unless, of course, it turns in to an orgy and 'voyeurism' which concerns another mental mechanism." André Bazin, "En marge de *L'Érotisme du Cinéma*," in QQCIII 73 [WCI 173].

[89] Bazin takes into account the fact of plays in which actors break the fourth wall, especially by entering the space of the spectators. He emphasizes that these are exceptions that prove the rule by emphasizing how important the footlights are in theatrical experience: "The rules of the game are made to be violated. We expect certain actors to play around with them." He also notes the technique of "psycho-drama" adopted by psychoanalysis in which children in particular, whose sense of reality and play is not so clearly distinguished, use role play in order to overcome psychological blockage. This is an intermediary case between theater and cinema where "the actor is his own spectator." Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," 95 [WCI 100-101; WCB 188-189].

> Since cinema is in essence a dramaturgy of nature, there can be no cinema without
> the construction of an open space, substituting itself for the universe instead of
> including itself within it.[90][xlii]

A film, so long as it runs, needs to eliminate everything that could reveal its object character. And since its realism is a historically driven need, one cannot do without this elimination without at the same time refusing the social mandate that the demand for realism represents. But the bind is that this same mandate of the medium can easily deprive its spectator of his social responsibility.

The spectatorial activity involved in theater and in painting for Bazin is much more satisfying in its critical and affective combination than the activity of the cinematic spectator or the reader of the novel, the popular realist medium of the nineteenth century. After a play, we feel "something more bracing and, let's be honest, more noble—or one should perhaps say more moral—than the satisfaction that follows a film."[91][xliii] As against these satisfactions, he writes, the cinema and the novel give us a sense of "complacence, a yielding to solitude, a sort of betrayal of action through the refusal of social responsibility."[92][xliv] Therefore, after watching even the best films, there is an "inevitable drop in voltage, and some mysterious aesthetic short-circuit in the cinema [that] deprives us of a certain tension that decidedly belongs to the stage."[93][xlv] From Bazin's analysis, this aesthetic short-circuit can only be the result of the fact that we possess the world on the screen so completely that we feel deprived of it just as thoroughly once the film ends. As we will see in chapters that follow, one of the defense

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[90] Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," 104 [WCI 110, WCB 199].

[91] Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," 93. [WCI 98; WCB 186].

[92] Ibid., 95. [WCI 100; WCB 188].

[93] Ibid., 93. [WCI 98; WCB 186].

mechanisms cinema calls forth against this deprivation is an insistent belief that *in some way* the world on the screen is/was our own world, so that we are neither deprived of our world when we enter that of the screen nor lose the world on the screen once a film ends.

Conclusion

I have elaborated the narrative of "Ontology" by putting it in in dialogue with other writing by Bazin in order to argue for two things. The first is that his understanding of "mythology" as we have seen it emerge in the part of this dissertation is tied to a narrative of secularization that is the constitutive horizon for the argument in "Ontology." This horizon also determines the political condition of modernity and the participation of the aesthetic within it. The second point I have argued is that there is a definite anxiety about cinematic realism running through the essay. This anxiety is exacerbated by Bazin's consciousness of his own historical moment as one in which this realism was asked to deliver on its evidentiary capacities and to thus close the gap between image and world. The following two chapters will expand upon this historical aspect, expand upon Bazin's concerns, and ground them in specific examples of films and the debates within which he read them. The final chapter will look at how Bazin nonetheless insisted that cinema needed to pass through these concerns, and work at both meeting the demand for realism and creating the minimal abstraction needed for a politically significant aesthetic autonomy.

I will conclude with some remarks on the existing accounts of "Ontology." I will take up Rosen's and Morgan's accounts again in chapter seven where Bazin's readings of specific films will help me briefly respond to the fundamental merits and limitations of their accounts. But, overall, we have seen how the essay is almost incomprehensible without taking seriously its grand narrative. Without it, we end up with partial claims that are bound to be both striking and

contentious. It isn't that the account I have attributed to Bazin cannot be contested, but the easy

polemics that come from any ahistorical position on image-reality relation would become

difficult to sustain. Since these polemics have turned often on the question of Bazin's religious

investment and his politics (or supposed lack thereof), I will here quickly address them based on

my argument.

Most accounts of Bazin caricature his theoretical investment in Catholicism. Thus, even

sympathizers of Bazin such as Jacques Rancière and Jacques Aumont cannot help making

condescending remarks on this front. Rancière refers to "a religious agenda firmly in the

background" of his work.[94] According to Aumont, for Bazin "God haunts the world" and cinema

would reveal his presence, however obscurely.[95] In one of his last articles, published just after his

death, Bazin himself rhetorically marked, with amused weariness, the charges of mysticism that

he knew would continue to dog him. Catching himself using a religious metaphor, he adds

parenthetically, "Oh, well! I will yet end up classing myself among the spiritual critics!"[96]xlvi

When Rosen rescues him from these caricatures on the rational grounds of historical

thought, he is at pains to deny any concern with the transcendental. Bazin's account of

secularization, as I have brought it out here, takes seriously both the long history of religion that

frames the social horizon and the impossibility of any single transcendental structure claiming

universal or indefinite primacy in modernity. For him, nothing authorizes in the absolute a

structure of belief, but a broad and complex consensus may be reached over one through social

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[94] Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 107.

[95] Jacques Aumont, *Que Reste-il du Cinéma?* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2012), 108-109.

[96] André Bazin, "Réflexions sur la critique," in CFLNV, 209. He writes this in the middle of discussing the role of criticism, measuring its "uselessness" against its dialogical value in society.

negotiations over diverse aspects in which the historical unconscious plays as great a role as conscious structural limits. Therefore, even the most rational social structure needs to create its transcendental conditions.

On the question of politics, the only acknowledgement we have ever had of its place in Bazin's work pertains to his key role in promoting cinema in the factories as part of the postwar popular education movement. This hardly ever extends to his theoretical and critical work. Here too unwitting condescension seeps in. Lowenstein's exploration of Bazin's investment in surrealism is careful enough to tell us that "Breton's surreality incorporates a number of explicitly political dimensions that Bazin's photographic realism does not."[97] Without going into the politics of surrealism, I will only say that the collapsing of the subjective and the objective, and the real and the imaginary, can become mystical formulae without an account of their non-liberatory dark side. I will now turn to demonstrating how Bazin treats this dark side in great detail on the terrain on politics.

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[97] Lowenstein, "The Surrealism of the Photographic Image," 56.

Chapter 6

Total War, Total History, Total Cinema

The previous chapter uncovered the historical specificity of the nineteenth century demand for realism that for Bazin fed into the inventions of photography and cinema. But just as this demand worked its way slowly over centuries and did not establish itself immediately upon the adoption of perspectival technique in painting, so the social responsiveness to cinematic realism for Bazin was not given once and for all. I had briefly argued in chapter two that Bazin's interest in new stylistic explorations such as staging in depth must be understood as part of a larger discourse of the crisis of Hollywood genres and in relation to debates over the political importance of the subjects that films treat. We have seen Bazin argue that the "importance" of subjects relies less on their manifest content than in their imaginary structures that mythologize the present. This is the reason he gave for welcoming cinema's turn away in its very first years from its primary function of recording reality.

Bazin went on to argue that that the stylistic inventiveness of silent cinema that undercut this recording function was also justified by technological reasons *and* the socio-historical experience of photo-filmic technology. Firstly, the absence of sound made the realism of the image a point of departure rather than an integral capture of physical reality. Secondly, he argued that there was only a slow increase in the importance assigned to the filmic image considered as a brute record of an event. Therefore, its claims to being an irrefutable record of reality did not immediately become the basis for its epistemological status and affective charge. Bazin understood this increase in the realist status of the image not so much in linear but in potentially

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cyclical terms. While in "Total Cinema (1946)," he argued that the invention of cinema

coincided with the expanding appetite for historical realism in an expanding public sphere, a

footnote to the original version of "Ontology" points to the slow work of the adaptation of

sensibilities.

> It would be interesting to follow… between 1890 and 1910 the competition in illustrated journals between photographic reportage, still at its beginning, and drawings. The latter satisfied above all a baroque need for the dramatic (cf. the *Petit Journal Illustré*). The feel for the photographic document increased only gradually. Today, the most authentic peasant prefers the most insignificant photograph to the most pathos-inducing illustration.[1]i

When he revised the essay at the end of the '50s, he modified this footnote to add, "We note

moreover that there is, beyond a level of saturation, a return to the dramatic drawing as seen in

Radar [a sensational, working-class news magazine]."[2]ii So, on the one hand, he saw that the

cinema would have to continue to wrestle with what he thought would be the increasing realism

brought on by new technologies, but also the possibility that technological realities may have to

contend with a variable socio-historical feel for realism. His own era—1945 to 1959—he firmly

believed was one of confronting the problem of realism, and this had to do with the War and the

importance of newsreels and film propaganda within it. The destruction of physical reality on

such large scale too, Bazin believed, had made filmmakers and the public more responsive to the

rudimentary realism of the image. By the late '50s, perhaps as the effects of the postwar

economic boom were being felt in France and Western Europe, he sensed that this

responsiveness may have been diminishing.

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[1] André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique," in *Les Problèmes de la Peinture* (Paris: Éditions Confluences), 407-408ff.

[2] André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique," QQCI 13ff [WCB 11ff1].

To summarize the context for Bazin's interest in cinema's ontological realism, as he himself understood it, there was, on the one hand, a crisis in frankly mythic genres and narratives that abstracted reality and, on the other, a heightened demand for the realism of the image as a record of history. Therefore, roughly four decades after its invention, cinema finally was asked to make good its promise as a site for the unabstracted "confirmation of history," to use a phrase with which Bazin described the function of myths.[3] The importance of newsreels to World War II propaganda had pushed cinema to become the site for such confirmation by multiplying the filmic records of history. Speaking about the resurgence of feature length documentaries after the war, he emphasizes their break from the semi-fictionalized format and re-stagings of most pre-war documentaries.

> [I]t seems as if the war has recovered the standing of this genre in an original manner… by restoring to documentary its nudity and its rigor, the sense of exactitude and of sincerity, and consequently educating the public in the sense of authenticity.[4],[iii]

Though this sharpened sense of authenticity is indeed a complex cornerstone of his theorization of film as an aesthetic form, there has been little attention paid so far to Bazin's anxieties about the powers of cinematic realism to meet the historical demands for "exactitude and sincerity." While I identified these anxieties at the theoretical level in the previous chapter, this chapter and the following one will turn to Bazin's writings on the films of his time that testified to filmic realism's ability to satisfy our desire for history while at the same time excusing us from participating in it.

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[3] André Bazin, "Le western, ou le cinéma américain par excellence," in QQCIII, 145 [WCII 148].

[4] André Bazin, "*Annapurna*," in Obs no. 154 (23 April 1953).

This chapter looks at Bazin's analyses of the *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942-'45) series and the activist fictions of André Cayatte where he argues that these films exploit cinema's ontological realism in order to align spectatorship with the processes of logical positivism; processes that create a very different relationship to history than the aesthetic mode. To emphasize that these films occupy the same historical terrain as the ethnographic documentaries that signaled a heightened desire for realism, I will take up Bazin's readings in relation to his invocation of the experience of "total war" and "total history," two concepts that parallel the legacy of nineteenth century aesthetics discussed in the previous chapter.

The films Bazin discusses are not instances of misuse of cinematic ontology but trace one possible path from its ontological powers; that is, their ideological effects derive from powers embedded in the medium. Otherwise, Bazin's critique would simply remain at the level of denouncing propaganda and thesis films which he was careful not to. Bazin considered propaganda to be a valid aesthetic mode and he took its use for this purpose to be a sign of cinema's socio-political importance. In order to emphasize this, the final section briefly discusses an article by him on two war-related propaganda films, *La Bataille du Rail* (René Clement, 1945) and *Ivan the Terrible* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1944). This last section will offer supplementary proof that Bazin could, under certain circumstances, welcome a very high degree of abstraction of reality even in postwar cinema to counterbalance the pull of cinema's evidentiary claims.

Total War

In "On *Why We Fight*: History, Documents, and Newsreels," a key theoretical text on the role of newsreels in the just-concluded war and its effect on our sense of reality, Bazin writes,

"The time of total war is fatally matched by that of total History."[5][iv] By total history, he is referring to the cinema's function of capturing and archiving events with unprecedented exhaustiveness and seeming irrefutability. Total history and total war are also terms that carried special resonance in this postwar era. In this section I will describe Bazin's charting of the conjunction of these totalities with the idea of total cinema which is understood here as cinema that transforms its ontological capacity to capture reality into documents of proof. Images of total cinema are perfectly locatable in the past by being perfectly legible in the present. This transforms the ontological suspension of temporality in film into a continuum linking past and present.

World War II has often been described as 'Total war,' a concept that emerged around the end of World War I and elaborated during the interwar years, so that by 1939 it had been in general use.[6] As an ideal type, it is meant to identify the "expanding parameters of warfare" in the 20th century such as the complete mobilization of a society's resources beyond the military for the war effort, the blurring of distinction between military and civilian targets, and the aim of total surrender or destruction of the enemy.[7] Bazin's own reference to it can be best understood in relation to the use of propaganda for the mobilization of civilians in the war effort. He may have had in mind the most dramatic use of the term and one of particular significance to film propaganda. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, used the term in a February

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[5] André Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*: histoire, documents et actualités," in QQCI, 32. [BW 187].

[6] Roger Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," in *Anticipating Total War: German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 16-17.

[7] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, "Are We There Yet?: World War II and the Theory of Total War," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Richard Chickering et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 2.

1943 speech to rally civilian participation in the war immediately after the surrender of German

soldiers at Stalingrad. Arguing that the Soviet Union had mobilized the whole of its society in

the war effort, he called on the Germans to overcome the "bourgeois" distinction between

soldiers and civilians and emulate the enemy's example. Stating that "Total war is the demand of

the hour," he ended the speech with "People, rise up, and storm, break loose!"[8]

Bazin would have been familiar with Goebbels's "Total War" speech and its emphasis on

civilian mobilization.[9] While this is important, Bazin's argument for the conjunction of total war

with total cinema appears in a review of an American cinematic effort to justify the war to its

citizens. This must be seen as a recognition of the special relationship of the cinema not just to

any propaganda but to the totalizing propaganda demanded by a world at total war which itself

was not the purview of a single nation or a few totalitarian regimes but a generalized condition.

The essay is a recognition of, among other things, the propitious conditions for cinema's

participation in the historical catastrophe of total war, conditions which include half a century's

accumulation of newsreel footage that saw a rapid multiplication with the just-concluded war.

> We live more and more in a world stripped bare by film, a world that sheds its own
> image. When the newsreels come one, hundreds of thousands of screens make us
> watch the extraordinary shedding performed each day by tens of thousands of
> cameras. As soon as it forms, History's skin drops on to film. Which pre-war
> newsreel was it that used to be called "the eye of the world"? Hardly a pretentious

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[8] Joseph Goebbels, "Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose," in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), pp. 112-139. Central to his efforts to rally German civilians from this point was the most expensive Nazi propaganda film *Kolberg* (Veit Harlan, 1945). David Culbert's remarks on its scrupulous realism underlines Bazin's argument about the increasing importance that cinema's ontological reality acquired with the war. See David Culbert, '*Kolberg*: Goebbels' *Wunderwaffe* as Counterfactual History', in *Historical Reflections*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2009), pp. 125-141.

[9] See the French newsreel from the Occupation era, 'Goebbels appelle l'Allemagne et l'Europe à se mobiliser contre le bolchévisme', available at http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu00251/goebbels-appelle-l-allemagne-et-l-europe-a-se-mobiliser-contre-le-bolchevisme.html, accessed 6 January 2016.

title today as countless Bell-and-Howell lenses, placed at the crossroads of all events, spy on the picturesque, curious, or terrible signs of our destiny.[10]v

Here we see Bazin dramatizing the relationship of cinema's ontology to history, as history secretes its own ontological doubles into the skin of film that lives on after it dies. These are lines written not in the twilight of a career that, through exposure to thousands of films, has felt the promise of the cinematic image degraded, but at its beginning when the promise of the talking film was still to be asserted against the nostalgics of silent cinema. This is Bazin "the theorist of the image in an archival age" in Paula Amad's apt phrase, but not a reassuring theorist.[11] Bazin argues that the exact images of the world and of its history exist more perfectly than the world and its history. Jean-Michel Frodon, therefore, is mistaken when he argues that the image was not as much of a stakeholder in Bazin's time as it is in ours and that there existed an acknowledged distinction between reality and representation which is now attenuated. The lines above indicate that with World War II the cinema had brought about an unsettling of the distinction Frodon talks about; an unsettling that it promised from the very beginning and in its essence.[12] The war and its use of filmed images effected a thorough intensification of this condition through some not entirely foreseen developments.

In speaking about the importance of cameramen to modern war, he speculates on the reasons for this beyond the more narrowly political uses of images such as rallying the citizens and controlling the war narrative. He talks about the coincidence of the historical moment's appetite for unstaged reality and the war's ability to produce such reality on an unprecedented

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[10] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," 33 [BW 189].

[11] Paula Amad, "Film as the "Skin of History": André Bazin and the Specter of the Archive and Death in Nicole Védrès's *Paris 1900* (1947)," in *Representations* vol. 130, no. 1 (Spring 2015), p. 88.

[12] Jean-Michel Frodon, "Film as Plaster: The Mold of History," in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, ed. Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 83.

scale. Citizens could be mobilized and the war's narrative could be controlled through the

guarantee of the filmic image's "exactitude and sincerity." It bears citing at length from the

opening paragraphs of the essay to get a sense of the dramatic picture that Bazin conjures up.

> For us, nothing compares to the unique event, caught on the fly, at the very moment of its creation. This theater of operations [that of the war], when compared with the other one, has the invaluable dramatic superiority of inventing the play as it goes on; a *commedia dell'arte* in which the layout [*canevas*] itself is always in question. As for the technical means, it is superfluous to insist on their exceptional efficiency. I would only like to emphasize that they reach a cosmic scale of grandeur and have no fear of competition except from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, and the end of the world. I say this without irony because I believe that the first episode of the series *Eternal News* will no doubt be devoted to a monstrous report on the Last Judgment, after which the report on the Nuremberg trials will be something like *Workers Leaving the Factory*.[13] vi

A footnote by Bazin when he revised the article in 1958 adds the Hydrogen bomb to complete

this picture of cinematic contingency on a nuclear scale. And the historical moment is well-

placed to satisfy the appetites of a medium for which its events are ideal material even as the

annihilation of the world threatens to satisfy this appetite once and for all. However, we need

further explanation for the desire of the audience for the products of this fateful conjunction of

history and medium:

> But the war report above all responds to another need which explains its extreme reach. *The taste for newsreel, combined with that for cinema, is nothing but the will to presence* [volonté de présence] *of modern man, his need to be present at the unfolding of History, in which political evolution, as much as the technical means of communication and destruction, are irremediably mixed up*. The time of total war is fatally matched by that of total History. The governments have understood this well, which is why they try to give us cinematographic reports of all their historic acts, the signing of treaties, the meetings of a few Great Men, etc. Since History is not at all a ballet absolutely fixed in advance, it is well to place the maximum number of

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[13] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," 31-32 [BW 187-188].

cameras in its way to be sure of catching it in the act (*in the historical act, naturally*).[14][vii]

With a judicious pun on Nietzsche's "will to power" ("*volonté de puissance*"), Bazin's "will to presence" (*volonté de presence*) places the cinema between the Nietzschean concept and its Foucauldian afterlife. If we think back to Bazin's lines about the accumulation of images as the "skin of history" and link them to the ones here on the "will to presence of modern man," we see a clear connection between the democratization of history and the democratization of access to it whose apotheosis might be the spectator's presence at the end of the world through nuclear war. But cinema's particular road to this spectacle threads historical events on a highly varied scale.

The will to presence that cinema responds to is extended to a wide range of events, from the quotidian to the grand. Workers leaving a factory, a baby's meal, a child's prank, a kiss, all become part of history. The challenge of access to history is to make sense of this overwhelming range. Cinema's incessant piling up of images and events drives us to fetishize some detail at the expense of the larger picture and at the same time frustrates such fetishization by thrusting into view other details. Some may want to be satisfied with and marvel at the fact that the "wind in the trees" can now be considered a part of historical experience, but what is the connection between this wind and the mushroom clouds in Japan? Is there a link between a bourgeois baby's meal and images of world leaders gathering to sign important treaties around a banquet table? Attempts to construct such narratives would illustrate what Jay calls a longitudinal understanding of totality, originating with the Enlightenment notion of progress and best illustrated by Hegel's phenomenology of history and some prominent versions of Marxist historiography.[15] A

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[14] Ibid., 32 [BW 188]. My emphasis. Bazin added the phrase "*volonté de presence*" in the lightly-revised 1958 version.

[15] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 26-31.

caricature of longitudinal understanding of history might say that the bourgeois fascination with nature and its desire to capture it in all its contingency down to the wind in the trees prepared the ground for nature's controlled annihilation in the form of nuclear bombs. Another might be that cinema as a technology of bourgeois consecration of family intimacies was wrested away in the next stage of history by Stalinist Communism to consecrate the revolution's intimate presence in the body of Stalin at the side of all Soviet citizens, from their love lives to their place on the battlefield.[16] Such a longitudinal understanding of history with the help of filmed documents is difficult on Bazin's account of cinematic ontology because the events of the past literally exist in the present, alongside the present that is in the process of shedding its celluloid skin. Even though cinema freezes time with all its historically contingent detail, its archive at first confers an ontological equality upon all the different temporalities it gathers. History on film is not a line from the past to the present but the many pasts in the present. It would be necessary to trace one of the shorter virtual lines from cinematic ontology to particular kinds of filmmaking to disentangle these temporalities and convert them into history placed on a continuum.

Bazin talks about the importance military cameramen acquired in the war for two slightly different purposes. The first is the fascination engendered by the "real" (Bazin's quotation marks) record of the war, and the second is the utility of this record for re-staging the event along conventional, dramatic lines. Thus, Bazin refers to Roger Leenhardt's speculation that we are not far from the moment when the recordings of war are made to serve semi-fictionalized documentaries starring Humphrey Bogart and Spencer Tracy in the role of the generals. But

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[16] This is what we see in *The Fall of Berlin* (Mikhail Chiaureli, 1949) where a Stakhanovite worker first confesses his love for a girl to Stalin before doing so to her, and a general responds to a rumor that Stalin has arrived at the battlefront by saying "Stalin is always with us," a quip that evokes satisfied smiles that suggest the presence of a favorite uncle.

more relevant for now is the third development that follows where these images, along with the millions of others collected over half a century, become dissociated from their original use and become part of a general international archive "complete enough to contain an event as intimate in its historical nature as Hitler's war dance at the Rethondes Crossroads."[17][viii] They can now be borrowed for any purpose whatsoever, so that the purpose of using images overrides the occasion of recording in a radical sense. Bazin does not state this explicitly but it can be inferred by putting this essay alongside the one on the Stalin myth, and I think this point is crucial to the overall argument that he makes about documentary propaganda. In the Stalin essay, Bazin talks about how newsreel footage of Stalin and other world leaders had existed for a long time and often recorded explicitly to glorify the personalities. However, either the newsreels' quality of "fossilized time"[18] made them records of a "moribund realism"[19] at a time when the public responsiveness to the realism of these documents was not completely developed or the incorporation of newsreel footage in explicitly propagandistic films always left some possibility that those images might be read against the grain.[20] *Why We Fight* uses images that fall somewhere in between images shot for the purposes of the film and images summoned from the archives since the film relies heavily on the material originating from the Axis powers in order to represent them against their own images. It lays out these images from different temporalities

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[17] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," 34 [BW 190]. In the revised version from 1958, Bazin includes a note that references John Grierson's disclosure that he had invented the image of Hitler seeming to dance at Rethondes by looping some frames. (QQCI 36ff; BW 192ff5].

[18] Bazin, "On Realism," 71.

[19] André Bazin, "Le mythe du cinéma total et les origines du cinématographe," in *Critique* no. 6 (November 1946), 557.

[20] Thus, Bazin writes that "The montage of the Congress of Nuremberg by Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of Will* (1934), appears as an argument against Hitler to the democratic viewer." André Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline dans le cinéma soviétique," in QQCI, 83 [BW 31].

onto the Benjaminian "homogeneous empty time" of a single film, realizing the historicizing force of the photograph that the Kracauer had written about in the '20s.[21]

The process of giving history a meaning constructed on a spatial conception of time is a mark of, following Jay, a latitudinal rather than longitudinal idea of totality which informs some empirically-intensive approaches to history.[22] What Bazin had in mind when using the term "total history" in an essay that also points to the intense accumulation of visual records of historical detail of any scale was most likely the approach of a school of French historiography that had already acquired prominence in the discipline: the *Annales* School. Ludovic Cortade has traced Bazin's considerable exposure to the *Annales* School in his education at Ecole Normale at Saint-Cloud where he was also exposed to a great amount of pedagogical documentaries and photographs.[23] The adjectives "total history" and "global history" were often used by the *Annales* practitioners to describe their ambitions of making history the sum of all social sciences.[24] This model of history is dominated by a desire to treat a social formation in all its aspects, starting from the geological and taking in climatology, economics, cultural practices, etc. Two things are nonetheless downplayed and differentiate this model of 'total history' from the longitudinal version. Firstly, trying to oppose its methods to the prevailing model of treating history as a linear accumulation of grand political events, the *Annales* School markedly ignored political

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[21] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 262-263; Kracauer, "Photography".

[22] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 32. To be sure, the longitudinal versions implicitly or explicitly contained within them the idea of latitudinal totality and vice-versa; the distinction is matter of priority of one over the other.

[23] Ludovic Cortade, "Cinema Across the Fault Lines: Bazin and the French School of Geography," in *Opening Bazin*, 13-31.

[24] Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The* Annales *School, 1929-89* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 114; Michael Harsgor, "Total History: The *Annales* School," in *The* Annales *School: Critical Assessments, Volume I*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Routledge, 1999), 258.

history and events in this sense.[25] Secondly, its focus on the *longue durée* rather than conventional periodization of history de-emphasizes linearity and thus treats large units of time in more spatial terms.[26] Bazin's evocation of the idea of total history when discussing the accumulation of newsreel footage should first bring to mind this latitudinal version. However, the intensely apocalyptic picture that frames the democratization of access to these records of history warns us that the *Annales* conception of total history has not dislodged the longitudinal impulse to totality of history but exists in tension with it. Thus, the democratic opportunity to participate in an experience of history that on the one hand expands spatially in the form of accumulation of record and on the other still defined by the big events is an ambiguous privilege.

This ambiguity of being thrown into an accumulation of historical records is captured by the example of Fabrice in Stendhal's novel *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) to whom Bazin refers in describing the chaotic battle scenes in a Soviet film.[27] Fabrice's desire to participate in the Napoleonic moment has him trying desperately to join the French forces in the Hundred Days War. He steals a dead soldier's uniform and catches up with the army on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. Not getting much closer than the chaotic sidelines and inviting the ridicule of those around him, he finally catches from a distance the attack on the French and exclaims, "Ah! Now we're under fire at last! I've seen action!" But after a period of chaos in which he can't make sense of the action, he asks, "*Monsieur*, this is the first time I've seen a battle, but is this a real battle?", and after the event his doubt is complete when he wonders, "Have I really taken

[25] Harsgor, "Total History", 264.

[26] François Fourquet, "Un nouvel espace-temps," in *The* Annales *School: Critical Assessments, Volume III*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Routledge, 1999), 215-230.

[27] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 80 [BW 28].

part in a battle?".[28] Fabrice is a young nobleman trying to do what perhaps nobility thought it should aspire to, but at a moment when the ownership of history is at least nominally extended to the masses, we are all liable to feel the pull that Fabrice does. *Why We Fight* demonstrates that the cinema and its uses by the forces of history address that need while sparing us the ridiculousness of Fabrice's situation.

Having invoked *Annales* historiography's empirical ambitions alongside the confusion of modern historical detail, we need to distinguish between methods to see how *Why We Fight* approaches lateral history. A positivist approach would seek to explain the vast records of history with logical precision. But like longitudinal historiographies which work within mythic structures such as the transition from feudal to bourgeois to proletarian society, latitudinal historiographies too sometimes call upon mythic structures such as "folk" and "nation" to get past the illusionary precision of positivism. These are models of social depth psychology to which even *Annales* took recourse through the idea of the "collective unconscious." In the 1920s, the psychologist Charles Blondel theorized the idea of "collective psychology" which Lucien Febvre, the co-founder of the *Annales* School, drew on in the '30s for the purposes of historiography.[29] For Febvre, the shift of the subject of history from individual actors to the masses posed precisely the problem of reconstituting this collective subjectivity. Febvre argues for interdisciplinary holism so that this subjectivity might be located at the intersection of objects, practices, and expressions. Bazin, as we have seen, constantly takes recourse to this idea of the collective unconscious of history which can only be expressed and lived indirectly. But the

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[28] Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, New York: OUP, 2007.

[29] Lucien Febvre, "History and psychology" and "Sensibility and history: how to reconstitute the emotional life of the past," in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), pp. 1-11 and 12-26. The original publication years for these essays are 1938 and 1941 respectively.

precision of the cinematic record promises to lay bare this deep reality, not at points of intersection, but in the bodies of facts and to transform contingent mythologies into objective truths. In French, the idiomatic phrase Bazin uses for describing film's capacity to capture the contingencies of history, "*prendre sur le fait* [fact]," translates as "caught in the (sexual) act." And he draws attention to this with the parenthetical remark "*sur le fait historique, naturellement*"—"in the historical act, of course." In this, it aspires to what Bazin elsewhere calls the ontological obscenity of the human body on film which gives the illusion of its complete presence.[30]

In 1946, Bazin found that *Why We Fight* illustrated this ontological obscenity of embodied facts as history. He grants the essential correctness of the film's argument as well as the cause in which it was mobilized but is damning of its methods, and those methods are neither those of montage in itself nor the process of placing them within an overarching frame that transcends the context of individual images: "The best montage-based documentaries until now have been only *narratives*; these are speeches."[31][ix] Narratives are needed to find a balance between the latitudinal and longitudinal aspects of history, not least by exorcizing the proliferating temporalities of the image archive. But narrative is different from speech. The mode of the *Why We Fight* films is not aesthetic but pedagogic. And unlike the run-of-the-mill pedagogic film whose commentary precisely comments on the images, these films use images to guarantee the logical coherence of discourse: "The principle behind this genre of documentary essentially consists in lending to images the logical structure of speech [*discours*], and *in giving to*

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[30] Bazin, "On Realism," 71.

[31] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," 34 [BW 189]. My emphasis.

speech itself the credibility and proof of photographic images."[32] Bazin calls this combination of

image and language "an abuse of psychology, belief, and perception."[33] It is the principle of

sobriety, cast in the mould of logical discourse and propped up by the ontological irrefutability of

the cinematic image that makes this genre of film threatening. There is no sense here of history

apprehended indirectly that even an empirically rigorous school of historiography such as

Annales acknowledges. Thus, even if Capra's films served the right cause in the war, and even if

the arguments presented were largely correct, it cannot be guaranteed that the procedure will

always be used for the right ideological reasons. The essay concludes as follows:

> I think that, far from making the historical sciences progress towards objectivity, the
> cinema by its very realism gives them a supplementary power of illusion. The
> invisible commentator, whom the viewer forgets while watching Capra's
> marvelously montage, is tomorrow's historian of the masses, the ventriloquist of this
> formidable prosopopeia that is being prepared in all the film archives of the world,
> resuscitating men and events at will.[34]x

This framework of illusory logic that bases itself on the factual claims of the photographic image

is one of the "virtualities" through which cinema can work upon film's ontological condition, re-

animating the fossilized images through prosopopeia, incarnating our desires in the perfect

realism of what they have captured. It would not be entirely correct to say that the reality within

these images has been compromised because as *half-living* images of events long dead they can

be brought to life again only as something else, speaking to the collective unconscious in the new

historical moment. It wouldn't even be accurate to say that their subservience to instrumental and

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[32] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," 35 [BW 190]. Though Bazin is discussing voiceover here, given the qualifying phrase "logical structure" to describe (public) speech, the French word "*discours*" may also be understood as a reference to Descartes's *Discourse on Method*; speech itself is not necessarily logical by definition, so Bazin means a specific kind of *discours*. See chapter six for discussion of his critical reference to Cartesian logic when describing the work of André Cayatte.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Bazin, 'On *Why We Fight*', 192 [QQCI 36].

logical reason in itself suggests that they are not free to *become* but are instead coopted. Images are always brought back to life by filmmakers, editors, commentators, and others. The necessity of this work is captured by Bazin's concluding sentence in the 1959 version that cinema is also a language.[35] But language is different from logical discourse, which moreover draws upon the ontological proof of photographic images.

Under the sign of logical positivism, cinema can help us "catch history in the act" but it at the same time makes us mere voyeurs of history; the emblematic device of modern power, the Panopticon, has in its sights but Peeping Toms. As psychoanalysis insists, voyeurism and exhibitionism are closely intertwined in scopophilia. In one characterization of this intertwining appropriate to this discussion, Lacan writes, "[The voyeur] believes he desires *because he sees himself desired*, and because he doesn't see that what the other wants to snatch from him is his gaze."[36] The democratic gazes of spectators, stemming from a desire to see themselves as the subjects of history, remain but its objects. Films such as *Why We Fight* satisfy the voyeuristic instinct by exploiting the realism of the cinematic image, but the exhibitionism in these films is that of logical reason itself.

"Grinding the Grain of Reality"

Bazin wrote the *Why We Fight* review in 1946 still under the impact of the screen propaganda of the war. By the '50s, he saw in this series nothing more than transparent propaganda whose manipulation of the footage through montage was obvious and not subsumed under the inexorable logic of rational speech. The challenges of documentary realism, as we have

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[35] Bazin, "Ontologie," QQCI, 19 [WCI 16; WCB 10].

[36] Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), p. 86. Italics mine.

seen in Bazin's remarks earlier in the chapter, had moved into the arena of anthropological

documentaries after the war (discussed in chapter 7). But the problems inherent in cinematic

ontology can only be displaced until such time that it loses all capacity to claim our belief in its

ability to record reality automatically. One part of '50s French production in which cinematic

realism's temptation of logic now appeared was the fictional work of the French filmmaker

André Cayatte which is the subject of Bazin's "The cybernetics of André Cayatte."[37] Cayatte

made social-problem films that implicated French society and its institutions for a range of

injustices. For example, *Nous Sommes Tous les Assassins* (1952) is about capital punishment in

France and its horrifying mechanisms such as executions carried out without prior notice to those

sentenced. But the film that Bazin finds particularly illustrative of the effects of Cayatte's

methods is *Avant le Déluge* (1954) in which a group of young people try to find some money to

escape France and the specters of the Korean War and attendant nuclear fears that hang over it.

In their attempts, they kill a night watchman. Through flashbacks, we see their familial situation

and they are all from very diverse middle-class backgrounds. One is the daughter of a stern

mother who has constricted her life, the other is a Jewish man whose parents died in the Nazi

camps, another is the son of an anti-Semitic musician, and the last is the son of dubious financier.

Both historical conditions and personal histories provide attenuating circumstances for the

accused, but these in turn incriminate the whole (bourgeois) society in all its diversity.

This film, like all the other Cayatte films, has a tight scenario that both in its social

purpose and its logical coherence is akin to the plays of Sartre. Bazin writes that Sartre's plays

have a "demonstrative rigor"[38] that their filmic adaptations lack; but that on the theater stage

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[37] Bazin, "La Cybernétique d'André Cayatte".

[38] André Bazin, "*La Putain Respecteuse*," in Obs no. 127 (16 October 1952).

with its sparse settings (often set in a single room whether the play takes place in Hell [*Huis Clos*] or America [*La Putain Respecteuse*]) the logic of these plays remains abstract. Cayatte exploits the realism of the filmic medium to, as it were, incarnate the logic of the scenario in 1950s France. The film's style is above all efficient, based on the principles of continuity editing that Bazin argues in "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" analyze physical reality and break it down into clearly comprehensible units. In this, it is quite unremarkable, and the problem is not continuity editing in itself which served the Western and the Gangster films as much as French poetic realism very well. This was because these films were recognizably generic films, lacking the argumentative ambitions of Cayatte's films. The diversity of Cayatte's bourgeoisie is meant to acknowledge the diversity of social reality only the better to subsume it to the film's logic that the bourgeoisie as a whole is guilty. Physically too, there is no hint of typology here. Neither the parents nor the children appear as symbols of their specific conditions. Bazin finds all this cruelly efficient and convincing. Indeed, Cayatte's films were both popular and critically acclaimed, winning top prizes at festivals.

Bazin finds himself terribly conflicted about these films since he did not think he was dealing with ordinary thesis films, in itself an unremarkable phenomenon. He has no quarrel with Cayatte's arguments and he indeed finds him taking greater risks in confronting French social systems unlike most epigones of Sartre in the film industry who offered little more than cynicism by way of social critique. But his critical "delirium" leads him to the conclusion that "Cayatte provokes in the mass of public soaked in the cinema a tremor whose novelty alone merits consideration." This tremor is the same one that *Why We Fight* provoked in him in 1946; that of a process of inexorable logic that the film sets in motion but now in a very different way. Like with *Why We Fight*, Bazin is not concerned by the particular arguments that Cayatte makes, but

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the situation is different because he is not confronted with the misrepresentation of the image. He describes what he finds to be a distinct mode by which "the habitual psychological mechanisms of the cinema are in some ways turned upon themselves and they ebb back on to the spectator, to put in motion little by little his faculties of reason in synchrony with the script and mise-en-scène."[39][xi] The habitual mechanisms Bazin refers to are based on "the identification of the spectator with the hero…; that is, on the passivity of the spectator."[40][xii] He gives the example of *Battleship Potemkin* which uses montage techniques to provoke "feeling [through identification with the collective protagonist] and through feeling an acceptance of the idea behind it. We can leave this type of film enthused and convinced, that is to say in a state completely contradictory to the one of intellectual disquiet in which Cayatte leaves us."[41][xiii]

The disquiet provoked by Cayatte's film comes first from the fact that we do not identify with any character in the film but with its logical processes which the spectators takes for her own. This is what Bazin means in writing that the normal conditions of processes are reversed so that the spectator identifies with her own rational ego. The consequence is that the tight logic of Cayatte's film is not limited to *its* argument but is a process that we are led to use upon the physical reality that appears in the film but which too is her own. "In leaving *Avant le Déluge*, the most stupid spectator has been forced to become, if not more intelligent, then at least more Cartesian. Once the film has launched in each of us the hand wheel of reason… it continues to grind the grain of reality for a while afterwards."[42][xiv] This intellectual churning demands "a

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[39] Bazin, "La Cybernétique d'André Cayatte", 172 [BW 96].

[40] Ibid., 171.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 173 [BW 96-97]..

reality without remainder, exactly divisible by the first ideas of which it is nothing more than an alibi."[43]xv So the problem for Bazin, unlike with *Why We Fight*, is not that the film is logically convincing, but that the spectator has been automatically initiated into an approach to reality using the very realism of the filmic image and its automatically captured "physical evidence."[44]xvi With *Why We Fight*, we are convinced by the seeming force of facts on the screen, but with *Avant le Déluge* we become arbiters of facts internalized by the mind. To consolidate the link of this use of filmic reality to its ontology, Bazin even likens the film's effect to that of a Surrealist nightmare with its "terrorism of intellectual evidence and linkage of facts which confer on the work the traumatizing properties of a nightmare whose details we try to blur by blinking our eyes."[45]xvii The difference of this film from Surrealism is of course that where the latter opposes an impossible but hallucinatory logic to given reality, the film fascinates us by logical processes into which the facts of the world disappear.

Despite the fact that Bazin's analysis of Cayatte's films so clearly recalls the realist ontology that he himself theorized, with its spatializing logic of evidence hallucinating in its exactitude, he accuses him of "*inventing a genre that is false* or more exactly equivocal and which betrays at once the realism of the cinema and *its dialectically interdependent powers of abstractions*."[46]xviii Bazin's argument in the essay is that reality always exceeds what analysis makes of it, that it has a "margin of mystery and ambiguity,"[47]xix and that cinematic realism must

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[43] Ibid., 176 [BW 99].

[44] Ibid., 170-171 [BW 95].

[45] Ibid., 170 [BW 95].

[46] Ibid., 173 [BW 97]. My emphasis.

[47] Ibid., 176 [BW 99].

capture this margin. But it would be a mistake to see him arguing simply that Cayatte should have used depth-of-field composition instead of continuity editing. The example he gives of a reality that resists complete subsumption by analysis is novelistic reality.[48] But the mention of a false genre in the quotation also alerts us to the fact that the particular idea of reality that Bazin has is first an *aesthetic* idea more than a specifically cinematic or novelistic one, or rather a novelistic one in the sense of a "matrix of myths."[49] Cayatte's films inaugurate a false genre because it doesn't construct determinate social imaginaries distinct from ourselves the way genres do but, using the objective claims of the film image, train us in processes of logical thinking that can be applied to the reality around us as much as to the reality in the film. They don't trap us in a world that stands autonomous from us but they trap us in our own minds which devour reality so completely that there remains no distance from which to ever confront the contradictions in our imaginaries.

The challenge of cinematic realism would be to locate the "dialectical powers of abstraction" that correspond to the realism of its image but which at the same time free this realism of its spectral suspension. And these powers of abstraction extend to all kinds of work upon the image, including montage as we see in the example of *Battleship Potemkin*. We saw Bazin argue earlier that Eisenstein's montage techniques were realist in their historical moment before acquiring a Romantic sheen once that moment had passed. However, even in the '50s Bazin welcomed hieratic and baroque styles in the cinema when employed in propaganda films which he argued were aesthetically valid and testified to cinema's importance as perhaps the only art form with an irrefutable social dimension. Given that the argument about Bazininan

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[48] Ibid., 176 [BW 99].

[49] André Bazin, "L'adaptation, ou le cinéma comme digeste," in Esp vol. 7 no. 146 (July 1948), 37 [BW 46].

realism so far has found him severely critical of propaganda films, the next section will demonstrate that it isn't this mode itself that Bazin condemns.

Propaganda: The Lost Aesthetic Secret

For Bazin, the problem in cinema is not propaganda and theses but their slipping into our consciousness "under the fallacious alibi of reality," as indisputable facts which may or may not be so, and which are more likely to be only productive or pernicious dreams. The normative commitment that Bazin calls upon the spectators to make is to discern what exceeds or troubles the truth claims even when accepting them. Without this openness to the ideological force even in the midst of critical vigilance, we would remain nothing but paranoid versions of the ideal Cayatte spectator, the one who divides up the reality of which there remains neither sum nor remainder. The corresponding commitment that Bazin wants films to make is to create room for the contradictions of reality even as they work to obscure them in favor of an overall impression of ideological coherence.

Given the diffuse notion of propaganda in Bazin's work identified earlier by which almost all films qualify as such, some distinctions are called for. A Bazinian typology of propaganda films would have three categories. Firstly, there are propaganda films, such as those of the Soviet avant-garde of the '20s in which the aesthetics manage to find visual forms appropriate to the demands of propaganda rhetoric, and such instances remain aesthetically valid whatever one may think of the ideologies they support. Paradoxically, in this category of films, despite the parallels with linguistic tropes, language as such remains noise to some degree and does not acquire logical coherence. Thus, the complete identification of ideology and aesthetics remains incomplete. This is propaganda proper because these films open announce their rhetorical character.

The second category of propaganda films are those in which there is a fatal coincidence of image, language, and ideology, as in Capra's documentary series and, in a different way as we will see in the next chapter, Stalinist propaganda films. Despite their explicit function as propaganda, on Bazin's understanding they aren't propaganda in the usual sense but films that make evidentiary claims upon our beliefs. Thirdly, there are the examples of *Bicycle Thieves* and *Paisa* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) which play a game of avowal and disavowal with ideology in order to go beyond its articulation to something like the imaginary experience of it. But this is also, as we have seen, what generic films do. Therefore, these films embody the aesthetic realism adequate to the postwar historical moment. The second category, that of an evidentiary cinema, has been the main subject of this chapter and in this section I will briefly discuss propaganda in the more limited sense that Bazin gives it. Further discussion of the third in relation to Italian neo-realism, which is Bazin's ideal for the political film in his historical moment, will be the subject of the final chapter.

We would be correct in thinking that in the 1940s and '50s, the kind of propaganda films of the '20s Soviet avant-garde would have been unwelcome to Bazin as the dominant aesthetic standard because it sidesteps the historical demand for a greater sensitivity to objective reality in the image, a demand that cinema must pass through if it is to retain its responsiveness to history. However, it did not mean that its explicit rhetorical quality could not or should not be rediscovered while giving greater consideration to pro-filmic reality. Moreover, he wanted cinema to rediscover a place for frank propaganda that had slowly dissolved into the seemingly transparent claims of newsreel realism. In 1951, he wrote:

> The values of didacticism, apologetics, and politics still remain the major scandals
> and the great unknowns of the cinema. Novels, paintings, and plays with theses have
> not survived the nineteenth century… Only the screen has provided the twentieth
> century with unquestionable instances of a propagandistic art that lose nothing in

comparison with any of the classical aesthetic categories. But it seems that the marvelous conjunction of politics and art that was the glory of Soviet cinema between 1925 to 1935 or 1938 remains a lost secret... It would be childish to remain blind to the current ideological needs of art. It does not matter if Communism in itself is, directly or indirectly, the cause of this blindness: the cinema cannot afford to ignore its own propagandistic power, even less so today, in 1951, than in 1925. The ideas of our time will use it, with or without artistic merit—and use it with all efficiency.[50]xx

When Bazin refers to the "marvelous conjunction of politics and art" in the Soviet cinema of the '20s, we need to emphasize the "marvelous" because, writing around the same time he penned his articles on Stalinist cinema and Cayatte, he could not have thought that the "conjunction between politics and art" itself had been lost. What had been lost was the striving for the sense of marvel through which propaganda made claims on audiences. What Bazin most probably means in this discussion of the Soviet trajectory of film propaganda is its slide into socialist realism. His reference to the possible responsibility of Communism for this change reinforces this impression.

The evidence for Bazin's critical desire for the restoration of propaganda as an openly rhetorical mode of address even in the context of a demand for greater realism is illustrated in an almost made-to-order review essay from 1946 about two propaganda films made in the shadow of the war, one realist and the other baroque.[51] René Clément's *La Bataille Du Rail* (1945; henceforth *Bataille*) was a film made to the glory of the Resistance among French rail workers, and Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1944; henceforth *Ivan*) was made to exalt the figure of Stalin in the midst of the war. *Bataille* is steeped in documentary realism down to the actual crashing of a train. Its hero is a group with barely identifiable individuals, played by non-professional actors, and its dialogue is spare. *Ivan* is a lush and baroque work that Bazin's

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[50] André Bazin, "Néo-réalisme, Opera et Propagande," in CdC vol. 1, no. 4 (July-August 1951), 49-50.

[51] André Bazin, "*Bataille du Rail*, *Ivan le Terrible*," in Esp vol. 4 no. 121 (April 1946), 667-671.

describes as a *Caligari*-esque ornamentation of space to the extent that it does not allow "the least bit of nature's skin to appear."[52]xxi On our conventional understanding of Bazin, the former should be his preferred film. As it turns out, he is respectful of the first but dissatisfied with it because its haphazard detail, despite the subject of Resistance, only sporadically acquires the poetic concentration of mythic force. *Ivan*, on the other hand, he finds to be prodigiously well-constructed, calling it a Wagnerian work, decadent in its aestheticism to be sure but handled with undeniable precision. Its complete divorce from the historical moment's desire for realism nonetheless suits its mandate for state propaganda.

Bazin writes that the French can't be scandalized by Stalin's exaltation in *Ivan* through a historical figure when they draw upon Joan of Arc to mythologize Charles de Gaulle and the Resistance. The problem is not propaganda but the ideas being propagated: those of autocracy and nationalism. But trusting that the purposes of the film are transparent both at the level of subject and style, one can admire the latter without being logically driven to commit ourselves to the latter.[53] It is ideological advertising and advertising as a genre for Bazin is both a valid aesthetic form and escapes the demands of a realist aesthetic.[54] He writes, "It could be that one

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[52] Bazin, "*Bataille du Rail*, *Ivan le Terrible*," 670.

[53] Bazin re-affirmed his position on the propaganda film in 1951 in relation to another film whose propagandist agenda he detested. This is the review from which I took the lines above on the importance of the propaganda film. The film in question was *Il Cristo Proibito/Forbidden Christ* (1951) by an Italian novelist and intellectual notorious for his ideological hopping. A one-time fascist intellectual who ran afoul of the establishment, Malaparte had joined the Italian Communist party after the war, and then made this, his only, film on the salience of Christ's sacrifice for healing the psychological wounds of the war in Italy. It was also made at the height of the Korean War and its Christian message is meant to be anti-Communist. Bazin likens Malaparte's film to *Ivan* and *Alexander Nevsky* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1938) for their baroque style and purpose, and links all three with Eisenstein's films of the '20s. Bazin, "Néo-réalisme, opera et propagande".

[54] In fact, according to Bazin, experimental filmmakers would do well to rely on the financial backing offered by the advertising industry for their stylistic experimentation. André Bazin, "Publicité et Avant-Garde," in *L'Observateur* no. 95 (6 March 1952). Giving special attention to animation, he gives the examples of Len Lye's work for the British Postal Service and Norman McLaren's in Canada.

can demand nothing more from an ideological film but a formalism open to the defense of all ideas."[55][xxii] In propaganda, this non-coincidence of style and a specific ideological agenda makes it possible for one to appreciate the aesthetic accomplishment, and even the complementarity of the style to the generic mode of propaganda, while accepting or rejecting the theses that it proposes. One may be enthused and convinced by them, but they do not constitute the fallacious logical alibis that *Why We Fight* and *Avant le Déluge* sought to provide, alibis that acquired legitimacy with the accumulation of "physical evidence" of the spectral remains of history on film.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that realism must be understood as a special problem in Bazin's aesthetic philosophy, one which straddles the broader aesthetic principles traced in part one of this dissertation and the postwar sensitivity to the truth claims of the filmic image. In re-reading "Ontology," I have foregrounded the trajectory of Bazin's argument as one that places realism in the *longue durée* history of the arts and their socio-political significance. This socio-political significance is tied to changing paradigms of transcendence from the immanent transcendence of the Egyptian mummy, through the vertical transcendence of Christianity, and then to a lateral transcendence in secular modernity. Realism as representation that is subject to the spatio-temporal conditions of the world is a problem specific to the framework of lateral transcendence. The difference of lateral transcendence from immanent and vertical transcendence is that in the latter the transcendence belongs not to the work of art but to the pre-existing religious frameworks in which they exist, whether pagan or monotheistic. Lateral

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[55] Bazin, "Néorealisme, opera et propagande," 50.

transcendence is an aesthetic transcendence in which the social imaginary is indirectly represented and which just as indirectly orients socio-political experience unlike the more direct orientation of religion.

The photograph, Bazin argues, restores something of the immanence of the Egyptian mummy but which, in the absence of an overarching religious framework to contain it, hovers between the lateral transcendence of modern aesthetics and the positivism of modern science. In reviewing *Why We Fight*, Bazin argued that with the extensive use of newsreels in World War II, where propaganda worked on the logic of documentary evidence, the photo-filmic image becomes a false tool of logical thinking. It is a false tool because the photograph and the film give us the illusion of objectivity of the past when in fact it lifts the past out of the temporal flux to which it belonged and hypostasizes it. Not only does the photo-filmic image fix the past but it also trains us to subsume present reality into processes of logical thinking. This is the argument Bazin offers in writing about the social problem films of André Cayatte. Given Bazin's anxieties about the conversion of cinematic ontology into the logic of evidence, but also his wish to see cinema participate directly in the politics of the day, he called for a propagandistic cinema that openly announces its rhetorical character and makes claims on our affective adherence to ideology.

It is possible that in critiquing logical positivism, Bazin underestimates the problematic effects of openly rhetorical propaganda. Comparing Stalinist film propaganda to *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934), he writes, "The montage of Leni Riefenstahl on the Nuremberg Congress, *Triumph of the Will*, appears as an argument against Hitler to the democratic viewer.

Moreover, these images could be used in an anti-Nazi montage."[56][xxiii] But there is something

other than underestimation at work here. It is that Bazin neglects to make explicit his own

insight, discussed here in chapter two, that the realism of one era stands exposed as rhetoric by

another. Such neglect also attends his own quiet re-assessment of *Why We Fight* when he

compared it favorably with Cayatte's films. He writes, "[I]t is legitimate to and even

commendable for the screen to use realism to the benefit of a pure idea, but on condition that

reality is broken down beforehand and its fragments selected. Thus, for example the famous

montage of *Why We Fight*… In other words, abstraction is only legitimate in the cinema when

the modes of narration designate it as such."[57][xxiv] If, following Bazin's implicit hypothesis, we

mark *Triumph of the Will* as belonging to an age of fascist pageantry and *Why We Fight* to a

project of logical persuasion in the era of newsreels, Cayatte's French films belong to the age of

Sartre and a judicial realism that defined committed art. From the perspective of one of these

historical moments, the propagandistic nature of the earlier films' arguments seems transparent.

And when Bazin compared *Triumph of the Will* to the Soviet films in which Stalin appeared as a

character, he was dealing with an altogether novel conjunction of realism and propaganda which

passes not just through the recording of any reality but through the special relationship that

cinematic realism has to the human body. This is the subject of the next chapter.

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[56] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 83.

[57] Bazin, "La Cybernétique d'André Cayatte," 176 [BW 99].

Chapter 7

Totalitarianism's Cinematic Body

The idea of totality was posed in the last chapter in terms of aesthetics and historiography. Cinema's initial suspension between the past and present calls upon filmmakers and audience to posit either a clear reference to the pastness of reality in the image (to give it historical specificity) or to create a lateral transcendence (to give it an aesthetic presence). In this chapter, I will look at Bazin's writings on cinema's ability to represent the fact or experience of totalitarianism that constituted the nucleus of his historical moment, with the Soviet regime's Show Trials on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other. Despite the undeniable centrality of instrumental rationality in the construction of its horrors, the aspect that Bazin's writings are concerned with are philosophical and aesthetic. The philosophical issues at stake concern the framework of longitudinal totality espoused by Soviet Marxism and the nature of death and its representability in the context of the Holocaust. Both these issues are linked by his writings on the screen body: in the case of the Soviet films, the body comes to be central through the state consecration of Stalin as the culmination of history; in relation to the Holocaust, the question will be whether the cinema can make the body a site for registering the experience of its terrors.

Before arriving at the question of the body and totalitarian experience in the cinema, it will be necessary to explain why, according to Bazin, the human body and its relationship to history becomes a privileged site for constructing a totalitarian paradigm of experience. As in the preceding chapters, I work out Bazin's ideas in relation to the discursive field of his time and as part of real or imagined debates with his contemporaries. Here I start with what I argue is an

unmarked response from Bazin to Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the subject of Marxist philosophy

of history and its relationship to the Soviet Show Trials under Stalin.[1] When speaking of Bazin's

historical context and his philosophical milieu, scholars have often pointed to the influence of

Emmanuel Mounier's personalism, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, and Maurice Merleau-

Ponty's phenomenology. The problem in articulating this influence has been that, since the

philosophers only occasionally or never wrote on the cinema, and since Bazin's writings on

cinema are informed by a larger philosophical framework that remains necessarily under-

elaborated compared to the work of the philosophers, the historical dialogue seems uni-

directional, and Bazin a more or less faithful disciple to the more illustrious figures.

Only in the case of Sartre has it been possible to complicate the narrative of influence,

not only because of Bazin's response to Sartre on *Citizen Kane*, but also because of a sustained

rather than occasional aesthetic engagement on Sartre's part against which Bazin's own positions

can be better compared and distinguished. Here, I will attempt to complicate this narrative of

influence in relation to Merleau-Ponty. Rather than on the question of phenomenological

aesthetics, it is on that of phenomenology or philosophy of history that I trace Bazin's response

to Merleau-Ponty. In a 1984 essay, Janet Staiger points out that Bazin's "The Myth of Stalin in

the Soviet Cinema" (henceforth "Stalin Myth") was written after Merleau-Ponty's own 1947

examination of the Stalin trials in the journal *Les Temps Modernes*, which became the basis for

the book *Humanism and Terror*.[2] She suggests that we read Bazin's denunciation of the Stalin

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[1] Though see Dudley Andrew's account of a disagreement at a public debate between Merleau-Ponty and Bazin on the subject of Jean Renoir's *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1946). But elsewhere in the biography, Merleau-Ponty appears as a *maître à penser* for Bazin. Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 214-216.

[2] Janet Staiger, "*Theorist*, yes, but what *of*?: Bazin and History," in *Iris*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1984), 107; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964 [first French edition, 1947])

myth in light of Merleau-Ponty's own attempts to distance French communism from Stalinist communism. However, Merleau-Ponty in '47 was much more ambiguous than Staiger suggests on the question of the Moscow Show Trials of the '30s. Therefore, I will argue that Bazin's own account of the Trials is a direct if unmarked response to Merleau-Ponty's argument rather than following from it. The differences between them turn upon how they understand the relationship of human subjectivity to history conceived as a longitudinal totality, exemplified by Soviet Marxism.

After the philosophical debate in which Bazin participates, the second section turns to the aesthetic issues involved. We will look at Bazin's analysis of Soviet films in which Stalin appears to mark out their bi-polar structure with the chaos of contingent material reality on one end and the stability of Stalin's body on the other with the two, rather than standing in contradiction with each other, forming a totality. This returns us to questions of Bazininan ontology of film to see how the insertion of the human body complicates it. I turn to his writings on the star body because the representation of revolutionary totality in the body of Stalin is predicated on an understanding of it as a star body. But Stalin films also pose a special problem in that the body of Stalin as a persona pre-exists the films in a way that star bodies generally do not. Bazin's analysis is based on this special feature of Stalin's cinematic stardom which allows him to stand as a demiurge of material reality at the origins of totalitarian experience.

In the final section, I take up Bazin's response to a Czech Holocaust film, *Distant Journey* (Alfred Radok, 1950) where he endorses the film's expressionist aesthetics as appropriate to its subject. As a final confirmation of Bazin's constitutive skepticism about cinematic relationship to history, I read this as his account of the near un-representability of the body at the other end of the totalitarian experience from that of the totalitarian leader.

Total History, Again

Bazin begins his essay on the Stalin myth by highlighting and commending the originality of Soviet cinema in representing living or recently-dead historical personages. He argues that in the Western tradition historically-important personages have to wait for their death, even a very long time after it, in order to become fit subjects for representation. He points to certain exceptions but notes that such people are almost never politicians and often tend to be celebrities who have already acquired a legendary character in their lifetimes. This points to two inter-related assumptions in this tradition: the meaning of a person's life is only fixed after his or her death, and only those historical subjects are generally fit for representation whose life had already acquired a mythic construct. As such, representations of historical characters in the Western tradition is "para- or post-historical."[3] Against this "transcendental" conception of human life, Soviet films such as *Chapaev* (Georgi Vasilyev & Sergei Vasilyev, 1934) and *The Turning Point* (Fridrikh Ermler, 1945) present us characters who participate in recent history and figure in it as actively engaged individuals. And yet they do not stand over history as its sole engines. What Bazin sees in these films is what he calls the "dialectic between Man and History" in which the unfolding of history is what defines the character and the character's participation makes History.[4] There is an important difference, however, that would have consequences for a historical materialist cinema. An individual's death greatly curtails the possibility of the meaning that can be ascribed to it, whereas the meaning of history has a more paradoxical character. On the one hand, history's meaning is provisional in a radical sense both because it has no end that is equivalent to human death (the prospect of nuclear annihilation of the world admits of no

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[3] André Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," in QQCI, 77 [BW 25].

[4] Ibid., 78 [BW 25-26].

meaning) and also because it depends on the unreliable subjectivities of the humans who live and shape it; they cannot be relied upon to toe the demands of historical progress. On the other hand, the nineteenth-century progressive conception of history is forever looking over the horizon for the next signpost of progress. Some versions of Marxist historical understanding, which is an important variation on this conception, actually posit an end to history in the form of a classless society. This is an instance of what Jay calls the 'longitudinal totality' of history, the hypothesized movement towards utopia.[5] For Bazin, the challenge for a Marxist cinema, understood against this skeletal framework, would have been the negotiation of the finitude of an individual and its relationship to the paradoxical nature of history as radically open yet whose experience is mediated by a desire for utopic closure. Whatever gains made in this direction by the films referred to above are betrayed when it comes to films in which Stalin appears as a character. Stalin is seen in these films, played by actors, as both the source of the idea of class struggle, the victory of the proletariat, and the engine of this triumph. In short, he appears as History realized, as "History incarnate."[6]

The argument that Bazin makes here goes much beyond a simple critique of Stalinist propaganda. Its critique is rather aimed at the tendency within Soviet Marxism to insist on the perfect immanence of its teleological destination and, worse, the identification of it with an individual. Bazin could criticize the emphasis on the individual while remaining within the logic of Marxism given its suspicion of individual agents. But what must have been more provocative was the critique of the perfection of history itself when, despite the horrors of the previous three

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[5] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 26-32, 64-67.

[6] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 85 [BW 31].

decades, many Left intellectuals in France continued to believe in its possibility. Moreover, Bazin not only suggests that the movement of history is inevitably compromised by individual subjectivity, he goes on to argue for it with a digression on the logic of Stalin's show trials. It is here that he takes on and contests an important meditation on the Moscow Trials and the "Communist problem" by Merleau-Ponty.

The articles collected in Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*, were a response to the debates around Arthur Koestler's novel, *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler's novel was published in France in 1945 (five years after its original publication in England) and while the polemical and divisive responses along pro- and anti-Communist lines predictably dominated public debate, one troubling aspect of it did not go unremarked. Its central character, Rubashov, put on trial for crimes he did not commit in any literal sense (such as actively collaborating with hostile nations, falsely implicating loyal Soviet functionaries for treason) nonetheless decides to confess to them, recognizing that whatever his intentions may have been, however insignificant a tactical error he may have made in his dealings, in an "objective" sense he may have betrayed the revolution because his actions—a chance word that remained ambiguous and thus could be construed as criticism of the regime by its enemies; an ill-judged silence that missed an opportunity to announce potential dangers to the revolution— rendered it vulnerable. Merleau-Ponty seizes on this aspect of Rubashov's testimony, and also the testimony of the real-life Soviet leader Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938) on whom Koestler based Rubashov, to argue that "the Moscow trials might be seen as the drama of subjective honesty and objective treason."[7] Those who read the trials as simply a deliberate judicial error in which innocents were convicted fail to understand what even those sentenced to death

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[7] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, 44.

understood: that they were joined to their prosecutors by the logic of a revolutionary trial in which intentions, values, acts find their justification only in their realization and not in themselves.[8] This is, for Merleau-Ponty, the necessary tragedy of politics: one cannot escape subjectivity because one does not know the future, but it is only with the objectivity that comes in the future that present action will or will not be justified.[9] Seen within this logic, the trials appear, not necessary, but still illustrative of the drama of revolutionary politics which acknowledges the necessity and justification of violence if it is in the service of overcoming violence in the future. The logic of the trials escapes the easy morality of liberalism which hides its own history of violence (of past and present colonialism) from itself when condemning violence in the abstract.[10] Thus, Merleau-Ponty asks, "Why should it be necessary to hide what there was of Soviet patriotism in the purges when one reveals what honor there was in the opposition?"[11]

Bazin never mentions Merleau-Ponty, but in what he says about the trials, it is impossible that he was not drawing upon directly and responding to Merleau-Ponty's arguments.[12] On the

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[8] Ibid., 29-33.

[9] Ibid., 64.

[10] Ibid., xiii-xv.

[11] Ibid., xxxiii-xxxiv.

[12] It is important to point out that the three year difference between the appearance of Merleau-Ponty's and Bazin's texts is of some significance. In '47, Merleau-Ponty's position on Soviet Marxism was "wait-and-see" not only because he wanted to resist the stark choice of Cold War politics but also because French Marxist thought was still to disengage itself completely from the doctrinaire totality of Soviet Marxism. Thus, Merleau-Ponty could still argue in terms of the Soviet Union's violence as a vehicle for the realization of a society without violence. But his text is also shot through with the contradictions of such a position. It is an apology for the Trials which took place in the '30s, but it refuses to endorse the further hardening of the Soviet regime. More importantly, it uses the Trials to analyze the question of the violence inherent in politics and a critique of liberalism's refusal to acknowledge its own violence when critiquing Revolutionary violence. Bazin's article was published just after the start of the Korean War, an event that alienated many intellectuals who until then were to various degrees still in sympathy with the Soviet regime. It would precipitate Merleau-Ponty's own distancing from it and his break with Sartre over the question. In the original version of his article, however, Bazin writes that he first thought of this article after watching a Soviet film, *The Vow* (Mikhaïl Tchiaoureli, 1946), which released in France in 1949, but that he waited

subject of the trials, Bazin begins by pointing out, as Merleau-Ponty does at one point, "the

astonishingly subjective character of the political trials in the People's Democracies."[13]i The

trials are not a simple case of measuring guilt by ordinary legal criteria that seek to establish

whether certain acts designated as illegal were committed or not, but attempts to bring to the

surface the tragic conflict of subjectivity with history. Bazin argues that if these trials had indeed

brought out this dimension of revolutionary politics, the course they had taken, contrary to what

Merleau-Ponty says, had actually worked to suppress rather than acknowledge this dimension.

Bazin writes:

> From a rigorously Marxist point of view, it would suffice to declare that Bukharin,
> Rajk, or Kostov embodies tendencies that the Party has decided to combat because
> they are historically incorrect. The physical elimination of these men then wouldn't
> be any more necessary than that of our own ministers who resign. But from the
> moment that a man has taken part in History, from the moment has been mixed up in
> such and such an event, a part of his biography is irrevocably "historicized." An
> intolerable contradiction now exists between this definitively objective part, frozen
> in the past, and the physical existence of a Bukharin, a Zinoviev, or a Rajk. One
> cannot reduce man solely to History without in turn compromising this History
> through the subjectivity present in the individual. The living communist leader is a
> god sealed into history by his past acts.[14]ii

What he tries points out here is that if these men had contributed in the past to the making

of history, Soviet Marxism could not tolerate that they ever again stand apart from it. If they did,

it would compromise a certain version of Marxist historiography which affirms not only the

reciprocal character of individual subjectivity and historical objectivity but aims to harmonize

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for the release of a few more films to offer a better assessment. He claims therefore to have been preparing it, broadly speaking, for a year before its publication rather than using the occasion of the war for launching his critique of Stalin. Jay, *Marxism and* Totality, p. 278; Sunil Khilnani, 'French Marxism – existentialism to structuralism', in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 304-307; André Bazin, "Le cinéma soviétique et le mythe de Staline," in Esp vol. 8 no. 170 (August 1950), 212.

[13] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 83 [BW 31].

[14] Ibid., 83-84 [BW 32].

them in the teleological progression of the revolution. It would suggest that subjectivity can engage and disengage from the course of history, be with it one moment, against it at another, and even indifferent to it at others. Bazin argues that for the Soviet understanding of History an individual's subjectivity is once and for all either with it or against it: "From the perspective of 'Stalinist' Soviet Communism, no one can 'become' a traitor, because this would mean that he hasn't been one all along, that there had been a biographical beginning to this treason. It would also mean that a man who has become detrimental to the Party and to History had formerly been useful to both, and thus had been good before he became evil."[15][iii] This explains the practice of re-writing the place of individuals in history in order to eliminate what Merleau-Ponty had called the "drama of subjective honesty and objective treason." Bazin concludes, "[O]ur bourgeois conscience, 'hypocritical' and 'idealistic,' can accept at the same time the historical evidence that Pétain is both the 'victor of Verdun' and the 'traitor of Montoire,' whereas the liquidated old comrades must disappear from the painting of Soviet history itself,"[16][iv] because "for the communist only death can reabsorb all subjectivity into event."[17][v] Therefore, "the notion of objective treason, which first seems to follow so clearly from Marxism, has in fact not survived practical politics."[18]

This provocative comparison with the history of the Occupation by invoking Pétain too follows Merleau-Ponty in comparing the Trials to the post-war Purge of collaborators in France. Merleau-Ponty had argued that there were perhaps cases where the collaborators were in the

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[15] Ibib., 84 [BW 32].

[16] Ibid., 85 [BW 31].

[17] Ibid., 83 [BW 31].

[18] Ibid., 84 [BW 32].

same position as the Soviet leaders put on trial, where they may have sincerely if misguidedly

thought that they were acting in the national interest by collaborating with the Nazis, doing the

only thing that prevented France from being completely overrun by Germany. This still does not

mean that they were innocent. But the French Purges were a judgment on the past that could well

be made without putting the collaborators to death, whereas the Moscow Trials of the late '30s

were a wager on the future of the revolution whose course needed securing from aberrant

subjectivities.[19] Bazin might agree with this logic but, as we have seen, would deny that the

Trials were really oriented towards a political future still in the balance. He speaks of the rare

cases in the Soviet context where a public *mea culpa* suffices, generally in the cases of

intellectuals or artists who have no claims on political power. This form of self-criticism

functions as a confession in the Christian sense, something that Merleau-Ponty also points out.

But Merleau-Ponty believes that the parallelism is further evidence of the necessary tragedy of

politics in an alienated world:

> To the extent that alienation and transcendence persist, the drama of the opposition
> member in the Party, is, at least formally, the drama of the heretic in the Church. Not
> that communism is, as is vaguely said, a religion but because in the one case as in the
> other the individual acknowledges in advance the jurisdiction of the event, and,
> having recognized a providential import in the Church, an historical mission in the
> proletariat and its leadership, having acknowledged that everything that happens is
> due to God or the logic of history, he can no longer back his own opinion against the
> judgment of the Party or the Church.[20]

Bazin refuses this logic because he refuses the logic of Christian confession and

absolution understood as a procedure by which an individual's life can be rewritten to make it

suitable for personal or historical salvation. In his review of Federico Fellini's *Il Bidone* (1955),

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[19] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, 36-44.

[20] Ibid., 68.

Bazin would go on to argue that salvation as an idea is valid only to the extent that it allows for the acknowledgement of the contradictions of a life but not to overcome them.[21] We have also already seen this as a normative feature of his theory of genres which too confess to contradictions at the end of their trajectories and those in the audience who had been under their spell before this confession are required to acknowledge them consciously just as they had imbibed them unconsciously; there is a necessarily tragic quality to this experience. In the essay on the Stalin myth, Bazin points out that Church and the Party, as Merleau-Ponty describes them, are not the instruments of the necessary tragedy of action but help in overcoming such tragedy by a process (the confession) that Bazin calls "exorcistic" in relation to history; something that conjures away the unwelcome phantoms of the past.[22] This exorcist's role of the Party leads Merleau-Ponty to hope that "the Party will perhaps rehabilitate those whom it condemned once a new historical phase has altered the significance of their behavior." The proof: it has made available the *Report of Court Proceedings* and "translated [it] into every language of the world."[23] Bazin's argument suggests that Merleau-Ponty was looking at the wrong document. If only he had been to the local film club to watch Soviet films, he would have known that the logic of History had already found its culmination, not in a classless society, but in the person of Stalin. There he would have seen that the parallel between the Church and the Party is rendered explicit, but not as a way of substituting the path towards a classless society for the Kingdom of God. In *The Vow* (Mikhaïl Tchiaoureli, 1946), the classless society gives way to the "consecration of History" in Stalin, with the blessings of a now-dead Lenin, represented with

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[21] André Bazin, "*Il Bidone*, or the Road to Salvation Reconsidered," in BW, 221-224.

[22] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, p. 32.

[23] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, p. 69.

explicit Judeo-Christian iconography. Thus, it is cinema that helps Bazin clinch an argument with Merleau-Ponty in which he accords with the latter's understanding of the nature of political action as an inevitable and often tragic drama of subjective and objective factors while refusing the latter's desire to eliminate the contradiction between the two.

As Staiger, Rosen, and Margulies point out, the essay on the Stalin myth reprises the central presuppositions of his most prominent theoretical essays, "Ontology" and "Total Cinema": the mummy complex of the first and the myth of teleological history of the second.[24] They point out how in the films both these principles are denuded of their hypothetical and open quality in Bazin's work. The hypostasized counterpart of the "mummy complex" of Ancient Egypt that Bazin had argued lay behind the filmic impulse in general turns into the literal mummification of Lenin which prepares the ground for the consecration of History in Stalin; and the asymptote principle of film history, by which cinema always approaches reality without coinciding with it, has its failed counterpart in Bazin's claim that in Stalin "the asymptote between Man and History is henceforth surpassed."[25][vi] In concluding the essay, Bazin argues that cinema's role in bringing about this consecration cannot be underestimated because, unlike language and iconography photographic cinema has, as Bazin had argued in the "Ontology" essay, the "irrational power to bear away our faith".[26]

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[24] Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 32-36; Ivone Margulies, "Bazin's Exquisite Corpses", in *Opening Bazin*, pp. 186-199; Staiger, '*Theorist*, Yes! But What *Of*?'.

[25] Bazin, 'Le mythe de Staline', 85 [BW 33].

[26] André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in Hugh Gray (trans. & ed.), *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 14.

It might seem astonishing that the essay should end with an observation that the Soviet cinema's representation of Stalin has in fact traded on this basic power of the cinematographic image that is understood to be the core of Bazin's fascination with film. Margulies notes that this is a "cut-and-dry" ending very unlike Bazin who was fond of phrases of audacious paradox for summing up his essays as a way to keep the experience of the image open. The reason for this, she suggests, is that Soviet cinema's misuse of his cherished powers of the cinematographic image points to a "real impasse" in his ontological theory of film, showing up its blind spots. Rosen writes, "Clearly, Stalinist cinema *diverts* the founding myth of total cinema. The irony and precision of Bazin's examination of religious attitudes in the decadent socialist realism of the late Stalinism show that the appeals of cinematic realism could be put to what an existentialist would call bad-faith uses."[27] These remarks suggest that, in accounting for the Stalinist use of cinematic realism which no longer relies on montage editing, Bazin becomes aware of how the asymptotic principle may become, or be made, inoperative, and the realist myth "diverted." But to imply that he becomes aware of this in 1950 is to accept the equivalence between Bazin's ontological and aesthetic accounts of the cinema. It is to also to imply that Bazin took cinema's ontological reality to be asymptotic by default. I argued in the last chapter that these assumptions are inaccurate since cinematic ontology yields nothing but a suspended reality whose historical origins and present meaning remain uncertain even as the image's claims to objectivity are unassailable at this first level. The Stalin films, like *Why We Fight*, exploit this uncertainty to consolidate their ultimate arguments. I will now describe this aspect of the films briefly before turning to their particularly novel use of the filmed body rather than logical speech to clinch their effect of irrefutable reality on film.

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[27] Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 34. My emphasis.

Reality on the Scale of Cinematic Ontology

If Stalin had to be represented as the culmination of the Revolution, then one could imagine films that simply thread together the mythic landmarks in its history from Marx or Lenin to Stalin, passing through the grand events. This is partly what the films do. In *The Vow* Stalin is seen as the next "stage" in the revolution after Lenin. In both *The Vow* and the *The Fall of Berlin*, World War II and specifically the battle of Stalingrad figure as the historical events on which Stalin and the Soviet Union impose themselves. But the films construct their grand narrative through the kind of attention to realist detail that both the war and the state doctrine of Socialist Realism, with its call for positive heroes, demanded. Bazin points to the films' almost obsessive use of real-scale war scenes shot from various angles that multiply the effect of reality without creating any order.

> In effect, and even as the reconstitution [of the battle] attains a material breadth and exactitude not equaled since Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, one could maintain that it is the equivalent of the vision that Fabrice had at Waterloo. Certainly not in material terms, since we are not spared the physical spectacle of war, but effectively so through the impossibility the camera creates of our giving the chaos any order. Equivalent in these terms to documentary newsreels recorded on the run, this image of war is in some ways amorphous… a species of human and mechanical cataclysm… Imagine that you look down from an unassailable helicopter at the war operations, giving you as general a vision of the battlefield as possible without for all that revealing the fate of the battle nor even its development or orientation.[28]vii

This is a view of history at the scale of cinematic ontology which seemingly brings us right into the heart of battle unlike Stendhal's Fabrice who could only catch the action of the battle he was supposedly fighting from a great distance. But we aren't any wiser than Fabrice who can't be sure if he actually saw a war, let alone fight one. It lacks the reassuring logical containment through voiceover that *Why We Fight* provides.

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[28] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 80 [BW 28].

What does confer the impression of logic upon the exhaustive but disparate reality of the Stalin films is the figure of Stalin himself poring over maps of the battlefield and explaining the course of action. But these explanations by themselves make little sense. As Bazin describes it, the chaos of the battlefield is the base of a cone and the figure of Stalin sitting in Kremlin is the tip that confers form on it. However, he says, in between the base and the tip there is nothing but an imaginary conductor of the logic proceeding from top to bottom. What Bazin finds amazing is that despite the absence of any comprehensible logic, these films succeed in giving the impression of a neat schema which claims to be not only historical but also scientific: "[W]e see that the means [of recording] were not rigged in order to reconstitute the battle as perfectly as possible. How can we then doubt the objective rigor of what we see at the other end of the chain? When one has gone to such trouble to show the resistance of Stalingrad in its material ampleur, how could we be wrong about that of Kremlin?"[29] But this quasi-magical conviction of logic that the figure of Stalin exudes cannot completely be derived from the objectivity of filmic image since it is the chaos of that very objectivity that cries for form. Since Stalin too offers nothing that can be seen as convincing logic, Bazin concludes that "the attributes of Stalin that we grasp here can no longer be called psychological but only the ontological ones of omniscience and infallibility."[30] In short, it is the *body* of Stalin that finally convinces us that there is logic to the objective chaos of battle. The following is Bazin's conclusion to the essay.

> Here the supremacy of Stalinian genius is no longer of the order of opportunism or metaphor; it is properly ontological. Not only because the significance and the persuasive force of cinema are incomparably grander than those of any other means of propaganda, but above all because the nature of the cinematic image is something else. Impressing itself on our minds as rigorously transposable onto reality, the cinema is in essence incontestable like Nature and History. A portrait of Pétain, de

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[29] Ibid., 81 [BW 29]. My emphasis.

[30] Ibid.

Gaulle, or Stalin can be taken down the same way it was put up—in itself it commits us to nothing even at the scale of a hundred square feet. A *cinematic reconstitution* of Stalin and one centered above all on Stalin suffices to define once and for all the place and meaning of Stalin in the world and to irrevocably fix his essence.[31][viii]

Bazin argues here that cinema's ontology serves to fix the essence of Stalin because of its ability to capture and mummify identity. But where is this identity when Stalin is played by an actor? And what gives us the impression of his ontological omniscience and infallibility? Also, since Bazin argues that the battle scenes defeat the logical significance of the image—maximizing its ambiguity as it were—even as they affirm its objective precision, the logical relation between Stalin's pencil on the map and the action on the battlefield should not come from the account of cinematic ontology that we have so far whose connivance with logical reason is absent here. Where films like *Why We Fight* and *Avant le Déluge* analyze reality through speech and editing, leaving no margin for contradiction, the Stalin films organize their effects of totality around the non-rational presence of the star body. What we need therefore is a reconstruction of Bazin's theory of the star body in general, to which I turn in the next section, before returning to his specific comments on Stalin's star persona. It is only with Bazin's standard account of the star body can we understand his analysis of the "genius" of Stalin's body on screen.

Corporeal Totality

The existing accounts of the place of the body in Bazin's theory have simplified it along the same lines as most existing accounts of Bazin's ontology of cinematic realism have elided his anxieties about it. The preferred readings are illustrated by the work of Karl Schoonover and Ivone Margulies which I will be engaging in my own reconstruction of Bazin's ontology of the

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[31] Ibid., 88 [BW 35-36]. My emphasis.

filmic body.[32] Both Schoonover and Margulies ascribe values of contingency and ambiguity to the body in Bazin's film theory, but they ascribe them to different ends. For Schoonover, the body as a marker of contingency, particularly the contingency of suffering and danger, is a mark of an ambiguous sincerity that facilitates identification. For Margulies, cinema's ability to expose the alternate convergence and disjunction between the actor's body and the character's body illustrates the indeterminacy favored by Bazininan ontology as well as its special relationship to the recording of human death. These accounts are not incorrect but certainly insufficient for capturing the complexity of Bazin's position because they do not sufficiently take into account his writings on star bodies.[33] I will argue that the star body and the mythic persona that it carries, however ambiguous, has the power to confer a non-logical meaning on an indeterminate world and paradoxically give it a veneer of logic. The fundamental ontological insight from the previous chapter guiding the discussion is that in the photo-filmic image a transfer of being takes place from the filmed body to the body on film, so that the body on film is at once identified with the person filmed and also continues to have an autonomous existence.

Karl Schoonover has argued that the body, and more particularly the suffering or endangered body, is a privileged mode of identification in Bazin's theory of realism. He makes this point in the context of a compelling argument that neo-realism is part of the construction of a new international humanism in the post-World War II world where identification with suffering at a distance plays an important role. Schoonover argues that Bazin's repeated fascination with suffering bodies, whether that of Chaplin in a lion's cage in *City Lights* (1931) or of the

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[32] Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), ch. 1.

[33] Even though Margulies writes about the *myth* of Chaplin and briefly references Bazin's essay on Humphrey Bogart, she remains at the level of conflating Chaplin's mythology with the mythology of cinematic realism and death in Bazin. Margulies, "Bazin's exquisite corpses," in *Opening Bazin*, 186.

expeditionists in documentaries such as *Kon-Tiki* (1947), comes from a belief that the body is the

site of the greatest ambiguity and contingency in the cinema.

> Bazin's concern for the filmed body follows from an interest in the radical
> potentialities of contingency in the relations between the image and its viewer. For
> him, the inadvertent or unintended gesture stands as a primary means of locating the
> force of contingency in the image… The ambiguity of the image often seems most
> available at moments of urgent corporeality. Figuring the image's ability to compel
> in a bodily idiom in this sense allows Bazin to emphasize the image's obligations
> without hypostatizing it. Bazin calls this "the flesh and blood ambiguity of the
> cinematographic image: see and understand!"[34]

Schoonover is right to argue that the body is a privileged locus for aesthetic affect but this locus

is both more complex and often also of concern to Bazin. In "On Realism," the 1944 essay Bazin

wrote at the same time as "Ontology," he writes:

> For the first time the realism of the image achieved entire objectivity and made of the
> photograph a sort of ontological equivalent of the model. (Because of this, *the human
> body, a privileged objects in all the plastic arts, is almost inevitably obscene or
> pornographic on the screen*."[35]

Schoonover points to this passage, but according to him, Bazin's understanding of the obscene

and the pornographic is defined "as much by curiosity, resolve, and resilience as by

withdrawal."[36] This is too quick an assertion which covers over the context of concern in which

Bazin makes this and other statements. As we will see, it elides the fact, that Bazin identifies

specific modes for overcoming this "ontological obscenity" of the body on film without

defeating the materiality of the filmic image.

Bazin's quote in my excerpt from Schoonover above, "the flesh and blood ambiguity of

the cinematographic image: see and understand!" is from "The Grandeur of *Limelight*." Bazin

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[34] Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 4.

[35] André Bazin, "On Realism," FCOR, 71.

[36] Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 3.

writes it in the context of describing how in the character of Calvero it is Chaplin himself who is

laying himself bare before the public, bringing the confessional form of narrative to the cinema.

After having defended Chaplin's prolixity by identifying it as a standard generic device of the

confession borrowed from literature, Bazin concedes that there is indeed something disturbing

about *watching* a person confess so confidently and blatantly in public.

> Art of the spectacle, hyperbole of incarnation by the monstrous physical proximity of the image, the cinema is in effect *a priori* the most immodest of the arts. For this reason, it requires the maximum modesty: the mask and disguise: that of style and subject, or of make-up. In *Limelight*, Chaplin half strips the first two, the third completely. *Ecce Homo*.[37] ix

Bazin here first sets up an opposition between the immodest "hyperbole of incarnation"

that captures the identity of the person filmed and the aesthetic mechanisms that can deflect this

capture (mask, style, subject, and make-up). But he also congratulates Chaplin for stripping away

these mechanisms, especially make-up, and revealing the "hyperbole of incarnation" in the

cinema. He explains this contradiction by arguing that Chaplin can take up the audacious gamble

of exposing himself so barely because he is confident in the popularity of his mythic persona: "It

is necessary that he be sure enough of the love of the public to speak of himself to millions of

men with such gravity and conviction; sure enough also to strip the mask that made him loved."

> The grandeur of *Limelight* is here mixed up with the grandeur of cinema itself. It is the most striking manifestation of its essence which is: abstraction *through* incarnation. Without doubt, *it is only the unique position of Chaplin, the universality and vitality of his myth… which allow the dialectical measure of cinema*. Socrates of the 20th century, Chaplin-Calvero drinks the hemlock in public, *the Public*, but the wisdom of his death cannot be reduced to words. It is first and above all in its spectacle which dares to base itself on the carnal ambiguity of the cinematographic image: see and understand![38] x

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[37] André Bazin, "Le grandeur de *Limelight*," in QQCIII, 130 [WCI 138].

[38] Bazin, "Le grandeur de *Limelight*," 131 [WCI 138].

It is tempting indeed, as Schoonover does, to believe that the ambiguity that Bazin talks about is a marker of sincerity in exposure which allows the identification desired by a new international humanism.[39] But this particular kind of ambiguity, based on the pornographic sincerity of the film image, is justified in Chaplin's case because of a necessary qualifying condition: the prior popularity of his screen persona that Chaplin counts on to dare this self-exposure. Spectatorial identification with Chaplin/Calvero does not follow exposure but rather precedes it, and it survives Chaplin's self-exposure because of the strength of this prior identification. Without this qualifying condition, the (aesthetic) essence of cinema remains "abstraction *through* incarnation," which is the opposite of self-exposure. The challenge is not incarnation which cinema yields automatically and hyperbolically but to reach for abstraction through this incarnation. The lesson of the essay that Schoonover quotes from is that without our prior attachment to Chaplin, his self-exposure and confession would have interrupted our identification with Calvero; and the one thing Bazin is not is a theorist whose normative commitment is to breaking the identificatory processes of the cinema.[40]

As has already been the case in this dissertation, the example of Chaplin reveals *in extremis* a more general theory in Bazin. In this case, the theoretical principle is that the screen persona of an actor takes over the ontological identity of the person acting who has an off-screen life. Bazin's approach to screen actors rests on a fascination with the fact that one is never

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[39] "For Bazin, an actorless cinema would bring us closer to pure cinema. Cinema is able to tell stories freed from human agency and less dependent on the conscious expression of its performers. The viewer is given the sense that she is watching 'caught unawares.' [sic]" Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 40.

[40] To extend Bazin's reading of *Limelight* on his own terms, what Chaplin bares with courage by taking off his make-up is still his public persona which is tied to his aging body, and this persona touches his private person only to the extent that Chaplin's private life added to his public persona rather than standing apart from it. His marriages, affairs, and business interests only seemingly stood in contrast with his screen persona, as we have seen Bazin argue in chapter three.

dealing only with characters on film, but always with characters and the actors who play them. As actors appear across films, they carry their identities to all the characters they play, however heterogeneous. Better yet, as Bazin argues in analyzing the personas of Greta Garbo, Jean Gabin, and Humphrey Bogart, these stars carry not personal identities but their mythic identities. The historical Garbo, Bogart, and Gabin have no identities in the public sphere except those that derive from or are related to their screen personae which themselves have a coherence that subsumes the characters they play: "[T]he film star is not just an actor particularly dear to the public, but a hero of legends and tragedy, a 'destiny' to which scriptwriters and directors are forced to conform even without their knowledge."[41][xi]

The drama of screen performance is always the drama of the complete coincidence of the actor's persona and the persona of the character being played. Moreover, it is predicated on an ontological death of Bogart, Gabin, and Garbo as open subjectivities off screen whose identities might change under the force of experience. Bazin finds a literal example of the camera's murderous demand upon the human body to fix itself upon film in Nicole Védrès's documentary *Paris 1900* (1947), a compilation film of newsreels from the *Belle Époque*. The film contains footage of a "birdman" who sets himself up to take flight from the roof of a building: "It seems clear that the poor fool takes fright and finally realizes the absurdity of his wager. But the camera is there to fix him for eternity and he dare not disappoint the soulless eye in the end. Had there been *only* human witnesses, a wise cowardice would no doubt have prevailed over him."[42][xii] The footage shows him jumping to his death. The living body of the star is also in some ways the

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[41] André Bazin, "Jean Gabin et Son Destin," in QQCIII, 79.

[42] André Bazin, "A la recherché du temps perdu: *Paris 1900*," in QQCI, 41-42. My emphasis.

dead body of the person who became the star who cannot disappoint the camera by a change of persona: "Do you see… Gabin as a future father of a family?"[43]xiii

Bazin explains the notion of the star persona as an abstraction of the body most clearly in his review of *Queen Christina* where he argues that Great Garbo's embodied abstraction of stardom corresponds to the stylistic abstraction of reality in the cinema of the '20s and '30s. Speaking of the eroticism of the film, he calls it "the highpoint of erotic litote and… of its effectiveness" because the sexuality of a fully-clothed Garbo exists at the other pole from the mark of authenticity that nudity would provide. The "almost incorporeal" Garbo is the "ontological equivalent of this universe where signs shun the gross weight of things… Her irreality however is not a lack but a supplement of being. It takes nothing away from her femininity but on the contrary adds all the possibilities of which incarnation deprives her. She is here Berenice… she could no doubt be all the grand heroines. She is our Eve."[44]xiv What Bazin celebrates with self-confessed nostalgia is a time in history where corporeal incarnation on film could, like the persona of the Tramp, be the abstracted site for multiple social affectivities;[45] in Garbo's case, a range of feminine ideals. But in his celebration, he argues that nostalgia cannot and should not prevent the cinema from now confronting its own realist "genius," in the literal sense of a source of historical expression. Chaplin's removal of the mask is at the crossroads of this corporeal confrontation that Bazin reads in *The Great Dictator* (1940).

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[43] Bazin, "Jean Gabin," 79.

[44] André Bazin, "*La Reine Christina*," in Obs no. 249 (17 February 1955)

[45] Bazin's review is prefaced with an extended autobiographical note where he speaks about how, despite not having watched much of Garbo when young because of his scholarly life in the province and tastes at the time, he recognizes himself as having grown up "under the aura of [Garbo's] glory" through "social osmosis." Bazin, "*La Reine Christina*".

In the speech at the end of *The Great Dictator*, "for the first time we are present… at the sketch of a metamorphosis. The proximity of the camera, and much more perhaps the grayscale of the panchromatic film, cause the face of Chaplin to appear as in a superimposition, clearly readable under the mask of the little fellow with the moustache."[46][xv] The war along with a new film stock that could register more shades had forced the body of the aging Chaplin to emerge from behind his screen persona and to speak to the world. It would be a mistake to read this multiplication of personae by film stock too quickly, following Margulies, as a mark of Bazin's aesthetic ontology. For her, as for Schoonover, this multiplication "tracks Bazin's attempt to secure cinema's alliance with the ephemeral, the faulty, and the contingent."[47] We need to remind ourselves that Chaplin's being at the crossroads of cinema's confrontation with corporeality was also only a chapter in his own mythology.

The laying bare of Chaplin's multiple bodies has an internal meaning that is stronger than the adjectives "ephemeral," "faulty," and "contingent" suggest. Rather this multiplication is in fact the necessary revelation of the contradictions of a single mythology which could only come towards the end of its trajectory. If Chaplin had started appearing as a young Tramp starting at fifty years of age, and the sensitive film stock had clearly shown his wrinkles behind the make-up as in *The Great Dictator*, there would have been no Charlot as we know him. Similarly, if this older Chaplin, without the popularity of his alter-ego behind him, had also made *Limelight*, the lack of make-up would have revealed nothing that had previously been hidden. In Bazin's account of the cinema, the make-up needs to first be invisible—that is "enduring," "efficient,"

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[46] André Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," in *Les Temps Modernes*, 1115. See also André Bazin, ""If Charlot hadn't died," in *Essays on Chaplin*, ed. & trans. Jean Bodon (New Haven: University of New Haven Press, 1985) 51-58.

[47] Margulies, "Bazin's Exquisite Corpses," in *Opening Bazin*.

and "firm"—if its ultimate disintegration is to have any meaning. But let us leave Chaplin to turn to the postwar persona that for Bazin was the most powerful embodiment of the confrontation between a stripped down physical reality and the star body that incarnated its mythology: Humphrey Bogart.

Mourning for an actor dead from "esophageal cancer and half a million whiskies," Bazin calls Bogart a modern myth in the Baudelairean sense because "in the hero of *The Barefoot Contessa* we admire the eminent dignity of our decay."[xvi] He "incarnated the immanence of death, as well as its imminence… the corpse on borrowed time in each of us."[48][xvii] But he goes on to point out that he does not embody an abstract idea of decay, death, and modernity but an *abstracted* experience of the death and decay brought on by the war: "I would like to… remark that this distant modernity which guarantees the profound poetry of Bogart's persona and no doubt justifies his legendary character responds to a more precise modernity of our generation. Bogart is no doubt the typical mythic actor of the war and the postwar era."[49][xviii] He then marks his coincidence with the emergence with *Citizen Kane* of the deep focus film style and its ambiguities. So far, Bogart's suffering body and his ambiguity confirm Schoonover's argument that these are the features of postwar realism that Bazin theorized. But it all depends on to what end the ambiguity is employed and if it is as contingent as Schoonover and Margulies argue. Bazin distinguishes Bogart from other major star personae of the postwar years: James Dean and Marlon Brando.

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[48] André Bazin, "Mort d'Humphrey Bogart," in QQCIII, 86, 83.

[49] Bazin, "Mort d'Humphrey Bogart," 86. Also, "Bogart is the man after fate. When he enters a film it is already the pale dawn of the day after, ridiculously victorious in a macabre combat with the angel, the face marked by what he has seen and the gait heavy with all he knows." (84)

274

> The only thing [Bogart and the method actors of the "Kazan school"] have in common is the reaction against psychological acting. But whether taciturn like Brando or exuberant like Dean, the Kazan style is based on the postulate of an anti-cerebral spontaneity. The comportment of the actors is supposed to be unpredictable since it no longer translates the profound logic of sentiments but externalizes immediate impulses whose link to the inner life can be read directly.[50] The secret of Bogart is different. It is surely the prudent silence of Conrad, the phlegm of one who knows the perils of rash revelations, but above all [knows] the *unfathomable vanity of these epidermal sincerities*. Suspicion and weariness, wisdom and skepticism, Bogey is a stoic.[51]xix

Bogart's is a studied and interiorized ambiguity which will not yield itself to the "vanity of these epidermal sincerities" of a Brando or a Dean who too readily put their incoherent contingent states on display; it is also a *wary* ambiguity. But Bazin argues that the *uses* of such an ambiguity were the key to Bogart's success.

Unlike a Gabin who could succeed only by playing the romantic character tragically cheated by life or most other stars who could convincingly play only the singular characters of their personae across all their successful films (Chaplin remains the Tramp even when is Verdoux or Calvero), Bogart could play characters with a variable moral compass, from the good to the ambiguous to the outright villainous while keeping his persona. Our sympathetic

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[50] In the original version in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the last phrase of this sentence is given as "*ne saurait se lire directement*" while the version in QQCIII gives it as "*saurait se lire directement*." The later version could well be a printer's mistake or Bazin's correction. However, I am assuming the latter because Bazin's point is clearly that the sincerities of Brando and Dean are skin deep and we do not sense any gap between the inner and outer life. Bogart, on the other hand, gives nothing of his inner life so that we can neither directly nor indirectly infer a link between the two. It is unclear if Bazin had time to edit the articles for this volume which was first published in 1960, around two years after his death. But then again, a note to his article on *Bicycle Thieves* in volume four of *Qu'est ce que le cinéma?* offers a *mea culpa* about his excessive praise in 1949 for *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) As Jacques Rivette's editorial note to the volume tells us, this was the only volume for which he could not identify articles before his death. And yet Bazin had left this note with the manuscript of the article. When Rohmer reviewed volume one of the book in January 1959, less than two months after Bazin's death, he was already speaking about a third volume on cinema and sociology that he had read. See Bazin, "Mort d'Humphrey Bogart," in QQCIII, 87; André Bazin, "Mort d'Humphrey Bogart," in *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 68 (February 1957), 6. André Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," in QQCIV, 47; Eric Rohmer, "André Bazin's 'summa'," in *The Taste for Beauty*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 101ff.

[51] Bazin, "Mort d'Humphrey Bogart," in QQCIII, 87-88. My emphasis.

attachment to him is ontological and persists through all such characters he plays. Here we return to the Bazinian aesthetic politics of the earlier chapters according to which the aesthetic affectively commits us to conditions, people, and things even against our inclinations, beliefs, and values. Bogart personified this lesson as a particularly postwar one when he demonstrated through his career and his particular deathly stoicism that "beyond all imaginary biographies and moral virtues or their absence, our sympathy goes to some more profound wisdom, to a certain manner of accepting the human condition which could be common to the bastard and to the brave, to the loser and to the hero. The Bogartian man [defines himself]… above all by this existential maturity which transforms life little by little into a tenacious irony at the expense of death."[52][xx] Bogart's stoicism is also different from that of prewar heroes who appeared equally reserved. In someone like Gary Cooper, Bazin argues, it drew its sense of conviction from the actor's physical strength. The decrepit body of Bogart gets by in physical fights with "perspicacity." He receives his fair share of blows but lands his own at just the right time, much the same way as his dry witticisms. "And then there is his revolver which in his hands becomes an argument that disarms."[53][xxi] What Bazin is describing here is a deflection of the demand for intellectual analysis into the embodiment of stoic wisdom. If we recall his analyses of films such as *Why We Fight* and *Avant le Déluge* in which the physical world on film calls forth logical positivism, we can see in Bogart's body a physicality which abstracts itself into something as uncertain as wisdom but which is perhaps more forcefully convincing than logical reason, all the while remaining thoroughly exposed.

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[52] Ibid., 88.

[53] Ibid, 84.

To sum up Bazin's reading of Bogart, the latter personifies the cinematic demand for greater realism by incarnating a decaying corporeality, but this is not the corporeality of contingency but of a studied and abstracted ambiguity that affirms the value of a range of otherwise contradictory experiences. The persona does not multiply contradictions but absorbs them into itself. Therefore, *pace* Margulies the aesthetic ontology of cinema consists first in an absorption of contradictions into a defining myth—in this case, the star body—rather than in their corporeal exposure which always comes at the end of the mythic life. The idea of ambiguity this reading yields is therefore different also from Schoonover's who believes that ambiguity for Bazin means a suspension of definite meaning. Therefore, he writes the following about Bazin's understanding of ambiguity.

> Bazin wants to find instances of cinema's radical contingency in specific moments when a realist film brings to bear the same uncertainty that confounds us in daily life. Always on the lookout for indeterminacy, Bazin sometimes overreaches to find his examples, obscuring how films like [*Bicycle Thieves*] exploit contingency, ambiguity, and indeterminacy for their rhetorics of realism… Bazin thus avoids the possibility that a film might deploy ambiguity with a particular semantic gain or in hopes of producing specific reactions in the viewer.[54]

The ideal of merely confounding us with radical contingency or indeterminacy is not a part of Bazin's aesthetic philosophy. The body of Bogart commits us to all the characters with their very specific outlines such as those of the "bastard" and the "brave." To tie this reading of the human body to the ideal of the "total artwork" and the post-theological condition in which I have placed Bazin's ontology of film, let us recall Bazin's concluding lines to the essay on Gabin and his tragic persona.

> It is up to the sociologist and the moralist (singularly up to the Christian moralist and, why not, up to the theologian) to look into the profound signification of a

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[54] Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 165. In chapter seven, I will demonstrate that for Bazin *Bicycle Thieves* was a perfect thesis film.

mythology where, in the popularity of an actor like Gabin, tens of millions of our contemporaries find themselves. Perhaps a world without God again becomes a world of Gods and their fates.[55]xxii

Cinematic mythologies, the preeminent ones for most of the twentieth century, find their expression in the transfer of identities around and into human bodies. With this reminder of the totalizing ambitions of the aesthetic, let us now return to the case of Stalin's body in Soviet cinema.

The Filmic Body at the Origins of Totalitarianism

The argument where we left it was that the figure of Stalin in the Soviet films manages to confer an impression of logical order to the chaos of battle scenes recorded and edited without consideration for the clarity and analysis of continuity editing. Bazin says that no one is stupid enough to believe that the particular pencil manoeuvers of Stalin shown in film were the ones that really dictated the war.[56] So the films do not convince us by demonstrable logic despite the "material ampleur" of the filmic evidence. His conclusion is that it could only be the presence of Stalin that by its sheer force embodies that ontological omniscience necessary to give the impression of order. However, the body on film is not Stalin's, but that of an actor playing Stalin, so what we see on film is not the embodied intelligence of Stalin the way Bogart is embodied intelligence. In these circumstances, is it sufficient for the actor to have the necessary physical features both to stand in for Stalin as well as for generating the affective force of Stalin himself? Bazin approaches this problem by looking further into what we have seen him remark upon, early in this chapter, as an innovation of Soviet cinema: its willingness to portray living historical figures in the cinema.

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[55] Bazin, "Jean Gabin," 82.

[56] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline, 80 [BW 28].

Bazin's argument on the representability of active public figures is that the personification of Stalin as the end of History goes against the idea of a human life as an open potentiality that can always turn into something else than what it has been until any given point of its existence. For Bazin the significance, or signification, of a life is radically incomplete until the moment of death.[57] The principle of the unpredictability of the meaning of human life has special significance in relation to political figures. The meaning of the life of a political figure, as with all lives, cannot be defined with any appearance of certainty while he or she lives… except through cinema. If a star plays a public figure, her myth does not exist in dialectical tension with the character of the political figure, but lends itself to defining that figure in the public imagination and robs it of continuing existence and its unpredictability to some extent. But what is to be mourned for Bazin is not the existential loss of the life of the politician but the loss of politics itself, as an ongoing contestation of meaning, which comes with the fixing of the politician's significance. When thinking of political figures, the example of Marshall Pétain hangs heavy on Bazin's imagination who went from the hero of one war, and subsequently being marginal to French political life, to suddenly finding a way at eighty-four years of age to become the prime traitor of the next war, much like the politician in a Jacques Prévert story Bazin references who goes mad on the day his statue is to be dedicated. Similarly, in the original version of the essay, he mocks the monarchic pretensions of Charles de Gaulle, the embodiment of French Resistance only five years ago, by referring to him as "Grand Charles."[58]

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[57] Even representations after the fact of death are better understood as contestations over meaning after the fact rather than as statements of a single meaning.

[58] Bazin, "Le Cinéma Soviétique et le Mythe de Staline," in Esp, 214.

As against the figure of the politician, Bazin points out, we find it hardly problematic to have representations of living celebrities from the fields of entertainment and sports. The meaning of their lives can be abstracted into myths with fewer problems because the lifetimes of actors, musicians, or sportspersons in those roles—their careers—do not always coincide with their whole lifetimes. This being true, the meaning of their careers may be defined while they continue to live their other lives. But a tension does exist in this case when the mythology of non-filmic celebrity confronts the particular mythology of the star playing her. One can always look for a star who complements the mythic persona of the celebrity, or find a non-descript but competent actor who can take on the persona of the celebrity; but at its limits the situation can be solved perfectly by having the celebrity play herself. Bazin found such an example at the time he was writing. He mentions the case of the French-Algerian boxer Marcel Cerdan who starred in two films, one in which he played a boxer, and the other in which he played himself in the lead role. Bazin writes, "But one might say, that was Cerdan in person; certainly, but the difference isn't so great [between Cerdan playing Cerdan and an actor playing him],"[xxiii] because he is playing his own myth.[59] This in fact was the option available to Soviet cinema when it wanted to define the meaning of Stalin's existence as the endpoint of History.

At this point, let us recall Bazin's argument in *The Great Dictator* that once Hitler "stole" Charlot's moustache his existence was at the mercy of Chaplin who could rob it any time by deciding to present himself as the dictator.[60] *The Great Dictator*'s ambition, only partly realized, was to transform the real Hitler into his caricature on screen and to thus deprive him of an autonomous existence in the public imaginary. Hitler could not have appreciated this, but this is

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[59] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 77 [BW 25].

[60] André Bazin, "Pastiche et postiche ou le néant pour une moustache," in QQCI, 91-95.

what Stalin needed, with the qualification of course that not a caricature but an embodiment of his own ideal play him. Bazin's argument is that the unpredictability of the subjective identity of an individual was a threat to the Soviet understanding of teleological history. And if that individual happened to be Stalin in whom history was supposed to have found its realization, he could not afford to have a subjective identity. Rather, he needed to be mummified at the apex of his terrifying reputation that had the power to safeguard the Soviet Revolution by keeping in check wayward subjectivities, making them confess their sins, at the same time as arranging them on chaotic battles from Kremlin. This reputation was forged both by his political actions as well as through propaganda through other media such as painting and sculpture. Now it needed cinema to secure it. Though Bazin does not spell it out, following the example of the boxer Cerdan, the perfect person to play Stalin for this purpose would have been Stalin himself. But the option that Soviet cinema took was to have an actor play Stalin.

Having decided to use an actor's body, Stalin had to take every precaution to ensure that this actor and his body cease to have an identity distinct from Stalin's. Bazin points out that the actor who played Stalin in Soviet films from 1938 until the '40s, Mikhail Ghelovani, was somewhat of a specialist in the role;[61] that is, he had no persona other than Stalin's. Eventually, he was perfectly replaceable as other actors took up the role; except that he would not be free to play other roles. For a myth such as Stalin's, already created and 'perfected' outside the cinema, there is no need for—indeed, it must do without—the mythical persona of a film star. What Bazin perhaps did not know but something he might have wagered on was that even after Stalin's death in 1953 and his denunciation by Khrushchev at the Soviet Communist Party Congress, Ghelovani would not be given a screen role. Even for Stalin's opponents he had

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[61] Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 75 [BW 23].

become Stalin. His appearance as Stalin would be excised from recut films by embarrassed filmmakers who would surely have responded that they were excising Stalin himself. But something much more uncanny happened that sealed Stalin's takeover of Ghelovani's body. Ghelovani died on 21 December 1956, three years after Stalin, on Stalin's birthday, without the obituary that he was entitled to as a People's Artist of the USSR.[62]

To return to the problem of Stalin embodying omniscience and infallibility in Soviet cinema, we see now that the films do this by the sheer force of stardom. It is true that his star persona was forged outside cinema but it is cinema that embalmed it. What could Bazin accuse these films of on ontological grounds? Rosen cites their bad faith use of the medium. But there is bad faith in the Western and in the Chaplin films too. Are we to debate degrees of bad faith between the mythologization of the history of American colonization and that of the engineer of the Gulag? We certainly can and should but that bad faith does not touch cinema's ontology. Contrary to Margulies's claim, there is no "misuse" of cinematic ontology but only its most perfect realization. Even more perfect in that it does not even take recourse to analytic editing and the processes of logic, but only to the impression of reason and wisdom embodied by a star body which imposed itself on the material chaos of history that cinema was so well placed to capture.

If we remain at the level of Bazin's ontology of film, all he succeeds is in demonstrating that Stalin and the Soviet film industry were film aestheticians of genius.[63] At the level of

[62] All details on Ghelovani's career from Arkady Bernstein, "Mikhail Ghelovani: One-role Actor," in *Soviet Film* vol. 9, no. 388 (1989), 16-17.

[63] Except that, as Bazin points out, Stalin himself had become the dupe of his ideal on film. In 1958, Bazin added a note happily citing from Nikita Khrushchev's address to the 1956 Soviet Party Congress that after 1928 the only source for Stalin about the state of the Soviet countryside were films: "We come full circle. The cinematographic mystification closed in on the very person who was its principle… Even Jarry himself could not have invented this pump for reinflating the spirit of his Father Ubu." Bazin, "Le mythe de Staline," 89 [BW 37].

aesthetics the only thing Bazin could accuse these films of was of bad taste and he spends little time doing that. Finally, the only significant principle we are left with is a political norm that he stated in the debate over the meaning of history and the place of individual subjectivity in it. The norm is that both history and subjectivity must be giving meaning in a way that acknowledged their contradictions and that they are not ultimately reducible to each other. Therefore, the comparison he sets up at the beginning of the essay between the Western, "bourgeois" conception of human subjectivity as transcendental in relation to history and the Soviet Marxist belief that human subjectivity and history are perfectly indissociable turns out to be ironic.

On Bazin's understanding, human subjectivity and history *are* transcendental to each other to some degree. This is also an aesthetic norm by which history and the films that distill it and give it shape are transcendental to each other. Only through such lateral transcendence can there be a possibility of dialectical relation in which neither is completely subsumed by the other. This calls for films that "bear away our faith" while leaving their contradictions in view, however obscured. For this norm to be realized, we cannot stay at the level of ontology. Even at the level of aesthetics, not all visible abstractions can keep the meaning of ongoing political experience sufficiently open. In the Stalin films, the contradictions of material reality are on spectacular display but they are resolved by Stalin's star body. Here we come up against a supplemental norm in Bazin's aesthetics, which is a prohibition of the conjunction of a star body and the current political questions of the day involving politicians, public institutions, and policy. And the Stalin films and Soviet Marxism were not the only ones who came in for critique in the name of this norm.

In 1951, Bazin devoted half of a capsule review of a film to the advertising short that preceded it. This short was clearly marked promotional material for Air France, French tourism,

and French fashion. However bad its taste or objectionable its politics, Bazin would not have

taken the trouble to criticize it if not for the conjunction of the star body with live politics.

According to his description, the part of the film that promotes French fashion shows a model

take an Air France flight to present evening gowns in Saigon. But, Bazin writes:

> One needs everything in order to make a world… and war. A few seconds later, the
> weekly newsreel shows the solemn funerals of three soldiers who died in Indochina
> to permit the gentle little Parisian mannequin to present her gowns. All the same, Air
> France would have been better inspired if it had chosen another flight and [the
> filmmaker] Mr. Borderie had avoided casting a star in his film.[64]xxiv

What we see in this description is a conjunction of a star mythology—that of the generic

body the French fashion model—and a colonial narrative. In the short film, this mythology does

not explicitly come into contact with the war which it abstracts away while presenting an

Indochina receptive to French culture. But even with an intertextual confrontation with the

newsreel evidence of the war in Indochina, Bazin believes that the star body provides a

supplemental consecration of the death of the soldiers and therefore of war. If he did not believe

this, he would have written about how the unpredictable programming of a film theater exposes

the complicity of French capitalism and French colonialism. That the unpredictable conjunctions

of programming disturb the coherence of the texts is certainly a possible reading. But then, in

this particular instance, one would have to ask if it is sufficient to show a funeral of soldiers to

put colonialism into question. The mythology of a soldier's funeral, as distinct from battlefield

images of soldiers wounded or worse, is never anti-war but a consecration of the idea of national

"sacrifice" in the star body of the soldier. And Bazin's broader point here is that uncanny

conjunctions on film do not only work towards disruption, and when star bodies are involved it

has the capacity to absorb these disruptions into itself and neutralize them. Two genres of French

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[64] Bazin, "*L'Etranger dans la Cité*: On n'est bien que chez soi," in RCT no. 76 (1 July 1951).

national stars—the fashion model and the solider—brought together in Indochina by history

return home via Air France and cinema with the mythology of colonialism.

I have come to the conclusion of the discussion of Bazin's anxieties about cinematic

realism's participation in the political questions of the day in ways that hypostasize reality and

close off discourse. I will summarize the main points of this discussion at the end of the chapter.

In the following and final section, I want to raise the question whether, on his account, cinema

could or should testify to the horrors of totalitarianism given that its ontological powers could fix

their reality too easily. The question in his historical moment, of course, pertains to the

experience of the Holocaust. Here too it is the status of the body and its experience in question.

The Filmic Body at the End of Totalitarianism

On Bazin's account, in totalitarian experience there is a complete unity of body and

space. In the Stalin films, the space of the battlefield and the body of Stalin are completely

separated but only so that they can be shown in a top-down unity. Following his analogy, the

space at the base of the cone is nothing but an emanation of the body at the top, linked through a

sleight of hand, no doubt, but still using specifically cinematic powers for accomplishing it.

Eisenstein's *Ivan* offers a more integrated expression of this reality where the body of Czar Ivan

is meant to be the body of Stalin but it is so stylized that the identification is also purely logical

and devoid of specifically filmic evidence. This abstract logic does find incarnation in the

symbolization by an actor's body but this body is thrice removed from Stalin's body: firstly by

being the body of the actor, secondly by referencing the body of the Czar, and finally, as Bazin

describes the bodies in the film, by not being a living body at all but one of the spatial ornaments

285

in the mise-en-scène like the scepter or the throne that rhyme with each other.[65] This ornamentation divides the pleasure of aesthetics from the satisfactions of logic which are united in a realist film such as Cayatte's. The film does not even have that initial separation of the autocrat's body and space that the Stalin films had which lay the ground for their top-down reconciliation. Therefore, when Bazin compares *Ivan* to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (henceforth *Caligari*), we need to recall his description of *Caligari*'s expressionism in his review of Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*. He writes that the expressionism of *Caligari* makes no distinction between the human body and the décor. In *Caligari*, Bazin describes a process whereby the space is devoured by the mind's projections so that its apparent dynamization is nothing but a collapse of distinction between the human and the non-human. The surprising discovery I will discuss in this section is that Bazin found a variation of this expressionist style to be appropriate to the fictional representation of the reality of the camps.

Philip Watts has argued that the opening of the concentration camps after the war and the use of filmed evidence in the Nuremberg Trials was the constitutive background for Bazin's theorization of realism.[66] His claim that Bazin's concern for a realist *rhetoric* devoid of ornamentation finds its urgency in a postwar world is indeed nuanced because for the most part he insists that Bazinian realism is tied to a mode of persuasion. While Watts's emphasis on rhetoric and persuasion offers a complex basis for understanding Bazinian realism, when evoking the camps and the use of filmed evidence in the Nuremberg Trials he also pushes this aesthetic into the realm of the evidentiary. We have seen in the previous chapter how skeptical Bazin was of cinema's evidentiary capacities. Indeed, against the background of the Nuclear

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[65] André Bazin, "*Bataille du Rail*, *Ivan le Terrible*," in Esp vol. 4 no. 121 (April 1946), 670 [BW 201].

[66] Philip Watts, "The Eloquent Image: The Postwar Mission of Film and Criticism," in *Opening Bazin*, 215-224.

threat and newsreel footage of atomic bomb testing that appeared in the newsreels not long after

the footage of the Nuremberg Trials, Bazin wrote. "I ask that we meditate on the bombardment

of the Bikini Atoll and on these naval lodges to which only those invited had access (a bit like

those 'live' telecasts of television), while multiple cameras record the sensational moment for

you and me. I ask that we reflect on the Nuremberg Trial which unfolded under the spotlights

like a reconstruction of a courtroom in a detective film."[67]xxv The film spectator of a newsreel is

quite unlike the experts who preside over the determination of the atomic bomb's efficiency at

the same time as they attend its spectacle live, nor are they the judges who confront the

documentary horrors on film to determine responsibility and guilt of those on trial. What

happened in Nuremberg was a *trial* which to the media and its consumers was a spectacle cast in

the paradigm of a detective film. As for the footage of the opening of the camps itself, even

certifiably bare and shot with the greatest reserve, to what could it testify by itself?

It is impossible here to go into the history of the debates on the representability of the

Holocaust, but it is important to note that Watts's ascription of this evidentiary quality to

Bazinian realism is beholden to the recent intervention by Georges Didi-Huberman.[68] Huberman

has argued that we cannot avoid the responsibility of confronting images of the Holocaust by

hiding behind an inflated rhetoric of unrepresentability. In the France of Bazin's time, there was

hardly time to pose the question so neatly in terms of representability or unrepresentability when

the confrontation with the reality of the camps itself was unforeseen and unpredictable. Claudine

Drame has analyzed all the French newsreels of 1945 for their treatment of footage of the camps

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[67] Bazin, "A Propos *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*," in QQCI, 33 [BW 188-189].

[68] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

and unsurprisingly found divergent narratives that were constructed from them depending on the

audience.[69] She speaks of a constant subordination of the image to speech, but there is one aspect

of the *production* history that is striking.

> The first shots of the camps maintain a distance between the filmed subject and the
> spectator. When the camera comes close, it is to a recumbent figure facing the
> ground. But when there started appearing images of emaciated bodies which no
> longer had a human appearance, of piles of corpses, or close-ups of faces twisted by
> final agony, the referential function of the image's activity was no longer carried out.
> The interpretive function took primacy.[70]

By interpretive function, Drame means the commentary which became incessant.[71] Bazin

wouldn't have been surprised by this prolixity brought on by the most horrifying documentary

images. His argument that human bodies on film are ontologically obscene and pornographic

comes not from an understanding of sexuality in itself but of the reframing of the sexual act

within an understanding of death. While film robs us of our lived experience everytime it records

and replays it—which is its ontological obscenity—Bazin argues that its images can still be

considered of the order of our own memories so that their repetition on screen once again

becomes part of our existence the way recall of past events is always a part of existence and is

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[69] Drame has found distinct narratives were attached to the images depending on the audience. For the general
public, the availability of images of the camps was restrained and the experience of the Jewish people was not only
assimilated into but subordinated to French suffering through an emphasis on those "returning," the deported, and
those who resisted. Newsreels intended for the French army contained greater footage of the camps, including
footage of Germans confronting the reality of the camps. Where the public newsreels cast the Germans in the role of
the traditional enemy of France who must stand accused for French suffering, the army newsreels raised the task of
Germany's reintegration into Europe. The only extended documentary on the subject, *Les Camps de la Mort* (1945),
showing the opening of the camps at great length was never screened commercially, but was part of a three-week
exhibit on Nazi crimes. Claudine Drame, "Représenter l'Irreprésentable: les camps nazis dans les Actualités
Françaises de 1945," in *Cinémathèque* no. 10 (Autumn 1996), 12-27.

[70] Ibid., 26.

[71] A partial exception to this, as Drame points out, is the documentary *Les Camps de la Mort*, in which the
commentary pauses on the long takes of corpses or when we are shown the damaged bodies of the survivors in
close-up. But the documentary is otherwise still overwhelmed by interpretative speech with the usual confident
authority of newsreel voiceovers. Drame contrasts this with the self-consciously informative mode that voiceovers in
British newsreels too on. The documentary is available at http://www.ina.fr/video/AFE00000275. Accessed 5
October 2016. Ibid., 20.

our way of reclaiming the past. Though he severely criticized the illusion of self-evidence of the

past on film, Bazin understood that this broad correspondence of the film image to memory is at

work in documentaries.

> But two moments of life radically escape this concession to our consciousness: the
> sexual act and death. The one and the other is in its way the absolute negation of
> objective time: the qualitative instant in its pure state. Like death, sex is lived and is
> not represented (it isn't for nothing that we call it little death), or at least is not
> represented without violating its nature. This violation is called obscenity. The
> representation of real death is also an obscenity, no longer moral as in love but
> metaphysical. One doesn't die twice.[72]xxvi

Bazin's problem with the filmic record and repetition on screen of actual death is that by

repeating the most unrepeatable moment of an existence, cinema robs it of its actual existence

definitively. In death, a human life reclaims its absolute privacy so by dying on film it loses this

privacy absolutely. But this applies to recordings of already dead bodies too, as we see in an

article titled "Information ou nécrophagie" where Bazin describes an underwater documentary

on television which shows a deep-sea diver discovering an airplane on the seabed with its dead

pilot at his post and then moving on after a brief glance.[73] A question seems to have been raised

on another television program about whether images of death should be allowed. With regret,

Bazin says that images like the one he described should be censored.

> But not so much for reasons of the phantasmagoric atrocity of an image inserted into
> a spectacle meant for all [television] audiences or even in the name of respect for the
> dead, but because of the gratuitousness and off-handedness which alone make them
> indecent. What is condemnable is not the objective cruelty or horror of the
> document… but the absence of a moral or aesthetic justification without which the
> image simply transforms us into necrophages. The death of a soldier, a lifeguard,
> even a torero or an automobile racer are events that have a meaning, however

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[72] André Bazin, "Mort tous les après-midi," in QQCI, 69; translated in André Bazin, "Death Every Afternoon," in
Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 27-31
[30].

[73] André Bazin, "Information ou nécrophagie," in RCT no. 408 (10 November 1957).

debatable. From that moment [of screening], the document addresses us through the equivocal horror of our senses. But there are no exquisite corpses![74]xxvii

What we should first note here is that this is actually a qualified acceptance of images of death on screen, which Bazin also states elsewhere.[75] Despite having argued that death on film is irredeemably obscene, Bazin could not but be aware that he was living in a time of deaths on screen, a problem that could not be avoided and called for some adequate response. But more than this, in "Marginal notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*," he points out that the spectacle of live death is nothing new: "it has not been too long since assassination has ceased to be a spectacle. The executions on Place de la Grève were nothing else…."[76]xxviii Therefore, the theoretical interdiction on recording live for him could only be qualified and also predicated on some further understanding of death that is implicit in the lines above.

For Bazin, the moment of death is not only unrepeatable but it has a specific kind of meaning. It is the moment in relation to which "the qualitative time of life is defined retroactively."[77]xxix The moment of death is unlike any other not only because it is the last but also because it retrojects itself onto to the dying life's entire past and authorizes attempts to think about that life's final meaning, "however debatable," with all its contradictions. Another moment to live and facts of this life and therefore its meaning could have become something else altogether. This convergence of multiple temporalities of a life into a single moment Bazin calls

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[74] Ibid.

[75] André Bazin, "La Mort à la écran," in *Esprit* vol. 9, no. 159 (September 1949), 441.

[76] André Bazin, "En marge de *L'Érotisme au Cinéma*," in QQCIII, 73 [WCI 173]. The last public execution in France was in 1939.

[77] Bazin, "Mort tous les après-midi," 68 [*Rites of Realism* 30].

"a sort of coitus with time."[78]xxx No camera in itself can bear testimony to this because in death the body appears as nothing but space. Here depth of field and tracking shots have the opposite effect of calling for the acknowledgement of a life's meaning because they reinforce the body's oneness with space.[79] They may be relatively less sensational than close-ups but they also, like the deep-sea diver and the camera in the TV documentary, treat the dead body like an object among others. This is the ultimate meaning of cinema's embalmment which does not even have the spectral quality of the doubles of live bodies preserved from the past. This may also be the spatial experience at the end of totalitarianism where even those alive, the survivors of the camps, cannot step outside the thingness of space to enter time.

The early newsreel footage that Drame describes approached the bodies in the camps with the relative restraint that one might adopt towards known but inscrutable facts and to which silence could be a response. But the moment the cameras moved in and revealed the damaged bodies both of those dead and those reduced to the condition of living objects whose damage the camera carefully fragments and scans, Bazin would not at all have been surprised that the commentators could not stop speaking and giving these images and these bodies meaning. To not do so would have been to announce their own and their spectators' submission to the objectification of death. To overcome the subjection of dead bodies to the "equivocal horror of our senses" we need to give them meaning and purpose, even an aesthetic one. However, as Bazin says, "there are no exquisite corpses."[80]xxxi

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[78] Bazin, "La Mort à la écran," 442.

[79] Let us recall here the discussion of Sartre's "being-in-itself" in chapter three and Bazin's remark, "At the limit, Charlot's defensive reflexes end in a reabsorption of time into space." André Bazin, "Introduction à une symbolique de Charlot," in QQCI, 102 [WCB 30].

[80] Bazin, "Information ou nécrophagie".

"The Exquisite Corpse" is the name of a Surrealist game that André Bréton describes in an article from 1948.[81] Like most Surrealist practices, this game too was predicated on automatic juxtapositions that would reveal uncanny realities, more authentic and real presumably than given reality. The name of the game itself was taken from the first chance phrase so coined; therefore, it has no special bearing on the discussion of corpses. But in describing the graphic version of this game in which all players contribute some figure that would create a final composite one, Bréton writes the following.

> Drawings using the technique of the *Exquisite Corpse*, because of their primary function as proposed *delineation of personalities*, tend inevitably to raise anthropomorphism to its highest pitch and to accentuate vividly the continuing relationship uniting the exterior world with the interior world.[82]

In other words, an exquisite corpse is a Surrealist aesthetic ideal for the human body which unites it with the spatio-temporal world around it to "delineate a personality." It is possible, Bazin suggests, that the ideal of the *Exquisite Corpse* may be realizable for the living but not when there is a real corpse involved. A real dead body is indeed completely at one with the exterior world, but it is also a concentration of its entire interior life understood as the web of its lived experiences and which is radically unlocatable in space. And this ideal is certainly not realizable when a camera confronts a dead body. So even as Bazin gives a qualified nod to the recording and replaying of actual dead bodies, he remains skeptical of our ability to give them a meaning adequate to what calls for recognition. Therefore, he would also not have been surprised at the self-serving and sensational commentaries that accompanied images of the camps.

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[81] André Bréton, "The Exquisite Corpse—Its Exaltation," in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 288-290.

[82] Ibid., 290.

If bearing testimony to the bodily experience of totalitarianism at the level of newsreel

and documentary seemed nearly impossible to Bazin, he could not in principle have ruled out a

fictional engagement. And he did get an opportunity to confront films that attempted this. Two

such films on the experience of the camps stood out for him, one Polish and the other Czech and

both made by Holocaust survivors. The Polish film, *The Last Stage* (Wanda Jakubowska, 1947),

was the more conventionally realist of the two attempting a degree of documentary precision to

narrate what is essentially a Resistance drama set in Auschwitz, and this film's representation of

the camp became the prototype for several Holocaust dramas over the decades, right through to

Schindler's List (Steven Spielberg, 1993). The Czech film, *Distant Journey* (1949) by theater

director Alfréd Radok was set in the Terezin ghetto and concentration camp. It tells the story of

the transportation of the Czech Jewish population to Terezin with an interracial couple at the

center. The couple gets a brief reprieve, because the husband is non-Jewish, only to watch their

friends and family sent away first to Terezin and then to the death camps around Europe.

Eventually, they too are sent to the concentration camp. The film is highly stylized, using

delirious framing and editing along with a nightmarish mise-en-scène (see Fig. 3). Bazin insists

on the complete correspondence of *Distant Journey*'s style with the heyday of German

Expressionism, and the film's dynamism indeed goes much beyond the chiaroscuro lighting and

tall shadows that were the more stabilized remnants of expressionism's legacy in, for example,

noir films. It cuts up and superimposes space upon space and on to human figures to create a

sense of spatial delirium and claustrophobia that is meant to be the equivalent of the

psychological experience of the characters; in Bazin's words "the most formalist film in a long time."[83][xxxii]

In comparing *Distant Journey* to the Polish *The Last Stage*, Bazin writes that despite the fact that the reality the films portray goes beyond any possibility of ornamentation it is the Czech film rather than *The Last Stage* that might bring us closer to a certain objective and subjective experience of the reality of the camps. He has no criticisms of *The Last Stage* in itself but is much more affected by *Distant Journey* which he argues represents the sense of futility in resistance that might be the specific quality of the "concentrationary universe" which, as Kracauer may have agreed, is "the only subject that tragically conforms to [the aesthetic of German Expressionism]."[84][xxxiii] In literary terms, he describes the film's unity of style and subject as an expression of a "hyperbolic prophecy of the concentrationary universe" that a Dante who had read Sade and wrote like Kafka might have created.[85] These references aren't a mere nod to canonical writers but attempt to capture the combination of apocalyptic archetypes (Dante) and their utterly physical (Sade) and psychological (Kafka) realization through which he understands the Holocaust: "terrestrial hell and objective nightmare."[86][xxxiv] The experience that the film captures for Bazin is an inexorable accumulation of spaces from the initially distant German pageantry and the battle fields to Prague to Terezin and from there the death camps;[87] or

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[83] André Bazin, "Le ghetto concentrationnaire," in CdC, no. 9 (February 1952), 58; André Bazin, "*Ghetto Terezin*," in Obs no. 87 (10 January 1952)

[84] Bazin, "*Ghetto Terezin*".

[85] Bazin, "*Ghetto Terezin*"; Bazin, "Le ghetto concentrationnaire", 59-60.

[86] Bazin, "*Ghetto Terezin*".

[87] "The Jew of Prague lives haunted by the transportation to Terezin, the Jew of Terezin in the anguish of the convoy towards the ghettos of certain death." Bazin, "Le ghetto concentrationnaire," 59.

in the case of one character a fall (which we never actually see) through a window which appears literally as a dizzying opening out of the space of a room that bears down with the full weight of contemporary events. Each instance of falling through or under this accumulation of space is individual but also civilizational, and each place gathers within itself the weight of other places in Europe. Therefore, "the internal organization of the camp and the relative but effective resistance that its cogs can offer seem here not so much impossible as unthinkable."[88]xxxv This description suggests that the experience of totalitarian horror is not just death but a living in a death-like state until the moment it actually arrives. The question is how, according to Bazin, an expressionist aesthetic captures this.

We just now looked at an argument about death's spatiality and that the difficulty of acknowledging it is the difficulty of rescuing the dead body from the space that it inhabits. The subject of *Distant Journey*, a feeling of petrification before being crushed under the spatial weight of history, raises a similar challenge. Expressionism like that of *Caligari* and *Ivan* would not be adequate here since it reduces the human body to space and repeats with great effort and ornamentation what the camera captures automatically when recording death. Here we can briefly call upon Kracauer and his understanding of the mass ornament to see why either the ornate expressionism of *Ivan* and *Caligari* or the automatic capture of death are inadequate as acknowledgments of the lived terror of totalitarianism.

The mass ornament, according to Kracauer, subsumes the individual and community into a symmetrical mass. Whereas communities of people are free to charge with meaning the material world to which they are joined, no such thing is possible with a mass ornament which

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[88] Ibid., 60.

"hover[s] in mid air" where its actors "never grasp the stage setting in its totality."[89] The challenge of acknowledging the experience of totalitarianism after its irreversible consequences have come to pass is to register this fearful ornamentalizing ambition inherent in it while making room for the body as a *subjective* register of this ambition, without making it the site of a fantastical resistance after the fact; that is, one needs both the sense of spatial homogeneity of the ornament but also that margin of experience that can testify to the felt horror of such spatial constriction. Something of the order of Kafka whom Bazin references and in whose work Kracauer identifies the primacy of the imagery of dungeons in which "[t]he measures provoked by existential fear are themselves a threat to existence."[90] Bazin recalls this feature of Kafkaesque entrapment when he remarks that the only characters who show a degree of resistance are the couple but the fact that theirs is an interracial marriage only means that more lives are drawn into the camps as the husband and his father are sent away to the camps and the wife herself tries to commit suicide to spare them and precipitate her own fate. But without this margin of subjectivity that becomes a threat to itself, nothing but the blank fact of death can be registered.

Given that the matrix of space and subjectivity just described wouldn't have been possible with the expressionism of *Ivan* and *Caligari*, Bazin falls back upon the distinction he made between the expressionism of *Caligari* and that of Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) when he wrote about Carné's *Le Jour Se Lève* and which he identified as *Kammerspiel* after reviewing Eisner's book. In describing Carné's film as an expression of the prewar mood of social claustropbia, he

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[89] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. & ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 76-77.

[90] Siegfried Kracauer, "Franz Kafka: On his Posthumous Works," *The Mass Ornament*, 268.

delineated the meticulous creation of a distinct, and distinctly material, space that bears down upon Gabin's character over the course of the film much like the carefully constructed space of *M* bears down upon Peter Lorre. Similarly, Bazin refers to the "true setting [*vrai décor*] of the Czech film" which creates the particular sense of live horror in the film.[91] While he describes the sense of cruel claustrophobia in the film, he does not actually carry out an analysis of its formal aspects to demonstrate his argument regarding the film's construction of space.[92] A brief look at them helps us see the significance of his argument.

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[91] Bazin, "Le ghetto concentrationnaire," 59; André Bazin, "Le Jour Se Lève," in *Doc Éducation Populaire 1948* (January-February 1948).

[92] It is perhaps astonishing that Bazin does not dwell too much on describing the nuances of style when writing about this incredible exception to his overriding contention that postwar film aesthetics has been forced to confront the medium's realist powers under pressures of history. The film after all deals with the greatest horrors of that history. We could however explain the film's return to, in Bazin's view, the most historically dated style in film history as an extreme confirmation of his skepticism regarding realist cinema's ability to record the reality of death in any meaningful way.

The reason Bazin does not analyze the film's technique in any detail or develop his general aesthetic ideas of film in light of the exceptional significance of *Distant Journey* may have something to do with broader historical reasons. He is clearly struck by the specifically Jewish experience of the Holocaust in this film. He calls the ghetto "a specifically Jewish concentration camp" which is a trace of the fact that in France as in most parts of Europe there had been great reluctance to acknowledge the scale and nature of specifically Jewish suffering even in relation to the camps. As Drame's descriptions of the newsreels of 1945 demonstrate, the discourse in France took on a nationalist frame. This changed little even with the commissioning of Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1956) which was meant above all as a film on the "Resistance and deportation." Sylvie Lindeperg reports that Olga Wormser, the historian behind Resnais's film and who had been the main force in a decade long work preceding the film in gathering information about the camps, would not claim to fully appreciate the difference between the Resistants and the Jewish populations in the history of the camps until she finished her thesis on the subject in 1968.

The director of *The Last Stage*, Wanda Jakubowska, too recalls that some Polish camp survivors were unhappy with the fact that the protagonist of her film is Jewish, even though the film has non-Jewish prisoners of Polish as well as other nationalities. But the narrative of Jakubowska's film is also mobilized according to the interests of the Communist regime in power. Given this atmosphere before *Night and Fog* was completed, *Distant Journey* was a rare opportunity for Bazin and the few other French spectators who watched it to clearly confront the racial foundation of the camps. Neither in his reviews of this film nor in that of *Night and Fog* does Bazin dwell much on the formal construction of the films. See Sylvie Lindeperg, *Night and Fog: A Film in History*, trans. Tom Mes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 22-23, 36; Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 39, 42-43.

Fig. 4: Stills from *Distant Journey* (Alfréd Radok, 1949)

Bazin describes "a feeling, probably justified, of a documentary fidelity to the objective and mental reality"ₓₓₓᵥᵢ of *Distant Journey* to its subject.[93] He neglects to point out the film's heavy and novel use of documentary footage itself. The film starts with images of Hitler and other Nazi leaders giving speeches and other documents of Nazi pageantry taken, from among various sources, *Triumph of the Will*. The intertitles giving the names recall the Gothic calligraphy of German Expressionist films of the silent era and the voiceover provides Czech summaries in a dry, exhausted tone. Once the film's narrative begins, however, the documentary

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[93] Bazin, "*Ghetto Terezin*".

footage always contains an inset image of the fictional diegesis at the bottom right of the screen (Fig. 3, top two panels); the diegetic image also shrinks down to reveal the documentary footage before magnifying to cover it up again. Another change in the nature of the documentary images is that while they indicate some historical events, they often linger on Nazi symbols or other abstract figures (including a photograph of corpses piled up) that signify an ornamentalized terror which is echoed by the diegetic image. This petrification in the documentary footage is constantly reclaimed by the oppressive dynamization of space[94] in the diegesis to both link the two but also to exorcize the petrification back into images of lived experience of terror. This experience is as much psychological as material, and only a degree away from the petrification of death. In that degree of difference, the largely helpless bodies nonetheless become living markers of death rather than its blank proof. There is no heroism in this, no shred of subjectivity really secure from the ornamentalizing forces; not even in the film's representation of the liberation (Fig. 3, bottom panel). As Bazin writes, rescue too could only come from the outside: "The walls of Terezin open with the arrival of Russian soldiers, but at the seventh sounding of the trumpets."[95][xxxvii] The reality of the camp is death even after liberation as shots of the graveyard are overlain with a voice reciting calmly the names of the death camps across Europe. But these images of death have been given a meaning, "however debatable," beyond death's sheer facticity.

There is, of course, no question of a complete adequacy of representation of *Distant Journey* to the reality of Terezin, let alone of the camps in general. But the film had found for

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[94] Including that of Terezin where some of the film was shot. Jan Láníĉek and Stuart Liebman, "A Closer Look at Alfréd Radok's Film *Distant Journey*," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 30 no. 1 (Spring 2016), 60.

[95] Bazin, "Le Ghetto Concentrationnaire," 60.

Bazin some way of responding to the horror of what happened without either an obscene curiosity or a deflection into concerns such as heroic or tragic resistance that are alien to the brute experience of terror. Bazin was not the only one in France to think so. Alain Resnais was impressed enough by the film to start *Night and Fog* with some of the same documentary footage as *Distant Journey*.[96] But the real similarities lie in the poetic abstraction of *Night and Fog*: its intercutting between the present and past linked by intersecting tracking shots, overlain with Hans Eisler's uninterrupted music against which Jean Cayrol, a survivor of the camps, reads a poetic commentary on the voiceover; stylistic elements that recall those Resnais had already employed in his documentaries on painting such as *Van Gogh* (1948) and *Guernica* (1950). A counter-confirmation of *Night and Fog*'s abstraction comes in the form of unacknowledged inserts from the "realist" *The Last Stop* which pass for documentary footage.[97] This was a completely different result from the vision of a newsreel-based documentary along the lines of *Why We Fight* that those who commissioned the film had in mind.[98] When Bazin reviewed the film, he described his feelings at the announcement of the film: reassured by those involved but still skeptical of cinema's ability to bear witness to the experience of the camps. He recalls the decade old images that "cannot leave our memories," but he also mentions the "obsession and demagoguery" that remained a threat with every return to those images.[99] He then praises the film unreservedly and above all for its ability to, without sanitizing history, creating a space for

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[96] Lindeperg, *Night and Fog*, 92, 98.

[97] Resnais met the director Jakubowska as part of his preparations in Poland. Lindeperg, *Night and Fog*, 102.

[98] Lindeperg, *Night and Fog*, 32-33.

[99] André Bazin, "Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*," in CFNVL, 182.

mourning through which we may in turn make perennial room for the memory of what happened.

> *Night and Fog* is above all a look of love and confidence in man, the affirmation of hope beyond despair. The grass no longer grew under the foot of Attila; the grass has grown timidly, cropped, and rare between the ruins of the crematorium, enough to affirm that life is stronger than nothingness. Please understand me! *Night and Fog* neither concludes upon nor incites smug optimism or forgetting. On the contrary, it recalls for us the everlasting concentrationary reality and incites us to an examination of conscience whose affirmation is stronger and more penetrating for going beyond the too easy rage and bursts of horror into this immense zone of serenity which follows tears of mourning when the loved one can live again in our memory.[100]xxxviii

We are perhaps far here from Adorno's interdiction of poetry after Auschwitz in this response from Bazin where he struggles to express hope in the midst of mourning and the "everlasting concentrationary reality." But Bazin's response and Resnais's film can also be seen as versions of another somewhat less grim statement of Adorno: "Total remembrance is the response to total transience, and hope lies only in the strength to become aware of transience and preserve it in writing."[101] As we have seen, for Bazin death calls for the retrieval of all that a body has been. But it would be wrong to think of "totality" here as comprehensiveness; it is "merely" a search for a form, an aesthetic one, in which to recover the reality of lives other than that of the self-evidence of dead bodies. Films such as *Distant Journey* and *Night and Fog* disturb the spatiality of death in order to construct such provisional forms of recovery.[102]

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[100] Bazin, "Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*," 183.

[101] Cited in J. M. Bernstein, "Why Rescue Semblance? Experience and the Possibility of Ethics," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Lambert Zuidervaart, Tom Huhn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 182.

[102] Since I have elliptically traced Kracauer's parallel presence alongside Bazin to understand the latter's confrontation of film aesthetics and history from prewar poetic realism to the experience of totalitarian horrors, we need to recall his famous analogy between cinema and Perseus's slaying of the Gorgon Medusa in the concluding passages from *Theory of Film*. There Kracauer speaks about how cinema allows us to confront the horrors of the world, for which it has a special affinity, through an indirection of the gaze just like Perseus could only slay the petrifying head of Medusa by looking at her reflection in Athena's shield (305). Given Bazin's response to *Distant Journey*, we should be careful about a too quick rapprochement between these two theorists on the grounds of

Conclusion

This chapter and the previous one have traced Bazin's skepticism about cinema's ontological realism even if he recognized the inevitability of film history's need to respond to the historical demand for its capacity to give us seemingly unmediated images of the world. Given the violent history of the twentieth century that fed this demand, the discovery of this skepticism should not be surprising. To sum up the discussion, on the question of propaganda, Bazin argued for cinema's participation in the political life of institutions and policy on condition that it does not rely on two kinds of ontological powers of the filmic image. The first is its capacity to be converted into evidence that leaves no room for discourse. The second is the power of the star body on film and its ability to short circuit discourse even in the face of obvious contradictions. To these, he privileged an openly rhetorical mode of address. The star body itself remained a privileged site for cinematic mythologies for Bazin, but paradoxically its high degree of abstraction made it particularly suitable for artificially fixing the identity of other public figures. A final confirmation of this skepticism comes in Bazin's endorsement of a film with extreme expressionist style as appropriate for representing the experience of the camps. In light of this skepticism, we now need to see what place Bazin's realism as we have conventionally understood it finds in his work.

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cinema's ontological realism itself. We cannot know if Kracauer would have found *Distant Journey*'s style appropriate to its subject after having written extensively about German Expressionism's collusion with authoritarian sentiment. He might have found it a cruel confirmation of his thesis; or he might have found it as paralyzing as pre-war German cinema and unsuited for representing its historical consequences. Kracauer also only mentions *The Last Stop* in passing in *Theory of Film* as an instance of cinema's particular interest in the cruel and the horrifying (57), and he most probably did not get an opportunity to watch Resnais's film in time for the book, if at all. *Night and Fog* did not find a distributor in the US for some time. Lindeperg could trace some special screenings for the media in 1959 after which it was bought by a TV broadcaster who took it apart and re-edited the 32-minute film it into an hour long program called *Remember Us* (1960). Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Lindeperg, *Night and Fog*, 211-222.

Chapter 8

The Bad Faith of Realism

In arguing that ontological realism was a matter of concern for Bazin, I have not set out to deny the positive significance of a realist aesthetic to Bazin's work. But I would argue that this significance cannot be appreciated without the background of the last five chapters. Its specificity takes its place as a privileged historical concern in Bazin's work but which nonetheless should be considered as a subset of a broader aesthetic philosophy. In this chapter, I will link Bazinian realism to the idea of bad faith that I developed in the introduction and then again towards the end of chapter four. There I had pointed out that the specific trajectories that Bazin analyzed in the Chaplin films and in the Western demonstrated that these bodies of work impose themselves on our imaginaries despite their contradictions and "against our sympathies." They orient us in our historical existence, even if indirectly, by sublating its contradictions. There is the bad faith of specific films that draw us into deceptively coherent worlds and then there is the bad faith of the spectators who are willing to be so drawn. However, we have seen that Bazin was careful to strip his account of any moralistic denunciation given its importance as a secular social ritual through which we try to grasp a transcendental historical reality not underwritten by any metaphysical guarantees, and which we make our own in more or less obscure ways through critique as much as through subliminal internalization.

A properly aesthetic realism in the cinema for Bazin needs to create conditions for an indirect confrontation with history while proceeding from the spatio-temporal conditions of experience and the material reality of the world. But the danger for cinema is that in recording

our world in its exactitude it can curtail the autonomy of its temporal existence beyond the filmic record by creating doubles of the world that can be used to manipulate its existence for us. We could argue that this is what the aesthetic in general does when it smooths over contradictions in experience, such as when the Western sublimates the place of women in society to deny their status as property. But the conventionality of all aesthetic experience makes room for the bad faith of the spectator who is willing to affirm the reality produced by the work of art. The truth of a Western can in theory be denied by those who refuse to take it seriously by citing its conventionality. In contrast, Bazin effectively argues, one cannot *a priori* deny the validity of a realist documentary or a realist reconstitution of history even after watching it without taking recourse to extraneous evidence. It is possible for realist cinema to evacuate spectatorship of any sense of bad faith and affirm our rational capacity for analysis. It is thus that Bazin concerned himself with cinema that he found both responsive to the demand for realist images and at the same time worked to create this margin of bad faith necessary for aesthetic experience and aesthetic politics.

I will start with a discussion of documentary realism and Bazin's explicit claim that bad faith is a pre-condition for its viability if it is not to slide into positivism. In the second section, I turn to his analysis of conditions of bad faith in fiction films.

Documentary Realism

Though documentary realism was first a matter of concern for Bazin because of the context of war propaganda, the postwar documentaries that he wrote about with a view to understanding cinematic realism originated with a different set of concerns. Several of these were ethnographic films whose postwar high point would come with the films of Jean Rouch. The ethnographic impulse in twentieth-century French art went back to the Surrealists' interest in

"primitive" cultures at the time of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition in the early 1930s. The links

between ethnography and art traveled in both directions as one of key members of the expedition

was Michel Leiris, a Surrealist author and professional ethnologist, whose future colleague at

Musée de l'Homme would be Jean Rouch.[1] In the postwar world, film became much more central

to ethnographic practice as a medium of record rather than an aesthetic one; that is, ethnography

called upon the ontological ability of cinema to capture the world which the professionals would

then analyze. As Bazin remarks, this undercut the impulse to exoticize non-Western cultures as

bearers of some presumed primeval human condition with which modern civilization has lost

touch. To this extent, in exploring indigenous cultures, "the white man… as adventurer, in this

contact [with "primitive" cultures], looks to test and know himself better."[2]ᵢ Against this

Romanticism, Bazin argues, ethnology ascribes to indigenous cultures their own parameters of

experience that the profession aims to study as valid on their own terms and without necessary

reference to Western standards. However, he is not certain of the possibility of such a radical

shift.

> This [scientific] observation based on a favorable prejudice is no doubt a good
> sociological method and its moral advantages are evident, but we are allowed to ask
> to what extent it fails to eliminate what after all remains a relational truth of our
> consciousness [*conscience*], by which I mean the apprehension of mystery and
> anxiety at the approach of a spiritual universe radically different from our own. For
> our young scholars, magic is an interesting and worthwhile occupation of the same

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[1] The postwar convergence of film and ethnography was fictionalized in Jacques Becker's 1949 film *Rendez-vous de Juillet*, to which Bazin refers for illustrating the context in which the new ethnographic film flourished. In it, we find the protagonist trying to put together an expedition to the African colonies for making such a film. While he bides his time, dropping in on classes at *Musée de l'Homme* (where we see films being used as part of instruction) and making the rounds of the colonial, ship, and airline offices to raise money, we actually get a portrait of a Paris on the verge of the explosion of those cultural energies—jazz, automobiles, etc.—that would feed into the French New Wave in the cinema and beyond. The other male characters are young and out of work film technicians, presumably laid low by the influx of the Hollywood backlog after the war, who are recruited by the aspiring ethnological filmmaker for his mission. The film constructs the ethnographic mission as an outgrowth of the restlessness and disappointments of Parisian youth culture which the characters both feed upon and flee.

[2] André Bazin, "L'évolution du film d'exploration," in *Le Monde Nouveau* (May-June, 1955), 260

standing as our western activities. To be a sorcerer on the banks of the Niger is, *mutatis mutandis*, as honorable as being an ethnologist in Paris. Everything goes on as if, having discovered the richness and value of so-called primitive cultures, we have exorcised them of fear by projecting them on the one hand on an aesthetic plane and on the other on that of science: Negro art and sociology.[3][ii]

Science, Bazin argues, maintains the same division that the Romantics relied upon in their approach to non-western and non-modern cultures. Where the Romantics turned these cultures into aesthetic objects, as in the Fauvist painters and the Surrealists, the ethnologists convert the non-scientific aspects of these cultures into scientific data. Ethnology, the above lines imply, plays a double game of using scientific standards in understanding these cultures but also trying to bracket the question of science's relationship to religion whose tensions have been formative for western modernity itself. Therefore, when Bazin talks about "spiritual universe[s] radically different from our own," he doesn't only mean Christianity and indigenous religions but the imbrication of both in their respective social contexts. Since western aesthetics and religion have not been untouched by scientific rationality and since scientific methods did not develop in a spiritual vacuum, one cannot use only art or only science to approach indigenous rituals that combine religious rituals and broader social practices. Doing so not only reduces the indigenous experience along the lines of this split, but also forecloses the question of the encounter of religion and social practice whose marker is the "apprehension of mystery and anxiety."

One of the important exceptions for Bazin to the mode of scientific disinterest whose shortcomings Bazin analyzes was *Forêt Sacrée* (Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau) in which the ethnographer/filmmaker Gaisseau sets out to record the sacred magical rituals of the population

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[3] Ibid., 260-261.

in a part of Upper Guinea.[4] However, these rituals are forbidden to strangers, so Gaisseau needs

to be initiated by the head sorcerer, a process involving a painful tattooing, to become one of the

local populace. This already compromises the distinction between the observer and the observed

on the part of the westerner and also between science and sorcery since Gaisseau tries to

combine the two in becoming one of the subjects of the magical rituals. But in the moment of the

ritual, an inevitable conflict arises, where "[i]t is necessary to choose between understanding the

mystery and living it, between doing a sociological study of magic and entering its circle."[5][iii]

Bazin also points out that the whole ritual that the ethnologists set out to understand and/or live

is itself compromised by the dubious initiation of someone who does not belong to the social

milieu.

On top of all the ambiguity of participation of westerners in the indigenous ritual, the

particular event of the ritual itself is compromised by the presence of the camera.[6] Bazin asks if

the ceremony remains the same when recorded under magnesium lamps. He then argues that the

success of *Forêt Sacrée* lies in its acknowledgment of these doubts by showing Gaisseau filming

with a camera, presumably in the midst of the rituals. Thus, the filmmaker/ethnologist "does not

at all hide the relative failure of his enterprise, its final decomposition into reciprocal bad

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[4] Of the films discussed in this section, I have only been able to watch *Kon-Tiki* (1952) and *Victoire sur l'Annapurna* (Marcel Ichac, 1953). With regards to *Naufragé Volontaire* (1953), I could watch a recent television documentary on Alain Bombard's attempt to survive as a castaway on sea and the documentary he made from the footage shot as part of the experiment. The TV documentary, *Bombard, le Naufragé Volontaire* (Didier Nion, 2012), contains clips from the original film and extensive interviews from those involved, including Bombard.

[5] André Bazin, "Avec *Naufragé Volontaire* et *Forêt Sacrée*, le reportage filmé devient une aventure spirituelle," in RCT no. 275 (24 April 1955)

[6] Bazin refers to the fact that the head sorcerer may have initiated Gaisseau to slight his own society and that he might be subject to ex-communication. It is possible that the film shows something to suggest these possibilities, or Bazin may be speculating on the validity of the initiation. Bazin, "L'évolution du film d'exploration," 262.

conscience."[7][iv] The presence of cinema at this encounter is as a catalyst and record of failure; failure of both cinematic and ethnological objectivity. However, the failure is relative because it manages after all to record the experience of the encounter of such heterogeneous life-worlds, with its "anguish and vertigo" without dividing it up into art and science. The film restores "the aesthetic of magic" by showing its social function as when the film shows women tracing figures on the walls of their huts to strengthen them, but it is a sociology which the westerner can neither fully participate in nor explain from a distance.[8]

The failure of cinema to be an objective record of the experience at which it is present is demonstrated in an even better manner by a few of the other documentaries about which Bazin wrote. These were adventure documentaries, some of which also had a scientific interest tied to the adventures. *Annapurna* (Marcel Ichac, 1953) is a record of an expedition to scale the eponymous summit, but *Kon-Tiki* (Thor Heyerdahl, 1952) and *Naufragé Volontaire* (Alain Bombard, 1953) had specific inquiries linked to their audacious experiments. *Kon-Tiki* records Thor Heyerdahl and his team's attempt to cross the South Pacific from Peru to the Polynesian islands on a raft in order to prove that it was possible for the Incas to migrate over this route with the rudimentary rafts they had at their disposal. In *Naufragé Volontaire*, Alain Bombard sought to reconstruct the experience of a castaway on an inflatable lifeboat to both test the limits of human endurance as well as to test the conditions in which castaways on seas are more likely to survive. He recounts that the motivation behind his attempt was an increase in the number of sinking ships around the late '40s as well the question of bodily suffering to which he became sensitive in the aftermath of reports of the camps to which one of his friends had been sent.

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[7] Ibid., 262.

[8] Ibid., 262-263.

Bombard started out with a colleague Jack Palmer who dropped out part of the way into the experiment so that there was no one left to be filmed.

A common aspect that Bazin identities in all these adventure films is that in foregoing documentary reconstitution in favor of raw footage they almost give up on any footage of dramatic interest. Given the perilous conditions of each adventure, the crew can be prepared to film the most interesting events only by increasing the danger of their enterprise. In an era of limited film stock and unwieldy amateur cameras, almost the only footage these filmmaker-subjects manage to capture is of the most unremarkable moments of their journeys. Some chance exceptions occur such as the sighting of a white whale in *Kon-Tiki* and the loss of the boat sail in *Naufragé Volontaire* but nothing that can truly constitute an objective record of the high point of the journeys. Nonetheless, "these rare images in the middle of the stream of film without any objective interest are like the invaluable and deeply moving flotsam on the monotonous swell of the ocean."[9]v The importance and beauty of these images lies less in what they capture than in their status as signs of what the films fail to capture: the many real events that made up the journeys at which the camera could not be present. Thus, Bazin writes, "*Kon-Tiki* is the most beautiful film but it doesn't exist!"[10] And he is entirely serious to the extent that the voice-over narrates all the dramatic events of the voyage that we do not see. At the most dramatic of these, when the raft is about to crash into a reef, all we see is a calm sea which gives way to an animated map charting the course of the crash. And yet *Kon-Tiki* the film offers itself as a record of the journey.

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[9] Ibid., 259.

[10] André Bazin, "Le cinéma et l'exploration," in QQCI, 51 [WCII 160]. My emphasis.

Thus, we could say of these films that they are significant, admirable, and moving only to the extent that they do not exist. But naturally, if they didn't exist at all, we wouldn't be able to judge. Therefore, I'll say that they are more precisely like cannons, composed of a void surround by bronze. But it is this void that is their real substance. And the more or less interesting images that surround these lacunae are there to authenticate them and to give them, as we say about cannons, their soul [*âme* in French refers both to "soul" and to the lining of a field gun's barrel].[11][vi]

The use of spiritual terminology here is very pointed and curious. The layman's understanding of the body-soul distinction, for those who make it, is that the body is a visible manifestation of an invisible soul. But here Bazin is talking about the material presence of documentary images as the soul of the invisible body of the adventures. It is important to emphasize that this is not a discourse of absolute unrepresentability of reality. Reality is something that cannot ever be represented totally but we do try to grasp its totality indirectly through material signs. Therefore, the spiritual reality here is of the order of the "lateral transcendence" that I argued in chapter five is a mark of aesthetic autonomy. The aesthetic world is always at the threshold of our world but does not collapse into it, and this can be as true of documentary worlds as fictional ones. It is only through discourse and interpretation that we try to bring them into our own but no meaning we ascribe to them can completely possess them.

In the context of the films he was writing about, Bazin emphasized that film was only one media for recording the events that were their subjects and among the least comprehensive of them. He pointed to the books that accompanied these films as well as lectures by the participants that attempt to give a more precise idea, both factual and experiential, of the events. Thus, such an adventure or ethnographic "film is conceived rather as an illustrated lecture where the presence and word of the lecturer-witness *perpetually* completes and authenticates the

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[11] Bazin, "Avec *Naufragé Volontaire* et *Forêt Sacrée*".

image."[12] The need to complete and authenticate the images, to wrest them from their place of lateral transcendence and make them fully immanent remains "perpetual" because these images have abstracted themselves from our world but still offer themselves as historical testaments. This is what Bazin calls their "bad faith."

> With *Naufragé Volontaire* and *Forêt Sacrée*, I would like to bring to notice a specific variety of this condition of reportage [whereby these films are most moving in their near absence]: "bad faith." I am placing this expression in quotation marks to signal that I understand its meaning in a purely psychological sense and not a moral one. In fact, I am not sparing in my respect for these courageous and sincere men who knew exactly how to push their courage to the point of assuming this bad faith.[13]vii

To "the reciprocal bad conscience" of *Forêt Sacrée* mentioned earlier, these films add a bad faith that impresses us with their open and unavoidable contradictions. Without these filmic records, the lectures and the books describing the expeditions may have remained only scientific tracts or personal testimonies. And documentaries whose claims to objectivity remained untroubled would also have merely illustrated scientific or objective claims and, like the images in *Why We Fight*, have "giv[en] to speech itself the credibility and proof of photographic images."[14] But the specifically aesthetic quality of these documentaries has transformed documentation and testimony into an ancillary discourse that "perpetually completes and authenticates the image" much like all critical discourse about aesthetic objects. If this were bad faith in the usual sense of deception, then we would dismiss them as fraud and wouldn't think that what we see on screen is an integral part of a reality that discourse is called upon to authenticate. But Bazin does not believe that the expeditions and adventures undertaken by the filmmaker/subjects are any less worthy of respect or that they were finally unsuccessful. We do

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[12] Bazin, "Le cinéma et l'exploration," 48 [WCII 156].

[13] Bazin, "Avec *Naufragé Volontaire* et *Forêt Sacrée*".

[14] Bazin, "A propos de *Pourquoi Nous Combattons*: Histoire, documents et actualités," in QQCI 35 [BW 190].

after all get to see *some* extraordinary images of these extraordinary adventures, such as the

white whale alongside the raft in *Kon-Tiki* and images of sacred rituals that are unfamiliar to us.

Fictional Realism

The problem of realism, understood as respect for the integrity of spatio-temporal reality

or "integral realism" as Bazin once called it, in fiction films is an extension of the basic problem

of film aesthetics which we have seen Bazin describe as "abstraction *through* incarnation."[15] The

abstraction in generic and star films too proceeds from physical reality whether it be the Western

landscapes or the bodies of Garbo and Bogart. They achieve a great degree of abstraction

through conventions of narrative and star personas. We have seen Bazin argue that a large part of

postwar production could no longer rely so surely on the power of conventions. It needed to

represent material reality with greater precision which undermined the power of conventions.

However, the problem remained the same: to give expression to the historical unconscious that

exceeds the given world even when films were forced to represent this world in all its detail.

Perhaps the clearest indicator that the demand for integral realism did not preclude the

construction of mythic reality is that the essay "Editing Prohibited" draws its examples from

Crin Blanc and *Le Ballon Rouge*, two children's films by Albert Lamorisse, and *Une Fée Pas*

Comme les Autres (Jean Tourane, 1957).[16] Bazin describes the purpose of the essay as follows:

"starting with the astonishingly significant examples these films offer, to analyze certain laws of

editing [*montage*] in their relationship with cinematographic expression and, even more

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[15] André Bazin, "Grandeur de 'Limelight'," in QQCIII, 130-131 [WCI 138].

[16] This essay is a combination of two articles that appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, one of which on *Crin Blanc* was titled "Le réel et l'imaginaire" and I will refer to both this source and to the extended article in *Qu'est Que le Cinéma?* André Bazin, "Le réel et L'imaginaire (Crin Blanc)," CdC no. 25 (July 1953), 52-55; André Bazin, "Montage Interdit," in QQCI, 117-130 [WCI 53-75; WCB 73-86].

essentially, its *aesthetic ontology*."[17][viii] So Bazin's main purpose is to tackle cinema's *aesthetic*

ontology which I have argued must be distinguished from basic cinematic ontology which can

also be converted into an ontology of image as evidence. Despite its title, which is ironic, I will

argue that the essay analyzes the limits to which cinematic realism can be pushed while keeping

it in the realm of the imaginary. It is not, contrary to what one might expect given the general

understanding of Bazin's work, an absolute denunciation of editing in favor of raw realism.

Let us first look at the subject of Lamorisse's films. *Crin Blanc* is set and shot in the

wetlands of the Camargue region in the south of France. It is about a child from a fisherman's

family who watches some ranchers trying to tame a wild horse, Crin Blanc. The horse keeps

running away from them until they seem to give up. The child manages to tame Crin Blanc

mainly by holding on to him with a rope while being dragged around the swamp until the horse

stops and then allows the boy to ride him home. In the meantime, the ranchers come for Crin

Blanc again and claim him. After some back and forth, in the final escape, Crin Blanc and the

child are chased by the men until the horse and child fall into the river and are swept away to the

sea. The fairy tale voiceover describes them as sailing away to a land where horses and men live

peacefully. The compositional high points of the film are the scene where the boy holds on to the

horse while being dragged, another in which the child riding Crin Blanc chases a rabbit, and then

the final one of them both being swept away by the river. All these are shot for the most part in

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[17] Bazin, "Montage Interdit," 118-119 [WCI 43; WCB 75]. My emphasis. Barnard's translation of the phrase
"*ontologie esthétique*" as "ontological aesthetic" perfectly illustrates the power of the narrative that Bazin's
aesthetics (as in style) follow from his ontology. No wonder that, despite his very astute philological work on
Bazin's use of the word "*découpage*," he still thinks that editing is Bazin's "bête noire." See Timothy Barnard,
Découpage (Montreal: Caboose, 2014), 60.

long shots which accentuates the drama by highlighting the risks to the child and the horse and giving to the rabbit chase a spatial tension.

Le Ballon Rouge is about a child who finds a red balloon on the way to school and which follows him wherever he goes. This creates trouble for the boy first at school where the principal frowns upon the balloon and tries to get rid of it, then at home where the parents throw it out of the window, and finally in the streets where other kids try to get hold of it. Through it all the balloon dodges its attackers and keeps up with the boy until the group of children get hold of it and "kill" it. At this moment, all the balloons in Paris fly to the boy who collects them all and in turn is borne away by them. The film is shot entirely on the streets of Paris where the balloon and the human characters always appear together in the frame with the city around them. This makes for a lot of long takes and tracking shots giving us the sense of integral reality that is the subject of this discussion.

Bazin's primary concern in discussing these films is not to appreciate the images of Camargue and Paris that they give us. Though these documentary images are the exceptional aspect of the films, he goes on to identify their specifically aesthetic function. In relation to *Crin Blanc*, he writes:

> The landscape of Camargue, the life of the cattle ranchers and the fishermen, the conduct of the herds of horses constitute the foundation of the fable, the solid and irrefutable point of support of the myth. But precisely on this reality is based a dialectic of the imaginary of whose split *Crin Blanc* is an interesting symbol… More than one scene among the most spectacular was shot almost without special effects and in some cases in contempt of sure danger. And yet it is enough to reflect on it to understand that if what the screen shows and signifies had to be true, effectively carried out in front of the camera, the film would have ceased to exist because at the same time it would have ceased to be a myth. It's the fringe of trickery, the margin of subterfuge necessary for the logic of the narrative which allows the imaginary to at once integrate reality and to substitute it… What is needed for aesthetic plenitude of

the enterprise is that we are able to *believe* in the reality of events *while knowing* that they are rigged.[18][ix]

What Bazin is arguing here is that if the spectator had been completely drawn into thinking about the risks taken by the boy and the horse in shooting some of the sequences, or if the sociologist in us observed the actors and the landscape as primarily the reality of Camargue rather than as the dramatic elements in the narrative, then there would be no aesthetic text. We would then either be present at a pure spectacle in the case of the stunts or be dealing with sociological data rather than be under the mythic spell of a fairy tale on film. It is in order to abstract away from raw reality that even at its most realist moments the film must find a margin for subterfuge. The same argument is true for *Le Ballon Rouge* which, Bazin says, would be a documentary of a miracle if it were all real rather than a fairy tale.[19]

The point is to understand what is specific to the trickery of the cinema of integral realism if it does not visibly use editing to create meaning that exceeds raw reality. Bazin rules out rear projection since audiences by the 1950s would find it too artificial a solution. What is needed is the rigging of reality itself: "The illusion is born here, as in prestidigitation, from reality."[20][x] One of the ways in which Lamorisse rigs reality is by using multiple balloons for the character of the single red balloon and multiple horses for the one Crin Blanc.[21] The realism of the image tells us that, "Crin Blanc is at once the true horse who still grazes the salty grass of Camargue, and the dream animal who swims eternally in the company of little Falco. His cinematographic reality cannot do without documentary reality, but for it to become the truth of

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[18] Bazin, "Le réel et L'imaginaire," 53.

[19] Bazin, "Montage Interdit," 122 [WCI 46; WCB 78].

[20] Ibid., 121 [WCI 45; WCB 77].

[21] Ibid., 123 [WCI 47; WCB 79].

our imagination, it must be *destroyed and reborn in reality itself.*"[22]xi For this mythic horse to

exist on the screen, the reality of the actual horse(s) playing him had to be rearranged, that is

"destroyed" and created again within the landscape of Camargue itself. For the red balloon to

follow the boy at the latter's command, the balloon had to be invisibly maneuvered while

retaining its integration with the Parisian landscape. In their combination of integral realism and

imaginative narration, these films are "imaginary documentar[ies]."[23]

Given their fairy tale narratives, Lamorisse's films are limit cases illustrating the work of

integral realism for Bazin. The abstract moral register of their narratives[24] grounded in integral

material reality conforms to the description Bazin provides of a myth's relationship to reality

when discussing *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*: "[Tati] has created, all of a piece, a universe

perfectly imaginary and completely lifelike, in the sense that the real one, and we along with it,

can no longer avoid resembling it."xii In Lamorisse's films as in Tati's, "the imaginary that takes

root in reality and nourishes it…."[25]xiii These films also illustrate the concluding lines of "The

Evolution of the Language of Cinema": "Because it leans on a much greater realism, the

image—its plastic structure, its organization in time— has at its disposal many more means for

inflecting and modifying reality from within. The filmmaker is no longer only a rival of the

painter and the playwright, but finally the equal of a novelist."[26]xiv Bazin's argument is that the

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[22] Ibid [WCI 47;WCB 80]. My emphasis.

[23] Ibid., 122 [WCI 46; WCB 78].

[24] Bazin analyzes this moral register too, drawing attention to their dark core: "It is pedagogy that has invented for children colors without danger, but one only needs to see the use they make of them to be riveted by their green paradise peopled with monsters." Bazin, Montage interdit," 118 [WCI 42; WCB 74].

[25] André Bazin, "Vacances avec M. Hulot," in Obs no. 278 (8 September 1955).

[26] André Bazin, "L'évolution du langage cinématographique," in QQCI 148 [WCI 39-40; WCB 105]. My emphasis.

modification of reality from within rather than its manipulation on the editing table or through other special effects had become the threshold of aesthetic realism on film at the time he was writing.

Here we need to revisit Philip Rosen's and Daniel Morgan's somewhat competing accounts of Bazinian realism to arrive at a more precise characterization of it.[27] On Rosen's account, cinema is an indexical capture on film of the world. This indexical capture does not guarantee any accuracy of what has been captured but it guarantees that it had once existed in front of the camera. Thus, the filmic image is an indexical *trace* of reality but without the fullness of presence of the original reality. This causes a gap between image and referent despite the indexical bind between the two. He designates this gap as an "asymptote of reality," using a word from Bazin's article on *Umberto D*.[28] Cinematic realism, riding on technological and stylistic evolution, approaches closer to capturing the world in greater integrity and detail but without ever collapsing the distinction between image and world. This causes the spectatorial subject to invest the image with belief and meaning that is always illogical because of the inevitable gap. This belief is in the past existence of the world which through film has been carried forward into the time of spectatorship.

According to Rosen, the spectator is led to posit illogical belief in the world on film "from the desire to counter threats to its own existence, its own being."[29] But it is unclear how and why investing belief in a fictional world shot in a studio can reassure the "defensive subject"

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[27] Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2001); Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 443-481.

[28] Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 23; André Bazin, "Une grande oeuvre: *Umberto D*.," in QQCIV, 96 [WCII 82].

[29] Ibid.

about cinema's ability to rescue her own existence from time. It is also unclear how this could be true of even a documentary world to which the spectator never belonged. Since home movies are not the standard movie watching experience, one can only conclude that Rosen has overinvested in the idea of the historicity contained in the image. All one can say is that the asymptote principle of cinematic realism holds good for documentaries such as *Kon-Tiki* and *Naufragé Volontaire* where they can be said to have captured the reality in front of the camera with great precision but that this reality is one that is most marginal to the subjects of the films. If anything, Bazin argues for making room for spectatorial subjectivity to be formed in opposition to the *threat* of complete presence of the past on film. Therefore, in writing about Nicole Védrès's compilation film of the *Belle Epoque*, *Paris 1900* (1947), Bazin says that "aesthetic joy is born out of a tear, because these 'memories' do not belong to us."[30][xv] Documentary authenticity is most productive for subject formation when it is accurate but incomplete because their images *must not* belong to us. But this does not touch the problem of reality in fiction films. While Rosen acknowledges in passing the importance of abstraction for Bazin and the range of films about which he wrote, he maintains the prior existence of the object that appears in the image as the baseline of Bazinian aesthetics.[31]

Morgan, as we have seen, contests the argument for a necessary gap between image and referent by emphasizing Bazin's investment in the idea of transfer of reality into the image. Through this transfer, the image does not refer to a past existence of the object but brings it

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[30] André Bazin, "A la recherché du temps perdu: *Paris 1900*," in QQCI, 41.

[31] "[O]nce it is emphasized that the referential force of such concreteness exists only for a subject, the relation of the indexical trace to the preexistent takes on a broader function. It can become a pervasive *ideal* or a privileged model—that is, a manifestation of certain ambitions of subjectivity vis-à-vis representation beyond the basic level of the relation of a film image to its referent." *Change Mummified*, 24.

wholly into the present. However, he finds the idea of transfer to be a "metaphor" and a

"conscious overstatement."[32] I have argued in chapters five and six that Bazin was entirely

serious about the idea of transfer but one that inhabits an uncertain temporality between past and

present. Because Morgan does not ultimately take the language of transfer seriously enough and

so does not register the uncertain temporal status of the image in Bazin's work, he effectively

draws a line separating Bazin's interest in perceptual realism from his broader film aesthetics. He

argues that Bazin judged films based on the internal coherence of their worlds irrespective of

their investment in perceptual and integral realism. I have argued that for Bazin, under historical

pressures, there was a greater demand on films to make spatio-temporal coherence the basis of

the coherence of their diegetic worlds.

Both Rosen and Morgan are involved in arguing whether the impression of integral

reality, as trace or transfer, is the baseline for Bazin's film theory or not. What they both miss is

the fact that these ideas of reality are the ontological baseline of the medium that Bazin theorized

but that the extent to which films are required to take them into account is a special, historical

concern. And the framework in which this "taking into account" must be understood is an

aesthetic one which is not identical with "aesthetics" understood as film style. What it involves is

not the maintaining of a gap between image and its non-diegetic referent, but preventing the

image from having any such direct referent at all (something that Morgan too notes) even when it

captures it with documentary precision. Therefore, it is important that even when the horse in

Crin Blanc is a horse that continues to exist somewhere in Camargue that we not think about this

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[32] 457-458ff43.

fact when watching the film. However exact the geography of Paris as seen in *Le Ballon Rouge*, it remains a Paris of the imagination.

At one point in his writings, Bazin, a great lover of animals, writes that "the visible death of a rabbit in *The Rules of the Game* affects us in the same way as the narrated one of the little cat of Agnès [in Molière's *L'École des Femmes*]."[33][xvi] Clearly, with a different understanding of animal rights now, this is no longer true for many if not most spectators who, like Vivian Sobchack, in watching the hunting scene in *The Rules of the Game*, find themselves jolted out of the diegesis.[34] We need disclaimers, preferably validated by a bona fide organization, to keep us in the diegesis with similar scenes of animal cruelty in more recent films. But the point is that, in Bazin's time, all the virtuosic tracking shots in Renoir's film which keep up with the flight of rabbits and birds only served to better integrate their real deaths into the imaginary deaths of the diegesis. This is a limit illustration of the specifically aesthetic mode of capturing integral reality for which the word in Bazin's writings is not "asymptote," which signifies a gap from reality, but "litote," a word that, as we will see in the next section, Bazin uses to characterize the work of style in the films he privileged.

A "litote" is an understatement which signifies something by stating its negation; for example, saying "It isn't cold today" on a scorching summer's day to mean "It is very hot today." Cinematic realism plays on this paradoxical condition in which both the given statement and its opposite are true; a typical bright summer's day isn't cold and the rabbit really died

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[33] André Bazin, "Théatre et cinéma," in QQCII, 100 [WCI 106; WCB 146].

[34] Sobchack writes, "The rabbit's death, however, exceeds the narrative codes that communicate it. It ruptures and interrogates the boundaries (and license) of fictional representation and has a "ferocious reality" that the character's death does not. Indeed, it is taken as an indexical sign in an otherwise iconic/symbolic representation." Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 247.

somewhere in the French countryside where Renoir shot his film, but these "banal" truths are less important than the "reality" they signify; this day is hotter than a typical summer's day and the rabbit did not die somewhere in France but dies in the world a decadent *haute-bourgeoisie*, and we see it die in such *integral* detail because we will not get to see the human death at the end of the film at the hands of a gamekeeper who will have been just fired from his job. Unlike an asymptote, in which the angle of a line approaches the tip of another but which will never meet it even when the two are extended to infinity, a litote signifies passing *through* integral reality and subsuming it into the reality of imagination, "abstraction *through* incarnation." This is what we have seen Bazin argue by emphasizing how important it was for Lamorisse to capture integral and contiguous reality to make his fairy tales more convincing. However, as I will now demonstrate, for Bazin the use of the long take and depth-of-field composition to maintain respect for integral reality did not in itself guarantee that the aesthetic balance between the imaginary and material realities of the postwar world would be politically compelling.

Long-Take Politics

Bazin, as we have seen, characterized Greta Garbo as "the highpoint of the "erotic litote" because her sexuality depends on her often being fully dressed in extravagant clothes which in themselves have little obvious sexual charge. Therefore, we "see" something when only its opposite is present. He also uses the words "ellipsis and litote" to describe the style of *Monsieur Verdoux* and of the work of Chaplin in general.[35] The Verdoux we see on screen in largely a suave person and we never actually see him kill anyone. The only time we see him try is with Martha Raye's character whose comical presence and luck make him look ridiculous. And yet, on Bazin's account this is simply a continuation of the Charlot myth in which we see only the

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[35] André Bazin, "Défense de Monsieur Verdoux," in *Les Temps Modernes* no. 27 (December 1947), 1122.

sentimental tramp rather than the ambiguous and inauthentic figure he is. In writing about *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), he argues that the hyperbolic style of Georges Bernanos's novel finds its equivalent in the "ellipsis and litote of Robert Bresson's *découpage.*"[36] In comparing the neo-realisms of Giuseppe De Santis and Vittorio De Sica, he draws a distinction between the "romantic eloquence" of the former with the "discretion full of litote and finesse" of the latter.[37] I return to De Sica below to examine the "litote" character of *Bicycle Thieves* (1949). To continue, "litote" is also the word Bazin uses to describe Welles-Toland's depth-of-field composition.

> [T]he frequent use… of what we could call the counter-emphasis (*contre-mise-en-valeur*) of the subject has never been pushed so far, by which I understand the refusal to let the viewer see clearly the culminating events of the scene. This dramatic procedure, which is linked to the litote, should not be confused with ellipsis which we insist (perhaps excessively) constitutes the fundamental rhetorical figure of cinema. With Welles, the entire film is partially withdrawn from our reach, and it is the whole action acquires a margin of inaccessibility.[38][xvii]

He then describes how the lighting in Welles's film is such that some of the most important dialogue comes from characters placed in badly lit corners. What we should note here is the distinction between ellipsis and litote. While ellipsis is an important method for abstracting reality for aesthetic purposes, it is one that skips over parts of reality instead of passing through it. Bazin's concern here is with understanding the conditions in which certain films have made it possible to capture reality in an integral sense so that the space and time of action is wholly present to the spectator and yet what remains just out of reach is the clear perception of the

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[36] André Bazin, "Pour un cinéma impur," in QQCIII, 23 [WCI 68; WCB 125]. Barnard translates "litote" as "understated."

[37] André Bazin, "*Onze Heures Sonnaient,*" in Obs no. 129 (30 October 1952).

[38] André Bazin, "L'Apport d'Orson Welles," in *Ciné-Club* (May 1948). Even though Bazin does not repeat these lines in either of the editions of his book on Orson Welles (1950 and 1958), Jonathan Rosenbaum cites them in a footnote in his translation of the later edition. See André Bazin, *Orson Welles : A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 73ff.

dramatic events of the film. Bazin is certainly not arguing that techniques such as the long take and depth-of-field composition give us absolute ambiguity—the films of Welles and Wyler are perfectly legible in their plot developments—but that they make us perceptually strain to get past what is obvious to what is obscure.

The question, however, is to what extent long takes and depth-of-field were the preeminent stylistic devices for Bazin; one that he addresses explicitly towards the end of "Editing Prohibited." He argues that a formal respect for spatio-temporal integrity needs to be motivated by the dramatic demands of certain scenes rather than be taken for a categorical imperative. Thus, he argues that *The Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948) could well have used classical editing techniques rather than the choreographed long takes in which it was shot without losing its dramatic effect. Scenes that need this respect for reality would include hunting scenes, like the seal hunting one in *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922), or slapstick comedy. Both are Bazin's examples. Films such as *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* use them only for certain scenes rather than the whole film: "[F]or reality to be restored to the narrative, it is sufficient that one suitably chosen shot gathers together the elements dispersed beforehand by editing."[39]xviii And even if films provide for greater sensitivity in our relationship to the spatio-temporal world by retaining its integrity, they do not necessarily speak more compellingly about historical reality.

It wasn't *The Best Years of Our Lives* (henceforth *Best Years*) that evoked the social and sensorial reality of the postwar America in Bazin but *Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk, 1947). Both films are about the difficulties that soldiers returning to America after the war face in

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[39] Bazin, "Montage interdit," 128 [WCI 51; WCB 82].

reintegrating with society. In *Crossfire*, an investigation into the murder of a war veteran who was seen just before his death having drinks with recently decommissioned soldiers. In piecing together, through character flashbacks, the events surrounding the murder, we come to know that the motive of murder was anti-Semitism. The film's dialogue contains as much commentary on the difficulties awaiting returning soldiers as on racism. ("Soldiers either go crawling, or they go crazy.") Among its characters is the initial suspect Mitch, a painter who is anxious to return to his wife, but also anxious about it since he has been away and his artistic ambitions reduced to painting signboards. His friend Keely who looks after him is cynical about postwar America. The actual killer Monty vaguely tries to justify his anti-Semitism by brooding bitterly on the difference between "professional" and "civilian" soldiers. And, finally, the murdered character, Samuels, is seen explaining the postwar condition as an exchange of a definite purpose (that of winning the war) for a much more uncertain restoration pre-war responsibilities.

The plot of *Crossfire* unfolds over twenty-four hours and moves through some locations that, as we will see, caught Bazin's interest. Mitch meets a dance-hall girl who asks him to go up to her apartment and wait. We see both the backyard of the dance hall now in disuse as well as the bare apartment which is just a room with a curtain separating the kitchenette, and a door separating it from another room occupied by someone who may or may not be her estranged husband. There is also the all-night movie theater where Mitch hides while his friends try to piece together what happened. Finally, there is the hotel where all the soldiers are put up. The

production values are those of a B film in accordance with the budget and the film was shot in a

stock *noir* style with expressionist lighting, which Dmytryk says was done to save money.[40]

    Best Years follows three friends from different social situations and who are dealing with

a range of problems. Al Stephenson returns to his wife and two kids and to a bank job where he

is discouraged from giving out loans to soldiers since they may not be able to reintegrate into the

economy well enough to repay them. Fred Derry returns to his job operating a soda machine

since the postwar economy cannot accommodate his superior skills and greater social

aspirations. This strains his relationship with his wife who is embarrassed by his job. Homer

Parrish has lost both his hands in place of which he has to learn to use metal forks. Because of

this, he seeks to break the engagement with his fiancée, Wilma. The film unfolds over several

months, was one of the more expensive films, and the long take and depth-of-field composition

required more elaborate settings. Homer Parrish is played by the real-life war amputee Harold

Russell. The aviation junk yard towards the end of the film where Fred recalls the war as a time

of heroism and promise is a real junkyard.[41]

    Both films had been criticized to some extent in France for abstracting away American

social realities. In the same article in *Les Temps Modernes* where Nathalie Moffat criticized

Monsieur Verdoux, to which Bazin responded so vigorously, she had also expressed

disappointment with the happy ending of *Best Years*.[42] Writing in *L'Écran Français*, Georges

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[40] See Jennifer Holt, "Hollywood and Politics Caught in the Cold War *Crossfire* (1947)," in *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* vol. 31, no. 1 (2001), 7; see also *Hate Is Like a Gun* (2005), a special feature included on the film's 2005 DVD release.

[41] For these production details as well as for a discussion of the film's mandate for providing a comprehensive picture of postwar realities for returning soldiers and their families, see David Culbert, "*The Best Years of Our Lives*: Social Engineering and Friedhofer's 'Populist' Film Score," in *Historical Journal of Fil, Radio and Television* vol. 26, no. 2 (June 2006), 227-233.

[42] Nathalie Moffat, "Lettre d'Amérique", in *Les Temps Modernes* vol. 2, no. 22 (July 1947)

Altman, in a response to Bazin, criticized *Crossfire* for not touching upon the experience of black Americans at all even when tackling the question of racism in America and for being summary in taking up the problem of anti-Semitism.[43] Bazin himself compared *Best Years* with *Crossfire* to come to some surprising conclusions; surprising that is in relation to our current understanding of Bazininan realism as integral realism.[44] Given the widely divergent production qualities of the two films but their shared mandate for exploring the social problems of postwar America, particularly as they relate to demobilized soldiers, Bazin explicitly raises the question of cinematic realism's relationship to historical reality.

Bazin notes that more and more postwar American films had been looking to exchange the unreality of studio decor for the authenticity of the streets, trying to create an aesthetic that is an "intermediary between the documentary and the newsreel." He places *Best Years* in this context and, despite admiration for its fluid composition, is skeptical about this drive towards authenticity.

> The concern for truth, social preoccupations, and material honesty are moral qualities rather than aesthetic values… Authentic settings, the true revolver from the true crime, the true amputee from the true war is all very well; the truth of art passes through this, but it cannot stop there… It is perhaps in following this Ariadne's thread of lost reality that American cinema will find its way out of the labyrinth of artifice where it's lost. On condition that upon exiting it does not confuse life with the process of blood transfusion.[45]xix

We see here Bazin's abiding suspicion of the truth claims of the filmic image. In using the word "blood transfusion" to characterize this false realism, he cautions against a transposition of

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[43] Georges Altman, "*Crossfire*, film policier intelligent et vigoureux pose mal un grave problème," in *L'Écran Français* no. 121 (21 October 1947)

[44] André Bazin, "*Les Plus Belles Années de Notre Vie* et le film social américain," in EF no. 119 (7 October 1947); André Bazin, "Feu Croisés: a propos de *Crossfire*," in EF no. 125 (18 November 1947).

[45] Bazin, "*Les Plus Belles Années de Notre Vie*".

material reality on to the screen in order to make the film and the world coincide, giving forth a sense of immediacy and truth that is devoid of the dividing line of the aesthetic.[46] What bothered Bazin was the combination of realist *and* exhaustive detail with the film's scrupulous concern for being representative of the entirety of postwar social reality. He calls it a "kind of civil epic where the scriptwriters have inventoried as many exemplary situations as possible," making it a "grand lesson of things."[47]xx This combination of exhaustiveness of social detail with the exhaustiveness of material detail made the film, despite Bazin's admiration for Wyler's style, into a moral lesson on postwar America rather than an aesthetic mediation of that history.

Here I will take a bit of a detour to address a seemingly glaring contradiction from what he know of Bazin's bibliography. If Bazin had severe reservation about the realism of *Best Years* in October-November 1947, we might be inclined to think that he changed his mind when he wrote "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of the mise-en-scène" (henceforth "Jansenist") in 1948.[48] But things are a little more complicated than that since he had already analyzed and defended the importance of depth-of-field composition of *Citizen Kane* in the February 1947 issue of *Les Temps Modernes* and acknowledges the significance of this technique in Wyler's film in the 1947 review of *Best Years*.[49] Moreover, his first use of the adjective "Jansenist" to describe Wyler's style was in the 1946 article in *L'Écran Français* on the "new American style" where he

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[46] "Blood transfusion" is also the phrase Kracauer uses in *Theory of Film* to describe how aesthetic experience can put us back in touch with concrete reality. But he uses this phrase in distinction from "completeness" to caution against confusing abstract knowledge with the experience of reality. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 297. For further discussion of the phrase, see Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 167.

[47] Bazin, "Feu Croisés".

[48] André Bazin, "William Wyler ou le Janséniste de la mise en scène," in QQCI, 152-173 [WCB 47-72].

[49] André Bazin, "La technique de Citizen Kane," in *Les Temps Modernes* (February 1947)

talks about *The Little Foxes* (1941), an adaptation of a play.[50] This is important to underline because Laurence le Forestier, in his haste to explain Bazin through some overall Foucauldian grid of French discourse, argues that it shouldn't be surprising if he defended *Crossfire* in a "committed" journal such as *L'Écran Français* and talked about a Jansenist style in a more "aesthetic" journal such as *La Revue du Cinéma*.[51]

The record tells us that Bazin defended *Crossfire* against the "committed" Georges Altman who preferred *Best Years* to it *L'Écran Français*. And he first brought up the "non-political" concern with depth-of-field in the "committed" *L'Écran Français* and then elaborated it in the "committed" *Les Temps Modernes* and in the "aesthetic" *La Revue du Cinéma*, in the same way that he defended the ideologically-confusing *Monsieur Verdoux* in *Les Temps Modernes* and *La Revue du Cinéma*. If Foucauldian historians are to let themselves be bothered about the work of individual critics at all, then they would do well to note Bazin's argument that individuals are indissociable from history but not reducible to it. In "Jansenist," Bazin treated the work of Wyler, or some of his films, along the lines of experimental films that have yielded

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[50] André Bazin, "Le Nouveau Style Américain: Le Cinéma Est-Il Majeur?," in EF no. 60 (21 August 1946).

[51] Laurent le Forestier, "La 'transformation Bazin' ou Pour une histoire de la critique sans critique," in *1895: Mille huit cent quatre vingt quinze* no. 62 (December 2010), 27. The publication of *Opening Bazin* was the occasion further polemical debate between le Forestier and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin in *1895: Mille huit cent quatre vingt quinze* no. 62 (Summer 2012). le Forestier would like us to "de-singularize" Bazin to go beyond a single critic and create a picture of a whole discursive field, "a history of criticism without criticism," much like Foucault's subject-less history. The later issue contains a dossier of critical exchanges between Georges Sadoul and Bazin and Delphine Wehrli's article looking at Bazin's exchanges with the Italian Marxist critic Guido Aristarco. Wehrli's article on the Bazin-Aristarco exchanges is meant to exemplify the kind of scholarship le Forestier would like us to take up. And its problems are instructive. Wehrli gives us the same Bazin we have always known—a realist film theorist belonging to the Catholic Left—and an Aristarco that most probably anyone who has a passing acquaintance with his work would recognize: a Lukácsian critic. But arguing that the real differences must be found on the level of their theoretical grounds, she points out that Bazin's "methodological error" was to have "falsified the assessment of photography, understanding it only as a *means of reproduction* and not of *expression*." If it is a matter of simply adding up well-known discursive nodes without showing any "transformation" in them, then one may be allowed to wonder where historiography turns into annotated sampling. If Wehrli had instead re-read Bazin's writings on Italian neo-realism intensively alongside his exchanges with Aristarco, she would certainly have deepened our understanding of his work. But that would have been too much "criticism." Delphine Wehrli, "Bazin/Aristarco: une relation en montage alterné," in *1895: Mille huit cent quatre vingt quinze* no. 62 (Summer 2012), 62-93.

important stylistic discoveries that would feed into broader film production; that is, the kind of popular avant-garde that his critical program promoted and that I discuss in chapter two. In "Jansenist," Bazin mentions the impact of the war and of the opening of the camps on Wyler's style by quoting him on the subject to underline the importance of this style to postwar sensibilities, but he calls *Best Years*, without stressing the negative connotations, a "civic rather than artistic work" and likens it to the "didactic films" of the Army.[52] Thus, even in "Jansenist," Bazin drew attention to the postwar theme of the film and the effect of war on Wyler's style, but did not argue that the one corresponded to the other adequately in *Best Years* itself.

To return to Bazin's comparison of *Best Years* with *Crossfire*, he first draws them together on the level of the subject. While Altman and, presumably others, treated *Crossfire* primarily as a tract against anti-Semitism and found it wanting on this front, Bazin read the film as much more about the condition of demobilized soldiers and of postwar America in general, much like *Best Years*. Except for a sermon by the investigating officer to a potential decoy for trapping the killer, Bazin finds that the film is much more concerned with the condition of the soldiers and the postwar society represented by the dance-hall girl whom Mitch, the initial suspect, meets and to whose apartment he returns to wait.[53]

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[52] Bazin, "William Wyler," 154-155 [WCB 50].

[53] On the question of *Crossfire*'s perceived abstraction of anti-Semitism, Altman brings up the Polish film *The Last Stop* and its narrative set in Auschwitz. Bazin responds, "But which work could withstand the evocation of the horror and the scale of the Jewish tragedy? *The Last Stop*? Agreed, even though this masterpiece of masterpieces is almost the only one that you could cite. But isn't it unfair… to compare a *European* film, made in the very heart of the massacre of Israel, with an *American* film treating the Jewish problem in *America* for *Americans*… It could well be that *Crossfire* does more there for the Jewish cause than *The Last Stop* does in Europe." On the question of the exclusion of the black population from the treatment of racism, Altman cites Richard Wright's novel *The Native Son* (1940) as an example of what American cinema needs in terms of addressing the problem. Bazin writes, "But this is a literary reference that I am forced to challenge. You know very well that the American novel and theater can take up almost freely the question of the black population because they have a sufficient public in the United States—or even in New York if it's a play. But no producer would be foolish enough to commission a film banned in advance by half of America. The scriptwriters [of *Crossfire*] have gone as far as they could with the racial question. It seems

> I simply continue to claim that despite the oblique angle and inadequacy of the attack [on anti-Semitism], Dmytryk goes much deeper into the subject [of postwar reintegration] than Wyler. And above all that the "realism" of *Crossfire* is aesthetically much more convincing. Because finally it's a matter of art and not pedagogy. Dmytryk gives me perhaps less information for a monograph on demobilization in America, but in the brief burst of magnesium of *Crossfire* I take away a much more *tragic* feeling for the moral situation of the GI.[54]xxi

The way to understanding the moral dimension of historical experience in cinema, as we see here, is through aesthetic rather than exhaustive reality; that is, through an abstracted materiality. And the proof of this is that Bazin registers this moral dimension by registering the material details of Dmytryk's film.

> Dmytryk realized his film in twenty-four days with an evident poverty of means. Few sets, often partial and of exceptional bareness, of which only four have a real dramatic role: the corner of a bar, three seats in a cinema hall in the last rows of the balcony, the semi-public room of a girl with a curtain to hide the kitchen, and the policeman's office (as dreary as possible)… Within this little space, however, I can strain to find out… how one goes to the cinema in America and until what time. I know how the hotel rooms are, and I have seen a kitchen without a refrigerator but with a gas stove where milk can overflow and leave the same grime as at my place (if I had milk).[55]xxii

Bazin notices all these "documentary" details through the bare studio sets of *Crossfire*, and while these are much meagre compared to what *Best Years* provides they are much more affecting, not because they stand outside the narrative as for a cinephilic audience which fetishizes detail over plot, but because of their integration into the plot. Given the fact that the plot unfolds while the soldiers are still stationed at a hotel with no clear indications about where they are headed, Bazin reads the geography of the film as a "no man's land" and a "social swamp" through which "a line of extraordinarily pure action passes" that leads through two

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evident to me that if the Blacks are absent, it isn't from a will to exclude them from the plea [against racism] but through ellipsis." Both citations from "Feu Croisés".

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

330

murders to the death of the killer. Speaking about the image of America the film conjures up, he writes, "[T]hese images stick to this sick world like an insipid chewing gum chewed through to despair."[56]xxiii

To understand Bazin's aesthetic grasp of historical reality through the descriptions I have cited, we need to note certain movements here. The first level of movements is at the level of the text, between convention and reality and between metonymy and metaphor. The generic story frames historical detail which is not specific to the genre of detective films: that of de-mobilized soldiers and racism. The equally generic studio sets and lighting capture the bits of material reality of postwar urban America. But they are all contained by the overall sense of despair that Bazin describes with the metaphor of the insipid chewing gum. This sense of despair applies both to America and to postwar Paris. On a second level, he goes on to describe the overpowering nature of this mood, collapsing the worlds of the film, of postwar America, and postwar Europe: "At dawn, *we* finally leave this story stinking of tobacco and alcohol, and the fresh air of the day returns hope to life. But the head is still heavy with bad whisky and above all with that other much more sickly hangover of the war."[57]xxiv By abstracting away reality, *Crossfire* engages history and the French spectator-critic Bazin much more completely than the "blood transfusion" of *Best Years*, to the extent that for a while its mood prevails over any signs of postwar hope. It succeeds in this because "we never sense that Dmytryk needed to *make* true [*faire* vrai] in order to be sure of being *true*."[58]xxv

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid. My emphasis.

[58] Bazin, "*Les Plus Belles Années de Notre Vie*".

A closer look at the touchstone film of what we take for Bazinian realism, *Best Years*, turns out to have ceded in his estimation to a genre film dealing with the same subject and evoking the same material reality. I would not take this to mean that "Jansenist" does not stand as a key engagement with the potential of integral realism for transforming spectatorial experience and making it more participative. This and other essays, especially "Theater and Cinema," contain much more complex insights on this question than we have credited Bazin with. In chapter five, I briefly sketched his exploration of the problem of spectatorial identification. I would argue that taking this up in greater detail would add further layers of complexity to Bazin's account of aesthetic experience without changing it. What Bazin was working out was how exploration of integral realism, under historical pressures, can create techniques that would fulfill, in new ways, the same aesthetic mandate for engaging spectators in the social imaginary that the older conventions had met so well. But then again, the question of subjects was just as important as ever and indissociable with questions of style.

Italian Neo-Realism, or Narrating Pre-revolutionary Reality

No body of films is more associated with Bazin's critical program than Italian neo-realism. While the films of Welles, Wyler, and Renoir are invoked in relation to his writings on style, we all take Italian neo-realism (henceforth "neo-realism" but always to indicate Italian neo-realism unless otherwise specified) to represent his humanist ideal where questions of style and technique efface themselves until, invoking that notorious sentence from his essay on *Bicycle Thieves*, "No more actors, no more story, no more *mise-en-scène*, which is to say that in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema."[59][xxvi] If over more than six

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[59] André Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 59 [WCII, 60].

chapters I have argued for an understanding of Bazin that is the very opposite of what these lines seem to convey, then either Italian neo-realism is a separate area of Bazin's critical work protected from his broader theoretical commitments or nothing illustrates better around five decades of misreading Bazin than the reception of his writings on Italian neo-realism. To make my argument that these writings indeed best represent our collective misreading of Bazin, and that he saw in neo-realism an explicitly political aesthetic, I will start with his analysis of the movement in the late '40s as contained in "Cinematographic Realism and the Italian School of Liberation" (henceforth "Italian School"), an essay which appeared in a special 1948 issue of *Esprit* on postwar Italy. Following this, I will concentrate upon his reading of *Bicycle Thieves* where the broader claims are illustrated with reference to a key text of the movement.

Like with the question of realism, where I have not taken up Bazin's analysis of the perceptual positioning of the spectator, I will not be able to touch upon a range of issues that define Bazin's engagement with Italian neo-realism. These include his analyses of its different phases from *Rome, Open City* through Rossellini's later films with Ingrid Bergman to Fellini's early films with a range of other neo-realisms in between. What is at stake in these phases are not only different styles—including pronounced baroque tendencies in a film like *Il Cristo Proibito* and the comparison of these films with the style of American novelists such as William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway—but also the mix and opposition between Marxist and Catholic ideologies which made Italian neo-realism such a resonant body of work for the French critics who worked in a social context somewhat ideologically similar but much more polarized. While I discuss the ideological background and questions of style here, a deeper exploration of this and the other issues would thicken the historical context within France and deepen the

discussion of the post-theological function of art as a producer of social mythologies without however contradicting anything in what follows.

There are two characteristics specific to neo-realism's emergence that Bazin identifies at the outset to mark its special status in postwar production. The first is that its interest in exploring the conjunction of material and social reality predates the Liberation by a few years. He highlights the various institutions in Fascist Italy that prepared the ground for practical and critical training for most of the filmmakers who stood out in the postwar production. The Venice Film Festival and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia date back to the early and mid-thirties and directly influenced the postwar film culture of Europe with its burgeoning film festivals and film schools. He names around ten films from before the end of war that had pronounced affinity with postwar neo-realism. Bazin's purpose in laying out this background is to point to the gestation of a critical aesthetic rather than its *sui generis* emergence with the Liberation. Another important thing to note here is that the impulse towards greater realism in Italian films developed in a more considered and gradual manner, perhaps in reaction to the spectacular super-productions that Italy was famous for, rather than exclusively to the pressures of evidentiary realism of wartime newsreels. Bazin mentions the influence of Jean Renoir on Italy in this regard.

The second characteristic identified by Bazin, and which emphasizes rupture rather than continuity, is the socio-political context. Here he compares the respective Liberations of Italy and France. In France, the Resistance immediately became the stuff of legend while the country pretended to pick up its history from before the Occupation. In Italy, the Liberation was followed by a complete rupture from a long-established political regime, and then occupation by the Allies, and social and economic upheaval. Therefore, while the French were happy enough

334

making films that consolidated the national imaginary around the mythology of the Resistance, the Italian filmmakers were denied such comfort and had to keep up with the uncertainty of the times. It is amidst this uncertainty where coherent mythologies had difficulty emerging that neo-realism sticks to the details of social and material reality to cultivate a sensibility which Bazin calls "revolutionary humanism."

> This perfect and natural adherence to topicality [*actualité*] is internally explained and justified by a spiritual adhesion to the epoch. In a certain sense, Italy is only three years old. But the same cause could have produced other effects. What is ceaselessly admirable and assures Italian cinema a very large audience in the western countries is the meaning that attaches itself to the painting of topicality. In a world again and already obsessed by terror and hate, where reality is almost never loved for itself, but only refused or defended as a political sign, *Italian cinema is certainly the only one which conserves a revolutionary humanism in the midst of the epoch it depicts.*[60]xxvii

This evocation of Cold War polarization in Europe—"a world again and already obsessed…"—and the congealing of reality around it gives the uncertainties of Italy a special charge and makes its humanism revolutionary "from which terror seems as yet absent."[61]xxviii It is this historical reality that is the subject of Italian neo-realism much before it is any concern for integrity of space and time, which is why Bazin often uses the word *actualité* to refer to the topicality of its subjects rather than to any newsreel quality of its images.[62]

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[60] André Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique et l'école italienne de la liberation," QQCIV, 15 [WCII 20-21; WCB 220-221].

[61] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 17.

[62] In the quotation above, Gray translates *actualité* as "actuality" and Barnard "reality." However, the point Bazin is developing here is not neo-realism's adherence to spatio-temporal reality but to postwar social reality. The sentence preceding this paragraph is "It follows that the Italian films present an exceptional documentary value so that it is impossible to extract the *script* without carrying away with it the whole social terrain in which it has plunged its roots." A little earlier he calls them "reconstituted reports" but there is no mention throughout this section of the essay of spatio-temporal reality. Rather, its theme is *actualité* as in "current affairs." Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 15 [WCII 20; Barnard 220].

By "revolutionary humanism" Bazin means an openness to engage across ideological barriers, a "communicative generosity," in the construction of postwar society. While this does not mean *keeping aside* ideology, since the construction of reality is necessarily an ideological operation, ideologies, particularly institutionalized ones like Marxism, Communism, and Catholicism, exist amidst a reality that palpably exceeds them. This makes "Italian cinema, for the moment, much less political than sociological." A range of social problems related to unemployment have prevented "*a priori* political values" from acquiring preeminence in socio-political experience. Within this fluid situation, ideological positions are forced to improvise together as much to salvage society as to keep themselves relevant. This improvisation has a paradoxical character in the films which have a range of collaborators across ideological divides, particularly on the scripts, but the films themselves are careful to emphasize individual experience in relation to the social context rather than group experience. Bazin likes this ideological and artistic improvisation to the "interdependence of improvisation of the *commedia dell'arte* or even of hot jazz."[63]xxix And here we come upon the aesthetic difference of neo-realism from the standard generic or dramatic film in tapping the social unconscious.[64]

Genre films tap into as well as impact the social imaginary from an aesthetic remove. This construction thrives and keeps its relevance through repetition across films which presupposes some continuity in society. Neo-realism is denied this continuity which forces it keep up with a reality that changes along unpredictable lines. Italian society exists amidst global ideological hardening, but within Italy ideology is forced to improvise along with rather than

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[63] For the ideas summarized in the paragraph see Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 16ff, 27ff [WCII 21ff, 31ff+; WCB 246ff3, 248ff6].

[64] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 46-47 [WCII 48].

stabilize reality. People have not stopped believing in the possibility of a workers' utopia or

Christian transcendence or range of other ideals, but they cannot ground them in a reality that

can be relied upon, however deceptively, to hold them in place. Therefore, unlike the usual

bodies of work built around genres or national film movements, the paradox of neo-realism is

that it cannot but reject this reality that it is forced to keep up with, without however knowing

where it is headed.

To take the case of the Soviet avant-garde to which Bazin likens neo-realism's political

importance, it had the mandate for constructing the social imaginary along the lines of an

ideology in power so that for it reality was not to be rejected but to be actively seized and

reshaped in keeping with this ideology. Therefore, its montage-based aesthetic was a historically

sanctioned realism which could not be revived in postwar Italy. Or to take the example of the

Western, all narrative incidents, even improvisations and modulations, derive their meaning

within an overall mythology. These national bodies of work emerge in the wake of completed

revolutions or historical movements and in that sense they are "post-revolutionary" unlike the

Italian films.

> The recent Italian films are at the very least pre-revolutionary. They all *refuse*,
> implicitly or explicitly, through humor, satire, or poetry, the social reality that they
> draw upon. But they know even when taking up the clearest positions to never treat
> this reality as a means. To condemn it is not necessarily to be in bad faith [in the
> moral sense unlike the psychological one discussed above]. They do not forget that
> before being condemnable the world quite simply *is*.[65]xxx

We need to note here both the refusal of the world and its acknowledgment to realize

Bazin's point that you cannot refuse what does not exist as well as the fact that the Italians could

not but refuse what existed. It is the kind of situation in which revolutions are made but not the

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[65] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 15-16 [WCII 21; WCB 221]. My emphasis on "refuse."

kind of situation in which a revolutionary reality has begun to establish itself. For the Soviet

filmmakers a reality that they refused—for example, farms that had not been collectivized, the

hold of the Church on people's minds—had an ideological alternative, whereas for the Italian

filmmakers there was only an unpredictable reality. We take this historical argument made by

Bazin for neo-realism's specificity to be a general affirmation of political quietism. Let us now

see the specific stylistic solutions with which Italian filmmakers responded to this condition

through the example of *Bicycle Thieves*.

Bicycle Thieves: A Thesis Film

Bazin analyzes *Bicycle Thieves* as a thesis film which like other works of neo-realism

refuses existing social conditions, but which, also like other neo-realist films, is aesthetically

revolutionary in how it draws us into taking up this attitude.

> The thesis implied is of a marvelous and atrocious simplicity: in a world where in order to subsist this worker, the poor, *must steal from each other*. But this thesis is never posed as such. The linking of events is always of a verisimilitude at once rigorous and anecdotal. Basically, the worker could have found the cycle in the middle of the film; only, there would have been no film.[66][xxxi]

The whole argument turns upon the problem of how a thesis as clear as "the poor must steal from

each other to survive" can be carried by a story composed of episodic and accidental events with

no clear logical or dramatic progression from one to the other. Among these assorted incidents

there *could* also have been one in which the worker finds his bike and this hypothetical

possibility should take away from the force of the thesis. To understand how the thesis

nonetheless holds, the question which needs answering is why the narrative actually needs to be

episodic rather than constructed along causal lines.

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[66] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 49 [WCII 68].

There are different reasons for this according to Bazin. The first is that *Bicycle Thieves* acquires its full dramatic force only in the context of Italian social reality in 1948 where the theft of something as simple as a cycle can lead to indefinite unemployment.[67] As we have seen him argue, the blame for such dire social conditions is carried at once by all social institutions and ideologies, and therefore by no one in particular. Bazin compares the character of the Church and the Party as they appear in the film. Antonio goes to a union branch to ask his friends for help and only these friends in their personal capacity try to help him. There could be no question here of asking the union to either officially organize a search for the stolen cycle or to find him a replacement, "because the unions work for justice and not for charity."[68]xxxii On the other hand, the paternalism of the Church "is intolerable, because its 'charity' is blind to this individual tragedy without [unlike the Party] doing anything to really change the world which is its cause."[69]xxxiii

While it would be difficult to place the blame finally at the doorstep of the Church when state failure, best represented by the police, is more immediately implicated in Antonio's crisis, a Church that claims authority over social life cannot escape criticism. The scene that captures the ambiguity of this critique for Bazin is the one where Antonio and his son are taking shelter from the rain and a group of Austrian priests surrounds them while doing the same: "We have no valid reason for blaming them for being so talkative and for speaking in German on top of that. But it would be difficult to create a situation *objectively* more anti-clerical."[70]xxxiv The Church's

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[67] Ibid., 48 [WCII 50].

[68] Ibid., 50 [WCII 52].

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

indifference at the same time its glibness is captured "objectively" in the chatter of the priests and a language that becomes a metaphor of incomprehension. Then there is the scene in the restaurant where Antonio and Bruno enjoy a meal with Antonio forgetting for a moment that it is his last bit of money only for him to be reminded of it by the wealth of those dining around him. Finally, there are incidents that interrupt the search and have no connection to social reality, such as the one where Bruno needs to urinate in the middle of a chase and the rain storm that forces father and son to take shelter. So the episodic structure does at least two interrelated things: it gives a cross-section of social reality that makes the loss of a cycle a crisis of such proportions for a worker; but it also breaks a direct causal relationship between social reality and the drama of the search for the cycle.

For Bazin, the breaking of the causal link both among narrative events and also between the social reality and the drama of the search for the cycle lies at the heart of the political efficacy of the film. He explains this by comparing what *Bicycle Thieves* does with what a usual thesis or propaganda film would have done.

> [A] propaganda film would have *demonstrated* that the worker *cannot* find his cycle and that he is necessarily caught in the infernal circle of his poverty. De Sica limits himself to *showing* us that the worker *can not* [*peut* ne *pas*] find his cycle and because of this he will no doubt be unemployed again. But who cannot see that it is the accidental character of the script which constitutes the necessity of the thesis, whereas the least doubt about the necessity of the events in a propaganda script would have rendered the thesis hypothetical.[71]xxxv

We thus return to the claim at the outset that because in the logic of an episodic script Antonio *could* have found the cycle, the film's thesis is much more effective than it would have been in a causally constructed script whose logic would have required that Antonio *must not* find

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[71] Ibid., 49 [WCII 51].

the cycle. The reason these lines give us is that if the thesis is linked to logic, then it would pass from the realm of the aesthetic to the realm of reason. Apart from Bazin's resistance to such a reduction (as discussed in chapters five and six), he implies that those *a priori* ideologically resistant to the thesis could argue from the complexity of social reality to easily weaken it. The film simply shows that Antonio tries everything he could to find the cycle but that he fails to find it, and because of this simple theft, in itself a random occurrence perhaps, is himself reduced to stealing, and this is not his personal failing but one for which the whole social reality we see in the film is responsible. It does not show that he *had to fail* in finding the bicycle, which would have meant *demonstrating* what specifically is wrong with society that can then be set right.

> As we have seen… the events and beings are never solicited for a social thesis. But the thesis emerges from them fully armed and that much more irrefutable for being given to us as a surplus. It is our mind [*esprit*] which brings it out and constructs it, not the film.[72]xxxvi

The fact that Antonio and his predicament exist first for themselves before serving the film's thesis means that as spectators we are engaged in a process of identification with him. Therefore, the words, "It is our mind that brings it out and constructs [the thesis]," should not be taken to mean that we are above all distant and critical spectators, as when watching the films of André Cayatte (chapter six), who draw reasoned conclusions. Therefore, the next move in Bazin's argument is to explain how the film constructs the personal dimension of the narrative.

We see Antonio's wife pawning the bedsheets to redeem the bicycle he needs to take up the new job, and also consulting a soothsayer earlier about his prospects, to be told that her husband will find a job soon. This combination of irrational faith and decisive, effective action makes her an outlier in a film where consequences never follow as decisively from action, let

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[72] Ibid., 50 [WCII 52].

alone consequence from prediction. Therefore, she disappears from the film once the search

begins and with her the most likely site for registering the personal consequences of Antonio's

predicament. Instead, it is the son, Bruno, who provides this personal dimension but whose

presence constantly distracts from the search, who sometimes walks alongside Antonio,

sometimes lags, and sometimes runs ahead. Bruno marks the alternation between the personal

and the social, showing their inter-relationship, but cutting any economic determinism between

the two. He is "the intimate witness, the private chorus attached to [the father's] tragedy."[73][xxxvii]

No economic explanation for Antonio's plight could give an account of the moral humiliation

that is the consequence of social conditions without this personal witness blind to that

explanation. If politics is more than just economic efficiency, if social solidarity is grounded in a

sense of personal dignity rather than an abstract commitment, then a social tragedy must have a

personal and moral dimension that accompanies social reality (like a chorus) but not reducible to

it. Therefore, the fact that the film constructs this personal dimension never completely in sync

with the social even when it is completely tied to it makes the affective basis of the thesis

immune to rational argumentation.

From the argument so far, it must be clear that Italian neo-realism's greatest innovation

for Bazin was at the level of narrative rather than at the level of style. He likens the episodic

structure of *Bicycle Thieves* and neo-realism in general to the structure of slapstick narratives and

to *commedia dell'arte* with the difference that they have been transposed into an explicitly tragic

mode. Where conventionally tragic narratives move inexorably towards catastrophe, neo-realist

films arrive at it through indirection and detours. And yet such narrative innovation did in turn

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[73] Ibid., 52 [WCII 53].

call for stylistic innovations: "no more actors, no more story, no more mise-en-scène." If the discussion so far demonstrates how intricately constructed the narrative of *Bicycle Thieves* is, then it should be clear that Bazin's "no more story" means something else than what it literally says: that everything appears in the film as *representative* of some social or personal reality without all of these aspects following logically from each other. Let me now look briefly at "no more actors" and "no more mise-en-scène."

If neo-realist narratives cannot repeat themselves because they have to keep up with a society in flux, and if all they have in common is an attitude, then they cannot have any stock characters or personae. If this is the case, then they generally cannot use stars or otherwise recognizable actors who, as we have seen Bazin argue, bring their own personae with them. These films could and often did use professionals but used them against type (Anna Magnani, Bazin points out, was a singer and so had a public persona); or they sometimes picked non-professionals but in accordance with suitability to character and not for the similarity of their lives to the characters. "What is important is to not to use the professional in the usual capacity. The rapport that he builds with his character must not be marked for the public by any *a priori* idea."[74]xxxviii "It can no longer even be a question of whether an actor[75] performs more or less well, as much as that man is identical with his character… It is not the singular excellence of this worker or this kid that makes for the quality of their performance, but the whole aesthetic system in which they come to be inserted."[76]xxxix This is no different from how star performance works

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[74] Bazin, 'Le réalisme cinématographique," 18 [WCII 23-24; WCB 224].

[75] Bazin uses the word "*figurant*" which means an "extra," but he is talking about the actors who plays the central parts.

[76] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 55 [WCII 56].

except for one crucial difference. The star persona, once established in some indirect accord with a relatively enduring social reality, has characters written for it to ensure its persistence from one role to another. In neo-realism, the character precedes the actor in keeping with a fluid social reality and therefore the actor is picked for his or her suitability. Therefore, "no more actors in a recognizable sense" rather than "no more actors *tout court*."

In one of the more unfortunate translation errors, Hugh gray translates "*plus de mise-en-scène*" as "no more sets." Bazin begins the essay on *Bicycle Thieves* by worrying about a possible impasse in neo-realism of which the main sign was a reflexive use of real locations. The documentary authenticity of the early postwar films "was inseparable from a certain historical conjuncture… [b]ut the novelty and above all the sharpness of this technical crudity [has] lost its surprise…."[77]xl

> But worst of all is the appearance of a sort of "neo-realist" super-production where the search for real location, manners, the depiction of the working-class milieu, the social background has become an academic cliché, and in this regard much more detestable than the elephants of *Scipion l'Africain* (1937).[78]xli

As should be expected by now, Bazin speaks about the need to integrate material realism into an aesthetic structure, and then gives no importance to the real locations of *Bicycle Thieves*.[79] The discussion of mise-en-scène actually refers to the film's editing which he argues *seems* as neutral as that of a Chaplin film, giving the impression of long takes in which the action unfolds without interruption. But then he points out that upon a closer look the film will turn out to be conventionally edited, and much more so than *Paisa*. The only difference from the standard

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[77] Ibid., 45 [WCII 47].

[78] Ibid., 46 [WCII 48].

[79] Ibid., 46 [WC II]

films is that classical editing in *Bicycle Thieves* never works along the causal logic of action, because its action itself lacks that kind of logic. A cut never links consequence to action because they are not so linked in the narrative.

So, no more actors, no more story, and no more mise-en-scène, in favor of an "aesthetic illusion of reality" which is the social reality of Italy in 1948. In fact, Bazin wrote an article titled "Néo-réalisme et 'réportage à thèse'" in 1952 arguing that in France and in Hollywood several films had employed the clichés of Italian neo-realism—non-professional actors, or actors cast against type, documentary realism, and above all subjects of current social relevance—but without the historical conditions that would allow them to create an "aesthetic illusion" they have turned out like "curdled mayonnaise" in which one can easily distinguish the "oil of realism" from the "yolk of good intentions."[80][xlii] In Italy, however, it yielded an aesthetic illusion of reality with a clear purpose: that of leading the audience to adopt an attitude of refusal towards a reality that it at the same time cannot deny, so that it may feel compelled to change it.

> It is stupid and perhaps as naïve as Beaumarchais's praise for the tears of melodrama, but tell me if, upon leaving an Italian film, you do not feel better, if you do not desire to change the order of things, preferably by persuading men, at least those who can be persuaded and who have been led only by blindness, prejudice or misfortune to hurt their own.[81][xliii]

This is indeed as "naïve" a faith in the political efficacy of cinema as one can find—that it will enthuse people into changing the world—but we must emphasize the "preferably by persuading men" which underlies the essentially discursive basis of this enthusiasm. And this discursiveness cannot draw upon anything other than images of a society without any logical

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[80] André Bazin, "Néo-réalisme et 'reportage à thèse'", in Obs no. 109 (12 June 1952)

[81] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 16.

causality built into them. The enthused spectators can only speak from a place of affect because to say that the Church or the Party or even the police is singularly responsible for Antonio's condition would be absurd based on the filmic evidence; to say that they are collectively responsible would be true enough but the film offers no alternative except their rejection. But then again, as Arendt reminds us, when we say that everyone is guilty then no one in particular can be held responsible. And that is the intolerability of the Italian situation, its pre-revolutionary character, according to Bazin.[82] We see an indifference of these institutions but there is no direct line from there to a program for changing the world; and a simple rejection of them is not such a program. Therefore, the most remarkable line of Bazin's essay is not the one about no more actors etc., but "De Sica wins every play on the board… without having placed a bet."[83][xliv] His thesis stands after the film has been put through every political logic because it testifies only to a condition and escapes those logical structures.

The aesthetic accomplishment of neo-realism is summed up by one of Bazin's subtitles in "Italian School"— "love and the refusal of reality."[84][xlv] Here "love" is nothing but the reflexive affirmation of *whatever is* even if it is unacceptable, an affirmation that could be the first step in transforming it without drawing the trajectory for it. Bazin develops this line of thought

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[82] Arendt writes, "Many people today would agree that there is no such thing as collective guilt or, for that matter, collective innocence, and that if there were no one person could ever be guilty or innocent. This, of course, is not to deny that there is such a thing as *political* responsibility which, however, exists quite apart from what the individual member of the group has done and therefore can neither be judged in moral terms nor be brought before a criminal court. Every government assumes political responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past… But this kind of responsibility is not what we are talking about here; it is not personal and only in a metaphorical sense can one say he *feels* guilty for what not he but his father or his people have done." For Arendt as for Bazin, personal responsibility must come into play within political responsibility but the problem for postwar Europe, especially in countries such as Germany, Italy, and France, is the scale on which this dilemma had been posed. Hannah Arendt, "Epilogue," *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin 2006), ebook.

[83] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 50 [WCII 53].

[84] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 15 [WCII 21; WCB 221].

346

extensively in a long article on De Sica for an Italian publication where he equates love with poetry in the sense of *poiesis* as the fabrication of something: "Poetry is nothing but the active and creative form of love, its projection on to the universe."[85][xlvi] And yet, rather than being comforting, the idea of love Bazin has in mind is its capacity to unsettle. He argues that the quality of "naïve love" that is the basis of De Sica-Zavattini's work is best gauged by the fact that critics of diverse political persuasions have tried to claim their films for their own ideological line. When diverse ideologies claim the same object of experience, whether they like it or not, they are brought to share the same terrain and run the *risk* of identifying with each other. This possibility that in aesthetic experience one may end up identifying with experiences and ideological positions that we are opposed to cannot and should not be comforting.

No one, hopefully, can persuade us that in accepting our "ontological sympathy" for Verdoux we need to accept his misogyny. We need critical vigilance to love Verdoux while rejecting his misogyny, and this is a strange thing to do. This is why Bazin distinguishes the capacity of poetic love to cross ideological barriers from any sense of optimism or pity. As with Chaplin, he compares the work of De Sica to Kafka to explain why we sometimes need to dissociate our affective responses to the world and to people from our necessary ideological commitments.

> [Kafka's] drama is this: God doesn't exist, the last office in the Castle is empty.
> There perhaps is the specific tragedy of the modern world, the passage to the
> transcendence of a social reality which births its own deification. The troubles of
> Bruno [from *Miracle in Milan*] and Umberto D. have immediate and visible causes,
> but we sense that there is also an insoluble residue made up of the psychological and
> material complexity of social relations that neither the excellence of institutions nor
> the good will of our neighbor can make disappear. The nature of this residue is no

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[85] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 86 [WCII 74].

347

less positive and social, but its action sometimes comes from an absurd and imperative fatality.[86][xlvii]

The kind of social love that is characteristic of aesthetic experience is here once again placed in the context of a post-theological world. "A social reality which births its own deification" is a reference to all the secular ideological constructs which seek to shape the world in their own image, and this is not only valid but necessary for organizing complex societies. But we need to keep coming up against the awareness of this "insoluble residue" of absurdity which derails all attempts at perfection. If this were not the case, "the earthly paradise would be in Sweden where the bicycles remain day and night on the pavements."[87][xlviii] The idea of politics as the organization of society, Bazin writes, has no regard for subjectivity, and therefore a perfectly functional politics in this sense "would no longer call upon love which would then become a private affair between man and man."[88][xlix] It is essentially a recognition of the inevitably tragic character of modern existence that makes love a political virtue. The alternative would be an accusatory denunciation of society like the thesis films of André Cayatte which, as we have seen Bazin argue, subsume reality into this denunciatory logic, leave nothing untainted by guilt and is more likely to lead to an erosion of reality after which it would be absurd to speak of politics or transformation.

Conclusion

I mentioned earlier that if his writings on Italian neo-realism are not to be considered as a part of Bazin's work separate from his interest in generic films or from his anxieties about the

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[86] Ibid., 85 [WCII 73-74].

[87] Ibid., 86 [WCII 74].

[88] Ibid..

realism of the filmic image, then perhaps nothing illustrates the misunderstandings that have attended his reception better than these texts. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter and my reading of Bazin by looking briefly at what these misreadings might tell us about the epistemic conditions in which his work has been received. Let us start with Christopher Williams's 1973 review of Bazin's writings on neo-realism which consisted of extended excerpts. He starts by citing at length Bazin's lines on revolutionary humanism that the latter had placed under the sub-heading "Love and the refusal of reality." Williams's conclusion is, "Bazin does not confront the problem of how a film might simultaneously refuse reality and yet be an expression of love for it."[89] I have argued here that that is clearly what Bazin does—"love *and* [not *or*] the refusal of the real"—and the lines Williams cites state so plainly. He then brings up Bazin's argument that De Sica's thesis in *Bicycle Thieves* stronger because the worker *could not* find his bike rather than insisting that he cannot find it. Williams uses this to suggest that Bazin does not care for propaganda rather than attending to the emphasis on a propaganda based on logical reasoning.[90] Noting that for Bazin questions of style, if they come up at all, are a means to the end of a passive revelation of meaning that lies hidden in reality, he writes, "If this is an aesthetic, it is one that has effectively abdicated."[91] Thus, he cites Bazin at length describing the necessary work of abstraction in cinema, where the latter's examples of such abstraction are Arnheimian elements of "black and white, plane surface" and Eisensteinian "laws of montage." This is also the paragraph where Bazin goes on to argue for the importance of lying to art. Williams concludes that nothing illustrates better than these lines Bazin's ideal of "integral realism"—the

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[89] Christopher Williams, "Bazin on Neo-Realism," in *Screen* vol. 14, no. 4 (1973), 61

[90] Ibid., 62

[91] Ibid., 64

term he uses in "The myth of total cinema" to describe the perfect reproduction of spatio-temporal reality. Earlier in the paragraph he cites from, Bazin writes that without the necessary selection of reality, we will simply and unacceptably return to the pure reality of *total cinema*.[92]

For Alessia Ricciardi, Bazin and the French critics simply mined Italian neo-realist films for the "redemption of cinema" without regard to their historical specificity.

> Regarding neorealist works solely in terms of their fidelity to "the ambiguity of reality," rather than say, their unambiguous critique of social and political inequalities, Bazin *sacrifices the historical specificity of the films* in order to uphold his theory of the ontology of the medium.[93]

Better still, Karl Schoonover, who painstakingly creates a Bazinian theory of the cinematic body to offer his own reading of Italian neo-realist films, draws upon Kristin Thompson's argument that *Bicycle Thieves*' narrative is carefully engineered to produce certain effects. This "corrects" Bazin's supposed understanding of it as predicated on chance.[94] And then he writes:

> Always on the lookout for indeterminacy, Bazin sometimes overreaches to find his examples, obscuring how films like [*Bicycle Thieves*] exploit contingency, ambiguity, and indeterminacy for their rhetorics of realism… Bazin thus *avoids the possibility that a film might deploy ambiguity with a particular semantic gain or in hopes of producing specific reactions in the viewer*.[95]

We have seen Bazin make his argument for *Bicycle Thieves* as a thesis film predicated entirely on a carefully engineered episodic narrative.

If I have cited these scholars at length, it is not at all suggest that they did not read the very words they so scrupulously quoted and cited, nor is to single them out for their misreadings.

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[92] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 21.

[93] Alessia Ricciardi, "The Italian Redemption of Cinema: Neorealism from Bazin to Godard," in *The Romanic Review* vol. 97 nos. 3-4 (May-Nov 2006), 488. My emphasis.

[94] Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 158

[95] Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 165. My emphasis.

What they offer instead is an illustration of something that Bazin as he appears in this

dissertation should help us understand: Bazin has been a victim of the mythology of "realism"

erected to understand him. And since mythologies serve some historical purpose, the Bazinian

myth may have been a necessary foil for the putatively more politically grounded arguments of

these scholars. But that would still leave some room for the possibility that they deliberately

created a straw man out of him to buttress their own arguments. Given that Williams cites at

great length lines that state the very opposite of his conclusions, and that Schoonover is actually

trying to deepen our understanding of Bazinian realism, we cannot accuse them of bad faith in

the sense of deliberate obfuscation. One can only conclude that something occurred to make the

very words on the page opaque and allowed for the myth to take shape. It has made statements

like the following nearly incomprehensible to a couple of generations of scholars:

- I dare say that ambiguity in the cinema is a criterion that never fails… Rare are the films which dare to impose on us an image of the world where all is not so simple, where *we are required to take sides freely, be it against our sympathies*.[96]
- Isn't this a solid definition of realism in art: *to force the mind to take sides without cheating with beings and things*?[97]
- The recent Italian films are at the very least *pre-revolutionary*. They all *refuse*, implicitly or explicitly… the social reality that they draw upon. But they… do not forget that before being condemnable the world quite simply *is*.[98]
- De Sica wins every play on the board… without having placed a bet.[99]

These are not statements from the thousands of articles Bazin wrote and that have not

been in print since their first publication. No archival recuperation was needed to come across

them and the arguments in which they occur. And scholars like Williams drew upon their own

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[96] André Bazin and Jean Cocteau, *Orson Welles* (Chavane: Paris, 1950), 30. My emphasis.

[97] André Bazin, "*Allemagne Année Zéro*," in QQCIII, 32. My emphasis.

[98] Bazin, "Le réalisme cinématographique," 15-16 [WCII 21; WCB 221]. My emphasis on "refuse."

[99] Bazin, "*Voleur de Bicyclette*," 50 [WCII 53].

French language skills to modify Hugh Gray's translations. Several of them, including Ricciardi, have noted his interest in genre films to only demote them in his mythology, when Gray's translations included the essays on the Western and on Chaplin. But there must be something lacking in the terms of their discourse whereby it becomes difficult to mark in particular that the notion of ambiguity in the lines above explicitly rules out endless indeterminacy that might then be a sign of political quietism, but rather designates the condition for an affective as opposed to a reasoned *commitment*.

A few terms offer themselves for understanding what had to become opaque for Bazin's mythology to be created. "Aesthetic" to begin with. Invariably, most scholars either understand this term in the narrow sense of style and technique or dismiss the whole paradigm as a quasi-religious model imbricated with bourgeois ideology in all its dominant forms. Bazin was deeply tuned into what it meant for the aesthetic to be a quasi-religious structure of experience in secular modernity and one that was thoroughly political. The Augustinian idea of love as not predicated on the attributes of what is loved grounds this understanding of aesthetic experience and would also certainly have been too contaminated by just by the adjective to warrant an effort to understand. Not Bazin but Williams and most of his contemporaries had most probably no idea what it meant to "confront the problem of how a film might simultaneously refuse reality and yet be an expression of love for it." But it is perhaps at the level of understanding politics itself that there had been a complete incommensurability of paradigms.

The word that designates this incommensurability is "tragedy" and its centrality to Bazin's understanding of the inevitable limits to all utopic politics. Rita Felski points out how with the prominence of Brechtian aesthetics in the latter part of the twentieth century, tragedy came to be discredited as "the enemy of politics in promoting a sense of hopelessness, fatalism,

and resignation."[100] It is not the least irony of the ideological critique of the Enlightenment subject that it put its faith in the Brechtian discourse of *distantiation* that challenges the spectatorial subject towards epistemological clarification and critique. But in a way all recognizably Marxist philosophies of history implicitly acknowledge the inevitability of the tragic to only reduce it to an engine of progress; that is, to an instrument called dialectical conflict for overcoming all tragedy. We see this in what I have argued is Bazin's implicit but clear response on the question of Moscow Trials to Merleau-Ponty. The latter calls tragedy the conflict between the "subjective innocence" of the leaders who acted in good faith and the "objective treason" of the Revolutionary state that was the result of their actions. The Trials were a recognition of this tragedy as a necessary engine of overcoming violence in the future. This would have struck, and did strike, Bazin as a farcical understanding of tragedy that can only end in a travesty of utopia such as the Stalin on screen.

Tragedy for Bazin as for Arendt designates the limits at which political experience needs to resume on new terms if it is not to be terminated by those limits. Films for Bazin tap into the unconscious processes of history by which these limits are shaped, at a partial remove from history, into possibilities, or rather virtualities, of experience. The task of critique is draw the imaginary lines of discourse, from a place of affect, in which these virtual shapes reveal themselves along with their inevitable contradictions. It is an affective critique (whose exemplary genre is perhaps the essay form rather than a research monograph) that allows for some acknowledgment that the contradictions of an aesthetic object and the possibilities of experience they make possible had been reflexively accepted by the critic in the experience of

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[100] Rita Felski, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 4.

"disinterested pleasure." On Bazin's understanding, only this would count as an aesthetic politics, and like all politics it is as troubling as it is potentially enabling for renewing experience. To measure the historical and epistemological distance between this conception of aesthetic politics and ideology critique is a project yet to be undertaken. It would require not just an internal analysis of the discourse of ideology critique or political modernism but a clearer understanding of the political contours of history against which it took shape. And this would have to go beyond the ritualistic invocations of 1968 and the supposed betrayal of its spirit by the very people who participated in it.[101] There is no dearth of critical analyses and biographies which historicize the luminaries of post-'68 critical thought, but within film studies what may need to be centered is the following question: what unease have film texts and affective-hermeneutic responses to them evoked that they had to be first subsumed into the doctrinal metaphysics of psychoanalytic Marxism and then buried under the ever more excavated archival material that we now need to "perpetually complete" them.

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[101] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Epilogue

The Image and Its Politics After Bazin

If, as I have argued in this dissertation, we understand Bazin's concern with realism as a historical question and one concerned with the medium's response to public desires, then to pose the question of how he can help us understand developments in our own landscape of images would also require us to ask how he can help us revise the role of film and media images in the time between his death and our own moment. We can do worse than start with a short 1953 article by him titled "Is cinema mortal?"[1] It addresses two kinds of crises facing cinema: reports of rapidly diminishing audiences in America and the appearance of television. Faced with the withdrawal of capital from the industry on the one hand and the promised ubiquity of the smaller screen on the other, Bazin speculates on the possible demise of cinema as an art form and its return to being a tool for the simple reproduction of reality. He recalls here his argument from "Total Cinema (1946)" according to which film had to learn to abstract the world it automatically reproduces in order to become a site for aesthetic expression. And just a little over half a century later, at the time he was writing, this achievement seemed about to exposed as an "optical illusion."[2] He expressly anticipates that the omnipresence of the televisual image may put an end to the idea of "art" that cinema had come to adopt from its predecessors; that is, the

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[1] André Bazin, 'Is Cinema Mortal?," in ABNM, 313-317.

[2] Ibid., 315.

image may no longer be able to take its distance from the world but come to inhabit it

emphatically, and that this is what audiences will find "more satisfying."

As we know, just over two decades after Bazin's words—the timeframe he grants before

some young critics would scoff at the idea of cinema as an art form—mainstream and narrative

cinema came under a sustained theoretical and practical assault. Not that such cinema

disappeared, but it wasn't untouched by the developments since the late '60s which put its norms

under question. It would be impossible to take up this history in any detail at this point, but I will

offer some broad pointers to how Bazin may help us reorient our sense of film history and the

history of film theory since his time. I will take up the much-discussed *Chronicle of a Summer*

(Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961; henceforth *Chronicle*) as a text that is symptomatic of the

shift that takes place in the film-spectator relationship after Bazin. The hypothesis I will be

proposing is that the film tries to shield itself from the anonymous spectator in order to make

itself the site of a known community. This both corresponds to the condition of people learning

to live with their own technological images and to a renunciation, even denunciation, of the idea

of the cross-communal popular that informed the aesthetic mode theorized by Bazin. Following

this discussion, I will more briefly address the status of the mechanically-recorded image in our

own time and how Bazin's work can still help us in understanding its terms.

Chronicle is a much-discussed document not only in the history of cinematic technology,

with its use of portable camera and sound-recording devices, but also in its ambition to chronicle

a France in crisis at the peak of the Algerian War in 1960.[3] It can be seen as consolidating the

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[3] For some key works on the film, see Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, "*Chronicle of a Summer*: A Film Book by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin," in Jean Rouch, *Ciné-ethnography*, ed. & trans. Steven Feld (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 227-342; Michael Rothberg, "The work of testimony in the age of decolonization: *Chronicle of a Summer* and the Emergence of the Holocaust Survivor," in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 175-198; Sam Di Iorio,

techniques of the postwar ethnographic documentary, the nascent North American developments in Direct Cinema, and even the 16mm fiction aesthetic of a film such as *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959). Though offering itself under the label *cinéma-verité*, we might call it as a landmark in "portable realism" that responds, consciously or not, to the ubiquity and liveness of the televisual image. And yet, Sam Di Iorio reads the film as landmark of crisis in realism rather than one consecrating the triumphal expansion of cinema's ability to reproduce the world in all its immediacy.[4] Working from the standard reading of Bazin, he sees in it a failure of the faith in cinema to reveal the truth of the world through its ability to reproduce it automatically. He sees this failure as heralding the crisis of representation in the cinema following '68; a crisis that became the prerequisite for cinema as a site for political action. After describing the film briefly, my own reading would concur with Di Iorio that the film does indeed mark a break from Bazin's positions about the cinema but they are not what he takes them to be. Similarly, rather than a film whose failure paves the way for a cinema that builds itself on more radical terms, I will argue that far from failing, *Chronicle* inures itself against failure and in the process actually defines new terms for conceptualizing the political character of cinema.

In *Chronicle*, Rouch and Morin transpose the ethnographic film to the home terrain and gather together a cast of office and factory workers, French and African students, and bourgeois families: all part of their circle of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. A multiplicity of histories and political concerns are enmeshed in the encounters we see. I will here describe a few key scenes, including the concluding ones where the participants react after watching it

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"Total Cinema: *Chronique d'un été* and the end of Bazinian Film Theory," in *Screen* vol. 48 no. 1 (Spring 2007), 25-43; Ivone Margulies, "*Chronicle of a Summer* (1960) as *Autocritique* (1959): A Transition in the French Left," in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* vol. 21 no . 3 (2004), 173-185; Ivone Margulies, "A "sort of psychodrama": Cinéma verité and France's self-analysis," in *South Central Review* vol. 33 no. 2 (Summer 2016), 68-79.

[4] Di Iorio, "Total Cinema".

themselves, following which Rouch and Morin discuss their reactions. The scenes I have picked are the ones that are discussed by the participants themselves towards the end of the film.

In the earliest scene, we see Angelo, a factory-worker employed with Renault, meet Landry, a student from the Ivory Coast in France, as they get to know each other and exchange their thoughts on the lives of workers and the experience of race. Landry wonders about the lives of French workers since he associates factory work with poor workplace conditions and yet he sees most French workers owning cars. Landry explains both the poor work conditions and the aspirational lifestyle built into his job despite the inadequate pay for most workers. Angelo in turn explains what it has been like to be a black immigrant student in France and how he has overcome his inferiority complex over time. The two seem to become good friends.

A later sequence shows us French and African students, among them Landry, again discuss race relations and the ongoing struggles for de-colonization in Africa. This sequence is in many ways the political heart of the film. A key presence here is Morin's assistant Marceline whom we had seen earlier with her boyfriend Jean-Pierre. Their relationship is emotionally strained by the disillusionments of political participation. Marceline is also a Holocaust survivor and carries the tattooed number from the concentration camp on her arm. The topic of discussion is supposed to be the events unfolding in Congo immediately after its independence. We see headlines from French newspapers relaying desperate cries of help from Belgians to their home country following the mutiny of the Congolese soldiers against the continued presence of Belgian officers. Before they get to this topic, we see them get into a discussion on interracial romance, as Marceline says that she cannot imagine being in a relationship with a black man, though she remembers a fourteenth of July dance—her first dance with a black man—that was an extraordinary experience. She waves off Rouch's amused accusation of "sexual racism" even

358

as her friend Nadine joins in by saying she can't think of being in such a relationship either, "above all for the children's sake." Landry protests at this perception of black people as good only for dancing with.[5]

As the conversation finally moves to Congo and to whether the students living in Paris feel connected to the events there. Landry affirms a sense of African solidarity against European colonization. Marceline says she understands this position from her own sense of being a part of a global struggle against anti-Semitism. At this point, Rouch asks Landry and his friend Raymond what they think is the reason for Marceline's tattoo. They don't know and make some lighthearted remarks about fashion and phone numbers, only for their mirth to be cut short by the explanation they receive from Marceline. What immediately follows this conversation is a planned sequence of Marceline walking through the Place de la Concorde and Les Halles addressing her father who died in the camps. The portable recorder she carries with her registers her address—a sort of interior monologue—and the camera is mostly at some distance from her, except for a short passage when she is framed in close-up. The sequence also has three cuts which further emphasize the staged character of the sequence.

A final set of sequences of relevance here pertains to Marilou, an Italian immigrant from a middle-class family, who has been in Paris for some time. We see Morin interview her, and they both seem to know each other well. As with most other characters, Marilou is part of the filmmakers' circle of friends and acquaintances. In the first of her sequences, we see her agitated and breaking down as she describes her alienation and sense of entrapment within herself, her unhappiness with her work, her housing, and her relationships. She says that even to kill herself

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[5] Nadine and Landry had also starred in Rouch's previous film, *La Pyramide Humaine* (1960) in which they, along with others, enact race relations among students at a French *lycée* in Abidjan.

would be false. We then see her again in a later sequence, in a similar set-up with Morin. She

once again appears high-strung and starts by describing a difficult experience, only to reveal that

she is free of her phantoms, has found some happiness, and is now also in a relationship. Unlike

the sequence of Marceline addressing her father, Marilou is filmed in a medium shot, often

turning into an extreme close-up.

Before we proceed further, we could note that though the film offers itself under the label

cinéma-verité, it might more accurately be described, following Bill Nichols, as an interactive or

participatory documentary rather than an observational one such as a film by Frederick

Wiseman. It is in line with Rouch's earlier works in which he and his camera are constitutive

presences in the drama. Similarly, Rouch and Morin set up the situations and attempt to guide the

discussions, revelations, and "confessions" of the participants.[6] It is also, for the most part, very

different from a reflexive documentary that comments on the nature of representation itself,

except in its opening and two closing sequences. At the beginning, we watch Rouch, Morin, and

Marceline discuss the possible difficulties in having people like her open up for the camera.

Rouch even promises self-censorship if anything recorded makes her uncomfortable.

At the end of the film, Rouch and Morin show some rushes to the film's participants,

only to encounter some unexpected reactions. Morin in particular had hoped that the film would

provoke recognition among the participants of their shared historical condition, that cinema

would play the role of, in Di Iorio's felicitous phrase, "a utopian Panopticon."[7] The reactions we

are shown pertain to the encounter between Angelo and Landry, Marceline's walk through Place

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[6] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues anc Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 44-56; Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 115-124.

[7] Di Iorio, "Total Cinema," 39.

de la Concorde and Les Halles, and Marilou's sequences. Some find Angelo and Landry's conversation to be full of generalities and not convincing, to which Angelo protests the sincerity of the friendship which developed in that moment. The strongest reactions are to Marilou and the rawness of her emotional vulnerability. More than one spectator-participant calls it indecent and exhibitionist, whereas Marilou herself believes that the truth of someone can only be captured on the verge of a nervous breakdown. On the other hand, Marceline's monologue strikes them as truthful but because it seems enacted. Even then, one spectator-participant finds her monologue to be as "embarrassing' as Marilou's sequences, because they are both essentially talking to themselves about things that only concern themselves. Marceline herself confesses that although the sentiments she expressed were a deep part of her emotional life and while she experienced them during the shooting, she nonetheless felt distant from them *between* shots. In response to a questionnaire given to the participants after the film, she recalls having "cinematographic fantasies," in particular drawing upon lines from *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*.[8]

Morin seems quite upset by the reactions of the audiences, especially those towards Marilou and Angelo-Landry and says that such reactions are "against the emergence of truth in the world, in social life, and among people." We then cut to Rouch and Morin discussing the reactions of the participants in the *Musée de l'Homme*, the official site of French postwar ethnography as well as the site of the scene where the students discuss colonialism, racism, and the Holocaust. Here Rouch asserts that Marceline did not act when she was speaking about and to her absent father, and they would know since they were there. Morin speaks about how this film, unlike standard filmmaking, makes us enter into life itself without telling us how to react to it. And yet he says that he wanted to make a film in which the spectator would love the people he

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[8] Rouch and Morin, "*Chronicle of a Summer*," 341.

loves. The irony here is pronounced as Morin tells us exactly the kind of film it was (is?) supposed to be, while at the same time speaking about how it is meant to leave the spectator free and disoriented, "as in life." Their conversation ends with the phrase, "*Nous sommes dans le bain*,' which roughly translates as, "we are in a tough spot."

Di Iorio rightly cautions us against reading the reflexivity at the end of the film as a means of putting the mechanisms of the production on display in order to break identification. It does seem much more like an effort to recuperate the film from the reactions of its own participants.[9] Di Iorio calls this a failure of Bazinian realism, which he characterizes as "representational," by which he means a framework predicated on the adequacy of an image to its object. Similarly, he frames this failure as a transitional period on the way to anti-representational politics of the cinema. In analyzing *Chronicle*, Di Iorio indeed identifies the key text in a paradigm shift of cinematic politics but he at the same time misidentifies the paradigms and the place of *Chronicle* within them. As this dissertation argues, Bazin's position on realism cannot be conflated with a representational paradigm. But also, *Chronicle*'s failure to provoke a recognition of its participants takes nothing away from its inauguration of a mode that would only become more important in the years to come. I would argue that the innovation of *Chronicle* is to foreground a mode of film experience from which the spectator is excluded unless she is also a part of it, either on screen or with the community to which it belongs.

Ivone Margulies traces the genesis of this film, as well as of Rouch's earlier films, to the influence of American psychodrama techniques used in group therapies. Techniques here include role play, role reversal, and feedback sessions, among others.[10] These were meant to break rigid

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[9] Di Irorio, "Total Cinema," 38.

[10] Margulies, "A 'sort of psychodrama'".

patterns and to create new and more flexible selves. For the most part, the psychodrama of the film resides in the encounters across classes, race, and generations, rather than in explicit role playing. The feedback mechanisms are built into the differences across which the encounters take place, except for the fact that the biggest such mechanism appears in the form of cinema at the end, a point ignored by Margulies. Even if the hoped for mutual recognition does not take place here, and even if a community does not form, the participants have defined the failures and successes of the film in relation to themselves. Recall also the reference to self-censorship at the beginning which effectively disavows the film as an open record of the truth of the encounters. We can here turn to Bazin and see what he has to tell us about this psycho-dramatic use of the cinema where the characters are also their own spectators and their need to thwart the anonymous spectator.

Though Margulies mentions that the techniques of psychodrama were introduced in France beginning in 1954, Bazin already referred to them in "Theater and Cinema," written in 1951, in order to illustrate the processes of theatrical identification. If we recall, in this essay Bazin argues that, unlike with theater, cinema is without a line of demarcation that separates the world of the spectator from the world of the film. In the theater, this is marked by the footlights, which he calls a "censor," that the spectator must overcome in order to enter the world of the play. He illustrates the work of the censor by citing the techniques of psychodrama and their use as a pedagogical tool to help children overcome their psychic inhibitions.[11]

> Isn't it significant that psychiatry has here taken up the term "catharsis" from
> Aristotle? Modern pedagogical research in relation to "psychodrama" seems well-
> placed to open up some fertile insights into the cathartic processes of the theater. In

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[11] For initial experiments with psychodrama in France, starting with educational contexts, see Didier Anzieu, "Les débuts du psychodrama en France (1946-1972)," in *Revue de psychothérapie psychanalytique de groupe* no. 56 (2011 [1988]), 9-24.

effect, they make use of the ambiguity still existing among children between the notions of play and reality in order to lead the subject, through theatrical improvisation, to liberate himself of the repressions from which he suffers. This technique amounts to creating *a sort of uncertain theater where the play is serious and the actor his own spectator*. The action that develops here is not yet divided by footlights which, by all evidence, are the architectural symbolic system of the censor that separates us from the stage.[12]i

In this description of the use of the psychodrama, Bazin speaks of a practice of vicarious self-transformation by which the child plays out a role that will liberate her from her inhibitions. She is her own spectator to the extent that she both knows it to be playacting and reality. Transposing this to the experience of the theatrical spectator, Bazin argues that the theatrical spectator similarly crosses a frontier to enter another world. But she starts with an awareness of the distinction between herself and the actor who are present to each other in the same space but separated by the footlights. And at the end of the play, she not only returns to her own world but also recognizes once again the essential separation and opposition between the actor and the spectator. The child may return to her world too, but the therapeutic purpose of the psychodrama is to bring back a less inhibited self. In any case, there is no distinction of bodies in which distinct identities can be located. As against the child's crossing of a frontier of which she is only dimly aware, the footlights, Bazin argues, ensure that theatrical identification is finally incomplete and thus protect us from being completely assimilated into another world.

As against the identificatory possibilities in the theater and pedagogical psychodrama, the cinema, we have seen Bazin argue, gives us a world through a keyhole or half-open blinds. Unlike the footlights, the keyhole is not a frontier but a part of the world of the film that hides us

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[12] André Bazin, "Théâtre et cinéma," in QQCII, 95. [WCI 100-101; WCB 188-189]. My emphasis. Bazin uses the word "symbolique" and not "symbole" to indicate the systemic nature of the footlights. It is also a word he uses to describe Charlot's mythic persona. To call these symbols would be to suggest that they refer to something absent, whereas for Bazin both Charlot and the footlights impress us as social presences that carry symbolic charge.

from the characters who are unaware of us watching. But unlike the process of psychodrama that works to give us another self, the processes of voyeurism give the film spectator both a heightened sense of identification and as thorough a loss of identification following the film, and this loss always carries some faint sense of embarrassment at involvement in the voyeuristic processes. To be clear, for Bazin this is the ontological condition of film spectatorship that is not all-determining of film experience. This is what each film both works with and against to create specific experiences, and this is what *Chronicle* too had to take into account in its experiment with self-revelation and community-building.

From the perspective of Bazin's work, what we see towards the end of *Chronicle* is that the film itself is meant to be a feedback mechanism for the participants. And what the participants confront are their own selves, a fact that short-circuits the normal processes of identification and its loss at the end in the cinema. They are called upon to identify with something that they no longer are, in however minute a sense. Unlike the images of a normal film that exist in a non-space-time, these images have the spectral of character of both being from the past and existing in the present. Some of them confront the "ontological obscenity" of the medium as they become voyeurs of each other's' lives. Some of them confess to being "completely taken" despite their discomfort. Marceline claims the truth of her experience while disavowing its expression as performance. It isn't surprising that the specifics of their experiences, the political or personal issues, are abstracted (at least in what the filmmakers choose to show us of the reactions) in order to focus on the display of and response to personal identity itself ("I wouldn't want to meet some of the people after watching this film." "I would now like to get to know her." "What she speaks about concerns no one but herself."). At the same time, the inclusion of these avowals and disavowals becomes a mechanism on the part of

the filmmakers, who care about their community of participants, to protect their images from external spectatorial arbitration.

The key change in film history that *Chronicle* perhaps marks is a film's relationship to its audience and the politics that follows from it. The aesthetic mode through which Bazin framed his understanding of cinema was predicated on a spectator who remains largely unknown to the text. His concept of the popular is not posited as a working-class category in opposition to the bourgeoisie but as one that reaches across class and other identities. This was not a utopic construct in which differences are dissolved but one in which their frictions work upon the collective imaginaries to produce and mask contradictions. It also does not deny that certain films or genres drew particular audiences and not others, or that studios pre-tested their films on certain audiences. But the address to specific audiences still remained an indeterminate process of identifying and meeting some uncertain need and at the same time shaping it. This irreducible anonymity of text and spectator to each other has allowed us to draw a distinction between the political character of films and the politics that they inform indirectly but in which they do not directly participate (unless they get caught up in censorship and other public controversies in which they are mobilized).

Against this essential anonymity, *Chronicle*'s subject and its audience is the same. Without the last two sequences of the projection of rushes and of the discussion between Rouch and Morin, the film may have remained a participatory ethnographic documentary addressed to a broad audience. But with these sequences, it is clear that the film was meant to be a site for the formation of some sort of community among the participants, and one in whose images it would find itself confirmed. Neither the failure of this vision nor the fact that the filmmakers still attempt to recuperate it at the end—only to confess their failure once again—is as important as

366

the fact that its success or failure is arbitrated within the text itself. The prospective and anonymous spectator is merely called upon to witness the events but from whose imaginary she is finally excluded because she never participates in the events on screen. We can certainly see in the film a compelling record of the political challenges that had marked France and the French Left in 1960, but both censorship and self-censorship had reduced these to generalities. We don't know where any of the characters stands on specifics or about the activities in which they have participated. But even this is less significant than the fact that in responding to themselves on film, the participants do not once name the class and racial confrontations that they do see. The responses target the perceived sincerity or its lack in the participants on screen. Even before the audience gets a chance to respond at the end of this chronicle, it has been reclaimed or disowned by its participants, and also reduced to themselves.

In *Chronicle*'s self-containment of the subject-spectator, it posits cinema as a technology that defines and is defined by an identifiable community. This gesture is what ultimately separates it from another landmark "summer" documentary on the political discontents of Paris, *Le Joli Mai* (Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme, 1963). Despite being inspired by *Chronicle*, *Le Joli Mai* remains a much more conventional documentary and for that reason much more open to the anonymous spectator. What *Chronicle* anticipates is the use of cinema in the events around May '68 when filmmaking and screening of these films was an integral part of the debates and political action. Most of these films reposed as much faith in the filmic image as a feedback mechanism as Rouch and Morin did, even if they more explicitly conceived this as an open process rather than one that would be rounded-off by the image. It was thought necessary that workers and students use cameras to make their own films and in the process both come to know their conditions better as well as reject the illusions of institutionalized cinema.

367

Here we can begin to see the new political paradigm within which cinema is now placed and which Margulies again helps us understand. She traces the "confessional" character of *Chronicle* to Morin's attempts at recuperating the notions of confession and autocritique from their Stalinist history and to make them available once again for a participatory politics.[13] The idea of confessing in *Chronicle* has its counter-part in free and even experimental expression within groups that characterized the '68 moment. And both are linked by a suspicion of large-scale political structures and a preference for organization within groups not contained by any single overarching structure. Di Iorio speaks of post-'68 uses of cinema for political action as predicated on anti-representationalism. However, if we look at the films made as part and following these events, they all appear to be standard but non-expository documentaries. The realism of the image and sound is respected, we see a lot of talking heads, and raw footage of street protests.[14] What Di Iorio calls anti-representationalism is generally associated with the work of Godard from this time, especially as part of the Dziga Vertov Group, but his work might be an exception that has more to do with Godard's place in film history and the political need to disown it. For the rest, we see a basic belief in the ability of film to be both record and catalyst of political debate and action.

Within the emergent political model of the '60s, the polarization of a transcendental state and the atomic citizen is refused and, with it, the polarization of a transcendental filmic text and the atomic spectator. The filmic image itself is no longer called to express an impersonal ideal that we are invited to temporarily make our own through identification, but now records any and every person—and not just the spectacular events of Bazin's newsreels—and plays their images

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[13] Margulies, "*Chronicle of a Summer* (1960) as *Autocritique* (1959)".

[14] See the films collected in the two-volume set *Le Cinéma de Mai 68* (Editions Montparnasse)

back to the world. It is interesting, therefore, that the radical aspirations of film discourse and practice that came out of '68 were not aimed at transforming the cinema aimed at a mass public. They did not ask that films replace their dubious idealizations with the real selves of real people. Neo-realism had already experimented with making the ordinary person the subject of a popular cinema, but this was largely through enactment and still subject to a sort of idealization. Instead, they sought to dismantle popular and even art cinema aimed at an anonymous public. I believe that we can use Bazin's theorization of the medium to detect some essential anxiety in the refusal of a new politics to allow a wide and anonymous circulation of images of people who had newly acquired the ability to record their lives.

A separate project would be needed to research the distribution and exhibition of these films, but the broad point remains that they were not meant to be part of an industrial structure that would make their images available to unknown spectators. If historical analysis bears out this point, then we might see the "discovery" of the voyeuristic and "illusory" dimensions of the standard film experience by theorists in the late '60 and '70s as stemming both from a critique of the top-down society of the spectacle and from the experience of a generation—not of one or another theorist in particular—that found the reproduction of its own image to be liberating and alienating at the same time: liberating from the condition of being addressed and "interpellated" by the impersonal apparatuses of the state and the cinema, and alienating because of the "ontological obscenity" of the mechanical capture and storage of their identities outside of lived time and their availability to absent gazes.

This sharpened sense of personal stakes in the image may serve to explain the theoretical assaults on institutional cinemas, whether mainstream or art cinemas, that followed this moment. Both these models correspond to a politics of anonymous collectives that are finally defined

369

through some top-down identity—for example, the nation or the bourgeoisie. The examples of *Chronicle* and the use of film in a variety of grassroots political movements corresponds to the search of new and alternate collective identities that are no longer addressed by images; these identities become the source and destination of the images. These images become imbricated in sub-cultural identities, however fluid. Clearly this mode of filmmaking and viewing was not the norm from the '60s onwards since mainstream and art cinemas continued to exist and be viewed. And the successes, failures, transience, or permanence of the alternate identities of the '60s is a matter of debate. But the theoretical consequences of this moment for approaching institutional cinema have been enormous.

In addition to the ideological critique of Hollywood since the '60s, we must also take into account the importance identity politics acquired in understanding it. Even if the '60s' movements did not necessarily produce new enduring identities and film practices, they brought to the surface a range of marginalized or subsumed identities. Identity politics both furnished the terms for critique—exclusion or misrepresentation of minority identities—as well as became a prism through which some forms of institutional cinema could be recovered, even against their own terms. Thus, for example, feminist scholars have not only critiqued the default address of institutional cinema to the male spectator, but they have also sought to understand the specific modes through which female spectators are positioned and respond to a genre such as the melodrama. Other marginalized or local identities have also been thus mobilized in order to disrupt the claims of the cinematic image to an anonymous address that could ideally be claimed, as Bazin argued in relation to De Sica's films, by a range of ideological positions at the same time. As against this ecumenism of the imaginary, for anyone exposed to the political stakes of identity as they emerged since the '60s, a film can cease to primarily be a site of escape from

370

identity, and therefore the world, and can become a site for exploring the place of a specific

identity in the social imaginary. Under these circumstances, one does not enter the world of the

film as an atomized spectator but self-consciously as part of a social sub-group. We might even

say that we let the film into our worlds rather than step into it.

For better or for worse, what I would argue has been attenuated, if not lost, with the

containment of images within broadly known collectives is a model of aesthetic politics in which

we escape our world in order to orient ourselves. The image becomes part of a feedback loop that

the aesthetic image at its most representational could not be. Cinema, so long as it worked or

works with the aesthetic mode outlined here, responds to our desires and we respond to its

images, but it essentially remains an encounter at an angle from our historical world and not

within it. This does not call for blindness to identity but it involves taking the risk of inhabiting

identities other than our own and the potential for both ideological compromise and ideological

reorientation implicit within this process. This is what on Bazin's account could be lost once

cinema ceases to be an art form. We can understand what is at stake here by turning to a scholar

with whose work Bazin's has a great affinity and whom no one can accuse of ignoring identity:

Richard Dyer.

What Bazin calls art, Dyer calls entertainment. In a 1977 essay, "Entertainment and

Utopia," Dyer starts by distinguishing as Bazin did at the very beginning of his career, capitalist

entertainment produced by professionals from the art forms of closed communities that were the

norm in the West before the spread of capitalism.[15] This professional character, he says, means

that what works of entertainment express has only an indirect relationship to both dominant

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[15] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Only Entertainment*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 19-35.

371

ideology and spectatorial desire that may or may not be in conformity with this ideology. He

calls this a "relatively autonomous mode of cultural production"[16] that negotiates conflicting

interests and does so through "temporary answers to the inadequacies of the society which is

being escaped from through entertainment."[17] As with Bazin, he does not discount that this

involves "playing with the fire of contradictions"[18] and that this implicates us in ideologically

unpredictable ways. But this is the specificity of the political character of entertainment.

Writing again at the turn of the twenty-first century, Dyer discovers that he was

theorizing this political character at the very moment of its decline or, as he prefers to call it,

"waning."[19] Echoing Bazin's words in "Is Cinema Mortal?" on the "miracle of ubiquity" that

televisual images promise, he writes that it is not that entertainment ceases to be produced but

that it now invades the world rather than placing itself in a place where we might escape to it:

"What may be in eclipse… is the provision of entertainment in artefacts and performances based

on a dynamic of separation of escape."[20] This makes life as it is seem entertaining and

pleasurable rather than life as it might be. The mechanism Dyer describes here is broadly akin to

the one I analyzed whereby the portability of the image recording and display closes the circle

between the spectator and the content of the image. In either case, there is a collapse of world

and image so that they share the same time and space. As Dyer writes, maybe this is a good thing

and signifies the democratization of pleasure. But he is also alert to the fact that, contrary to

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[16] Ibid., 20.

[17] Ibid., 25.

[18] Ibid., 27. My quotation is a paraphrase of Dyer's remarks.

[19] Richard Dyer, "The Waning of Entertainment," in *Only Entertainment*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 175-179.

[20] Ibid., 175.

appearances, not everyone has access to this utopia and many labor in conditions of deprivation to make it possible for a few. There is distinct hope in Dyer that entertainment may wax again in order that the distance of utopic imaginaries from the world can become politically productive.

I think that the imbrication of the ubiquitous image in recent global events offers us additional reasons to think of why we need to look for possibilities by which the world and the image can recover a relative autonomy with regards to each other. The role of social media in grassroots political movements across the world, from those in the Middle East and North African regions to Black Lives Matter in the US, has been a subject of extensive debate. At this level, the digital image, on a much more intensified scale, seems to reinforce the spectator-image loop that I have suggested may be traced back to the '60s, creating alternate communities that undermine top-down hierarchies. But some events have worked to alert us to complexities in this way of framing digital images. We are now being asked to take note once again of the stubborn persistence of top-down appropriation of image-based media by governments around the world. As in Bazin's day, political leaders once again systematically fake improbable photographs to consolidate their public personas, holograms of strong leaders now campaign for office in their stead, and, in looking at the history of US presidential elections, the importance of an *appearance* of sincerity (now aligned with a critique of the 'insincerity' of political correctness) overrides others forms of scrutiny on the path to public office.[21] What pushed the Turkish people to choose between an undemocratic coup and a democratically elected but authoritarian leader seems to have been the live appearance of Recep Tayip Erdoğan on a video-chat app, urging

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[21] Ellen Barry, 'A changed Russia arches an eyebrow at Putin's staged antics', *The New York Times*, 5 October 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/world/europe/putins-diving-exploit-was-a-setup-aide-says.html> accessed 13 December 2016; Prasun Sonwalkar, 'How London techies helped Modi create campaign buzz', *Hindustan Times*, 25 May 2014, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/how-london-techies-helped-modi-create-campaign-buzz/story-qyIwywmPnsRg3YohLtRBgL.html> accessed 13 December 2016.

them to resist a faceless coup. The image, in other words, can no longer be so easily contained

within self-defined communities but has to a significant extent returned to mediating the

polarized encounter between the overarching state—embodied in individual leaders—and, if not

the individual spectator-user, specific sub-groups.

Even apart from these instances of the uses of the image by top-down structures of

power, there are other instances which speak of the fact that the instant distribution of images in

the digital era can no longer be easily contained within an image community. The successful

European campaign for the "right to be forgotten," by which people can have their online records

removed under certain circumstances, and the phenomenon of online identity curation underline

this change most clearly. Every image and every piece of information has "viral" potential,

subject to unpredictable factors. Unlike the '60s, when a limited distribution of images

encouraged expression unconstrained by ideals of the perfect image, the era of Instagram calls

upon us to project our most remarkable selves. As one Web feature on risky Instagram pictures

writes, the site "is the place to post the most saturated, picturesque version of your life."[22] We

can think back to Bazin's lines on the "Birdman" who proceeded to jump to his death from a

Parisian building despite hesitating because he was in the presence of an unforgiving witness: the

movie camera.[23] The dynamics on Bazin's terms here are complex. The camera fixes and

alienates our identities in an image even after we have changed. On the one hand, this alienation

could be a promise against the corrosiveness of change and so we submit our most saturated

selves to it. But the scale on which the collection and display of images takes place, our records

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[22] Amirah Mercer, "11 Extreme Instagrammers Taking Pictures From the World's Most Unbelievable Places," Mic.com, September 09, 2014, < https://mic.com/articles/98184/11-extreme-instagrammers-taking-pictures-from-the-world-s-most-unbelievable-places#.DtqBnU3vV>, accessed January 10, 2017.

[23] André Bazin, "A la recherche du temps perdu: Paris 1900," in QQCI, 41-42.

are forever under threat of being submerged by others, causing us to produce more of them.[24] All this without taking into account Bazin's insistence on the literality of the mechanically-recorded image's appetite for real death. A veteran of the short history of online news writes, "In charge of an international news website during the Iraq war, I saw graphic footage on the wire service feeds, but I have seen more people dead or dying through Facebook in the past few months."[25]

In this media landscape where we find identities slipping from image to image or slipping away into image, it might remain one of the urgent critical tasks to identify and attend to instances of the aesthetic image or, in Dyer's terms, the entertaining image, that would allow us to take some distance from the world of images. This does not mean a rejection of the world imbricated in images, but a necessary escape in order to return to it. And indeed films of the kind that interested Bazin and Dyer hardly ceased to be made at any point, and an unprecedented archive has been made available on home video. While this does not mean that they play their role on the same scale as at the time when Bazin theorized their socio-political role, these films retain many of the features that allowed him to theorize such a role. His response to the anticipated crisis of cinematic art in 1953 may still provide a way of dealing with the persistence of cinema in a world of images: "In the meantime and while waiting [for cinema to die], let's just play dodgeball; I mean, let's go to the cinema and treat it as an art."[26] The challenge may be learning to play dodgeball.

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[24] André Bazin, "A propos de Pourquoi Nous Combattons," in QQCI, 33 [BW 187-188].

[25] Emily Bell, "The unpredictable course of live streaming has caught us unawares," in *The Guardian*, July 17, 2016, < https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/17/live-streaming-violent-events-crisis-facebook>, accessed January 10, 2017.

[26] Bazin, "Is Cinema Mortal?," 316.

Appendix: List of Original French Quotations Cited from André Bazin's Articles

Introduction

ᵢ Le drame… consiste en ceci: Dieu n'existe pas, le dernier bureau du château est vide. Voilà peut-être la tragédie spécifique du monde moderne, le passage à la transcendence d'une réalité social qui enfante d'elle-même sa propre déification.

ᵢᵢ l'alibi fallacieux de la réalité

ᵢᵢᵢ prolonger, le plus loin possible…, le choc de l'oeuvre de l'art.

ᵢᵥ Le plus haut mérite religieux de cette œuvre n'est-il pas de nous rappeler en effet cette éminente vérité chrétienne, que les derniers siècles de l'histoire catholique ont peut-être dangereusement estompée mais que l'expérience des missions est en train de remettre au jour : à savoir l'origine communautaire du sacerdoce.

Chapter 1

ᵢ Comment tenir avec certitude le mobile subjectif d'une invention? Quelle psychanalyse rendrait compte de l'importance relative d'un progress technique, parfois accidental, et des mythes plus ou moins confus qui orientèrent consciemment ou non les recherches?

ᵢᵢ spécialiste non de l'optique mais de l'électricité

ᵢᵢᵢ Le génie de Louis Lumière ne lui vaudrait pas la place qu'il occupe dans la paternité du cinéma, s'il s'était borné à la seule technique. Lumière a su réaliser les premiers films répondant à une certaine attente de la conscience collective devant l'invention nouvelle, et créer du même coup un véritable spectacle. Alors qu'Edison ne faisait guère passer, dans son kinétoscope, que des scènes dont l'intérêt ne dépassait pas la curiosité d'une fidèle reconstitution du mouvement, Lumière, avec sa caméra légère, put aller prendre « la nature sur le fait ». *La sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon*, *Entrée du train en gare de la Ciotat* sont les ancêtres de nos actualités et du documentaire de reportage, dont toute une partie de la production mondiale est profondément imprégnée. Qu'il suffise de rappeler Dziga Vertov et l'école russe, ou les films de guerre récents.

ᵢᵥ Le gout de l'actualité, joint à celui de cinéma, n'est que la volonté de présence de l'homme moderne, son besoin d'assister à l'Histoire, à laquelle l'évolution politique, aussi bien que les moyens techniques de communication et de destruction, la mêlent irrémédiablement.

ᵥ C'est une question de kilomètres de pellicule : pour une mètre de film technique on en impressionne cent de film de fiction. C'est comme si le langage servait neuf fois sur dix à écrire des romans ou des pièces de théâtre.

_{vi} engouement passager

_{vii} Jusqu'au XIXe siècle, la notion d'art populaire est inséparable de celle de la communauté. L'exemple type nous est fourni par la folklore caractérisé essentiellement par son rattachement à la milieu donné. Une danse, un chant, un conte, un style de mobilier ou d'habitation, sont d'autant plus populaires qu'ils correspondent à un groupe humain plus restreint et plus différencié, qu'ils sont moins assimilables à d'autres groupes humains. La popularité s'entend donc ici dans le sens du particulier et de l'intensif. Elle s'exprime dans la tradition et le rite.

_{viii} Le cinéma au contraire parce qu'il ne procède pas d'une psychologie communautaire, mais d'une sociologie de masses atomisées et grégaires, ne saurait bénéficier des ces générations spontanées. La convenance de l'œuvre au consommateur ne peut être le résultat d'une poussée obscure et infaillible dont l'artisan ou l'artiste ne serait que le truchement. Tout au plus peut-on penser que le besoin populaire existe virtuellement, comme un vide invisible que l'oeuvre peut venir combler mais dans lequel elle ne saurait se mouler automatiquement.

_{ix} Dans notre civilization mécanique où l'homme est dévoré par la technicité de son métier, normalié par les contraintes politiques et sociales, le cinéma avant tout souci artistique, est là pour répondre à d'imprescriptibles besoins physiques collectifs refoulés.

Chapter 2

_i Pour se survivre commercialement, le réalisme des films de Lumière avait besoin que naisse un cinéma de création qui le subordonne à l'économie imaginaire de l'œuvre artistique… Avec lui [Méliès] le cinéma devient œuvre d'imagination. In entre dans la fable.

_{ii} En réalité, les véritables obstacles à surmonter dans l'hypothèse de telles adaptations ne sont pas d'ordre esthétique ; ils ne relèvent pas du cinéma comme art, mais comme fait sociologique et comme industrie. Le drame de l'adaptation, c'est celui de la vulgarisation. On a pu lire dans un pavé publicitaire de province cette définition du film *La Chartreuse de Parme* ; « D'après le célèbre roman de cape et d'épée ». La vérité sort parfois de la bouche des marchands de pellicule qui n'ont point lu Stendhal.

_{iii} Il est singulier que ces mêmes romanciers s qui défendent si farouchement l'intégrité de leur texte soient ceux-là mêmes qui nous abreuveront un autre jour de confessions sur les exigences tyranniques de leurs personnages. A les entendre, leurs héros sont des enfants terribles dont ils ne sont plus les maîtres une fois conçus. Le romancier est l'esclave de leurs caprices, serviteur de leurs quatre libertés. Nous n'en doutons point, mais c'est alors qu'il faut bien admettre que la véritable réalité esthétique d'un roman psychologique ou social c'est le personnage ou le milieu avant que d'être ce qu'on appelle « le style ».

_{iv} sont des matrices de mythe.

_v Une large fraction de la production cinématographique s'apparente encore…, à des formes littéraires primitives, au jeu élémentaire et collectif de l'imagination populaire. L'histoire que le cinéaste prétend raconter n'est au fond qu'un prétexte, un enchainement des symboles qui ne

nous plaisant autant qu'en raison de leur résonance dans notre subconscient. La plus invraisemblable comédie américaine d'avant-guerre avec ses marivaudages de millionnaires dans un univers sans crise économique, sans chômage, sans maladie, sans souffrance est certainement, pour qui saurait la lire avec la compétence d'un psychanalyste interprétant un rêve, un documentaire de géographie humaine beaucoup plus rigoureux que les *Cités sans voile* du néo-réalisme hollywoodien.

vi Mais la nouveauté du cinéma par rapport aux contes du folklore ou de la mythologie, c'est que la fable y peut naître d'une simple apparence physique : du galbe d'un visage, de l'eau d'un regard.

vii [Je] suppose que Feuillade lui-même n'y eût pas retrouvé ses assassins. Les paris étaient ouverts pour savoir quels étaient les bons et les méchants. Tel, qu'on tenait pour bandit, se révélait victime à la bobine suivante. Enfin la lumière, rendue à la salle toutes les dix minutes pour recharger l'appareil, multipliait les épisodes. Ainsi présenté, le chef-d'œuvre de Feuillade révélait de manière éclatante le principe esthétique de son charme. Chaque interruption soulevait un « Ah ! » de déception et la reprise un espoir de soulagement. Cette histoire, à laquelle le public ne comprenait rien, s'imposait à son attention et à son désir par la seule et pure exigence du récit. Elle n'était en aucune manière une action préexistante arbitrairement morcelée d'entractes, mais une création indûment interrompue, une source intarissable dont une main mystérieuse aurait retenu le flot. D'où la malaise insupportable provoqué par « la suite au prochain numéro » et l'attente anxieuse, non pas tant des événements suivants, que de l'écoulement d'un récit, de la reprise d'une création suspendue… la délicieuse attente du conte qui se substitue à la vie quotidienne, laquelle n'est plus que la solution de continuité du rêve.

viii de discuter du sexe des anges cependant qu'on préparait la bombe atomique qui résoudrait le divorce de l'artiste et du peuple…

ix on se demande du reste comment un livre de Miller ou de J.P. Sartre pourrait affronter cette épreuve orale et s'il n'en résulterait pas une sensible réduction des thèmes littéraires…

x Carta invoque Jean Paul Sartre. Mais c'est une caution doublement périlleuse. D'abord parce que rien n'est venu bien solidement confirmer jusqu'ici les idées exposées dans la préface des *Temps Modernes*, ensuite et surtout parce que le dernier engagement de Sartre ayant consisté avec trois ans de retard à étayer de l'extérieur le stalinisme au moment qu'il allait s'effondrer, son aventure donnerait plutôt raison à ceux qui pendant ce temps ont continué à écrire comme on joue à la balle au chasseur.

xi En 1926, Eisenstein s'imposait comme le promoteur d'un réalisme, presque du réalisme par excellence : au cinéma-rêve, au film-évasion, le *Potemkine* opposait le cinéma incarné dans l'Histoire pour la transformer. Mais ce réalisme dans la matière, nullement dans l'expression. La confusion n'a duré qu'autant que l'évolution technique du cinéma et celle même de la révolution soviétique l'ont permise…. Avec le recul apparait bien mieux ce qui, dans le *Potemkine* est d'une part, quant à la forme, une admirable machinerie esthétique parfaitement indépendante de la réalité qu'elle mobilise.

ₓᵢᵢ Il y a réalisme et réalisme et le problème n'est pas tant de savoir si la production est plus réaliste que celle de 1938, que de voir en quoi elle en diffère.

Chapter 3

ᵢ Son étude, s'attachant surtout aux films qui illustrent sa thèse, rejette implicitement dans l'ombre l'autre face de la réalité esthétique… Car les rapports de la réalité historique avec le western no sont pas immédiats et directs mais dialectiques. Tom Mix est le contraire d'Abraham Lincoln, mais il en perpétue à sa manière le culte et le souvenir. Sous ses formes les plus romanesques ou les plus naïves, le western est tout le contraire d'une reconstitution historique. Hopalong Cassidy ne diffère, semble-t-il, de Tarzan que par son costume et le cadre de ses prouesses. Pourtant si l'on veut bien se donner la peine de comparer ces histoires charmantes mais invraisemblables, de les supposer, comme on fait en physiognomonie moderne de plusieurs négatifs de visages, on verra apparaître en transparence un western idéal fait des constantes communes aux unes et aux autres : un western composé de ses seuls mythes à l'état pur.

ᵢᵢ Comme la conquête de l'Ouest, la Révolution soviétique est un ensemble des événements historiques marquant l naissance d'un ordre e d'une civilisation. L'un et l'autre ont engendré les mythes nécessaires à la confirmation de l'Histoire, l'un et l'autre aussi one dù réinventer la morale, retrouver à leur source vive, avant leur mélange ou leur pollution, le principe de la loi qui mettra de l'ordre dans le chaos, séparera le ciel et la terre.

ᵢᵢᵢ Leur ridicule ne le cédait rien en rien à ceux du film, mais… Jacques Tati a fait beaucoup mieux : il a créé de toutes pièces un univers à la fois parfaitement imaginaire et totalement ressemblant, en ce sens que le vrai ne peut plus s'empêcher d'y ressembler, et nous avec.

ᵢᵥ ce sont les racines qui relient l'imaginaire au réel e l'en nourrissent… par la force du mythe que Jacques Tati nous a désormais imposé.

ᵥ les héros n'en sauraient être qu'assez riches pour pouvoir l'oublier. Ils vivent dans un univers sans résistance économique où l'argent tient lieu de puissance féerique de baguette magique.

ᵥᵢ In en est de M. Verdoux comme de M.K., c'est un personnage plongé dans certaines situations. Il n'a à se justifier d'aucune. Sa seule raison d'être est d'être. Son existence esthétique est suffisamment établie si le rapport entre le personnage et la situation, leur réaction mutuelle, s'imposent comme vraies. J'entends *esthétiquement* vraies et non pas moralement, psychologiquement, sociologiquement ou par rapport à quelque idéologique que ce soit ; car le propre du mythe, c'est précisément son autonomie. La seule critique appropriée à *Monsieur Verdoux* serait l'inverse de celle de Nathalie Moffat. Elle devrait procéder par sondage dans le mythe pour juger de son homogénéité et se sa densité, déceler les porosités des situations que les concrétions mythologiques ne sont pas venues combler. Selon une telle méthode, loin que la valeur idéologique puisse être portée *a priori* à l'actif de l'œuvre, elle est au contraire d'essence impure hétérogène au mythe.

ᵥᵢᵢ Ainsi le manque complet d'entêtement quand le monde lui oppose une résistance trop grande. Il cherche alors à tourner la difficulté au lieu de la résoudre, une solution provisoire lui suffit

comme si l'avenir n'existait pas pour lui. Dana *Le Pèlerin* par exemple, il bloque un rouleau à pâtisserie sur l'étagère avec une bouteille de lait dont il devra se servir quelques instants plus tard… Mais si le provisoire lui suffit toujours, il fait preuve dans l'immédiat d'une ingéniosité prodigieuse. Aucune situation ne le laisse jamais désemparé.

ᵥᵢᵢᵢ C'est du reste une règle générale de son comportement de ne pas hésiter à commettre des petite vilenies quand on ne le regarde pas.

ᵢₓ Entre la tendre et douce Edna Purviance, la jeune aveugle des *Lumières de la ville*, la frêle infirme de Verdoux, il n'existe pas de différences très sensible sinon que Verdoux est marié avec la dernière. Elles sont toutes, comme Charlot, des êtres malheureux et sous-adaptés à la Société, des infirmes physiques ou moraux de la vie sociale. C'est cette hyperféminité qui séduit Charlot, le coup de foudre amoureux est l'origine d'une conversion foudroyante aux normes sociales et morales.

ₓ Mais c'est une loi commune à l'évolution de tous les personnages vivant du commerce avec le public, qu'ils tendent à justifier notre sympathie par une plus grande cohérence psychologique et plus de perfection morale.

ₓᵢ Tout au plus peut-on prétendre que le succès éventuel de ces œuvres se construit sur des malentendus. Même si *Monsieur Verdoux* n'était pas venu livrer les secrets de Charlot, les rétrospectives des ciné-clubs nous auraient révélés, avec le recul, dans le comique de Chaplin, l'univers Kafkaïen où se débat le Petit Homme.

ₓᵢᵢ Charlot est par essence l'inadapté social, Verdoux un suradapté.

ₓᵢᵢᵢ il ne s'agit pas de prouver qu'il a raison de les tuer selon n quelconque critère idéologique, il suffit qu'il a raison de les tuer par rapport à lui-même. Et cette condition ma paraît suffisamment remplie. Quant à engendrer ce faisant la sympathie, le terme même paraît équivoque et insuffisant parce que encore trop imprégnée de psychologie. Je trouve plus juste de dire que nous somme *avec* M. Verdoux, ce qui implique beaucoup plus qu'un sentiment, une sorte de sympathie ontologique. Selon l'argumentation de Nathalie Moffat il n'y aurait même aucun moyen de donner tort à la justice. Tout au plus, attendrait-on de celle-ci qu'elle traite M. Verdoux comme irresponsable. Mais rien ne serait plus absurde qu'un M. Verdoux en maison de santé. Les juges *doivent* condamner Verdoux. À l'inverse de M.K., Verdoux est par essence le coupable social que la Société ne reconnaît pas. Car notons-le bien, la Société était incapable de le trouver : c'est lui qui se livre à la justice et ce sont les juges qui ont peur (est-il besoin à ce propos de souligner la similitude des situations avec le Christ).

ₓᵢᵥ Sa fuite maladroite et précipitée a toujours été l'indice d'une vague culpabilité qui se dénonce d'elle-même et qu'il suffit du reste de sanctionner d'un coup de bâton blanc. Il leur causait au find bien peu de souci, le petit homme à la démarche de canard, sa malice et son astuce ne le poussaient jamais au-delà de revanches, bénignes ou du minimum de larcins nécessaires à sa subsistance. C'était une victime facile qui leur échappait toujours au dernier moment, mais qui savait rester dans son rôle de coupable.

ₓᵥ on n'aurait jamais vu ça: la Société, par essence, ne saurait qu'accuser

ₓᵥᵢ Plus de Charlot, plus de coupable! C'est la Société qui souffre d'un étrange malaise…

ₓᵥᵢᵢ On comprend que M. Johnston, les porte-parole de la Légion de la décence, et tous les clubs de femmes d'Amérique aient trouvé que le dernier film de Chaplin sentait le brûlé. *Scarface*, à côté, n'est qu'une histoire d'enfant de chœur.

ₓᵥᵢᵢᵢ naïf gréviste

ₓᵢₓ "condamne la condamnation d'un homme « justement » condamné par la Société

Chapter 4

ᵢ la familiarité avec la mort n'est pas entretenir la peur de l'enfer, le scrupule et la ratiocination morale

ᵢᵢ La nécessité de la loi n'a jamais été plus proche de la nécessité d'une morale, jamais non plus leur antagonisme plus concret et plus évident.

ᵢᵢᵢ plus que la crainte d'un risqué aussi futile que celui de la vie: la force positive d'un mythe.

ᵢᵥ Dans *Le Banni* personne n'est antipathique: c'est l'ordre de l'univers qui donne à l'homme la prééminence et fait de la femme un animal domestique, agréable mais ennuyeux, auquel le vrai bétail est encore préférable.

ᵥ a compris que la mythologie de la comédie américaine était arrivée à la fois à saturation et à épuisement. On ne pouvait plus l'utiliser qu'en prenant son excès même comme sujet de scénario.

ᵥᵢ Ce n'est plus seulement ici de la tragi-comédie de la comédie, mais une véritable désintégration en chaine où l'éclat de rire du spectateur est amorcé par la mise en cause du cinéma lui-même. Vous riez, mais votre rire s'élève sur les cendres d'un film dont la matière s'est entièrement volatilisée en énergie comique.

ᵥᵢᵢ un western qui aurait honte de n'être que lui-même et chercherait à justifier son existence par un intérêt supplémentaire : d'ordre esthétique, sociologique, moral, psychologique, politique, érotique…, bref, par quelque valeur extrinsèque au genre et qui est supposée l'enrichir

ᵥᵢᵢᵢ Balzac et Stendhal, s'ils avaient été cinéastes auraient pu faire des westerns, mais Jean-Paul Sartre sans doute ferait du sur-western ; pour des autres raisons, Cécil-Saint Laurent aussi.

ᵢₓ la réhabilitation politique de l'Indien

ₓ S'il s'amuse il ne se moque pas.

xi D'où le gène que j'éprouve. Si cette guerre évoque en nous quelque chose, c'est davantage ce qui se passe en Algérie, par exemple, que la lutte avec les Indiens ; et c'est aux Indiens que me font forcément penser les Coréens d'Anthony Mann. Ce n'est point certes que la guerre contre les Indiens fût particulièrement morale ou brillant mais le recul et surtout la popularité du genre western en ont fait une convention presque abstraite. Or on peut penser ce qu'on veut de la guerre de Corée, tout sauf précisément n'en rien penser. Et j'admettrai davantage qu'Anthony Mann s'emploie à en faire indirectement l'apologie qu'à nous présenter comme une donnée de la nature, une simple source d'action.

xii *Monsique Verdoux* est avec *L'Opinion Publique* le seul film de Chaplin où Charlot n'apparaît pas ; l'un et l'autre se passent en France. De là, à inférer que la France est pour Chaplin le contraire mythologique de l'Amérique, il n'y a qu'un pas. Je la franchis allègrement.

xiii Il condense en lui (comme disent les psychanalystes) trop d'affectivité sociale….

xiv Rien n'est plus sot que de considérer la critique comme une spécialité sinon, dans bien des cas, pour une spécialité de la sottise. L'autorité du critique professionnel se saurait résider dans le fait que c'est son métier, mais seulement dans celui de fréquenter plus assidûment que le spectateur moyen les salles obscures. Bref, c'est une hypothétique supériorité de culture non de jugement.

xv Je n'espère pas, mon cher Aristarco, vous avoir convaincu. Aussi bien ne convainc-t-on guère aves des arguments. La conviction qu'on y met compte souvent davantage. Je serais heureux si seulement la mienne, où vous trouverez l'écho de l'admiration de quelques autres critiques de mes amis, pouvait au moins ébranler la vôtre.

xvi La fonction du critique n'est pas d'apporter sur un plateau d'argent une vérité qui n'existe pas, mais de prolonger, le plus loin possible dans l'intelligence et la sensibilité de ceux qui le lisent, le choc de l'œuvre d'art.

xvii Allez revoir… le petit bonhomme blanc et noir de votre enfance et de votre jeunesse ; le Charlot d'un temps où l'on ignorait encore que quelque part en Europe un peintre en bâtiment lui avait volé sa moustache.

xviii J'oserai affirmer que l'ambiguïté est au cinéma un signe de valeur qui ne trompe pas… Rares sont les films qui osent nous imposer l'image d'un monde où tout n'est pas si simple, où tout n'est pas si simple, où nous devons prendre parti librement, fût-ce contre nos sympathies.

xix N'est ce point là une solide définition du réalisme en art : contraindre l'esprit à prendre parti sans tricher avec les êtres et les choses.

xx foi surannée et dérisoire dans le Paradis à l'ombre des épées

xxi mille symboles de la guerre, mais tout autour de d'eux la foi de ceux qui les gardent, vestales de la petite flamme de patriotisme cocardier qui est au cœur des quarante million de Français

xxii Il faut alors fait un effort de volonté pour éviter de fredonner la chanson. Toute la salle, comme vous-même, chante intérieurement… Ainsi est mis en évidence le réflexe conditionné de la musique militaire. Certes, la salle éprouve une vague honte, une gêne diffuse de cette turgescence patriotique qu'elle se sent incapable de contrôler. Mais bien peu de spectateurs en prendront une conscience lucide. En éveillant le Déroulède qui sommeille en chacun de nous, Franju est simplement conséquent avec son sujet, il en prolonge l'écho dans la salle. Ce faisant, il touche, il est vrai, aux limites de l'atrocité cinématographique.

xxiii admire… l'admiration du guide

xxiv une connaissance intime et une imitation, à la fois libre et précise des modèles

xxv combiné, en inversant les rôles, les situations

xxvi À la devise de défense intellectualiste et inconsciemment aristocratique : « Pas de culture sans efforts », la civilisation qui se fait oppose celle du : « C'est toujours ça de pris ». Pour autant que le progrès existe : c'est en un.

xxvii n'aime plus autant qu'on le pourrait croire le mélo qui s'avoue tel (les parodies le prouvent)

Chapter 5

i Nous partirons, comme il se doit, de l'image photographique, élément primitif de la synthèse finale, pour en arriver à esquisser, sinon une théorie du langage cinématographique fondée sur l'hypothèse de son réalisme ontogénétique, du moins une analyse qui ne lui soit point contradictoire.

ii Fixer artificiellement les apparences charnelles de l'être c'est l'arracher au fleuve de la durée : l'arrimer à la vie.

iii modalité active

iv Il est entendu que l'évolution parallèle de l'art et de la civilisation a dégagé les arts plastiques de ces fonctions magiques….

v Mais elle ne pouvait que sublimer à l'usage d'une pensée logique ce besoin incoercible d'exorciser le temps.

vi La fabrication de l'image s'est même libérée de tout utilitarianisme anthropocentrique. Il ne s'agit plus de la survie de l'homme, mais plus généralement de la création d'un univers idéal à l'image du réel.

vii la confusion entre l'esthétique et le psychologique, entre le véritable réalisme qui est besoin d'exprimer la signification à la fois concrète et essentielle du monde, et le pseudo-réalisme du trompe-l'œil (ou du trompe l'esprit).

_{viii} évènement décisif… l'invention du premier système scientifique et, en quelque sorte, déjà mécanique: la perspective

_{ix} la réduction de l'art à ses catégories psychologiques

_x Un homme hors du sacrée

_{xi} Mais les rites religieux ne sont pas les seuls. La société entretient mille convenances qui ne sont elles-mêmes qu'une sorte d'Office permanent qu'elle se donne à elle-même… Religieux ou non, le sacré est partout présent dans la vie sociale, pas seulement dans le magistrat, le policeman, le prêtre, mais dans le rituel de la nourriture, des rapports professionnels, des transports en commun. C'est par lui que la société maintient sa cohérence comme par un champ magnétique. Inconsciemment, à chaque minute, nous nous alignons sur ses lignes de force.

_{xii} Il resterait sans doute au sociologue et au moraliste (singulièrement au moraliste chrétien t, pourquoi pas, au théologien ?) à se pencher sur la signification profonde d'une mythologie où se retrouvent, en la popularité d'un acteur comme Gabin, les dizaines de millions de nos contemporains. Peut-être un monde sans Dieu redevient-il un monde des dieux et de leur fatalité.

_{xiii} À la fin d'un film traditionnel nous nous sentons pendant un temps plus ou moins long vaguement habités par les personnages : l'univers du film est en nous ou nous sommes en lui : c'est un état à la fois passif et passionnel.

_{xiv} Tout mental, inesthétique en lui-même, dont on ne saurait trouver l'origine que dans la mentalité magique

_{xv} le concept même d'univers est spatialement exclusive. Pour un temps, le film est l'Univers, le Monde, ou si l'on veut, la Nature.

_{xvi} la scène et le décor où l'action se déroule sont un microcosme esthétique inséré de force dans l'univers mais essentiellement hétérogène à la Nature qui les entoure

_{xvii} le cadre du tableau est orienté de l'extérieur vers l'intérieur, qu'il définit un espace centripète hétérogène au fond qui l'entoure

_{xviii} qu'il fallait sacrifier au tableau suivant

_{xix} l'autonomie du microcosme pictural cristallisé à jamais hors du temps

_{xx} Devenue soluble dans le monde extérieur elle se prête désormais à toutes les combinaisons du réalisme, elle est livrée pieds et poings liés à la discrétion du cinéaste qui peut vouloir faire d'une pomme de Cézanne, un dessert à manger au couteau.

_{xxi} C'est peut-être dans la mesure même où le film est pleinement une œuvre et, donc, où il paraît le plus trahir la peinture, qu'il sert en définitive le mieux celle-ci.

xxii certaines des ses virtualités secrètes

xxiii Jusqu'au le XIXe siècle l'alibi de la ressemblance constituait le malentendu réaliste par lequel le profane croyait pouvoir entrer dans le tableau, et l'anecdote dramatique ou morale multipliât encore les prises par l'esprit ignorant de la génétique secrète du tableau.

xxiv C'est au XIXe siècle que commence véritablement la crise du réalisme dont Picasso est aujourd'hui le mythe et qui mettra en cause tout à la fois les conditions d'existence formelle des arts plastiques et leurs fondements sociologiques. Libéré du complexe de la ressemblance, le peintre moderne l'abandonne au peuple qui l'identifie désormais d'une part à la photographie et de l'autre à la seule peinture qui s'y applique.

xxv L'imaginaire vu à travers le réel.

xxvi La solution n'était pas dans le résultat mais dans la genèse.

xxvii Sur la photographie, image naturelle d'un monde que nous ne savions ou ne pouvions voir, la nature enfin fait plus qu'imiter l'art : elle imite l'artiste.

xxviii comme une empreinte digitale

xxix Par là, elle s'ajoute réellement à la création naturelle au lieu de lui en substituer une autre.

xxx la photographie ne crée pas, comme l'art, de l'éternité, elle ambaume le temps, elle le soustrait seulement à sa propre corruption

xxxi [conserve] l'objet enrobé dans son instant comme, dans l'ambre, le corps intact des insectes d'une ère révolue

xxxii Le film… reste par nature même ancré à la durée de sa naissance. Dans la couche de gélatine ne se conserve que du temps fossile

xxxiii effectivement re-présenté, c'est-à-dire rendu présent dans le temps et dans l'espace

xxxiv Ces ombres grises ou sépia, fantomatiques, presque illisibles, ce ne sont plus les traditionnels portraits de famille, c'est la présence troublante de vies arrêtées dans leur durée, libérées de leur destin, non par les prestiges de l'art, mais par la vertu d'une mécanique impassible….

xxxv participe au contraire de l'existence du modèle comme une empreinte digitale

xxxvi la perfection de l'imitation ne s'identifie pas avec la beauté ; elle constitue seulement une matière première dans laquelle le fait artistique vient s'inscrire

xxxvii Tout ce qui se passe sur l'écran est affecté d'un coefficient de réalisme auquel nulle autre technique figurative ne peut prétendre. Nous le percevons comme comme un décalque du monde

extérieur ; cela existe comme l'objet qui se reflète dans une glace. Le film est à la fois représentation et langage, mais ce n'est qu'en tant que représentation qu'il est d'abord et universellement compris.

xxxviii le cinéma est un langage qui se présente sous les aspects du monde sensible est qui vise à se confondre avec lui… La culture cinématographique n'est donc pas seulement nécessaire à… une plus riche jouissance des œuvres de qualité, elle l'est aussi à la conscience des idées que le film vise à introduire dans notre conscience sous l'alibi fallacieux de la réalité. Je ne parle pas seulement des films explicitement de propagande, leur étiquette les dénonce déjà à notre attention, mais de presque tous les films qui d'une manière ou d'une autre sont aussi implicitement de propagande. Propagande pas toujours systématique et calculée, répondant à un mot d'ordre précis, mais expression diffuse d'un mode de vie, d'une morale, confirmation subtile des valeurs d'un régime ou d'une civilisation ; qu'il accepte ou refuse ces idéologies implicites, l'homme cultivé doit du moins le faire sciemment

xxxix Le photographe, procède, par l'intermédiaire de l'objectif, à une véritable prise de l'empreinte lumineuse : à un moulage. Comme tel. Il emporte avec lui plus que la ressemblance, une sorte d'identité (la carte même de cette nom n'est concevable que dans l'ère de la photographie).

xl C'est que pour lui le mot « présence » prête aujourd'hui à équivoque et qu'un pléonasme n'est pas de trop au temps du cinématographe.

xli À l'écran, leur apparition satisfait des aspirations sexuelles inconscientes' et quand le héros vient en contact avec elles il satisfait au désir du spectateur dans la mesure où celui-ci s'est identifié au héros. A la scène, les girls éveillent les sens du spectateur tout comme la réalité le ferait. De sorte que l'identification avec le héros ne se produit pas. Celui-ci devient un objet de jalousie et d'envie. En somme Tarzan n'est concevable qu'au cinéma.

xlii Le cinéma étant par essence une dramaturgie de la nature, il ne peut y avoir cinéma sans construction d'un espace ouvert, se substituant à l'univers au lieu de s'y inclure.

xliii Je ne sais quoi de plus tonique et, avouons-le, de plus noble—ou peut-être faudrait-il dire plus moral—que la satisfaction qui suit un bon film.

xliv une complaisance à soi-même, une concession à la solitude, une sorte de trahison de l'action par le refus d'une responsabilité sociale

xlv un dévoltage inévitable, quelque mystérieux court-circuit esthétique nous privait au cinéma d'une certaine tension décidément propre à la scène

xlvi allons bon, je vais encore me faire classer dans les critiques spiritualistes

Chapter 6

¡ Il serait intéressant de suivre… la concurrence dans les journaux illustrés de 1890 à 1910 entre

le reportage photographique, encore à ses origines, et le dessin. Ce dernier satisfaisait surtout le besoin baroque du dramatique (cf. *le Petit Journal illustré*). Le sens du document photographique ne s'est imposé que peu à peu. Aujourd'hui le paysan le plus authentique préfère la photographie la plus insignifiante à l'illustration la plus pathétique.

ii On constate du reste, au-delà d'une certaine saturation, un retour vers le dessin dramatique du type « Radar ».

iii [I]l semble que la guerre ait revalorisé le genre de façon originale… en resituant au reportage sa nudité et sa rigueur, le sens de l'exactitude et de la sincérité, en éduquant par voie de conséquence, le public dans le sens de l'authenticité.

iv Aux temps de la guerre totale répond fatalement celui de l'Histoire totale.

v Nous vivons de plus en plus dans un monde dépouillé par le cinéma. Un monde qui tend à faire la mue de sa propre image. Des centaines de milliers d'écrans nous font assister, à l'heure d'actualités, à la formidable desquamation que secrètent chaque jour des dizaines de milliers de caméras. A peine formée, la peau de l'Histoire tombe en pellicule. Quel journal filmé s'intitulait avant guere « l'œil du monde » ? Titre à peine présomptueux aujourd'hui où d'innombrables objectifs de Bell-Howell épeint, à tous les carrefours d'événements, les signes pittoresques, curieux ou terribles de notre destin.

vi Rien ne vaut pour nous l'événement unique, pris sur le vif, à l'instant même de sa création. Le théâtre des opérations a, sur l'autre, l'inestimable supériorité dramatique d'inventer la pièce au fur et à mesure. Commedia dell'arte où le canevas même est toujours en question. Quant aux moyens mis en œuvre, il est superflu d'insister sur leur exceptionnelle efficacité : je voudrais seulement souligner qu'ils atteignent un ordre de grandeur cosmique et ne craignent la concurrence que des tremblements de terre, des éruptions volcaniques, des raz de marée et de la fin du monde. Je le dis sans ironie, car je crois que le journal filmé no. 1 des *Actualités éternelles* ne manquera pas d'être consacré à un reportage monstre sur le Jugement Dernier auprès de quoi celui de procès de Nuremberg sera quelque chose comme *La Sortie des Usines Lumière*.

vii Mais le reportage de guerre répond surtout à un autre besoin qui explique son extrême généralisation. Le goût de l'actualité, joint à celui de du cinéma, n'est que la volonté de présence de l'homme moderne, son besoin d'assister à l'Histoire, à laquelle l'évolution politique, aussi bien que les moyens techniques de communication et de destruction, la mêlent irrémédiablement. Aux temps de la guerre totale répond fatalement celui de l'Histoire totale. Les gouvernements l'ont bien compris, c'est pourquoi ils s'efforcent de nous donner le reportage cinématographique de tous leurs actes historiques, signature des traités, rencontre des trois, quatre ou cinq Grans, etc. Comme l'Histoire n'est tout de même pas un ballet absolument réglé à l'avance, il convient de dispenser sur son passage le maximum de caméras pour être sûr de la prendre sur le fait (sur le fait historique naturellement).

viii assez complètes pour contenir un événement aussi intime dans son caractère historique que la danse du scalp d'Hitler au carrefour de Rethonde.

_{ix} Les meilleurs documentaires de montage n'étaient encore que des récits, ceux-ci sont un discours.

_x Je crois que loin de faire aux sciences historiques un progrès vers l'objectivité, le cinéma leur donne, par son réalisme même, un pouvoir d'illusion supplémentaire. Ce commentateur ivisible que le spectateur oublie en regardant les admirables montages de Capra, c'est l'historien des foules de demain, ventriloque de cette formidable prosopopée, ressuscitant à volonté les hommes et les événements, qui se prépare dans les archives cinématographiques.

_{xi} les mécanismes psychologiques habituels au cinéma sont en quelque sorte retournés contre elles-mêmes, refluent vers le spectateur pour mettre peu à peu en branle ses facultés de raisonnement en synchronisme avec le scénario et la mise en scène

_{xii} l'identification du spectateur avec le héros… c'est-à-dire encore sur la passivité intellectuelle du spectateur

_{xiii} provoquer le sentiment et du sentiment pour faire admettre l'idée. De ce type de films on peut sortir enthousiaste et convaincu, c'est-à-dire dans un état tout contraire à l'inquiétude intellectuelle où nous laisse Cayatte

_{xiv} En quittant *Avant le déluge* le plus bête des spectateurs est dévenu. De force, sinon plus intelligent, du moins plus cartésien. Le film ayant lancé en chacun le volant du raisonnement… continue quelque temps encore sur sa lancée à moudre le grain de la réalité

_{xv} une réalité sans restes, exactement divisible par les idées premières dont elle n'est que l'alibi

_{xvi} l'évidence physique

_{xvii} terrorisme dans l'enchaînement et l'évidence intellectuelle des faits qui confèrent à l'œuvre, si peu qu'on cligne des yeux pour en estomper les détails, les propriétés traumatisantes du cauchemar

_{xviii} a inventé un genre, mais c'est un genre faux ou plus exactement équivoque et qui trahit à la fois le réalisme du cinéma et ses pouvoirs d'abstraction dialectiquement solidaires

_{xix} la frange de mystère et d'ambiguïté

_{xx} Or la valeur didactique, apologétique et politique reste encore le grand scandale et l'inconnue majeure du cinéma. Roman, peinture et théâtre à thèse n'ont pas survécu au XIXe siècle… Seule l'écran a fourni au XXe siècle d'incontestables exemples d'un art de propagande qui ne le cède en rien aux catégories de l'esthétique classique. Mais il semble aussi que la merveilleuse conjonction de la politique et de l'art, qui fit la grandeur du cinéma soviétique de 1925 à 1935 ou 1938, soit un secret perdu, partiellement et épisodiquement retrouvé dans la production soviétique contemporaine, à la dimension d'une séquence, au détour d'une scène, mais jamais à l'échelle de l'œuvre et dans son principe même. Or il serait puéril de se voiler la face devant les actuels besoins idéologiques de l'art. Il n'importe que le communisme en soit, par réaction ou

directement la cause ; le cinéma ne peut ignorer son pouvoir de propagande, en 1951 moins encore qu'en 1925. Les idées de ce temps se serviront de lui, avec ou sans art, mais efficacement.

xxi la moindre surface de la peau à la nature

xxii Il se peut qu'on ne puisse rien demander de plus à un cinéma idéologique qu'un formalisme ouvert à la défense de toutes les idées.

xxiii Le montage de Leni Riefensthal sur le Congrès de Nuremberg, *Triomphe de la volonté*, apparaît au spectateur démocrate comme un argument contre Hitler. Ces images peuvent d'ailleurs utilisées dans un montage anti-Nazi.

xxiv il est légitime et même recommandé à l'écran d'utiliser le réalisme au bénéfice de l'idée pure, mais à condition de briser préalablement la réalité et d'en sélectionner les fragment. Ainsi par exemple, des fameux montages « *Pourquoi nous combattons* »… En d'autres termes, l'abstraction n'est légitime au cinéma que dans les modes de récits qui la désignent comme telle.

i le caractère étonnamment subjectiviste des procès politiques dans les démocraties populaires

ii D'un point de vue rigoureusement marxiste, il pourrait suffire de proclamer que Boukharine, Rajk ou Kostov incarnent des tendances que le Parti a décidé de combattre comme historiquement erronées. Leur liquidation physique ne serait pas plus nécessaire que celle de nos ministres démissionnés. Mais du moment qu'un homme a participé à l'Histoire, qu'il a été mêlé à tel ou tel événement, une part de sa biographie est irrémédiablement « historicisée ». Une contradiction intolérable se constitue alors entre cette part définitivement objective, pétrifiée dans le passée, et l'existence physique d'un Boukharine, d'un Zenoviev ou d'un Rajk. On ne peut réduire l'homme à n'être que l'Histoire sans compromettre réciproquement cette Histoire par la subjectivité présente de l'individu. Le dirigeant communiste vivant est un dieu terme scellé dans l'Histoire par ses actes passés.

iii Dans la perspective communiste soviétique « stalinienne » nul ne peut « devenir » un traitre, car il faudrait admettre qu'il ne le fut pas toujours, qu'il y eut un commencement biographique à cette trahison. Il faudrait d'autre part qu'un homme devenu néfaste au Parti et à l'Histoire ait pu antérieurement lui être utile et donc avoir été bon avant d'être mauvais.

iv notre conscience bourgeoise « hypocrite » et « idéaliste » supporte encore une fois cette évidence historique que Pétain soit à la fois le « vainqueur de Verdun » et le « traitre de Montoire », tandis que les anciens compagnons liquidés doivent disparaître de la peinture historique soviétique

v pour le communiste c'est elle seule [la mort] qui peut résorber toute subjectivité en événement

vi l'asymptote de l'Homme et de l'Histoire est désormais dépassée

vii En effet, et bien que la reconstitution atteigne à une ampleur et une exactitude sans doute inégalées depuis *Naissance d'une nation* de Griffith, on peut soutenir qu'elle est équivalente à la

vision que Fabrice eut de Waterloo. Non certes matériellement, car on ne nous épargne pas le spectacle physique de la guerre, mais essentiellement, par l'impossibilité où nous met la caméra d'ordonner son chaos. Equivalente en cela aux reportages d'actualités pris sur le vif, cette image de la guerre est en quelque sorte amorphe… une espèce de cataclysme humain et mécanique… Imaginez que vous assistez aux opérations du haut d'un hélicoptère invulnérable, vous donnant du champ de bataille une vision aussi générale que possible, sans pour autant rien vous révéler du sort des armes ni même de son développement et de son orientation.

viii Ici, la suprématie du génie stalinien n'a plus rien d'opportuniste et de métaphorique : elle est proprement ontologique. Non seulement parce que la portée et la force de persuasion du cinéma sont incomparablement plus grandes que ceux de tout autre moyen de propagande, mais encore et surtout parce que la nature de l'image cinématographique est autre : s'imposant à notre esprit comme rigoureusement superposable à la réalité, le cinéma est par essence incontestable comme la Nature et comme l'Histoire. Un portrait de Pétain, ou de de Gaulle ou de Staline, se décroche comme il s'accroche—au fond ça n'engage à rien, même sur cent mètres carrés. Une reconstitution cinématographique de Staline et surtout centrée sur Staline suffit à définir sans retour la place et le sens de Staline dans le monde et à fixer irrévocablement son essence.

ix Art du spectacle, hyperbole de l'incarnation par la monstrueuse proximité physique de l'image, le cinéma est en effet *a priori* le plus impudique des arts. Il requiert par la même le maximum de pudeur ; le masque et le déguisement : celui de style, du sujet ou du maquillage. Chaplin dans *Limelight*, dépouille à moitié les deux premiers, totalement le troisième. *Ecce homo*.

x La grandeur de *Limelight* se confond ici avec la grandeur même du cinéma, elle est la manifestation la plus éclatante de son essence qui est : l'abstraction *par* l'incarnation. Seule sans doute la position unique de Chaplin, l'universalité et la vitalité de son mythe… permettaient de donner la mesure dialectiquement du cinéma. Socrate de XXe siècle, Chaplin-Calvero boit la ciguë en public, *le Public*, mais la sagesse de sa mort ne se réduit pas à des mots, elle est d'abord et surtout dans le spectacle qu'il en donne, elle ose fonder sur l'ambiguïté charnelle de l'image cinématographe : Voyez et sachez !

xi la vedette de cinéma n'était pas seulement un comédien ou un acteur particulièrement chéis du public, mais un héros de légende ou de tragédie, un « destin » auquel scénaristes et metteurs en scène, fût-ce même à leur insu, ne pouvaient que se conformer.

xii il paraît évident que le pauvre fou prend peur et juge enfin l'absurdité de son pari. Mais la caméra est là, qui le fixe pour l'éternité, et dont il n'ose pas finalement décevoir l'œil sans âme. N'eût-il eu des témoins humains, une sage lâcheté sans doute l'emportait

xiii vous voyez… Gabin en future père de famille ?

xiv l'équivalent ontologique de cet univers où les signes répugnent à la pesanteur grossière de la réalité… Son irréalité n'est pourtant pas un manque, mais un supplément d'être. Elle ne lui retire rien de sa féminité. Elle lui ajoute au contraire tous les possibles dont la priverait l'incarnation. Elle est ici Bérénice… elle pouvait sans être sans doute toutes les grandes héroïnes féminines. Elle est notre Eve.

xv pour la première fois on assistait… à l'esquisse d'une métamorphose. La proximité de la caméra, est plus encore peut-être, la gamme de gris de la panchromatique faisaient apparaître, comme en surimpression sous la masque du petite homme à la moustache, le visage clairement lisible de Chaplin

xvi chez le héros de *La Comtesse aux pieds nus* l'éminence dignité de notre pourriture

xvii incarné l'immanence de la mort, son imminence aussi

xviii je voudrais… remarquer qu'à cette modernité à longue portée qui assure au personnage de Bogart sa poésie profonde et justifie sans doute typiquement l'acteur mythe de la guerre et de l'après-guerre

xix Ils n'ont en commun que leur réaction contre le jeu de type psychologique ; mais taciturne comme Brando ou exubérant comme Dean, le style Kazan est fondé sur un postulat de spontanéité anti-intellectuel. Le comportement des acteurs s'y veut imprévisible puisqu'il ne traduit plus la logique profonde des sentiments mais extériorise des impulsions immédiates dont le rapport avec la vie intérieure saurait se lire directement.

xx L'homme bogartien ne se définit pas par son respect accidentel ou son mépris des vertus bourgeoises, par son courage ou son lâcheté, mais d'abord par cette maturité existentielle qui transforme peu à peu la vie en une ironie tenace aux dépens de la mort.

xxi Et puis il y a le revolver qui devient entre ses mains une arme quasi intellectuelle, l'argument qui désarçonne.

xxii Il resterait sans doute au sociologue et au moraliste (singulièrement au moraliste chrétien t, pourquoi pas, au théologien ?) à se pencher sur la signification profonde d'une mythologie où se retrouvent, en la popularité d'un acteur comme Gabin, les dizaines de millions de nos contemporains. Peut-être un monde sans Dieu redevient-il un monde des dieux et de leur fatalité.

xxiii Mais, dira-t-on, c'était Cerdan en personne : certes, mais la différence n'est pas si grande.

xxiv Il faut de tour pour faire un monde… et la guerre. Quelques secondes plus tard, les actualités de la semaine présentaient les obsèques solennelles de trois soldats, mots en Indochine pour permettre au gentil petit mannequin de Paris de présenter ses robes. Tout de même, Air France aurait été bien inspiré en choisissant une autre ligne et M. Borderie en évitant de mettre son film en vedette.

xxv Je demande qu'on réfléchisse sur le procès de Nuremberg se déroulant sous les sunlights comme une reconstitution de cour d'assises dans un film policier.

xxvi Mais deux moments de la vie échappent radicalement à cette concession de la conscience : l'acte sexuel et la mort. L'un et l'autre sont à leur manière la négation absolue du temps objectif : l'instant qualitatif à l'état pur. Comme la mort, l'amour se vit et ne se représente pas—ce n'est pas sans raison qu'on l'appelle la petite mort—du moins ne se représente pas sans violation de sa

nature. Cette violation se nomme obscénité, non plus morale comme dans l'amour, mais métaphysique. On ne meurt pas deux fois.

ₓₓᵥᵢᵢ Mais non pas tant en raison de en raison de l'atrocité fantasmagorique d'une image insérée dans un spectacle autorisé à tous les publics ou encore au nom du respect des morts, mais à cause de la gratuité et de la désinvolture qui font seules son indécence. Ce qui est condamnable ce n'est pas la cruauté ou l'horreur objective du document… mais l'absence de justification morale ou esthétique faute de quoi l'image nous transforme en simples nécrophages La mort du soldat, celle du sauveteur, voire celle du torero ou du coureur automobile sont des évènements ayant un sens, fût-il discutable. Le document dès lors s'adresse à notre esprit à travers l'horreur équivoque de nos sens.

ₓₓᵥᵢᵢᵢ il n'y a pas si longtemps que l'assassinat n'est plus un spectacle. L'exécution en Place de Grève n'était pas autre chose…

ₓₓᵢₓ se définit rétroactivement le temps qualitatif de la vie

ₓₓₓ d'une sorte de coït avec le temps

ₓₓₓᵢ Mais il n'y a pas des Cadavres exquis !

ₓₓₓᵢᵢ le plus formalistes qu'on ait vu depuis longtemps

ₓₓₓᵢᵢᵢ jamais l'expressionisme au temps de sa gloire n'a rencontré un sujet aussi tragiquement conforme à son esthétique

ₓₓₓᵢᵥ Enfer terrestre et cauchemar objectif

ₓₓₓᵥ L'organisation interne du camp, la résistance, relative mais efficace, que pouvaient opposer ses rouages à l'écrasement concentrationnaire, semblent ici, non pas tant impossibles qu'impensables.

ₓₓₓᵥᵢ le sentiment probablement justifiée d'une fidélité documentaire à sa réalité objective et mentale

ₓₓₓᵥᵢᵢ Les murailles de Terezin s'ouvrent à l'arrivée des soldats russes, mais à la septième sonnerie de trompettes.

ₓₓₓᵥᵢᵢᵢ *Nuit et brouillard* est avant tout un regard d'amour et de confiance en l'homme, l'affirmation d'espoir au-delà de la désespérance. L'herbe ne poussait plus sous les pas d'Attila ; l'herbe a repoussé timide, rase et rare entre les ruines du crématoire, assez pour affirmer que la vie est plus forte que le néant. Entendez-moi ! *Nuit et brouillard* no conclut n'incite à l'optimisme béat ou à oubli, bien au contraire, il nous rappelle la pérennité de la réalité concentrationnaire et nous incite à l'examen de la conscience, mais son affirmation est d'autant plus forte et pénétrante qu'elle se situe au-delà des trop faciles colères et des sursauts d'horreur, dans cette zone d'immense sérénité qui succède aux larmes du deuil quand l'être aimé peut

revive dans notre souvenir d'une seconde vie. La vérité de la *Nuit et brouillard*, c'est la douce lumière de l'homme.

ᵢ l'homme blanc… en tant que aventurier il cherche dans ce contact à mieux connaître lui-même

ᵢᵢ Cette observation avec préjugé favorable est sans doute de bonne méthode sociologique et ses avantages moraux sont évidents, mais il est permis de se demander dans quelle mesure elle n'élimine pas ce qui demeure toute de même une vérité relationnelle de notre conscience. Je veux dire l'appréhension de mystère et l'angoisse à l'approche d'un univers spirituel radical différent de nôtre. Pour nos jeunes savants, la magie est une occupation intéressante et méritoire au même titre que nos activités occidentales. Etre sorcier au Niger est, mutatis mutandis, aussi honorable que d'être ethnologue à Paris. Tout se passe en quelque sorte comme si, ayant su découvrir la richesse et la valeur des civilisations dites primitives, nous en avions exhorcisé la peur en les projetant d'une part sur le plan esthétique et de l'autre sur celui de la science : l'art nègre et la sociologie.

ᵢᵢᵢ Il faut choisir entre comprendre le mystère et le vivre.

ᵢᵥ ne point cacher l'échec relatif de l'entreprise, sa décomposition finale dans la mauvaise conscience réciproque

ᵥ ces rares images au milieu au milieu d'un flot de pellicule presque sans intérêt objectif sont comme des épaves inestimables et bouleversantes sur la houle monotone de l'océan

ᵥᵢ Ainsi pourrait-on dire de ces films qu'ils ne sont significatifs, admirables et émouvants, que dans la mesure où ils n'existent pas. Mais naturellement, s'ils n'existaient pas du tout, nous n'en pourrions pas juger. Je dirai donc que qu'ils sont précisément comme les canons : composé de vide avec du bronze autour. Mais c'est ce vide qui est leur vraie substance. Et les images plus ou moins intéressantes qui cernent ces lacunes sont là pour les authentifier et leur donner, comme on dit justement des canons, une âme.

ᵥᵢᵢ Avec *Naufragé Volontaire* et *Forêt Sacrée* je voudrais pourtant mettre en évidence une variante particulière de cette condition de reportage. La « mauvaise foi ». Je place l'expression entre guillemets pour signifier que je l'entends dans son sens purement psychologique, non moral. Je ne ménage pas au contraire mon admiration et mon estime à ces hommes courageux et sincères qui ont su justement pousser leur courage jusqu'à assumer cette mauvaise foi.

ᵥᵢᵢᵢ à partir de l'exemple étonnamment significatif qu'elles en offrent, certaines lois du montage dans leur rapport avec l'expression cinématographique et, plus essentiellement même, son ontologie esthétique.

ᵢₓ Le paysage de Camargue, la vie des éleveurs et des pêcheurs, les mœurs des manades, constituent la base de la fable, le point d'appui solide et irréfutable du mythe. Mais sur cette réalité se fonde justement une dialectique de l'imaginaire dont le dédoublement de *Crin Blanc* est l'intéressant symbole… Plus d'une scène parmi les plus spectaculaires ont été tourné presque sans trucage et en tous cas au mépris des périls certains. Et pourtant il suffit d'y réfléchir pour

comprendre que si ce que montre et signifie l'écran avait dû être vrai, effectivement réalisé devant le caméra, le film cesserait du même coup d'être un mythe.

ₓ L'illusion est naît ici, comme dans la prestidigitation, de la réalité.

ₓᵢ Crin Blanc est-il tout à la fois le vrai cheval qui broute encore l'herbe salée de Camargue, et l'animal de rêve qui nage éternellement en compagnie du petit Folco. Sa réalité cinématographique ne pouvait se passer de la réalité documentaire, mais il fallait, pour que celle-ci devint vérité de notre imagination, qu'elle se détruise et renaisse dans la réalité elle-même.

ₓᵢᵢ Jacques Tati a… créé de toutes pièces un univers à la fois parfaitement imaginaire et totalement ressemblant, en ce sens que le vrai ne peut plus s'empêcher d'y ressembler, et nous avec.

ₓᵢᵢᵢ ce sont les racines qui relient l'imaginaire au réel e l'en nourrissent

ₓᵢᵥ L'image—sa structure plastique, son organisation dans le temps—parce qu'elle prend appui sur un plus grand réalisme, dispose ainsi de beaucoup plus de moyens pour infléchir, modifier du dedans la réalité.

ₓᵥ la joie esthétique naît d'un déchirement, car ces « souvenirs » ne nous appartient pas

ₓᵥᵢ la mort visible d'un lapin dans *La Règle du jeu* nous atteint tout autant que celle, racontée, du petit chat d'Agnès

ₓᵥᵢᵢ l'emploi fréquent… de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la contre-mise-en-valeur du sujet n'a jamais été poussé si loin. J'entends par là le refus de laisser clairement voir au spectateur les événements culminants de la scène. Il ne faut point confondre ce procédé dramatique, qui s'apparenterait plutôt à la litote, avec l'ellipse dont on répète peut-être abusivement qu'elle constitue la figure de rhétorique fondamentale du cinéma. Chez Welles le film tout entier est partiellement soustrait à notre atteinte, c'est tout l'action qui est comme frangée d'inaccessible.

ₓᵥᵢᵢᵢ il suffit pour que le récit retrouve la réalité qu'un seul de ses plans convenablement choisi rassemble les éléments dispersés auparavant par le montage

ₓᵢₓ Ce que le souci de la vérité, les préoccupations sociales, l'honnêteté matérielle sont plutôt des qualités morales que des valeurs esthétiques… Le décor authentique, le vrai revolver du vrai crime, le vrai mutilé de la vraie guerre : c'est bien ; la vérité de l'art peut passer par là, elle ne saurait s'y arrêter. Mais il faut peut-être à Hollywood cette discipline un peu primaire. Ce n'est peut-être qu'en suivant ce fil d'Ariane de la réalité perdue que le cinéma américain retrouvera l'issue du labyrinthe d'artifice où il s'est égaré.

ₓₓ une espèce épopée civique où les scénaristes ont recensé le maximum de situations exemplaires… cette espèce de grande leçon des choses

ₓₓᵢ Je continue simplement à prétendre qu'en dépit de cet angle d'incidence oblique et de

l'exiguïté du champ d'attaque, Dmytryk va bien plus profond dans le sujet que Wyler. Et surtout que le « réalisme « de *Crossfire* est esthétiquement beaucoup plus convaincant. Car enfin il s'agit d'art et non de pédagogie. Dmytryk me donne peut-être moins de renseignements pour constituer une monographie de la démobilisation en Amérique, mais j'emporte du bref éclair de magnésium de *Crossfire* un sentiment beaucoup plus *tragique* de la situation morale des G.I.

xxii Dmytryk a réalisé son film en vingt-quatre jours avec une pauvreté de moyens évidente : très peu de décors, le plus souvent partiels et d'une rare sobriété, quatre seulement ont un véritable rôle dramatique : un coin de bar, trois fauteuils de cinéma, aux derniers rangs de balcon, une chambre de fille semi-publique, avec un rideau pour cacher le cuisine, et le bureau (aussi terne que possible) du policier… Je me fais pourtant fort de trouver en si peu d'espace, sinon autant renseignements sur la vie américaine que dans les décors des *Plus belles années de notre vie*, du moins ce que Wyler ne nous a pas montré. Je sais comment on va au cinéma en Amérique et jusqu'à quelle heure. Je sais comment sont les chambres d'hôtels, et j'ai vu une cuisine sans frigidaire avec un réchaud à gaz où le lait peut déborder et laisser la même crasse que chez moi (si j'avais du lait).

xxiii Ces images collent à ce monde malade comme un chewing-gum insipide mâché jusqu'au désespoir.

xxiv À l'aube nous sortons enfin de cette histoire puante de tabac et d'alcool, et l'air frais du petit jour nous rend à l'espérance de la vie. Mais la tête est lourde encore de mauvais whisky et surtout d'une autre gueule de bois bien plus malaise : celle de la guerre.

xxv sans que on sente jamais que Dmytryk ait eu besoin de *faire* vrai pour être sûr d'être *vrai*.

xxvi Plus d'acteurs, plus d'histoire, plus de mise en scène, c'est-à-dire enfin dans l'illusion esthétique parfaite de la réalité : plus de cinéma.

xxvii Cette adhérence parfait et naturelle à l'actualité s'explique et se justifie intérieurement par une adhésion spirituelle à l'époque. Sans doute l'histoire italienne récente est-elle irréversible. La guerre n'y est pas ressentie comme une parenthèse, mais comme une conclusion : la fin d'une époque. En un certain sens l'Italie n'a que trois ans. Mais la même cause pouvait produire d'autres effets. Ce qui ne laisse pas d'être admirable et d'assurer au cinéma italien une audience morale très large dans les nations occidentales, c'est le sens qu'y prend la peinture de l'actualité. Dans un monde encore et déjà obsédé par la terreur et par la haine, où la réalité n'est presque plus jamais aimée pour elle-même mais seulement refusée ou défendue comme signe politique, *le cinéma italien est certainement le seul qui sauve, au sein même de l'époque qu'il dépeint, un humanisme révolutionnaire*.

xxviii d'où la terreur semble encore exclue

xxix interdépendance de l'improvisation de la *commedia dell'arte* ou même du jazz hot

xxx Les films italiens récents sont à tout le moins pré-révolutionnaires : tous refusent, implicitement ou explicitement, par l'humour, par la satire ou par la poésie, la réalité sociale dont

ils servent, mais ils savent, jusque dans les prises de position les plus claires, ne jamais traiter cette réalité comme un moyen. La condamner n'oblige pas à la mauvaise foi. Ils n'oublient pas qu'avant d'être condamnable le monde *est*, tout simplement.

ₓₓₓᵢ La thèse impliquée est d'une merveilleuse et atroce simplicité : dans le monde où vit cet ouvrier, les pauvres, pour subsister, *doivent se voler entre eux*. Mais cette thèse n'est jamais posée comme telle, l'enchaînement des événements est toujours d'une vraisemblance à la fois rigoureuse et anecdotique. Au fond, au milieu du film, l'ouvrier pourrait retrouver son vélo : simplement il n'y aurait pas de film.

ₓₓₓᵢᵢ car les syndicats travaillent pour la justice et non pour la charité

ₓₓₓᵢᵢᵢ est intolérable, car sa "charité" est aveugle à cette tragédie individuelle, sans rien faire pour changer vraiment le monde qui est en la cause

ₓₓₓᵢᵥ Nous ne avons aucune raison valable de leur reprocher d'être aussi bavards et, par surcroît, de parler allemande. Mais il était difficile de créer une situation *objectivement* plus anticléricale.

ₓₓₓᵥ un film de propagande chercherait à nous *démontrer* que l'ouvrier *ne peut pas* retrouver son vélo et qu'il est nécessairement pris dans le cercle infernal de sa pauvreté. De Sica se borne à nous *montrer* que l'ouvrier *peut* ne *pas* retrouver son vélo et qu'il va sans doute à cause de cela retourner au chômage. Mais qui ne voit que c'est le caractère accidentel du scénario qui fait la nécessité de la thèse au lieu que le moindre doute sur la nécessité des événements dans le scénario de propagande rendrait la thèse hypothétique.

ₓₓₓᵥᵢ Comme on le voit… les événements et les êtres ne sont jamais sollicités dans le sens d'une thèse sociale. Mais la thèse en sort tout armée et d'autant plus irréfutable qu'elle ne nous est donnée que par surcroît. C'est notre esprit qui la dégage et la construit, non le film.

ₓₓₓᵥᵢᵢ le témoin intime, le chœur particulier attaché à sa tragédie

ₓₓₓᵥᵢᵢᵢ Ce qui importe, c'est de ne pas placer le professionnel dans son emploi habituel : le rapport qu'il entretient avec son personnage no doit être grevé pour le public d'aucune idée à priori.

ₓₓₓᵢₓ il ne peut même plus être question qu'un figurant joue plus ou moins bien, tant l'homme est identifié à son personnage… Ce n'est pas l'excellence singulière de cette ouvrier et de ce gosse qui nous vaut la qualité de leur interprétation, mais tout le système esthétique dans lequel ils sont venus s'insérer.

ₓₗ était inséparable d'une conjoncture historique… Mais la nouveauté et surtout le piment de cette crudité technique ayant épuisé leur effet de surprise, que reste-t-il du « néo-réalisme » italien…

ₓₗᵢ Mais le pire de tout, ce fut l'apparition d'une sorte de super-production « néo-réaliste » où la recherche du décor vrai, de l'action des mœurs, de la peinture du milieu populaire, des arrière-plans « sociaux » devenait un poncif académique.

_{xlii} « une mayonnaise tournée »… « l'huile du réalisme »… « d'œuf des bonnes intentions »

_{xliii} C'est bête et c'est peut-être aussi naïf que l'éloge que faisait Beaumarchais des larmes du mélodrame, mais dites-moi si, en sortant de voir un film italien, vous ne vous sentez pas meilleur, si vous n'avez pas envie de changer l'ordre des choses, mais de préférence en persuadant les hommes, du moins ceux qui peuvent l'être et que seuls l'aveuglement, le préjugé ou la malchance ont conduit à faire du mal à leurs semblables.

_{xliv} De Sica gagne à tout coup sur le tableau où… il n'a pas mise.

_{xlv} Amour et refus du réel

_{xlvi} La poésie n'est que forme active et créatrice de l'amour sa projection sur l'univers.

_{xlvii} Le drame, au contraire, consiste en ceci: Dieu n'existe pas, le dernier bureau du château est vide. Voilà peut-être la tragédie spécifique du monde moderne, le passage à la transcendance d'une réalité sociale enfante d'elle-même sa propre déification. Les peines de Bruno et d'Umberto D. ont des causes immédiates et visibles, mais nous nous apercevons qu'il y a aussi un résidu insoluble, fait de la complexité psychologique et matérielle des rapports sociaux, et que l'excellence des institutions aussi bien que la volonté de notre prochain ne peuvent suffire à faire disparaitre. La nature de celui-ci n'est pas moins positive et sociale, mais son action nait toutefois d'une fatalité absurde et impérative.

_{xlviii} le paradis terrestre serait situé en Suède, où les bicyclettes restent jour et nuit le long des trottoirs

_{xlix} l'amour, qui demeure une affaire privée, d'homme à homme

Epilogue

_i N'est il pas significatif que le psychiatre ait repris ici le terme de *catharsis* à Aristote ? Les recherches pédagogiques modernes relatives au « psycho-drame » semblent bien ouvrir les aperçus féconds sur les processus cathartique du théâtre. Elles utilisent en effet l'ambiguïté existant encore chez l'enfant entre les notions de jeu et de réalité, pour amener le sujet à se libérer, dans l'improvisation théâtrale, des refoulements dont il souffre. Cette technique revient à créer une sorte de théâtre incertain où le jeu est sérieux et l'acteur son propre spectateur. L'action qui s'y développe n'est pas encore scindée par la rampe, laquelle est de toute évidence la symbolique architecturale de la censure qui nous sépare de la scène.

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