

objects of *presentness* would be painting's latest effort to maintain its conviction in its own power to establish connection with reality—by permitting us presentness to ourselves, apart from which there is no hope for a world.

Photography overcame subjectivity in a way undreamed of by painting, a way that could not satisfy painting, one which does not so much defeat the act of painting as escape it altogether: by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction.

One could accordingly say that photography was never in competition with painting. What happened was that at some point the quest for visual reality, or the "memory of the present" (as Baudelaire put it), split apart. To maintain conviction in our connection with reality, to maintain our presentness, painting accepts the recession of the world. Photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it. The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past.

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Photograph and Screen

Let us notice the specific sense in which photographs are of the world, of reality as a whole. You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph—a building, say—what lies behind it, totally obscured by it. This only accidentally makes sense when asked of an object in a painting. You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense asked of a painting. You

their trappings—is a perfect negation of that condition of movement I described as one in which an individuality is the subject of film. These figures no more lend themselves to such study than they do to imitation. To impersonate one is to impersonate all; their personalities are already impersonations. This, further, negates or literalizes the condition I characterized as the ontological equality of objects and human subjects in photographs; for these figures are no longer the human part of nature.³³

What needs accounting for is simultaneously that the tradition is still available to current successful films, and also that serious works are in the process of questioning their relation to the tradition, that they are moving into the modernist predicament in which an art has lost its natural relation to its history, in which an artist, exactly because he is devoted to making an object that will bear the same weight of experience that such objects have always borne which constitute the history of his art, is compelled to find unheard-of structures that define themselves and their history against one another. (Without this *consistency* of human experience, history would not develop meaningfully, would not have its ironies and losses and narrow escapes. That is, there would be no human history but merely another species of natural evolution—a condition we may yet arrive at. And the history of an art is a human history.) When in such a state an art explores its medium, it is exploring the conditions of its existence; it is asking exactly whether, and under what conditions, it can survive.

What conditions of movie-making are to be explored? What “possibilities” of the medium of movies are now given significance?

The material basis of the media of movies (as paint on a flat, delimited support is the material basis of the media of painting³⁴) is, in the terms which have so far made their appearance, *a succession of automatic world projections*. “Succession” includes the various degrees of motion in moving pictures: the

motion depicted; the current of successive frames in depicting it; the juxtapositions of cutting. "Automatic" emphasizes the mechanical fact of photography, in particular the absence of the human hand in forming these objects and the absence of its creatures in their screening. "World" covers the ontological facts of photography and its subjects. "Projection" points to the phenomenological facts of viewing, and to the continuity of the camera's motion as it ingests the world.

The categories of succession and projection include the ones most emphasized in what I have heard and read about the aesthetics of film. In particular, they include what many take to be the basic question of the subject, namely, whether it is the possibility of cutting from one view to another (one sense of succession) or the possibility of continuous projection of an altering view (altered by depth of focus or by moving the camera) which is the essence of the cinematic. I have not made myself trace the experience and the philosophy which led, say, Eisenstein to opt for montage and Bazin for continuity; nor have I collected enough instances of the one and of the other to know my mind on the topic. My excuse for speaking in ignorance of this question is that I have a hypothesis about it, namely, that it is not a question. I should be in a better position to say what that hypothesis comes to after developing the categories of world and automatism.

It is not to be expected that a given discovery shows the significance of an isolated possibility of the art, or that a given possibility yields up some single significance. For whatever is meant by a medium's "possibilities," each is what it is only in view of the others. This is why the general answer to the common question, "In what ways do movies differ from novels or from theater?" ought to be: "In every way." It is why the idea that a movie should be "cinematic" is either as bad or as special as the idea that a poem should be poetic, or as empty.

everything. Nothing less than that is what modern philosophy has told us (whether for Kant's reasons, or for Locke's, or Hume's) is metaphysically beyond our reach or (as Hegel or Marx or Kierkegaard or Nietzsche might rather put it) beyond our reach metaphysically.

To say that we wish to view the world itself is to say that we are wishing for the condition of viewing as such. That is our way of establishing our connection with the world: through viewing it, or having views of it. Our condition has become one in which our natural mode of perception is to view, feeling unseen. We do not so much look at the world as look *out at* it, from behind the self. It is our fantasies, now all but completely thwarted and out of hand, which are unseen and must be kept unseen. As if we could no longer hope that anyone might share them—at just the moment that they are pouring into the streets, less private than ever. So we are less than ever in a position to marry them to the world.

Viewing a movie makes this condition automatic, takes the responsibility for it out of our hands. Hence movies seem more natural than reality. Not because they are escapes into fantasy, but because they are reliefs from private fantasy and its responsibilities; from the fact that the world is *already* drawn by fantasy. And not because they are dreams, but because they permit the self to be wakened, so that we may stop withdrawing our longings further inside ourselves. Movies convince us of the world's reality in the only way we have to be convinced, without learning to bring the world closer to the heart's desire (which in practice now means learning to stop altering it illegitimately, against itself): by taking views of it.

I said also that what enables moving pictures to satisfy the wish to view the world is the automatism of photography. I have not claimed that film which is not used photographically, to reproduce the world, cannot be used for the purpose of art. I remark only that film which is not used photographically, in the sense intended, is not being used in its power of automa-

ism. *Reproducing the world is the only thing film does automatically.* I do not say that art cannot be made without this power, merely that movies cannot so be made. Of course we may have to forgo this power; it may lose its power for us. That just means that the movie will have lost its power. For what has made the movie a candidate for art is its natural relation to its traditions of automatism. The lapse of conviction in its traditional uses of its automatism forces it into modernism; its potentiality for acknowledging that lapse in ways that will redeem its power makes modernism an option for it.

One might explain the movie's natural relation to its traditions of automatism by saying that a given movie can naturally tap the source of the movie medium as such. And the medium is profounder than any of its instances. This sounds like other ideas one comes across currently. But the idea of a medium of art is stilled if one does not recognize that this was always true, that the power of a given sonnet or rondo or portrait was its power to stand for the form it took and thence to invoke the power of poetry or music or painting as such. Modernism signifies not that the powers of the arts are exhausted, but on the contrary that it has become the immediate task of the artist to achieve in his art the muse of the art itself—to declare, from itself, the art as a whole for which it speaks, to become a present of that art. One might say that the task is no longer to produce another instance of an art but a new medium within it. (Here is the relevance of series in modern painting and sculpture, and of cycles in movies, and of the quest for a "sound" in jazz and rock.) It follows that in such a predicament, media are not given *a priori*. The failure to establish a medium is a new depth, an absoluteness, of artistic failure.

It is in thinking of the power of an art as such that I think again about a hesitation I have sometimes felt toward regarding the movie as an art at all, its effects being too powerful or immediate to count as the effects of art. It may be that this hesitation arises when one is out of touch with some object which

work? Unless your words here are meant to correct a false impression, they do not so much as add up to a remark. They are at most the uttering of a name, which, as Wittgenstein puts it, is a preparation for going on to say something. No narrative device is more common than a cut from and to a character as he enters or leaves a room. In *Grand Illusion*, a film obsessed with the entering and leaving of rooms, with the relations between the inside and the outside of a dwelling, with the impassability of sills and frames, this most common of devices is actively avoided until the beginning of the last act, at the farm. Then we cut from Gabin entering a doorway away from us, still in the cold and foreign night, to Gabin entering through that doorway towards us, into a bright kitchen. The very commonness of the gesture yields to, and acknowledges, the commonness, the anonymity, of the need for warmth and food.

Good directors know how to mean everything they do. Great directors mean more—more completely, more subtly, more specifically—and they discover how to do everything they mean. The gestures of bad directors are empty—they speak, as it were, nonsense. The implication of this theme is the absolute responsibility of the artist for the actions and assertions in his work. It is an instance of the human being's absolute responsibility for the intentions and consequences of his actions, and a kind of solace for it. (The human condemnation to intention and consequence is the sequel, if not the meaning, of original sin.) My impatience with the idea that photographs and paintings never really project or represent reality (when, that is, they obviously do) expresses my sense that, as elsewhere, a fake skepticism is being used to deny that human responsibility.

We may need freedom from this responsibility, but the denial of its claims is no route to that freedom, except within the bounds of comedy or of religion. Film is a moving image of skepticism: not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not

overlapping



exist—even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes. Our vision is doubtless otherwise satisfiable than by the viewing of reality. But to deny, on skeptical grounds, just *this* satisfaction—to deny that it is ever reality which film projects and screens—is a farce of skepticism. It seems to remember that skepticism concludes against our conviction in the existence of the external world, but it seems to forget that skepticism begins in an effort to justify that conviction. The basis of film's drama, or the latent anxiety in viewing its drama, lies in its persistent demonstration that we do not know what our conviction in reality turns upon. To yield here to the familiar wish to speak of film as providing in general an "illusion of reality" would serve to disguise this latent anxiety—as does the conclusion of philosophical skepticism itself. This idea of the illusion of reality dims the differences in the role of reality posed in painting, in theater, and in film, and it closes out the wish of art to address reality in order to combat, or suspend, our illusions of it. The "sense of reality" played upon in comedy, and by religion, or searched by philosophy and in tragedy, is neither enforced nor escaped through film; one might say that it is there entertained.

The moral of film's image of skepticism is not that reality is a dream and not that reality confines our dreams. In screening reality, film screens its givenness from us; it holds reality before us, it holds reality before us, i.e., withholds reality before us. We are tantalized at once by our subjection to it and by its subjection to our views of it. But while reality is the bearer of our intentions it is possible, as I put it in my book, to refuse to allow it to dictate what shall be said about it (p. 120). Flanked by its claims to speak for us, it is still open to us in moments to withhold it before ourselves, so that we may see for ourselves and may gladly grant that we are somewhat spoken for. To know how far reality is open to our dreams would be to know how far reality is confined by our dreams of it.