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1 On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema

In the days when the cinema was a novel and astonishing thing and its very existence seemed problematical, the literature of cinematography tended to be theoretical and fundamental. It was the age of Delluc, Epstein, Balázs, Eisenstein . . . Every film critic was something of a theoretician, a "filmologist." Today, we tend to smile at this attitude; at any rate we believe, more or less surely, that the criticism of individual films states all there is to be said about film in general. And certainly the criticism of films—or, better yet, their analysis—is an enterprise of utmost importance: it is the film-makers who create the art of the cinema; it is through reflection on those individual films we have liked (or those we have disliked) that we have gained insights into the art of the film in general. Still, there are other approaches. Cinema is a vast subject, and there are more ways than one to enter it. Taken as a whole, it is first of all a fact, and as such it raises problems of aesthetics, of sociology, and of semiotics, as well as of the psychologies of perception and intellection. Whether good or bad, each film is, first of all, a piece of cinema (in the way that one speaks of a piece of music). As an anthropological fact, the cinema has a certain configuration, certain fixed structures and figures, which deserve to be studied directly. In its broadest sense, the fact of

film is too often taken for granted—yet there is so much that remains to be said about it. As Edgar Morin has written, the sense of wonder at the cinema has given us some of the most meaningful works devoted to the seventh art.

One of the most important of the many problems in film theory is that of the *impression of reality* experienced by the spectator. Films give us the feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle—to a much greater extent, as Albert Laffay has noted, than does a novel, a play, or a figurative painting.^{1*} Films release a mechanism of affective and perceptual participation in the spectator (one is almost never totally bored by a movie). They spontaneously appeal to his sense of belief—never, of course, entirely, but more intensely than do the other arts, and occasionally films are, even in the absolute, very convincing. They speak to us with the accents of true evidence, using the argument that “It is so.” With ease they make the kind of statements a linguist would call fully assertive and which, moreover, are usually taken at face value. There is a filmic mode, which is the mode of presence, and to a great extent it is *believable*. More than the latest play or novel, a film, with its “impression of reality,” its very direct hold on perception, has the power to draw crowds. We know that André Bazin attached great importance to this popularity of the art of motion pictures.² Although it is by no means rare for an excellent film to be a commercial failure, by and large the cinema—even in its “advanced” or experimental forms—commands a large audience. Can as much be said for the other arts of our time? Can one really speak of an audience, in the full sense of the word, when referring to the narrow circles of the initiates of abstract painting, serial music, modern jazz, or the French *nouveau roman*—small groups of the enlightened which have little in common with even the cultivated layer of society (not to mention the mass) and which, furthermore, consist mostly of the creative artist’s “accomplices,” whether known or unknown to him, his peers, and his real or potential colleagues? A following does not become an audience until there

is at least a minimum numerical and sociocultural difference between the creators and the spectators.

The reason why cinema can bridge the gap between true art and the general public, in large part anyway, and why film-makers are able to speak for others, and not just for their friends (or for those who might be their friends), is that films have the *appeal* of a presence and of a proximity that strikes the masses and fills the movie theaters. This phenomenon, which is related to the impression of reality, is naturally of great aesthetic significance, but its basis is first of all psychological. The feeling of credibility, which is so direct, operates on us in films of the unusual and of the marvelous, as well as in those that are “realistic.” Fantastic art is fantastic only as it convinces (otherwise it is merely ridiculous), and the power of unreality in film derives from the fact that the unreal seems to have been realized, unfolding before our eyes as if it were the flow of common occurrence—not the plausible illustration of some extraordinary process only conceived in the mind. The *subjects* of films can be divided into the “realistic” and the “nonrealistic,” if one wishes, but the filmic vehicle’s power to make real, to *realize*, is common to both genres, imparting to the first an impression of familiarity which flatters the emotions and to the second an ability to uproot, which is so nourishing for the imagination. The fantastic creatures of *King Kong* were drawn, but the drawings were then filmed, and that is where, for us, the problem begins.

In his article on the rhetoric of the image,³ Roland Barthes devotes some attention⁴ to the question, but only in connection with still photography: What, he asks, is the impression of reality produced by the photograph? What, above all, are the limits of photography? These issues, we know, have been raised frequently enough with respect to cinema (indeed, they constitute one of the classic topics of filmology and of the theory of film), but to a much lesser extent with respect to still photography. When we look at a photograph, says Roland Barthes, we do not see a presence “being there”—for this definition is too loose and can be applied to any copy—but a presence that “has been there.” “We therefore have a new category of space-

* Superscript numerals refer to the References, which follow the text.

time: place present but time past—so that in still photography there is an illogical conjunction of *here* and *then*.” This explains the photograph’s quality of “real unreality.” The portion of reality is to be found in an earlier temporal position, for the image existed at one time in front of the camera lens; photography—a mechanical means of reproduction—had simply to record the image to give us that “rare miracle: a reality from which we are sheltered.” As for the unreality, it is produced by the “deliberation of time” (things have been thus, but no longer are), and also by our awareness of what is “here”—for, “we must insist upon the magical aspect of the photographic image,” which is never experienced as a total illusion. We always know that what the photograph shows us is not really here. For this reason, Barthes continues, photography has little projective power (projective tests are based, preferably, on drawings) and gives rise to a purely spectatorial awareness, an attitude of externalized contemplation, rather than an awareness of magical or fictional possibilities. “*This has been*” overpowers “*Here I am*” (Barthes’s italics). There is thus a great difference between photography and the cinema, which is an art of fiction and narration and has considerable projective power. The movie spectator is absorbed, not by a “has been there,” but by a sense of “There it is.”

Taking this too briefly summarized analysis as a starting point, I would like to extend it with some observations more directly related to the cinema. The impression of reality—varying as it does in intensity, for it has many degrees—yielded by each of the different techniques of representation existing today (still and motion-picture photography, the theater, figurative sculpture and painting, representational drawing, and so on) is always a two-sided phenomenon. One may seek to explain it by examining either the object perceived or the perception of that object. On the one hand, the reproduction resembles the original more or less closely; it contains a number, more or less great, of *clues* to reality. On the other hand, the vital, organizing faculty of perception is more or less able to *realize* (to make real) the object it grasps. Between the two factors, there is a constant interaction. A fairly convincing reproduction causes the phenomena

of affective and perceptual participation to be awakened in the spectator, which, in turn, give reality to the copy. With this in mind, we may ask ourselves why the impression of reality is so much more vivid in a film than it is in a photograph—as so many writers have observed, and as each of us may verify in his own experience.

An answer immediately suggests itself: It is movement (one of the greatest differences, doubtless the greatest, between still photography and the movies) that produces the strong impression of reality. This, of course, has often been pointed out, but the observation has perhaps never been pushed far enough. “The combination of the *reality* of motion and the *appearance* of forms* gives us the feeling of concrete life and the perception of objective reality. Forms lend their objective structure to movement and movement gives body to the forms,” observes Edgar Morin in *Le Cinéma ou L’homme imaginaire*.⁵ Compared to still photography, motion-picture photography possesses a higher degree of reality (because the spectacles of real life have motion). But, as Edgar Morin further notes,⁶ drawing on Albert Michotte van den Berck’s famous analysis,⁷ there is more to it than that: Motion imparts corporality to objects and gives them an autonomy their still representations could not have; it draws them from the flat surfaces to which they were confined, allowing them to stand out better as figures against a background. Freed from its setting, the object is “substantiated.” Movement brings us volume,** and volume suggests life.⁸

Two things, then, are entailed by motion: a higher degree of reality, and the corporality of objects. These are not all, however. Indeed, it is reasonable to think that the importance of motion in the cinema depends essentially on a third factor, which has never been sufficiently analyzed as such—although Edgar Morin does mention it in passing (when he contrasts the appearance of forms to the reality of movement in film) and Albert Michotte van den Berck does grant it separate treatment.⁹ Here is what the latter says: Motion

* The italics are Morin’s.

** I mean, simply, an acceptable equivalent for volume. The problem of volume in the film is vast and complex.

contributes *indirectly* to the impression of reality by giving objects dimension, but it also contributes *directly* to that impression in as much as it appears to be real. It is, in fact, a general law of psychology that movement is always perceived as real—unlike many other visual structures, such as volume, which is often very readily perceived as unreal (for example, in perspective drawings). Albert Michotte van den Berck examined the causal interpretations—the impression that something had been “pushed, pulled, thrown, etc.”—advanced by test subjects to whom movement had been shown by means of a small device constructed in such a way that only movement, and not the mechanisms that produced it, would appear. In Michotte van den Berck’s opinion, these spontaneous causal explanations derive from the fact that the subjects never doubt, even for an instant, that the motions they perceive are real.

Let us go further: Because still photography is in a way the *trace* of a past spectacle—as André Bazin has said¹⁰—one would expect animated photography (that is to say, the cinema) to be experienced similarly as the trace of a past motion. This, in fact, is not so; the spectator always sees movement as being present (even if it duplicates a past movement). Thus, Roland Barthes’s “deliberation of time”—the impression of another time that makes the photograph’s presence seem unreal—no longer functions when there is motion. The objects and the characters we see in a film are apparently only effigies, but their motion is not the effigy of motion—it seems real.*

Movement is insubstantial. We see it, but it cannot be touched, which is why it cannot encompass two degrees of phenomenal reality, the “real” and the copy. Very often we experience the representation of objects as *reproductions* by implicit reference to tactility, the supreme arbiter of “reality”—the “real” being ineluctably confused with the tangible: There, on the screen, is a large tree, faithfully reproduced on film, but, if we were to reach forward to grasp it, our hands would close on an empty play of light and shadow, not on the

* Of course, minus one of the three spatial dimensions in which it usually unfolds. I am talking about its phenomenal character of reality, not its richness or its diversity.

rough bark by which we usually recognize a tree. It is often the criterion of touch, that of “materiality,” confusedly present in our mind, that divides the world into objects and copies.* It never allows the division to be seriously transgressed (except in certain cases, which are considered pathological). Roland Barthes is right to remind us that even the most intense photographic “participations” do not involve the illusion of the real. The strict distinction between object and copy, however, dissolves on the threshold of motion. Because movement is never material but is *always visual*, to reproduce its appearance is to duplicate its reality. In truth, one cannot even “reproduce” a movement; one can only re-produce it in a second production belonging to the same order of reality, for the spectator, as the first. It is not sufficient to say that film is more “living,” more “animated” than still photography, or even that filmed objects are more “materialized.” In the cinema the impression of reality is also the reality of the impression, the real presence of motion.

In his book *Le Cinéma et le temps*,¹¹ Jean Leirens develops a theory that, in the cinema, identification—closely linked to the impression of reality—may be in some ways a negative phenomenon. He supports this with Rosenkrantz’s famous distinction¹² between the character in the theater, who is an object of “dissociation,” and the film character, who is an object of identification.

For his part, the French dramatist Jean Giraudoux¹³ writes that in the theater “one presents the spectator with inventions, but each one is disguised by a whole rigorously sexed body.” According to Rosenkrantz, the spectator is summoned to take a position in relation to these very real actors, rather than to identify himself with the characters they embody. The actor’s bodily presence contradicts the temptation one always experiences during the show to perceive him as a protagonist in a fictional universe, and the theater can only be

* The case of sculpture, where even the effigy possesses a high degree of materiality, raises different problems. And yet, imagine a statue whose visual resemblance to a human model would be so great as to deceive one’s eyes (think of Mme. Tussaud’s); it would still be the criterion of touch—wax against flesh—that would ultimately allow us to distinguish between the copy and the original model.

a freely accepted game played among accomplices. Because the theater is too real, theatrical fictions yield only a weak impression of reality. Conversely, according to Jean Leirens,¹⁴ the impression of reality we get from a film does not depend at all on the strong presence of an actor but, rather, on the low degree of existence possessed by those ghostly creatures moving on the screen, and they are, therefore, unable to resist our constant impulse to invest them with the "reality" of fiction (the concept of diegesis*), a reality that comes only from within us, from the projections and identifications that are mixed in with our perception of the film. The film spectacle produces a strong impression of reality because it corresponds to a "vacuum, which dreams readily fill."¹⁵ In his article, "L'Acte perceptif et le cinéma,"¹⁶ Henri Wallon develops an idea that partly confirms Jean Leirens's theory. The theatrical spectacle, he says, cannot be a convincing duplication of life, because it is itself a part of life, and too visibly so: Consider the intermissions, the social ritual, the real space of the stage, the real presence of the actor—their weight is too great for the fiction the play elaborates to be experienced as real. The stage setting, for example, does not have the effect of creating a *diegetic* universe; it is only a convention within the real world. (One might add, in the same vein, that what one calls "fiction" in the cinema is, in fact, the diegesis, whereas in the theater the "fiction" exists only in the sense of a "convention," in the same way that there are fictions in everyday life, for example, the conventions of politeness or of official speeches.)

The cinematographic spectacle, on the other hand, is completely unreal; it takes place in another world—which is what Albert Michotte van den Berck calls the "segregation of spaces":¹⁷ The space of the diegesis and that of the movie theater (surrounding the spectator) are incommensurable. Neither includes or influences the other, and everything occurs as if an invisible but airtight partition were keeping them totally isolated from each other. Thus, the sum of the spectator's impressions, during a film's projection, is divided into two entirely separate "series": according to Henri Wallon¹⁸—the "visual

series" (that is to say, the film, the diegesis) and the "proprioceptive series" (one's sense of one's own body) and, therefore, of the real world, which continues to be a factor, though weakened, as when one shifts around in one's seat for a more comfortable position). It is because the world does not intrude upon the fiction and constantly deny its claim to reality—as happens in the theater—that a film's diegesis can yield the peculiar and well-known impression of reality that we are trying to understand here.

It can be argued that the negative explanations I have just summarized are, precisely, too negative. They account for the circumstances that render the impression of reality possible, but not for those that actually produce it; they define the necessary, not the sufficient, conditions. It is quite obvious that when a stage actor sneezes or hesitates in his delivery the brutal interruption by "real" reality disrupts the reality of the fiction; it is equally apparent that such interferences exist not only in the caricatural and unusual form of a sneeze, but that they have a thousand more insidious embodiments, which the quality of even the most perfectly regulated performances cannot suppress—since one finds them arising from the audience as well as from the stage, in the "man's pose of independence, in the woman's dress and make-up."¹⁹ By hermetically isolating fiction from reality, film instantly dismisses this set of resistances and levels all obstacles to spectator participation. Participation, however, must be engendered. A man may be freed from his bonds and still not act. In still photography and figurative painting, the separation of the real and the fictitious is as strict as it is in film (two incommensurate spaces, and no human interpreters), but neither of the first two produces a strong impression of reality. Jean Mitry²⁰ rightly observes that the attempts to explain the "filmic state" by hypnosis, mimicry, or other procedures wherein he is entirely passive, never account for the spectator's participation in the film, but only for the circumstances that render that participation not impossible. The spectator is indeed "disconnected" from the real world, but he must then connect to something else and accomplish a "transference" of reality,²¹ involving a whole affective, perceptual, and intellectual

* See A Note on Terminology, p. ix.

activity, which can be sparked only by a spectacle resembling at least slightly the spectacle of reality. If one wants to explain a powerful phenomenon like the impression of reality, one has, therefore, to fall back on the necessity of accounting for positive factors, and notably for the elements of reality contained within the film itself, the principal one then being of the reality of motion.

Rudolf Arnheim²² recognizes that, lacking the dimensions of time and volume, still photography produces an impression of reality much weaker than that of the cinema, with its temporal aspect and its acceptable equivalent for depth (obtained mainly through the interplay of movement). But, he adds, the stage spectacle is more convincing than the cinematographic fiction. Arnheim's theory of "partial illusion" is well known:²³ Each of the representative arts is based on a partial illusion of reality, which defines the rules of the game for that art. In the theater, one laughs if a stage prop collapses but not at the sight of a "parlor" with only three sides. This statutory illusion is more or less great according to the art: Film is given a middle position between photography and theater. In each case, the nature and the degree of the partial illusion depend on the material and technical conditions of the representation; now, film gives us images only, whereas a play unfolds in real time and real space.²⁴ This analysis seems hardly acceptable; it is contradicted by common experience (one "believes" in the film's fiction much more than in the play's). Furthermore, if one follows the author, the element that is more powerful in the theater is not the "illusion" of reality but *reality itself* (precisely, the real space of the stage and the real presence of the actors)—to which Arnheim contrasts the simple images that are all the nourishment the film spectator gets. But if this is true, the spectator no longer has the illusion of reality; he has the perception of reality—he is a witness to real events.

All arguments of this kind show that a much clearer distinction is needed—even in terminology, where the word "real" is forever playing tricks on us—between two different problems: on the one hand, the impression of reality *produced by the diegesis*, the universe of fiction, what is *represented* by each art, and, on the other hand, the

reality of the vehicle of the representation in each art. On the one hand, there is the impression of reality; on the other, the perception of reality, that is to say, the whole question of the degree of reality contained in the material available to each of the representative arts. It is indeed because the art of theater is based on means that are too real that the belief in the reality of the diegesis finds itself compromised. And it is the total unreality of the filmic means—here we return to the ideas of Jean Leirens and Henri Wallon—which allows the diegesis to assume reality.

However, it by no means follows that, as by some mechanical law, the impression of the diegetic reality becomes stronger as the vehicle of representation is removed further from reality. For if that were true, still photography—whose means have even less reality than those of film, because they lack motion—would have to involve the viewer's sense of belief even more powerfully than does the cinema. And figurative drawing even more so, being further from reality than photography is, since it cannot represent the literalness of graphic contours with the accuracy of a photographic image. It is easy to see how this concept of a continuous scale of inverse proportions would lead to countertruths. The truth is that there seems to be an optimal point, film, on either side of which the impression of reality produced by the fiction tends to decrease. On the one side, there is the theater, whose too real vehicle puts fiction to flight; on the other, photography and representational painting, whose means are too poor in their degree of reality to constitute and sustain a diegetic universe. If it is true that one does not believe in the reality of a dramatic intrigue because the theater is too real, it is also true that one does not believe in the reality of the photographed object—because the rectangle of paper (grayish, scant, and motionless) is *not real enough*. A representation bearing too few allusions to reality does not have sufficient *indicative* force to give body to its fictions; a representation constituting total reality, as in the case of the theater, thrusts itself on perception as something real trying to imitate something unreal, and not as a realization of the unreal. Between these two shoals, film sails a narrow course: It carries enough elements of reality—the literal

translation of graphic contours and, mainly, the real presence of motion—to furnish us with rich and varied information about the diegetic sphere. Photography and painting cannot do this. Like both these arts, film is still composed of images, but the spectator perceives it as such and does not confuse it with a real spectacle (this is Albert Michotte's notion of the "segregation of spaces"). Being too weak to present itself as a *part of reality*, the *partial reality* integrated into the means of the spectacle is entirely discarded in favor of the diegesis: This is what makes the difference between film and theater. The total reality of the spectacle is greater in the theater than in motion pictures, but the portion of reality available to the fiction is greater in the cinema than in the theater.

In short, the secret of film is that it is able to leave a high degree of reality *in its images*, which are, nevertheless, still perceived as images. Poor images do not sustain the world of the imagination enough for it to assume reality. Conversely, the simulation of a fable by means that are as rich as reality itself—because they are real—always runs the danger of appearing to be merely the too real imitation of an unreal invention.

Before the cinema, there was photography. Of all the kinds of images, the photograph was the richest in clues to reality—the only kind, as André Bazin observes,²⁵ that can give us the absolute certainty that graphic outlines are faithfully respected (because their representation is obtained by a process of mechanical duplication) and where, in some way, the actual object has come to print itself on the virgin film. But, accurate as it was, this means was still not sufficiently lifelike: It lacked the dimension of time; it could not render volume acceptably; it lacked the sense of motion, that synonym for life. All these things were suddenly realized by the cinema, and—an unexpected bonus—what one saw was not just some plausible reproduction of motion but motion itself in all its reality. And it was the very images of still photography that this so real motion came to animate, thereby bestowing on them a novel power to convince—but, since they were, after all, only images, it was all to the advantage of the imagination.

In these few pages, I have attempted to outline one of the several* aspects of that problem, the impression of reality in the cinema. To inject the reality of motion into the unreality of the image and thus to render the world of the imagination more real than it had ever been—this is only part of the "secret" of motion pictures.

* There is also, of course, the fact that a film is composed of *many* photographs, which raises all the problems of montage and discourse, both of which are very closely linked to the impression of reality but should be studied separately.

INTRODUCTION

Leo Tolstoy, who was very much interested in the first developments of pre-sound cinematography, called it "the great mute." The technical conditions of cinematic art developed in such a way that a long period of pre-sound, "mute" existence preceded the era of sound in film. But it would be a serious error to assume that the cinema began to speak, or that it acquired a language, only with the acquisition of sound. Sound and language are not the same thing. Human culture converses with us, i.e. transmits information to us, in various languages. Some of them have only an acoustical form. One such, for example, is the "language of the tom-toms" which is widespread in Africa, and is a special system of beats on a drum which enables African tribes to transmit complex and varied information. Other languages are exclusively visual. One example would be the system of street signals (traffic lights) which is used, in large, civilized cities, to perform the responsible task of providing drivers and pedestrians with the information necessary for correct behavior on the streets. Finally, there are the natural languages (the concept of a natural language in semiotics corresponds to "language" in the ordinary use of the word. Examples of natural languages are: Estonian, Russian, Czech, French, etc.). As a rule they have both an acoustical and a visual (graphic) form. We read books and newspapers and obtain information directly from the written text—without the aid of sounds. Finally, even mute persons converse using a language of gestures for the exchange of information.

Therefore "mute" and "not having a language" are concepts which are definitely not identical. Does the cinema have its language: all of cinema, both "mute" and sound films? In order to answer this question we must first agree on what we will call a language.

Language is an ordered communicative (serving to transmit information) sign system. From the definition of language as a communicative system there results the description of its social function: language ensures the exchange, preservation and accumulation of information in the society which employs it. Pointing out the sign aspect of language defines it as a *semiotic* system. In order to accomplish its communicative function language must have at its disposal a system of *signs*. A sign is the materially expressed substitute for objects, phenomena and concepts which is used in the process of information exchange in a society.

Consequently the basic feature of the sign is its ability to realize the function of substitution. The word stands for the thing, object, concept; money stands for value, for socially necessary labor; a man stands for a region; military insignia stand for the rank which corresponds to them. They are all signs. Mankind lives surrounded by two kinds of objects. Some of them are used directly, and since they do not replace anything they cannot be replaced by anything. There is no substitute for the air we breathe, the bread we eat, for life, love or health.¹ In addition, however, mankind is surrounded by things whose value has a social import, and which does not correspond to their immediate, material properties. Thus, in Gogol's story "Diary of a Madman," a dog, in a letter to another dog, tells how her master was awarded a medal: ". . . a very strange person. Quiet, mostly. Rarely speaks; but a week ago he was constantly talking to himself: 'Will I get it or not?' He put a piece of paper in one hand, clenched the other, empty hand and said: 'Will I get it or not?' Once he even asked me: 'What do you think, Medži, will I get it or not?' I didn't understand a thing, sniffed his boot and walked away." Then the general was awarded the medal. "After lunch he lifted me up to his neck and said: 'Look, Medži, what do you suppose that is?' I saw some sort of ribbon. I sniffed it, but couldn't discover any smell at all. Finally I gave it a little lick. It was slightly salty." For the dog the value of the medal is determined by its immediate qualities—taste and smell—and she is totally unable to understand why her master is rejoicing. For Gogol's bureaucrat, however, the medal is a sign, a testimony to the particular social value of the person to whom it has been awarded. Gogol's heroes live in a world in which social signs obscure or swallow up people and their simple, natural tendencies. The comedy "Vladimir of the Third Class," which Gogol never finished, was to end in the insanity of the hero who imagined that he had turned into a medal. Signs which had been created in order to facilitate communication, to replace things, had replaced people. The process of alienation of human relationships and of their replacement by token relationships in a monetary society was first analyzed by Karl Marx.

¹ Actually the problem is somewhat more complicated. In a society whose culture is intensively oriented toward semiotics, any need, however natural, may acquire a secondary, sign value. Thus in the system of Romanticism, as Černyševskij pointed out, illness and its attributes—paleness, melancholy—can acquire a positive value since they serve as signs of doom, Romantic elitism, being raised above the mundane.

Because signs are always replacements of something, each sign presupposes a constant relation to the object for which it stands. This relation is called the *semantics* of the sign. The semantic relation determines the content of the sign. But since each sign is necessarily expressed by material, the dichotomous relation of expression to content becomes one of the basic indicators for consideration of individual signs and of sign systems as a whole.

But language is not a mechanical aggregate of individual signs. Both the content and the expression of each language form an organic system of structural relationships. We do not hesitate to equate spoken "a" and written "a," not by virtue of some mystical resemblance between them, but because the place of the former in the overall system of phonemes is equivalent to the place of the latter in the system of graphemes. Let us imagine a traffic light with one minor defect: the red and the amber signals function normally, while the glass has been smashed on the green one, so that we see only the white bulb. Despite certain difficulties which such a traffic light poses for drivers, it is nevertheless possible to transmit signals with it, since the expression of the signal "green" does not exist as a separate sign, but as part of a system designating "not red" and "not amber." Constancy of location in a three-member system plus the presence of the red and amber signals make it easy to identify the white and green as two variants of expression of a single content. After repeated use of such a traffic light a driver may not even notice the difference between white and green, just as he does not notice shadings in color among different traffic lights.

The fact that signs do not exist as individual, disparate phenomena, but as organized systems, is one of the basic ordering features of language.

In addition to semantic ordering, however, language also presumes *syntactic* ordering. This involves the rules of joining individual signs into sequences—sentences—according to the norms of the given language.

This rather broad conception of language embraces the entire area of communicative systems in human society. The question of whether the cinema has its own language is really another question: "Is cinema a communicative system?" Apparently no one doubts that it is. All those who create films—directors, actors, scenario writers—wish to tell us something through their works. Their ribbon of film is a kind of letter, a correspondence addressed to the audience. In order to understand this correspondence we must know its language.

In what follows we shall have to touch on various aspects of the nature of language insofar as they will be necessary to an understanding of the artistic essence of cinema. At present we will take up only one aspect: *a language must be learned*. Mastery of a language, including one's own native language, is always the result of study. But where, when, and by whom is an understanding conveyed to the millions of viewers of cinematography, the most widespread of all the arts? It might be said, here, that no institution is needed, since the cinema is already understood. Well, anyone who has ever studied foreign languages or the methodology of language instruction knows that mastery of an absolutely unknown, totally "alien" language, presents, in a sense, less difficulty than study of a language related to one's own native language. In the first situation the text is indecipherable, and it is clear that both the lexicon and the grammar must be learned. In the second case an apparent understanding exists; there are many words which are familiar or which resemble ours, and the grammatical forms look more or less familiar. But it is just this resemblance which makes us feel that nothing needs to be studied, and that is the source of errors. In Russian and Czech there are the words "čerstvýj/čerstvý." In Russian the word means "stale," in Czech: "fresh." In Russian and Polish we have "uroda/uroda." In Russian: "freak," in Polish: "beauty." Cinematography resembles the world which we see. An increase in this similarity is a constant factor in the evolution of cinema as art. But this similarity is as unreliable as the words of a foreign language which sound like words in our own. That which is different pretends to be identical. The illusion of comprehension is created where no genuine comprehension exists. Only by understanding the cinema can we be convinced that it is not a slavish copy of life, but an active re-creation in which similarities and differences are assembled into an integral, tension-filled—sometimes dramatic—process of perceiving life.

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Signs are divided into two groups: conventional and pictorial. Conventional signs are those in which the connection between expression and content are not internally motivated. Thus we have all agreed that a green light designates freedom of movement, and a red light forbids it. But we could have agreed on just the opposite. In every language the form of any word is historically conditioned. But if we ignore the history of a language for a moment, and simply write the same word in

various languages, the very possibility of expressing one meaning in so many ways, in such diverse forms, proves convincingly that there is no mandatory connection between content and expression in the word. The word is the most typical and culturally important instance of a conventional sign.

A pictorial or iconic sign presupposes that a meaning has one unique, naturally inherent expression. The most widespread situation is a picture. Although we can point out that in the Slavic languages the designations of concepts for "stul" (chair) and "stol" (table) were mutually confused/old Russian "stol" in modern Russian means "that on which one sits" (cf. "prestol"—throne), Polish "stoł" (pronounced "stul") is translated by the Russian "stol" (cf. also Estonian "tool"), nevertheless it is impossible to imagine a drawing of a table about which it could be said that in a given case it denotes a chair and that is how it should be understood by those who view it.

Over the entire history of mankind, no matter how far back we penetrate, we find two independent and equal cultural signs: the word and the picture. Each of them has its own history. But for the development of culture it seems that the presence of both types of sign system is necessary. Within the limits of the present work we can not discuss the reasons behind the necessity for fixing information in precisely these two opposing systems of signs. We simply mention the fact and move on to a description of the specific advantage of communicative employment of each form of sign, and also of the inevitable inconveniences.

Iconic signs are notable for their greater comprehensibility. Let us imagine a highway sign: a locomotive and three slanting lines below it. The sign consists of two parts: one—the locomotive—has a depictive character, the other—the three slanting lines—a conventional one. Any person who knows about the existence of locomotives and railroad tracks can guess, when he glances at this sign, that he is being warned about something related to these phenomena. To do so one need not know the system of traffic signs. On the other hand, in order to grasp what the three slanting lines mean, it is definitely necessary to look into a traffic manual, unless the system of traffic signs already exists in the mind of the viewer. In order to read a sign on a shop one must know the language, but in order to understand a golden pretzel above a doorway, or to guess from the goods displayed in a door window (the goods, in this case, play the role of signs) what may be purchased inside, no code seems to be needed.

Thus a message presented by conventional signs will appear to be in code, and to require knowledge of a special cipher in order to be understood, whereas iconic messages seem to be "natural" and "understandable." When dealing with people speaking a language which we do not understand, we resort to iconic signs and illustrations. Experiments have shown that cognition of iconic signs proceeds more rapidly, and although the time difference is extremely small in absolute terms, it justifies the preference for iconic signs as traffic signals and for buttons on machinery requiring the shortest possible reaction time.

It must be stressed (for later discussion) that the iconic sign, by virtue of being "natural" and "understandable" is antithetical to the conventional sign. Taken by itself it, too, is conventional. The very necessity of depicting a bulky, three-dimensional object as a flat, two-dimensional image testifies to a certain conventionality. Between the depicted and the depiction certain conventional rules of equivalency are established, e.g., the rules of projection. Thus, in the iconic locomotive noted above, we must know the rules of direct projection and profile depiction. Moreover it is easy to see that the locomotive is portrayed very schematically and is not a reproduction of all of its external details, but a conventional sign. It would appear as such alongside a photograph of a locomotive, but in conjunction with the slanting lines it is perceived as iconic. There is also a metonymic convention in this situation: the image of the locomotive has as its content not the object or concept "locomotive," but "railroad," which is not shown on the sign. Even in this very simple example we discover that "depictiveness" is a relative and not an absolute property. The drawing and the word presuppose each other, and each is impossible without the other.

The degree to which iconic signs are conventional will become clear if we recall that the ease of reading them is restricted to a single cultural area. Beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the area the signs cease to be understood. Thus European Impressionist paintings appear to a Chinese viewer as a collection of colored blots which do not reproduce anything. As a result of cultural disparity we mistakenly "see" in archaic drawings a man in a diving suit, or we see a longitudinal section of a space rocket in ritualistic Mexican designs. In the case of an imaginary communication with representatives of non-terrestrial civilizations, drawings would be as useless as words. Most likely the starting point for such communication should be graphic representations of mathematical relationships. For a creature from outside the culture of our Earth there should be no difference between "understandable" and

"non-understandable" pictures, since the difference itself is entirely a property of earthly civilization.

In order to complete the discussion of these two types of signs, we should point out one more aspect: depictive signs are perceived as "signs in a lesser degree" than words. Therefore they already begin to oppose words in the situation: "capable of being the means of a deception—not capable of being the means of a deception." The Oriental proverb has it: "Better to see it once than hear about it a hundred times." A word can be both true and false, and a picture contrasts with it, in this respect, to the same degree that a photograph contrasts with a picture.

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Between pictorial and conventional signs there is still another difference which is important for our discussion. Conventional signs easily acquire a syntax—they can be assembled into chains. The formal character of their expressive aspect is convenient for distinguishing their grammatical elements whose function is to insure correct assembly (from the viewpoint of a given language system) of words into a sentence. It is very difficult to construct a phrase out of objects displayed in a shop window (each object, in this case, is an iconic sign of itself), or to define how the elements are combined and what the limits of combination might be. But we need only replace the objects with words which designate them and a phrase constructs itself. Conventional signs are capable of *telling*, of creating narrative texts, while iconic signs are restricted to the function of *naming*. It is instructive that in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, which may be viewed as an attempt to create a narrative text on an iconic basis, there quickly arose a system of determinatives: formal signs of a conventional type for the transmission of grammatical meanings.

The worlds of iconic and conventional signs do not simply co-exist, they are in constant interaction, in continual mutual crossover and repulsion. The process of their mutual transfer is one of the essential aspects of cultural comprehension of the world by humans employing signs. It is particularly clearly manifested in art.

Two varieties of art—visual and verbal—develop on the basis of two kinds of signs. This division is obvious and would seem to need no further explanation. But if we look closely at artistic texts and consider the history of the arts, it becomes clear that the verbal arts—poetry and, later, prose fiction—strive to construct from the material of conventional

signs a verbal image whose iconic nature is clearly manifested, if only in the sense that the purely formal levels of expression of the verbal sign (phonetics, grammar, even graphics) become content in poetry. From the materials of conventional signs the poet creates a text which is a depictive sign. At the same time the opposite process takes place: man inevitably makes attempts to narrate through pictures, although, by their very nature, they were not created in order to serve as a means of *narration*. The propensity of graphics and painting for narration is a paradoxical but continual tendency of the visual arts. In extreme cases the sign in painting may acquire the same conventionality, with respect to expression and content, that is the usual property of the word. Allegories in Classical paintings are a case in point. The viewer must know (he acquires his knowledge from the cultural code lying outside of painting) just what is meant by poppies, a snake with its tail in its teeth, an eagle sitting on a book of laws, a white tunic and a red cape in the portrait of Catherine the Great by Levitsky. In the history of painting in ancient Egypt we find a genre of wallpainting which reproduced the lives of the pharaohs. The work was performed in rigidly ritualistic forms. In the event that the pharaoh was a woman, a boy was depicted, as usual, while the real sex of the person was explained in a written subscript. In this case the picture showing a boy was an expression whose content was "girl," thus radically contradicting the very basis of the graphic arts.

There is an immediate, direct link between attempts to transform graphic signs into verbal signs and narration as the fundamental principle of text construction.

If we consider such examples of visual narration as the icons of the fifteenth-century Russian artist Dionisij: "Metropolitan Peter" or "Metropolitan Aleksej" (their compositional principles are the same), it can easily be seen that their composition includes two basic elements: the central figure of the holy person and a series of illustrations arranged around this figure. This latter part is arranged to depict a story about the man's life. First of all, it is segmented into spatially equal parts, each of which captures a moment in the life of the central character. Further, the segments are in a chronological order which imparts a certain sequentiality to our reading of them. The fact that we are confronted not by a mere accumulation of disparate pictures, but by a unified narrative is determined:

1. By repetition in each segment of the figure of the saint, depicted by similar artistic means, and identified, despite differences in

external appearance (his age changes from one episode to another) by means of a sign—a shining halo around his head. This insures the graphic unity of the pictorial series.

2. By the link between the pictures and the pattern of crucial episodes in the life of the saint.

3. By the inclusion of verbal texts in the pictures.

The latter two points define the inclusion of illustrations into a verbal, hagiographic context. Thus their narrational unity is insured.

It can easily be seen that a text which has been constructed in this manner is strikingly reminiscent of film construction with its division of narration into shots and, if we include silent cinema, the conjunction of a visual story and written titles (later on we will discuss the function of the graphic word in the sound film).

It is not the mechanical conjunction of two types of signs, but a synthesis growing out of a dramatic conflict, out of nearly hopeless but unceasing attempts to acquire new means of expression through the use of sign systems despite, it would appear, their most basic properties, which gives rise to the various forms of pictorial narration, from cliff drawings to the art of the Baroque and the windows of the Russian Telegraph Agency. The illustrated folk chap-book, picture book, and comic book are examples of this unified movement, although they differ with respect to historical circumstances and artistic worth.

The emergence of cinematography as art and cultural phenomenon is related to a great number of technical inventions and, in this sense, is inseparable from the period beginning at the end of the nineteenth century. This is the perspective in which it is usually viewed. But we should not forget that the artistic basis of the film was established by a considerably older tendency, one which involves the dialectical contradictions between the two basic types of signs which characterize communication in human society.

THE ILLUSION OF REALITY

Every art is concerned, to some extent, that a feeling of reality be conveyed to its audience. The cinema is foremost in this respect. Later on we will consider the role played by the fantastic, starting with the films of Méliès, in transforming cinematography into art. But the "feeling of reality" now under discussion consists in something else: no matter how fantastic an event taking place on the screen might be, the audience is a witness to it and, in a sense, a participant in it. Therefore, although the audience is conscious of the irreal nature of the event, it reacts emotionally as it would to a genuine event.¹ As we shall see later, there are specific difficulties connected with the transmission by cinematographic means of the past and future tenses, as well as the subjunctive and other irreal moods in cinematic narration. The cinema, because of the nature of its material, knows only the present tense just as, we might add, do other arts employing depictive signs. This point was discussed relative to the theater by D. S. Lixačev.

The emotional faith of the audience in the genuineness of the material being shown on the screen involves cinematography with one of the most important problems in the history of culture.

All technical improvements are a two-edged sword: called upon to serve social progress and the public welfare, they have been just as successfully employed for negative purposes. One of the greatest achievements of mankind—sign communication—has not avoided this fate. Signs, although called upon to serve information, have often been used for purposes of disinformation. The "word" has often appeared in the history of culture as a symbol of wisdom, knowledge and truth (cf. the biblical statement "In the beginning was the Word"), and as a synonym for fraud or lying (Hamlet's "Words, words, words," Gogol's "The frightening kingdom of words instead of deeds"). Equating the sign with a lie, and the struggle against signs—refusing to use money, social symbols, sciences, speech itself—is met constantly in the ancient and medieval worlds, in various cultures in the East, and in recent times has become one of the leading ideas of European democracy from

¹ "Reality" of the cinema in this sense has been investigated by Christian Metz in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Paris, 1968, pp. 13-24.

Rousseau to Leo Tolstoy. This process continues parallel to apologies for the sign culture and to the struggle for its development. The conflict of these two tendencies is one of the consistent dialectical contradictions of human civilization.

Against the background of this contradiction there developed a more specific but exceedingly tenacious antithesis: "a text which may be false vs. a text which can not be false." It could manifest itself as the opposition "myth vs. history" (in the period preceding the rise of historical texts, myth was counted as one of the unconditionally true texts), "poetry vs. document," etc. Since the end of the eighteenth century and the ever increasing demand for truth in art, the authority of the document has increased rapidly. Pushkin introduced genuine court documents of the 1830's into *Dubrovskij* as a part of that artistic work. In the second half of the century the place of the reliable document—the antithesis of the poet's imagination in Romanticism—was occupied by newspaper reportage. It was natural that prose writers from Dostoevsky to Zola, in their search for veracity, turned to reportage, or that poets from Nekrasov to Blok oriented their works toward it.

Within the climate of rapid development of European bourgeois civilization in the nineteenth century, newspaper reporting reached its high point of cultural importance, and then declined rapidly. The expression "He lies like a journalist" testified to the fact that this genre had also departed from the ranks of texts which could only be true, and had joined the opposition. Its place was taken by photography, which possessed all the credentials of being unconditionally documentary and true, and was perceived as something opposite to culture, ideology, poetry, tendentiousness of any kind—as life itself in its reality and genuineness. It firmly took over the position of a text having the greatest documentary quality and reliability within the overall system of texts in the culture around the beginning of the twentieth century. It was acknowledged by one and all, from criminologists to historians and journalists.

Cinematography as a technical invention which had not yet become a form of art was, first and foremost a moving photograph. The ability to register motion added to the trust in the documentary reliability of films. Psychological data indicate that the transfer from motionless photography to the moving film is seen as an introduction of greater capacity in depiction. Precision in the reproduction of life, it was thought, could go no farther.

We should emphasize, though, that it was not so much a matter of the unconditionally reliable reproduction of an object, as it was the emotional confidence of the audience. We all know how distorting and unconvincing photographs can be. The better we know a person, the less resemblance we find in photographs of him. For each person whose face is truly familiar to us we prefer a portrait by a competent artist to a photograph of equal artistry. We find more resemblance in the painting. But if we are shown a portrait and a photograph of a person whom we do not know, and are asked to select the one most clearly resembling him, we pick the photograph without hesitation—such is the “documentary” charm of this type of text.

It would appear that we are being forced to conclude that the documentary and reliable aspects of cinematography give it such great initial advantages that, merely on the strength of the technical features of this form of art, we grant to it a realistic quality much greater than that enjoyed by other sorts of artistic creation. Unfortunately, the matter is not quite so simple. The cinema slowly and painfully developed into an art form, and those properties which we have just mentioned both helped and hindered it along the way.

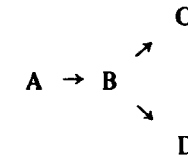
In the realm of ideology, “authenticity,” on the one hand, made the cinema an exceedingly informative art and guaranteed it a mass audience. But, on the other hand, it was just this feeling of the genuineness of the pictures that activated in the first cinema audience those unquestionably base emotions which are typical of the passive observer of genuine catastrophes, auto accidents, and which appeased the quasi-aesthetic and quasi-sporting emotions of audiences at Roman circuses—not unlike the reactions of present-day fans of Western automobile racing. This base emphasis on the spectacular, fed by the viewers’ knowledge that the blood which he sees is real, and that the disasters are genuine, is exploited for commercial purposes by contemporary Western television which arranges reports from the theater of military activities, and the showing of sensational, bloody real-life dramas.

The transformation of cinematographic authenticity into a means for *cognition* was a long and difficult procedure.

Attempts at aesthetic assimilation of cinematic authenticity gave rise to equally complex difficulties. As strange as it may seem, the photographic accuracy of the film shots hindered rather than helped the birth of the cinema as an art.

This situation, familiar to historians of the cinema, is clearly substantiated in the general postulates of information theory. Not every

message, by any means, can have meaning, i.e., be the carrier of some specific information. If we have a series of letters—A-B-C—and we know beforehand that after A only B can occur, and after B, C, the entire sequence is totally predictable from the first letter (“entirely redundant”). Statements of the type “The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea,” for a person who already knows that fact, carry no information. Information is the removal of some uncertainty, the destruction of ignorance and its replacement by knowledge. Where there is no ignorance there is no information. Neither “The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea” nor “A stone falls downward” carries any information, since they are the only ones possible, and within the limits of our experience and common sense we cannot construct any alternatives. Neils Bohr noted that a non-trivial statement is one such that an assertion of its opposite is not obvious nonsense. But let us assume that we have the series



where, after event B, either C or D could ensue (assume the probabilities are equal). Then the message: “There occurred $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$ or $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow D$ ” would contain a certain minimal bit of information.

Thus the quantity of potential information depends on the presence of alternative possibilities. Information is the opposite of automatism: where an event automatically has another as a consequence, no information arises. In this sense the transition from drawing to photography, although it greatly increased the accuracy of reproduction, sharply lowered the informativeness. The object was automatically reflected in the depiction with the inevitability of a mechanical reproduction. An artist has an infinite (rather, a very great) number of possibilities in choosing *how* to render an object, while non-artistic photography enforces a single, automatic dependency. Art does not simply render the world with a lifeless automatism of a mirror. In transforming images of the world into signs, it saturates the world with meanings. Signs are unable not to have meaning or not to carry information. Therefore those properties of an object which result from their

automatic ties with the material world become, in art, the result of free artistic choice and thus acquire the value of information. In the non-artistic world, in the world of the object, the message "The earth was located below and the sky above" (provided that we are describing the impressions of an observer on earth, and not of an airplane pilot) is trivial and carries no information since it has no non-absurd alternative. But in the film by Chukhrai, "Ballad of a Soldier," at the moment when the German tank is pursuing Alyosha who is out of breath from running, the picture on the screen is inverted. The shot turns upside down and the tank crawls with its tread uppermost along the top of the screen, and with its turret hanging down into the sky. When the shot returns to its normal position, with the sky again above and the earth below, this message is far from trivial (the audience heaves a sigh of relief). Now we know that the normal position of earth and sky is not an automatic reflection of the photographed object, but the result of a free choice by the artist. For just this reason the message "The sky above, the earth below," which in a non-artistic context *does not mean anything*, turns out in our situation to be capable of carrying unusually important information: the hero is saved, a turning point has been reached in his duel with the tank. The transition to the next shot—a burning tank—is entirely justified.

The aim of art is not simply to render some object or other, but to make it a carrier of meaning. No one of us, looking at a stone or a pine tree in a natural landscape, would ask: "What does it mean, what did they intend to say?" (as long as we do not take the view according to which a natural landscape is the result of a deliberate act of creation). But as soon as such a landscape is portrayed in a painting this question becomes not only possible, but entirely natural.

It is now clear to us that both still and moving photography, being superb *materials* of art, were at the same time materials which had to be overcome, whose very advantages caused enormous difficulties. Photography fettered the work of art, subjecting huge areas of text to the automatism of the laws of technical representation. Those areas had to be rescued from automatic representation and subjected to the laws of creation. It is significant that each new technological improvement, before it becomes a fact of art, must be freed from technological automatism. While color was determined by the technological possibilities of film and lay outside artistic *choice*, it was not a fact of art, and at first it narrowed rather than broadened the range of possibilities out of which a director made his selection. Only when color became

autonomous (cp. the literary image of the "black sun"), being subordinated at all times to the intention and selection of the director, was it introduced into the sphere of art. Let us explain our point with an example from literature. In "The Lay of Igor's Campaign" there is an exceptionally poetic image. In a dream filled with dire prophecies, *blue wine* is poured for the prince. But there is reason to assume that in the language of the twelfth century "since" (blue) could have meant "dark red" and that in the text we have, not a poetic image, but simply an indication of a color. Clearly this place in the work has become artistically more significant than it was for readers of the twelfth century. This is so because the semantics of color had shifted and "blue wine" became a combination of two words whose conjunction is possible only in poetry.

No less significant are the difficulties posed to cinematography by the invention of the sound track. We know that such masters as Chaplin strongly disapproved of sound in the cinema. In an attempt to "conquer" sound, Chaplin, in "City Lights," delivered a speech by an orator, during the unveiling of a statue of "Prosperity," with unnatural speed, subordinating the timbre of his speech not to the automatism of the reproduced object, but to his own artistic intent (his speech turns into chirping). In "Modern Times" he performed a song in an invented "nonesuch" language. It was a mixture of words from English, German, French, Italian and Yiddish. As early as 1928 the Soviet directors Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Pudovkin put forth an even more basic program. They propounded the thesis that the combination of visual and auditory images must be, not automatic, but artistically motivated, and that the motivation is revealed by the use of *displacement*. The method indicated by the Soviet directors turned out to be the most acceptable one, both in correlation of depiction and sound, and of photography and the word. When Wajda, in "Ashes and Diamonds," transmits to the audience the words of a banquet orator, the camera has already left the hall where the celebration is taking place, and we see on the screen a public toilet where an old female custodian is awaiting the arrival of the first drunks. In "Hiroshima Mon Amour" the French heroine tells her Japanese lover about her long days of solitude in a cellar where her parents had once hidden her from the rage of their fellow citizens who were persecuting her for loving a German soldier. Her only visitor in the cellar is a cat. When the cat is discussed it does not appear on the screen. Its eyes will glow in the dark later on, when the girl's story has gone far beyond the incident. Technology made

possible the strict synchronization of sound and depiction and gave art the choice of observing or violating this synchrony, i.e., made synchronization a *carrier of information*. Thus we are not discussing the mandatory deformation of natural forms of an object (focus on constant deformation usually reflects the immaturity of an artistic device), but rather the *possibility* of deformation, and hence of the conscious choice of artistic solution in the event of its absence.

Actually, the entire history of the cinema as an art is a sequence of discoveries whose aim has been to drive out automatism from every element which can be subjected to artistic scrutiny. The cinema conquered motion photography, making it an active means of knowing reality. The world which it presents is simultaneously the object itself and a model of the object.

The remainder of this work will be primarily devoted to a description of the means used by cinematography in its struggle with "raw" naturalness in the name of artistic truth.

We must once again emphasize, however, that in its struggles against the natural similarity of cinematography and real life, shattering the naive faith of an audience which is prepared to equate emotions caused by a film with emotions experienced while viewing real events (including the vulgar lust for strong emotional shocks from genuinely tragic sights), the cinema at the same time endeavors to preserve a naive (perhaps too naive, at times) faith in its genuineness. The inexperienced viewer who does not know the difference between an artistic film and a documentary is far from being an ideal audience, but he is a "film audience" to a greater degree than the critic who focuses only on "devices" and never for a moment forgets about the "kitchen" of the film industry.

The greater the victory of art over photography, the more necessary it is that the audience believe, with a portion of its consciousness, that it is seeing only a photograph, only real life not set up by a director, but merely observed. Encouragement of this belief has been the aim of the same directors who simultaneously constructed a cinematic world on the basis of complex ideological models—from Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein to the Italian neorealists, the French "New Wave" and Ingmar Bergman.

This aim is also furthered by the inclusion, in artistic films, of segments of genuine documentaries from the war years. In Bergman's "Persona" the heroine is watching a television set which shows the self-immolation of a demonstrator. At first we are shown only reflections

from the screen on the heroine's face and her expression of horror—we are in the world of acting in cinema. But then the television screen occupies the entire movie screen. We know that the television takes us out of the world of actors, and we become witnesses to a real tragedy which goes on for a painfully long time. By juxtaposing real life and cinema life Bergman underscored the artistic conventionality of the world he depicts and—art is able to do so—at the same time made us forget about the conventionality. The world of the film heroine and the world of the television set are one world, a genuine, interrelated world. The authors of "Paisan" achieved the same effect when they filmed a genuine corpse in an episode about the liberation of Italy.

Strangely enough, the struggle to inspire confidence in the screen involves numerous plots concerning the creation of a film, of cinema within cinema. Enhancing the feeling of conventionality (a "sense of cinema" in the audience), works of this type appear to concentrate cinematic conventionality in episodes depicting a screen on a screen: we are forced to perceive the remainder as genuine life.

This dual relationship to reality creates that semantic tension in whose field the cinema as art holds forth. Pushkin defined the formula of aesthetic experience with the words: "I shed tears over an imaginary event."

Here, with the precision of genius, we are shown the dual nature of the viewer's or reader's relation to the artistic text. He "sheds tears," i.e., he believes in the genuineness, the actuality of the text. The sight arouses in him the same emotions as life itself. But at the same time he remembers that it is an "imaginary event." Crying over a fancy is a blatant contradiction since, it would appear, we need only know that an event is fictitious for the desire to experience an emotion to vanish entirely. If the audience did not forget that a stage or screen was before it, if it continuously thought about actors wearing makeup and about director's intentions, it is natural that it would not be moved to tears or experience other emotions connected with real-life situations. But if the viewer did not distinguish stage and screen from real life and, weeping copiously, forgot that before him was an invention, he would not be experiencing genuinely artistic emotions. Art requires a two-fold experience—simultaneously forgetting that you are confronted by an imaginary event and not forgetting it. Only in art can we both be horrified by the evil of an event and appreciate the mastery of the actor.

The duality of perception of a work of art² leads to the fact that the greater the similarity or direct resemblance of art and life, the more strongly, at the same time, must the audience feel the conventionality. Almost forgetting that he is experiencing a work of art, the viewer or reader must never forget it *completely*. Art is a living phenomenon and dialectically contradictory. And this requires equal effectiveness and equal value of the opposing tendencies which comprise it. The history of cinematography provides numerous examples of this principle.

At the dawn of cinematography moving images on the screen aroused a physiological feeling of horror in the audience (shots of an onrushing train) or physical nausea (shots taken from a great height or with a swaying camera). The audience did not distinguish, emotionally, between the image and reality. But cinematic depiction became an art only when the combined exposures of Méliès made it possible to augment extreme verisimilitude with extreme fantasy on the plot level, and montage made it possible to demonstrate the artificiality of shot groupings. (The actual invention of montage is attributed by scholars to the Brighton school or to Griffith, but its theoretical significance was only discovered through the experiments and investigations of L. Kulešov, S. Eisenstein, Ju Tynjanov, V. Šklovskij and a number of other Soviet cinematographers and scholars in the 1920's.)

Moreover, the very concept of "likeness" which seems so immediate and axiomatic to the audience is, in actuality, a fact of culture derived from previous artistic experience and from certain types of artistic codes employed at a particular time in history. Thus, for example, the real world which surrounds us is made up of many colors. Therefore its depiction in black and white is a convention. Only a knowledge of this convention and an acceptance of the rules for decoding a text employing it make it possible, when looking at the sky in a shot, to accept it without any difficulty as cloudless and blue. In a shot of a sunny summer day we perceive various shades of gray as signs of the colors blue and green, and correctly establish their equivalence to particular color referents (designated objects).

When color film was introduced the audience began, automatically, to associate color shots not only with multicolored reality, but also with the tradition of "naturalness" in cinematography. Actually, the

²For a more detailed account cf.: Ju. M. Lotman "Tezisy k probleme "Iskusstvo v rjadu modelirujuščix sistem" /On the problem of "Art as a Modelling System"/, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* III. Učenyje zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, vyp. 198, Tartu, 1967, str. 130-145.

more conventional black and white film, for certain traditional reasons, is perceived as the original, natural form. Ivor Montagu recalls a striking fact: "When Peter Ustinov was asked on television why he made 'Billy Budd' in black and white and not in colour he replied that he did so because he wanted it to seem real." Montagu's comment is also interesting: "This was a strange reply, but stranger still was it that nobody seemed to find anything strange in it."³ As we see, the latter fact is not strange, but entirely fitting.

It is instructive that in contemporary films employing a montage of colored and black and white segments, the former, as a rule, are connected with plot narration, i.e., "art," and the latter refer to a reality beyond the screen. Typical in this respect is the deliberate complication of such a correlation in Wajda's film "Everything for Sale." The film is based on the continual confusion of levels. The same shot may refer to reality outside the screen and to the plot of an artistic film about this reality. The audience is not permitted to know in advance just what it is seeing: a portion of reality accidentally captured by the camera lens, or a segment of film about this reality—considered and constructed according to the laws of art. The displacement of one and the same shot from the level of object to a metalevel (shot about a shot) creates a complex semiotic situation whose meaning lies in the attempt to confuse the viewer and force him to experience with maximum intensity the "falseness" of everything, to long for simple and genuine things and simple and genuine relationships and values which are not signs of anything. And then, into this unstable world, where even death is made ambiguous, there bursts simple, "unrehearsed" life—the funeral of an actor. This segment, in contrast to colored shots of both levels—events in life as well as their filmic depiction—is shown in two-color tones. This is real life, not reproduced by the director, but witnessed by the camera, a genuine piece in which everyone is taken aback and is therefore sincere. But here, too, the interrelationships grow complicated. The camera retreats, and what we thought was a slice of life turns out to be cinematography within cinematography. The edges of the screen are revealed and we see a room and in it are the same people who were on the screen, and they are discussing how to transform the events into an artistic film. The opposition seems to have vanished. Everything has turned out to be a game, and the opposition "color film—black and white film" has lost its meaning. But this is not true. Even when introduced

³Ivor Montagu: *Film World*, Baltimore, 1964, p. 113.

as cinema within cinema, the two tone film is a documentary and not an acted film. Against the background of intermingled acting and life-acting, it serves the function of plain reality. Important, too, is the fact that in just this segment a person outside the cinema-world, a viewer, mentions that the dead artist was a legend, a myth during his lifetime, and how could such a person have existed? Precisely this statement (together with the speaker's face) becomes that extra-textual reality to which the entire complex cinematic text is equivalent, i.e., the *meaning* of the film. Without it the film would remain somewhere between a laboratory experiment on cinema semiotics and a sensational exposé of the secrets and personal life of movie stars in the manner of "Private Life" by Louis Malle.

In this respect it is of some interest to consider the treatment found in "Andrej Rublev" by A. Tarkovskij. He presents us with an original artistic construct which we perceive as simultaneously unexpected and natural. The sphere of "life" is shown in black and white, which we assume to be a neutral cinematographic approach. And then at the end the audience is suddenly shown some frescoes which are done in a marvelous wealth of colors. This not only forces us to experience the ending very intensely, but also returns us to the rest of the film, providing an alternative to the black and white treatment and thereby emphasizing its significance.

Thus the attempts of cinematography to merge completely with life, and the desire to manifest its cinematographic specifics, the conventionality of its language, to assert the sovereignty of art within its own sphere—these are enemies which are constantly in need of each other. Like the north and south poles of a magnet, they do not exist without each other and form that field of structural tension in which the real history of cinematography operates. The disagreements between Dziga Vertov and Sergej Eisenstein, the arguments over "prosaic" and "poetic" cinema in Soviet cinematography of the 1920's and 1930's, the polemics surrounding Italian neorealism, the articles by A. Bazin on the conflict between montage and "faith in reality" which formed the basis of the French "new wave," again and again reaffirm the regularity of the sinusoidal movement of real cinematic art within the field of structural tension created by these two poles. In this context it is interesting to note the manner in which Italian neorealism, in its struggles against theoretical pomposity, arrived at the total equation of art and extra-artistic reality. Its active elements were always "refusals": refusal to use a stereotyped hero or typical film scenes, refusal to use professional

actors, denial of the "star" system, refusal to employ montage and an "ironclad" scenario, refusal to use a "prepared" dialog or musical accompaniment. Such a poetics of "refusals" can only be effective against a remembered background of cinema art of the opposite type. Without cinematography of historical epics, film operas, westerns or Hollywood "stars" it loses a good deal of its artistic meaning. The non-artistic role of a "scream of truth," of truth at any cost, truth as a condition of life and not a means for attaining some transitory goals, all this could be accomplished by neorealism only to the extent that its language was perceived by the audience as merciless and uncompromising. It is thus all the more significant that, having reached the apogee of "refusals" and having asserted its conquest, neorealism made an abrupt turnabout in the direction of restoration of shattered conventionality. Fellini's attempts at a "metafilm," a film about a film, analyzing the very conception of truth ("8½"), Germi's attempt to merge the language of film acting and the national tradition of the *commedia dell' arte*, both are profoundly instructive. Particularly interesting is the progress of Luchino Visconti, just because in his work the theoretician has always dominated the artist. In 1948 Visconti created the film "La Terra Trema"—one of the most consistent realizations of the poetics of neorealism. In this film we have everything: from Sicilian dialect, incomprehensible even to the Italian audience but demonstratively used by the director without translation (better incomprehensible but evoking the absolute reliability of documentary authenticity, than a film which is comprehensible but suspected of "artiness") to the choice of types, plot, structure of cinema narration—in short, a protest against the "artificiality of art." But by 1953 he made the film "Senso": not entirely acceptable in its resolutions, but exceedingly interesting in its intentions. The action is set in 1866, in the time of the uprising in Venice and the Italo-Prussian war. The film opens with the music of Verdi. The camera focuses on the stage of a theater in which the opera "Il Trovatore" is in progress. The nationalistic, heroic aura of Verdi's music is blatantly used as a system within which the plot and personalities of the heroes are encoded. Taken out of context the film strikes us by its theatricality, its openly operatic dramatics (love, jealousy, betrayal and death come one after the other), by the frank primitivism of the stage effects and the archaic nature of the director's approach. But in the context of the overall movement of art, paired with "La Terra Trema," it acquires a different meaning. The art of naked truth, trying to rid itself of all existing kinds of artistic conventionality, requires an

immense culture in order to be perceived as such. Being democratic in its ideals, it becomes too intellectual in its language. The untrained audience becomes bored. The struggle against boredom leads to the re-establishment of the rights of language which is consciously primitive and traditional, but close to the audience. In Italy the *commedia dell'arte* and the opera are art forms whose traditional system of conventions is comprehensible and close to the mass audience. And cinematography which had approached the brink of naturalness had to revert to the conventional primitivism of those artistic languages which had been familiar to the audience since childhood.

The films of Germi ("Seduced and Abandoned" and especially "Divorce Italian Style") shock the audience with their merciless "cynicism." But we need only recall the language of the puppet theaters and the *commedia dell'arte* in which death can be a comic episode, murder—a buffonade, suffering—a parody. The un pitying nature of Italian (and not only Italian) folk theater is organically connected with its conventionality. The audience remembers that these are puppets or maskers on the stage and perceives their death or suffering, beatings or misfortunes, not as the death or suffering of real people, but in a spirit of carnival and ritual. Germi's films would be unbearably cynical if he invited us to see real people in his characters. But, by translating content which is normal in the social protest and humanism of neorealistic cinema into the language of buffonade, he suggests that we see the heroes as carnival clowns and puppets. The plebeian, coarse, country-fair language of his films contains just as many possibilities for social criticism as does the style, more familiar to the intellectual audience, of the humanized actor and humanized stage which dates back to European ideas of the Enlightenment. If Leoncavallo in "I Pagliacci" translated country-fair buffoonery into the language of humanistic ideas, Germi did the opposite; using the language of the folk theater he talks about serious problems of the present.

Visconti chose the direction of another national, democratic tradition—the opera. Only with respect to this tradition and to the artistic language of "La Terra Trema" can the intent of the author of "Senso" be comprehended.

Thus the feeling of actuality, the sense of resemblance to life without which there can be no art of the cinema, is not something elementary, provided by direct sense perception. Being a component part of a complex, artistic whole, it is facilitated by numerous ties with the artistic and cultural experience of society.